

### Prologue

The world has been in a constant spiral of confusion wrapped in a ribbon of deceit. The war that started out on Mars as a territorial conflict blossomed forth into a campaign of annihilation. Both sides the TA and the EAP soon refused to acknowledge each other's existence and the battles that were always contained raged out of control. This all came to pass when Genesis, the organization that changed the face of military warfare with the introduction of the Mechanized Frame came up with the Azure Cup Tournament. A tournament in which any MF pilot from either side could participate in. Every pilot soon found themselves registering for the tournament as a means of escape from the uncontrollable war. 128 pilots in total fought vigorously in the tournament but only one managed to remain; an enigmatic pilot shrouded in the shadows of existence, Rebel358. Rebel358 easily commanded the respect and admiration of all the pilots in the Azure Cup except for one, Adam Novus. In the final match of the tournament between Adam Novus and Rebel358, Rebel managed to gain the advantage and ended the match. It was a splendid tournament that lasted nearly a month while both the EAP and the TA continued their war on Mars.

Since MFs were no longer on the forefront of the war each side had to resort to lesser means of battle. Armored Tanks, along with fighter planes became the mass means of war, that only lasted a few weeks until two new organizations, Revelations, and Prodigy arose on both sides. These organizations became a substitution for Genesis; they both had the idea of having a single MF representing each side, their staple flag of the war. Everything seemed to be straight forward and Revelations manufactured what came to be known as the Shade-line of MFs, MFs that were distributed to all areas of the TA. It wasn't long before pilots were trained to handle these MFs and the Shades took hold of the war. Prodigy did the same thing with the EAP; they manufactured a new line of MFs labeled, Night-Wings. With two staple MF lines devoted to each group the war escalated even more. Battles were more chaotic and ended with a higher rate of casualties. It finally came to the point where each side could no longer prevail over the other and much more extreme measures were needed; nuclear weapons. The TA acted first dropping nuclear bombs over Europe completely eradicating EAP headquarters in Germany. As the war began to spiral out of the hands of man the public began to burst out into panic, the war had previously been held on Mars, but it finally transferred over to Earth. At this point Rebel358 took things into his own hands and lead 4 other pilots to Earth. His idealistic views were over top to most, in his eyes "humans were sinners and needed to be purged." He knew that if he left them alone their demise would happen naturally, but he felt that only a being greater than humanity had the right to hand out their punishment.

Rebel358 and his four horsemen began launching assaults onto EAP and TA military based on Earth. This caused both sides to focus their attentions on Rebel, battles engulfed the skies but Rebel was able to defeat every battalion of Shades and Night-Wings sent his way. Eventually Adam and Stephen Novus along with their military team of MF pilots made their way to Earth and intervened. Adam Novus got his rematch and finally managed to gain the upper hand against Rebel358 with the help of his brother. For two years the war continued into space, new ships developed by both Revelations and Prodigy allowed for the EAP and the TA to take their conflict into the depths of space where they believed it was much safer than fighting near innocent villages and cities.

Most people drowned themselves in the idea that Mars would soon be completely habitable. During the 2 years of battle cities were growing as construction prospered at a rapid pace. 1 year after the battle moved into space small cities developed, military bases were abandoned and peace looked promising. However the war continued to grow more dangerous and a new organization called Orbis entered the scene. Orbis was a neutral organization formed by a good amount of MF pilots that participated in the Azure Cup Tournament. These pilots had their fill of the war and through the tournament were able to bond with pilots that would naturally be their enemies. Orbis jumped in the

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middle of the TA and EAP conflict hoping to put an end to the war that had already been waging for 4 years (began after the Chimera incident). However the interruption that Orbis caused only made the battles much more chaotic and tragic. Orbis, lead by Gail Contadino continued to fight against both the TA and the EAP refusing to give into the odds that were heavily against them. Gail declared that Orbis would continue to fight for peace on Earth and on Mars. This was a simplistic utopian ideal but the people of Earth and the small population that was migrating to Mars fell in love with Gail and Orbis.

Along with Orbis another organization began to develop on Mars, stating that it would fight to defend Mars from any outside threat, whether it is the TA, the EAP or even Orbis. Red Fury was an organization that wanted to prevent any conflict from reaching Mars. A former USAF pilot, Carlos Rendetore led the up and coming faction. No one could possibly know where the future of both Earth and Mars was heading.

### Chapter One: Sea of Desire

Conflagrant spheres of positron energy burst across the dark abyss. Battles continued to scorch the empty space; the EAP and the TA remained clutched in arms vying for victory. War had become more chaotic due to the constant interventions of Orbis. No one knew where or when the rogue organization would strike. During the years involving the colonization of Mars several space stations were built, each being able to contain around 1,000 soldiers. These markers of human travel as referred to by President Malum are the first steps in what he believes to be the future of humanity. In an ideal world both the EAP and the TA would join together to aide one another in the expansion of humanity into space, but personal feelings and vendettas have gotten in the way. The tragedy that struck down on Berlin, Germany about 3 years ago stains the memories that linger in the minds of men and women. War became a game of retaliation with no signs of peace in the near future. Every habitat of humanity has become a prime location for war, on Earth people fear for their lives everyday, not knowing when the next attack will occur. Mars is no different, for the few tens of thousands of people who managed to migrate to the crimson planet they too fear for their lives. Remnants of TA and EAP forces remain on Mars and do collide violently.

Red Fury tries to keep the commotion on Mars to a minimum by quickly extinguishing these fires of conflict that occur, but it is impossible to stop every outbreak. In total four main continents had been recognized since the terraforming of Mars; Aetherius, Abyssus, Terrenus, and Mundus. Each of these continents sprouted cities, about 10 to each continent. Originally each continent was established by either the TA or the EAP however due to Red Fury's appearance and violent nature both of the Earth countries cut their ties to Mars allowing for each continent to govern themselves. Over the 2 years of colonization Mars managed to sprout into a satisfactory society. Societies were separated by the vast oceans however each society managed to remain united under the guise of Red Fury. Mars became a refuge from the war that continued to prosper. Most question or criticize those who fled to the crimson planet and view them as cowards, people running away from the harsh reality of the war.

General Copiare stood watching as his soldiers continued to fall from grace. The Night-Wings of the EAP clearly outmatched the Shades in mobility. He knew there was no way for him to be victorious in the end, and yet he continued to push the soldiers to fight.

"General! There is no possible way we can continue at this rate! We are too outnumbered!" The Ensign assigned to navigation screamed. His crimson hair shaking as sweat dribbled down his pale looking facial expression.

"We have to make it through...I am fully aware that we are outnumbered. There are 3 Phoenix war ships out there and we're nothing but a Serpent. But we are carrying Admiral Caden, our mission is to get him to Washington Space Station...we can not afford to be deterred here." The General replied back with intensity.

"Yes sir..."

"General...if we die here then everything we're trying to accomplish will become a fairy tale and vanish in the subtlest breeze." The older wiser voice of the Admiral softly mumbled.

"I know that...but, I promise you we won't die." Copiare replied.

Shades continued to explode into singed pieces of metal as the Night-Wings soared through the caliginous clouds that engulfed the destroyed units. 3 Phoenix ships slowly hovered through the abyss, their elongated obsidian cannons rotating locking onto the single Serpent war ship. As each cannon began to gather energy a bright flicker of light emanated in the distance, instantly the alarms on every MF and ship began to roar. General Copiare quickly turned around in shock, he watched as the Ensign below him continued to type on the control panel in order to uncover the identity of the incoming object. Copiare grinned, he knew who and what the object was.

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“Captain Procella! I have the full analysis of the situation before us!” A younger looking man, most likely in his early teens ran quickly through the bridge of the ship. Chris Procella, one of the MF pilots who participated in the highly admired Azure Cup had quite the TA in order to join Orbis. He firmly believed in Gail’s idea and dreams, he wanted to end the war before another attempted Tribulation could occur.

“Good work Lieutenant. How bad is it?” Chris asked.

“Not too bad, 3 Phoenix’s, 1 Serpent and approximately 15 MFs including Shades and Night-Wings. Although there are far more Night-Wings than Shades.”

“I see, Leo. You think you can handle this situation by yourself?” Chris yelled over towards one of the pilots sitting comfortably by the navigation screen. Leo Ombra, another MF pilot who joined Orbis. His memory has slowly begun to recover however; there are still too many holes that he feels needs to be filled. He smirked as he slowly rose.

“Eh, this shouldn’t be too difficult. Give me 10 minutes.” Leo replied.

“10 minutes huh? Do you want us to back you up?”

“Nah, just 15 inferior MFs. This shouldn’t be too tiring.” Leo mumbled.

Chris shrugged his shoulders just as Leo swung his ivory helmet over his right shoulder. knew that Leo would get the job done; there was just no questioning his skill in the cockpit. On the outside he seems distant and quiet, but once he entered Forsaken all bets were off.

“\*sigh\* Attention all TA and EAP ships, this is Freedom-7 of Orbis. We request that you halt all movements immediately. If you do not comply we will have no other choice but to open fire. (Is this really the right way to end the war? Or will this just end up backfiring on us by forcing the TA and the EAP to join together to fight against us?)” Gail had made it a requirement to every battalion in Orbis that they warn their enemy, giving them the opportunity to surrender before jumping into battle. Naturally no one had ever surrendered.

General Copiare smirked; he knew that with the intervention his mission would receive a greater chance at succeeding.

“Listen, once Orbis begins to attack we will move at a 45 degree pitch angle. By doing so we should be able to move away from the battle and head straight to Washington Space Station. The EAP ships will be too busy with whatever forces Orbis sends out.”

“General? But what about our own forces? We still have Shades out there, we can’t just abandon them!”

“I know...but unfortunately our mission takes a much higher priority than the lives of our soldiers. This is an order.” The General replied sternly. The look in his frigid eyes struck fear into those around him; he was not a man to be trifled with. The young Ensign sighed but saluted to the General with quivering fingers.

“Yes...yes sir.”

The explosions lighting up the darkness of space began to occur at a more rapid pace. Shades and Night-Wings alike began to fall apart, their limbs hovering lifeless through the shadows that engulfed the everlasting darkness. The grey and crimson MF, Forsaken surged through a team of Night-Wings. The intimidating MF slashed through each arm of every Night-Wing within a close distance of his position. No pilot TA or EAP alike stood much of a chance against the Orbis pilot without a past. Leo cringed as his radar began to beep loudly, a group of 4 Night-Wings recently launched from one of the Phoenix’s. His eyes slightly moved to the side, he noticed the slight subtle movements of the Serpent making its way away from the battle.

“Chris...the TA is trying to escape. I’m currently busy dealing with these pests.” Leo replied.

“Eh, let them go. Our only objective is to end the battle.” Chris replied.

“Fine...” Leo hated letting people go, but he still felt at ease knowing that he got to deal with the remaining MFs flying around.

Just as the four Night-Wings closed in on Forsaken Leo quickly swayed to the right, the crimson thrusters ignited at an angle, soon enough Forsaken began to spin rapidly around with both energy sabers

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extending outwards. In the form of a twisting blaze of energy Forsaken swatted down each Night-Wing that closed in on his position.

“This is too easy.” Leo mumbled.

“Sir! We have to call back the Night-Wings...we can't handle this MF!”

The Captain of the lead Phoenix slowly turned his head revealing a deep diagonal gash running across his face from the right side of his forehead down to his bottom left cheek. He stood in his bright maroon uniform with 4 golden stars dangling from each side of his broad shoulders. He was Captain Joseph Trahis, a French elite MF pilot in his youth. 3 years ago he fought bravely against one of the four horsemen sent down by Rebel358. During the battle he suffered a severe injury to his internal organs and in a cockpit explosion gained the ghastly scar that lines his face. After going through numerous surgeries he was able to recover and rejoined the EAP. Unfortunately for him his MF piloting days were over, but he was reborn as a Captain.

“Shit...it's just one MF! How can one MF pose this much of a threat?!” Trahis screamed.

“I'm not sure sir...but we're down to 3 Night-Wings, and on top of that the TA has left the perimeter of the area of operations. At this rate we will not be able to intercept Admiral Cadne. He will make it to Washington sir...”

“Err...Gail sure knows how to make things difficult. This Orbis organization of his sure is annoying. Damn, it looks like we have no choice. Call our remaining forces back to their ships, and from there we will head back towards Justice Space Station.”

“Yes sir!”

Suddenly dozens of crimson flares burst out signaling a retreat. Leo smiled, as expected he was able to put an end to the combat in that region. His fingers slowly moved away from the obsidian throttles. His eyes glazed over with a shell of relief and a feeling of emptiness. For years he had tried to uncover the mysterious of his past, and for years he had failed.

“Is this the path I am supposed to be on? Does the role of mediator truly fit me?...Gail, can you answer these questions for me?” His voice slowly trailed off as he nodded when Chris' face appeared on his communications display screen.

Thousands of people gathered around the main square located within Evo, the at one time military base had blossomed into the main city in Aetherius. Red Fury was holding one of their many rallies, their rallies promoted the glory of Mars as a single peaceful nation. The wind was strong and soothing at the same time. Leaves eloquently oscillated through the gentle breeze as Carlos Rendetore stood at the podium staring back at all of the people that gathered before him.

“Thank you all for coming. We have all been through many difficult times lately. The war continues to grow more unstable with each passing day. And as you all know both the EAP and the TA continued to bring their pointless war closer to our home. You are all aware of how Red Fury came to be, I was once apart of this war. As a soldier I fought against opponents chosen by my superior. I was dispatched along side the battalion of Shades that dropped the nuclear bomb on Berlin. It was there where I realized I could no longer tolerate the atrocities that the TA was committing. And the EAP was no different; if we were to follow their methods of actions then war would never end. It would become an endless cycle of retaliation. I have seen the military from Earth try to turn Mars into a clone of Earth. A place burdened by greed, and lust for power; I refuse to stand by and let that happen. That's why I left the TA and came to Mars with my comrades, we are all that is here to protect Mars from the ignorant people of Earth. Currently we have over 200 pilots registered to Red Fury. And when the time is right we will strike!” Carlos screamed. His dark brown hair was now long and lingered over his face covering his left eye. Both of his friends, Eric and Anthony sitting behind him smiling, it was their dream to protect Mars from the ignorant people who dwelled on Earth.

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Carlos suddenly turned his head towards the right, within a few seconds the ground began to rumble violently. Booming thunderous sounds echoed through the Martian atmosphere, the abrupt sounds startled the crowd of people forcing them into a state of panic.

“Crap...they managed to make it onto Mars without bringing attention to themselves.” Carlos screamed.

Both Anthony and Eric jumped out of their seats and ran to the side of their leader. They knew the situation was grim; they were completely defenseless at the moment. Their eyes focused on three massive MFs that had a strong resemblance to the Shades of the TA, and at the same time was equipped with booster extensions and sleek limbs like the Night-Wings of the EAP. The grey behemoth was at least 2 times the size of a normal MF making it about 44 meters in height. Etched clearly on the right cube like shoulder was an emblem of a dragon clutching onto a small ivory sphere in its right hand. Carlos cringed; it was the emblem of the Night Stalkers, a special division of the Earth Government that is separate from the military. The Earth Government was a small organization that tried to keep the Earth in a state of stability. It was their job to deal with the threat of Orbis and even Red Fury; the two organizations were thought to be a tremendous threat to the Earth. The Night Stalkers composed of highly skilled upper echelon MF pilots, and were extremely dangerous.

“What do you suggest we do Carlos?” Anthony mumbled.

“Err...there’s nothing much we can do at the moment. Our MFs are still at our HQ. Damn the Night Stalkers....we’re easy prey...” Carlos mumbled.

“Hehehe....Red Fury. You were once an elite squadron of the USAF, and now you’re nothing more than a group of traitorous bastards. You’re time has come...hehehe...” A voice manifested from the front MF as they glared down at the panic driven state that fell over Evo.

### **Chapter Two: Sins of Humanity**

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Carlos stared at the three behemoths that stood before him. Their three metallic toes outstretched across the cracked, imperfect streets of Evo. Each obsidian claw firmly planted into the cement causing the road to become lopsided with pieces of rigid block of concrete piercing out into the sky. The Night Stalkers had been constantly giving Red Fury problems in the past, but never succeeded at bring the Martian organization to their knees. This time was different, much different and Carlos knew this. They were in Evo for a simple speech, one that would hopefully draw in more members to their cause. The interruption brought about by the appearance of the Night Stalkers was not one they had anticipated.

“This is bad Carlos, it’s just us, and we have no means of retaliation.” Anthony yelled.

“I know, I’m fully aware of the disadvantage that we’re in right now.” Carlos replied. His eyes failed to look back to his fellow comrade in arms; he was too busy trying to analyze the new machines that the Night Stalkers brought before him.

Eric glanced at his small phone that he grasped in his right hand. His phone was blinking with a light green glowing aura. Soon his lips began to smile; with a quick stroke he closed his phone placing it in his denim pocket.

“Guys no need to worry. Back up is on the way. Apparently David and Alex were monitoring the Night Stalkers ever since they entered the Martian atmosphere.” Eric replied.

“Really...heh, those two are pretty handy. So it looks like we’re going to have to some how survive until they get here then.” Carlos mumbled.

“Gonna be risky. I mean we can’t out run those things, not on foot anyway. If we had our Vipers than it might be another deal but we don’t.” Anthony replied.

“I’m content with that fact. I’ve played out my usefulness. Red Fury has blossomed into a force to be reckoned with. Even we die here the cause will live on.” Carlos replied.

“\*sigh\*, you’re right....as always. RED FURY WILL LIVE ON!” Anthony screamed.

The lead pilot inside the enormous MF began to chuckle slightly under his cold breath. His crimson hued eyes widened while adrenaline continue to pulse forcefully through his blood stream. His long stringy green hair flowed down his pale skin covering the six wires that protruded out from his neck. The wires flowed down his spinal cord connecting to a rectangular silver panel. Inside the panel were six tubes filled with bubbling cerulean concentrations. As the liquids flowed through the wires and into the pilot’s neck laughter began to bellow through the dark cockpit. His smile stretched across his cheek forming thin dimples while he ivory fang like teeth to glisten devilishly.

“Hehehe....you hear that Pride? They think they’re pathetic little group will live on without their leaders....hahaha!” The pilot’s voice was low in pitch and subtle despite the excitement that filled his head.

The triangular head on top of the circular core slowly turned facing the second monstrosity on its right.

Pride as the first pilot referred to began to smile as well. His dark blue hair was tied toward the right side of his head in the form of a pony tail. Each single strand of his hair extended to a sharp edge and shined brightly with even the subtlest amount of light. Pride’s muscles were forcefully contained within the restraints of his leather jumpsuit, each detailed curve was apparent while the leather caressed his large body.

“Hehehe, it is quite amusing Wrath. The sheer ignorance that these humans possess and continually like to boast, it is no wonder why sin exists in the world. These pathetic humans do not deserve to live the way they do. It still amazes me how they managed to stall the Tribulation. They should have just accepted it and died! It would have been a lot easier!” Pride screamed.

The final MF stood quietly behind the first two, inside the pilot crossed her arms across her foreboding chest. Her left eye was hidden beneath the long strands of light pink hair that ran down to the middle of her abs. Like the other two pilots she too had six tubes protruding from the back of her neck. Her eyes were thin and appeared to be inhuman, demonic even; two thin reptilian slits replaced the typical spherical pupils. Her narrow dull lips smiled as she looked at her fellow pilots, Wrath and Pride.

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“Both of you shut up. We’re wasting time. Our mission is to destroy the leaders of Red Fury. And because of you’re stalling we’ve got company.” Her raspy voice echoed through the communication radios on both Pride and Wrath’s MFs.

“What are you talking about Sloth?” Wrath screamed back.

“You idiot look at your damn radar. We’ve got three MFs heading towards our location at a rapid rate.” Sloth mumbled.

“Let them come then; I’ll have no problem showing them that they’re inferior to me!” Pride rambled on.

“Inferior to you?! Inferior to us!! I’m not waiting, I’LL DESTROY THEM NOW!” Wrath exclaimed.

“Wrath...what are you...” Before Sloth could mutter out the words Wrath’s MF already turned around, its jet-like wings fully extending and the thrusters igniting. The thrust power was intense; it needed to be in order to send a beast of that size into the air.

“Idiot...our Seraphs drain too much energy! If you waste it so early on we’ll never get the mission completed!” Sloth yelled.

“Shut your trap Sloth. This shouldn’t take too long. I’ll be back before you know it!” Wrath yelled. His smile grew in size every few seconds; it wasn’t long until he was able to get a visual of the 3 MFs that were heading towards Evo.

“That’s it? Just those 3? Look at them! They’re so fragile...hahahahaha!”

David Lepidus, a leading Lieutenant in Red Fury’s militia stared straight into the heart of the beast; the massive MF known as a Seraph stared back with its single crimson glowing eye. David smirked, ever since the Azure Cup he had been hoping for a challenge where he would be able to prove his skill. His dark brown eyes glanced back at his two accompanying soldiers, Alex Diaz and Michelle Dolce.

“Both of you head straight for Evo and deal with the other two enormous MFs there. I’ll handle this one!” David yelled.

“What? You can’t be serious! We don’t even know what these things are, let alone what they’re capable of.” Alex replied.

“It’s an order.” David calmly replied. His MF, Retribution was a heavily armored unit with curved shoulders and a cubical core; just under the core was a massive particle cannon. The particle cannon was nothing more than a massive oval located just underneath the chest of the torso. Because of the cannon, the cockpit was forced to be located inside the head unit of Retribution. Normally this would be extremely dangerous, but the orange MF’s head unit was the surrounded by 3 layers of armor made from an unknown alloy found only on Mars. Retribution was not only high in defensive properties but offensive capabilities as well, both hands held onto obsidian plasma rifles. Hanging securely on the back of the core were two Excalibur swords. David was confident in this MF, unlike the weaker version he used in the tournament 3 years prior.

Michelle sighed as she watched Retributions boosters erupt violently sending the orange blur farther into the distance leaving her and Alex on their own.

“You think he’ll be alright?” Michelle mumbled.

“Yeah, David knows what he’s doing. What about you? You’re the one who left her entire life behind on Earth just to fight with your cousin.” Alex replied.

“I know...there are things I wish I could have brought with me to Mars, but...this is how it was meant to be. I can’t concern myself with such trifles right now. We need to get rid of these things before it’s too late!”

“You’re right...come on.”

Red Dawn’s thrusters slowly flickered with energy as did Alex’s MF, D-Block. The two MF’s quickly launched towards the smoldering Evo. Their guts ached as they continued to approach the one time glorious city. Michelle tried to ignore the massive Seraph that was now engaging with David, her eyes constantly found themselves glancing to the side. David was her cousin; she couldn’t help but worry



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about his well-being. But she was part of Red Fury now, and the cause always had priority over the individual.

“Damn you David...”

“Is this all you can do with that enormous thing? Ha, I expected much more!” David’s voice echoed throughout the dunes of Mars that surrounded Evo.

Wrath ignored the statements which he considered to be “prayers for death” His Seraph was a force to be dealt with in his opinion. The Seraph was merely a tool for him to bring his wrath down on those who were plagued with sin. Retribution shifted to the right avoiding an energy round fired from the massive cannon held by the Seraph. The cannon was tremendous in size and needed to be held with both mechanical hands. When fired the force of the recoil was equivalent to the explosion that it produced, no normal MF could handle the strain of the cannon. But the Seraph was no normal MF; it was 44 meters of pure heavy armor. Behind the sleek front of the Seraph were nine thin angular rods that stretched out into the sky from the lower part of the torso. Wrath considered them the nine-tails of fury, each Seraph was equipped with these “tails” but the amount of them differed depending on the pilot’s fighting style. Wrath’s final weapon was a large obsidian shuriken, 4 blades that stuck out in the shape of a “t”, each blade once ignited would emanate a thin beam of crimson energy. Very rarely did he ever find himself in a situation where he needed to use it.

“You humans...really are pathetic.” Wrath mumbled.

“Humans? What the hell are you talking about?!” David replied. Retribution sharply cut back heading straight towards the looming Seraph. He began having second thoughts about attacking the Seraph; in his mind it seemed a lot bigger when he was only a few feet in front of it. Regardless of its size he knew he had to take it down. The crimson boosters erupted once again as Retribution began to fire both plasma rifles. The recoil from the constant firing of the rifles caused Retribution’s velocity to slow down slightly. Wrath smirked as he watched the dozens of crimson plasma energy zoom through the air.

“Is this all you have to offer? Hehehehahahaha, how does Red Fury intend to survive with this kind of dull attack?!” The right arm of Seraph sluggishly moved inwards covering the torso and protecting the cockpit. Each plasma beam bounced off the glistening metallic armor leaving David in a state of shock. At the moment all he could hear was the sinister laughter emanating from the lingering Seraph. Just as Retribution continued on its path speeding up the tower like Seraph the massive left arm quickly swatted the orange MF to the ground. Retribution violently collided with the callous ground. Tons of light red smoke burst into the air as the MF tumbled through the ground. David clutched onto his throttles for dear life while his body swung around randomly but remained held in position due to the restraints.

“Ugh...this is going to be a lot harder than I thought...” David mumbled.

His heart abruptly began to switch to a rapid thumping pace while he unwillingly swallowed the sweat that rolled down the curves of his tanned skin face. The subtle movements of his fingers became frantic as they quivered around the stem of the throttle. David’s mahogany eyes were shaking from the fear that sped through his body.

“You humans truly are pathetic. What a waste...” Wrath muttered. The Seraph slowly advanced towards the fallen orange MF while David remained frozen. At the moment all he could do was stare blankly at the monstrous MF.

“I...I can’t be defeated here.....I won’t.....” By some miracle his body was no longer numb; his blood now flowed effortlessly through his veins. Just as the Seraph’s triangular foot lifted in preparation to crush the tiny MF by comparison the dual boosters abruptly roared sending a torrent of flames outwards. As Retribution sped into the air and out of the shadows of Seraph the massive foot crashed into the ground causing a minor shockwave to ride through the crimson sand.

“Heh, looks like you still have some fight left in you then.”

“I WON’T LOSE!” David’s voice carried through the sound waves of the atmosphere while his MF advanced at a hastened pace. The two orange chrome hands clutched onto the two Excaliburs. His adrenaline now took full control of his actions, no longer was he able to come up with last minute

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affective strategies for combat. Without thinking Retribution's two arms swung down crossing over each other just before the blades from the swords came in contact with the Seraph's outstretched right arm. Wrath's eyes widened just before the contact, he tried to avoid but there was no time; he underestimated his opponent. A blinding crimson fury of flames ruptured through the tough callous armor surrounding the right arm of the Seraph. As the arm dislodged from the elbow joint Wrath cursed under his breath.

"I was careless...hehehe...it's been awhile since I actually had to put forth some effort in a confrontation...hehehHAHAHAHAHA!!!!"

David cringed at the sound of the devilish laughter that taunted him from only a few meters away. "After all that he continues to laugh? Just what am I really dealing with here?"

"Carlos we have to get out of here. Let Michelle and Alex handle this!" Anthony screamed.

Carlos heard his friend's warning but refused to budge an inch. His hair continued to flap through the wind changing direction with each explosion that occurred in the distance. He watched his comrades fight the two Seraphs with every ounce of strength they could muster and yet it wasn't enough. The Night Stalkers were the strongest of the elites, they wouldn't lose so easily.

"You and Eric get out of here." Carlos mumbled.

"What? What are we supposed to do? Just leave you here to die? Red Fury can't go on without you!" Anthony screamed.

"Red Fury no longer needs me....it has become too big to be stopped now. We're no longer just an elite team of pilots; we're the guardians of Mars Anthony. And....and it's because of this that I can't leave Evo at a whim, even if there is nothing I can physically do. The least I can do is stay and see this to the end."

"Carlos...but...but...."

"You better listen to him and get out of here...." A voice bellowed from above. The sound of the youthful voice caught the three leaders of Red Fury by surprise; they thought that every civilian had left the vicinity by this point.

"What? Who the hell are you? It's not safe here you know!" Eric screamed staring up at the man who stood on top of a towering piece of debris that fell from a near by building. The young man slowly turned his head, his brown hair flowing through the strong winds covering his face.

"I live here, it's unfortunate that things aren't peaceful, even on Mars." The man replied. "But, I guess that's just how this world works...heh, anyway, I'm getting out of here, it's too dangerous. I suggest you guys do the same." With a quick gesture from his left hand the man jumped down from the debris vanishing from sight.

"Just who the hell was that?..." Suddenly a massive explosion roared through the central part of Evo causing thick clouds of smoke to sweep through the fallen rubble. Carlos, Anthony and Eric quickly covered their faces in order to protect themselves from the flinging rocks and other sorts of minerals that would be thrown into the air.

"Damn it! MICHELLE!" Eric screamed, the smoke slowly began to subside revealing a battle worn Red Dawn. Its arms were severed leaving nothing more than dangling wires and singed armor.

"You guys get out of here....you two need to survive." Carlos mumbled.

"Huh? What are you saying? Carlos?!" Anthony yelled.

Carlos ignored the words that spat out at him and began to run and jump over the fallen pieces of cement and cracked pavement. Eric then placed his right palm on his friend's shaking shoulder.

"It'll be alright, Carlos knows what he's doing..." Eric mumbled.

"You don't think he's going to use "it" already do you?" Anthony questioned.

"To be honest, I don't think he has a choice anymore."

"But he'll die...."

"It's his decision and his alone to make at this point, there's nothing we can do to sway him. Red Fury....will not die here."

### **Chapter Three: The Devil's Hand**

Michelle found herself motionless while the Seraph loomed over the broken and battered Red Dawn. Sloth sighed staring back at her defenseless prey, she thought it was pretty sad that the battle itself was short and unentertaining. Alex was too preoccupied with Pride to help Michelle. D-Block maneuvered around each ball of energy that fired out from the massive positron cannon.

“How can you expect to save your friend like this?!” Pride screamed.

“Damn it. ...Michelle...” Alex mumbled. Quickly the throttles were pulled inwards as D-Block swayed to the right allowing one of the conflagrant balls of energy to speed by. Just as D-Block avoided the attack the tyrannical Seraph appeared behind the silver light weight. D-Block's two cylindrical shoulder were suddenly engulfed in flames. A stream of blazing fire spat out from the mechanical mouth unit on the Seraph's head. Alex screamed in anguish, at such a close range he couldn't properly avoid any other attack launched by his opponent, and with each passing moment Michelle was in even more danger.

“Forget about your friend...hehe, Sloth will make sure she has a painfully slow death. You humans are so fragile...” Pride muttered.

“What?! How dare you!” Alex screamed. He knew there wasn't much he could do against the behemoth standing before him, but to him it didn't matter; Michelle had become one of his closest friends, both fighting for the cause they believed in they learned to trust one another with their lives. His

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teeth slowly began to grind against each other, his eyebrows tilted and curled at their tips, small thin wrinkles formed along the edge of his forehead; no longer could he contain his emotions, his anger. The six boosters on D-Block's back torso ignited with a bright golden glow, the light weight MF suddenly seared through the dawning sky. Pride smirked, small clusters of laughter poured out from his lips.

"Amusing these humans are...hehe...I would never go to such lengths for my comrades." Pride mumbled.

Sloth's eyes moved to the side quickly taking notice of the oncoming MF.

"Pride you idiot, you let one go. \*sigh\*...I guess it can't be helped..hehehe..." Sloth soon turned back to the quivering image of Michelle once again. "You got lucky, I'll deal with you later, your friend comes first."

"What?!...ALEX!" Michelle screamed. The dual chain guns pivoted aiming straight into the sky. Sloth shrugged her shoulders laughing, the resonating sound of her laughter brimmed in Michelle's ears.

"You...take this!" Michelle suddenly pulled the trigger causing the chain guns to start rotating in a counter clockwise direction. The small orange tinted shells poured out from the rapidly turning barrels. Michelle's soulful eyes focused in on each shell that traveled towards the monstrosity looming over her.

"Heh, amusing." Sloth mumbled. Each solid shell bounced off the shimmering armor of the Seraph dealing no damage. Frozen in a chaotic state of confusion and fear Michelle closed her eyes waiting for the final blow. Her closed eyes quivering from the amount of pressure she was exerting to keep them closed.

"GET AWAY FROM HER!" Alex screamed as D-Block ignited its energy sabers. Sloth sighed slowly bringing her throttles around. Seraph abruptly turned around raising both of its -arms to block Alex's attack. D-Block struck ferociously but failed to inflict any sort of damage. Instead Seraph's tremendous right hand clutched onto both of D-Block's hands, the speed that the beast displayed was jaw-dropping, especially for something of tremendous mass.

"What? That's not possible!" Alex yelled. His screams amused Sloth; she remained sitting calmly with the liquid from the console continually flowing into her veins.

"You can not possibly defeat me. Not with your inferior tactics. I am no longer amused by any of you. Die." Sloth mumbled.

The utterance of the word "die" sent fear speeding down his spine. He too found himself frozen in his cockpit; he had transitioned to a helpless child. A single radiant explosion boomed through the darkened sky, every person in a 30 mile radius stopped their actions and stared back at the amazing spectacle.

"What is that?..." A feminine voice mumbled softly. She was surrounded by dozens of people who managed to escape from Evo all clustering together hoping to find a safe haven from the attack. One of the elder men with his wise looking and wrinkled face slowly turned around and just shook his head.

"Don't concern yourself with the past child. We must get away from here as quickly as possible." The old man said.

"...I guess you're right....hey....where's....." Her voice paused as she began to scan through the crimson shifting sands. She suddenly found herself in a state of panic, her mahogany hair flowing through the gentle breeze whipping from side to side as her head jerked around. The pupils in her eyes widened trying to locate the person who was standing by her side not too long ago.

"I'm sure who ever you're looking for is safe. Now we must get out of her. I don't think Red Fury can hold off those arrogant Earth bastards much longer." The old man muttered.

"But....I....I...." Tears began to blossom around the lower parts of her eyelids, her feelings were crushed, even thinking about leaving her partner she thought was sinful. The old man wanted to pull her along by force; he didn't want to see the future generation of leaders die in such a place. What prevented him from doing so was the heart shaped 5.05 carat diamond ring securely placed around her ring finger on her left hand. He smiled; it was then that he realized that the person she was looking for and so deeply concerned about was her fiancé.

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“I see...so how long? If you don't mind me asking?”

“Huh?...oh” The young woman glanced at her engagement ring on her finger. “It's been about 5 months now. The wedding is scheduled for September of this year.” She replied blushing.

“I see...then we need to find him.”

“Really?”

“Yeah...come on.”

David sneered as he stared at the Seraph. A dozen alarms continued to blare inside Retributions' cockpit, the generator was completely drained of energy due to the radiator working at an overhauled level and yet the MF was still over heating. Retribution laid amongst the desert like sand just outside of Evo with nothing more than a singe core and scratched up head unit. Wrath glared back at Evo after the explosion shook the foundation of the ground but smirked when he realized both Pride and Sloth were still standing.

“You do realize that this is the end, don't you human?”

“Heh... \*cough\*...you keep referring to me as a human, what does that make you then?” David mumbled. His head jerked forward as his lungs sent blood through his throat. The white gloves that covered his hands were now stained with the dark tint of his blood as it trickled through the small crevices between each finger.

“I am more than human. I have transcended humanity and have become something much better...something deserving of both worlds, Earth and Mars. All that needs to be done is to wipe out every remaining sinner on both planets...hehe...hahaha...”

“...that...you're nothing more than a Rebel wanna be. Heh, you're trying to justify your actions by spitting out the same crap that Rebel358 did all those years ago. Heh...I am not amused.”

“Rebel358? Hehahahaha...it may be true that he did try to force the Tribulation onto humanity, and that he believed that humanity needed to be wiped out in order for purity to remain. However Rebel was nothing more than a failure, a failure could not handle the responsibility needed to cleanse the world. I tire of talking, you were amusing to me for a short amount of time; it is over.” Wrath mumbled.

David began to struggle with the controls in his cockpit hoping, praying for some miracle to save him. He couldn't die, in his mind there were still too many things left for him to accomplish. The positron cannon lowered as energy began to formulate around the barrel.

“NO!” Carlos' voice boomed from the distance distracting Wrath from his task at hand.

“What the hell?!” Wrath screamed. Just as the head unit of the Seraph turned it was engulfed in an onslaught of crimson energy. The energy attacks continued to press forward completely bombarding the Seraph. Wrath raised the positron cannon as quickly as he could with one free arm, but he still managed to accomplish the feat. In the distance was a silhouette of another massive machine, one that rivaled the size of the Seraph. Six thinly armored arms protruded from the elongated torso each holding onto a laser rifle, ten cannons stretched out from the back of the torso, each curving around the arms, five on each side constantly gathering energy. Two sharp obsidian spikes extended outwards from the feet of the titan that now stood a few meters in front of the Seraph. Wrath chuckled once the pulsating beams of energy dispersed.

“Heh, what have we here? Another pathetic human who wishes for death?”

“I am a human...and death is indeed inevitable. But I do not intend to watch you kill my friends! Red Fury will never disappear!” Carlos screamed.

“Big words for such a pathetic human, you cling onto your ideal, believing that you are justified in your actions. You believe that you are protecting some sort of society, that you are the chosen few free of ignorance and deprived of sin. But it makes no difference, you were born on Earth, you are fighting against your own people. You're the worst kind of person, one who believes that detachment equals rebirth. You're Red Fury will wither into ashes and be tossed to the wind.”

“Heheh...you don't know me too well. I will never just stop fighting because someone tries to make me question the decisions I've made in my life. With the power of this Devil's Hand I will get rid of you Night Stalkers once and for all!” Carlos screamed.

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“Really? Hahahaha, I find that amusing, because your comrades said the same thing and now they can’t even move. Hardly worth killing!” Pride screamed. Both Pride and Sloth’s Seraphs crashed into the ground surrounding Devil’s Hand. Images of both Alex and Michelle raced through his mind, even though they were said to still be alive that didn’t change the rage collecting inside his heart.

“You...” Carlos mumbled. Just before he could finish the ten cannons pivoted in the opposite direction and fired at the two Seraphs standing behind him while the six arms began to fire at Wrath in front of him. Pride and Sloth quickly separated and began to dash into the sky while dodging the attacks that were blazing in the darkness.

“Heh, do you really think you can handle all three of us at once?!” Sloth mumbled.

“Let him try Sloth, this can be fun.” Pride replied.

“Damn you three!” Carlos screamed. Just then Wrath’s Seraph sped colliding into Devil’s Hand throwing it off balance. The sizable Devil’s Hand quickly began to stumble, the machine was a prototype and not meant to fight in actual combat; it wasn’t reliable enough. But only Carlos, Anthony and Eric were aware of this fact.

“Hahaha, you topple so easily!” Wrath screamed.

Wrath’s Seraph backed away allowing both Pride and Sloth to pass by grabbing onto one of the many arms. Both Pride and Sloth quickly ignited their thrusters and sped away ripping two of the six arms off of Devil’s Hand. Just as they moved away from Carlos the ten cannons fired. The crimson beams of energy erupted on the back of Sloth’s Seraph causing it to crash into the ground. Sloth didn’t scream but remained quiet and collected as the sand tossed into the sky around her.

“Heh, not too bad. No one has been able to get Sloth like that before.” Pride mumbled. Devil’s Hand regained its balanced just as Wrath fired the positron cannon. Carlos’ eyes widened as the massive beam tore through the left side of Devil’s Hand. As the beam dissipated it revealed Devil’s Hand still standing but with smoldering smoke rising from the enormous hole on it’s left side, the remaining two arms were gone, all that was left was a gap in the shape of a backwards “c”. The former USAF pilot cringed whipping the sweat out of his sockets, this was a lot different than what he was used to, the Vipers were a lot easier and more reliable to control than the monster he was piloting at the moment.

“Damn...(I knew it was too soon to use this...heh, Anthony and Eric were right...as long as they live on so will Red Fury...I’ll die knowing that I tried my best)...what the?” Carlos glanced at his radar noticing 5 blinking ivory dots.

“Heh, you guys are late....Envy...” Sloth said softly as her Seraph rose from the crimson dirt.

Envy smiled widely with his ivory teeth sparkling reflecting the lights that emanated in the cockpit of his Seraph.

“I know...but Gluttony refused to leave. Besides it’s not like you guys couldn’t handle the situation on your own anyway.” Envy replied. His short dark green hair waved to the side once he pushed his pale fingers across his scalp.

“Gluttony that fat prick.” Pride mumbled.

“You did save me some action right? It’s been a while since I was able to work out properly.” Another deep voice radiated through the communications link.

“Greed...heh, of course we saved you some.” Pride replied.

“Good...Lust, you don’t mind do you? I would like to take care of this one by myself.” Greed replied. His reptilian slit pupils glanced over to his display screen which showed the image of a woman with dull pallid skin and long crimson hair. The woman, Lust shrugged her shoulders and waved her hand briefly.

“Do what you wish. As long as we finish the mission I don’t care what you do.” Lust replied.

“Can we eat?!” Gluttony screamed.

“Again? We just ate, try and contain yourself for once you obese idiot.” Envy screamed.

Carlos just stared at the 7 Seraphs that now lingered a few hundred meters in front of him. His sweat was now drenching his entire pilot suit; his fear fully took hold of his soul. He was having difficulty against 3 Seraphs, but now 7 stood.

“Damn...looks like this is indeed the end.” Carlos mumbled.

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Both Michelle and Alex managed to make their way to the exit grounds of Evo, there waiting for them was Anthony and Eric.

“You two are still here?” Alex muttered in complete shock.

“Yeah, we couldn’t just leave Carlos to fend for himself.” Anthony replied.

“I see...WAIT? Does that mean?!?” Michelle exclaimed.

“Yeah...he’s taken the Devil’s Hand.” Eric replied sullenly.

“But...but I thought it wasn’t ready.” Alex mumbled.

“It’s not, but he had hoped that its power alone would be enough to topple those things....but it doesn’t look like that’s the case.” Eric replied.

“What?” Both Michelle and Alex screamed in simultaneous nature.

“4 more Night Stalkers showed up. Meaning all 7 are here, united in battle for the first time from what I understand.” Anthony said.

“7 of those things?! Carlos can’t fend them off by himself!” Michelle yelled.

“Of course he can’t....but he’s going to try. Red Fury is his creation, he would never sit down and do nothing when its in danger.”

“But Eric! He’ll die!” Alex yelled.

“I know....and he knows it too.”

“HEY!” A vibrant young voice bellowed from the distance. Alex, Michelle, Eric and Anthony turned their heads; they were shocked to say the least to see some people other than themselves still in Evo. The elderly old man slowly walked down the small hill holding onto the young woman.

“What are you people doing here? It isn’t safe!” Anthony screamed.

“I know....I told her that myself. But she’s looking for her fiancé; it seems that he got misplaced during the evacuation. You haven’t seen a young man around her have you?” The old man replied.

It had almost slipped their minds; both Anthony and Eric recalled running into a person earlier however they were unable to get a good look at him. At that moment the gentle breeze began to pick up and the winds increased in velocity. The ground started to shake abruptly as the sky echoed the immense humming sound of boosters found on an MF.

“What the hell?! Another one?!” Alex screamed. The young woman paused taking a deep gasp for air as she stared into the sky holding her hands near her pounding heart. In a blaze of speed another MF soared through the darkened sky heading towards Carlos and the 7 Seraphs.

“I...I think I found him....” The young woman mumbled under her breath. Her eyes still quivering from the shock of seeing the MF in the sky once again. The old man confused glanced at her.

“Wait? Are you telling me your fiancé is an MF pilot?!”

The young woman didn’t respond verbally, she merely nodded. Michelle stood back up from the ground staring at the young woman and older man. Her eyes suddenly widened once she realized the identity of the woman.

“Hey.....you’re....Sharon Amare.....”

### **Chapter Four: Seven Sins of Humanity**

Sharon's stared into the slightly pale crimson sky as dull light gray clouds as the heavily armored golden MF soared over their heads. Her frown returned to its original form, lately any time she would see an MF and instinctively believe it to be *that* MF. There was Michelle, now standing a few feet in front of her, someone she hadn't seen for about 3 years ever since she and Mario went their separate ways. Michelle believed in Carlos and in Red Fury while Mario didn't. It was the classic Romeo and Juliet ordeal, one on one side the other on the other. The wind was subtle for the battle that was taking place in the distance, and even for an MF that had just passed by over head.

"Michelle...it's been 3 years right?" Sharon mumbled. Her eyes continued to scan the area, particles of crimson dust and sand fluttered in the sky with each step she took.

"Yeah...it really has been that long hasn't it..." A loud explosions settled in the distance causing shockwave of energy to disperse through the chilled air. Sharon along with Michelle and the others all collapsed into the ground as the winds picked up with a violent streak.

Carlos knew there was no possible way for him to be determined the victor in the battle. The seven Seraphs, the MF's that were the steeds to the Night Stalkers were too much for him to handle by himself. The Devil's Hand was in no condition to continue the fight, but he was a man full of pride; an emotion that he had implanted into Red Fury, he knew no matter the outcome Red Fury would not perish, they were meant for much greater things.

"Can we finish this already? This is boring me." Sloth mumbled as she yawned greatly.

"Impatient as always huh Sloth? I'll finish this myself, you six stay back. He's all mine." Greed replied with a devilish grin lighting his face.

"Damn....I don't think I'm going to make it out of this alive." Carlos mumbled.

The ground shook as the Seraph slowly made its way towards Carlos. Just then an enormous beam of fizzing energy soared through the air between Carlos and Greed. The lime green colored beam caused Greed to halt roughly causing tons of debris to erupt into the sky.

"Who?!" Greed screamed suddenly taken back by a barrage of grenade shells that exploded on his Seraph's armor. The damage was insignificant only able to scuff parts of the glossy metallic armor.

A golden MF hovered gracefully in front of Devil's Hand holding onto a laser rifle and a smaller grenade rifle on the left arm. Resting on the right shoulder of the rectangular core was a spherical cannon emanating smoke into the sky. On the opposite side of the cannon was a circular weapon, an autonomous pod launcher. The pilot sighed with relief as he glanced over to Carlos' MF.

"So this is the Devil's Hand I've heard about, impressive." The pilot mumbled.

"Yeah....about time you guys arrived." Carlos replied.

"Sorry, we got caught up in space."

"Orbis butting in on the TA and EAP again I take it?" Carlos replied.



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“Of course, that’s what Gail wants. As impressive as that machine is Carlos I think you should back out. I don’t think you’ll be much help.”

“Still pointing out the obvious eh Chris?” Carlos joked.

“Doing what I’m good at I suppose. But damn, I wasn’t expecting seven of them. Are they the Night Stalkers?” Chris asked.

“Yeah...that’s all of them. The first time that they’ve all been clustered together...” Carlos managed to mutter.

“I see...this might be a bit tougher than I originally thought.” Chris replied.

“What? You don’t seriously expect to take them on all by yourself do you?!”

“I can stall, the rest of Orbis’ troops are on their way. Now get out of here, if you die this whole thing would be pointless! Chris screamed. Greed’s eyebrows arched upwards as he continued to stare at the golden MF known as Tempest.

“And who might you be?” Greed screamed.

“Doesn’t matter!” Chris yelled back as the golden MF dashed towards the Seraph.

“Apparently this one wishes for death as well...hehe.” Suddenly six spherical pods shot out, each one flying in a circular pattern around Greed.

“Is this really it?” Just as Greed prepared to engage in combat Envy’s Seraph flew down in between Tempest and Greed with its thin obsidian skeletal wings flapping in the air.

“The hell?!” Chris screamed as Tempest abruptly stopped its movement in mid air.

“ENVY?!”

“Our mission isn’t to get into conflict with Orbis.” Envy mumbled.

“That may be true, but they’re getting in the way. Are you suggesting we just let them go?”

“Greed...know your place. If we step out of line...you know what will happen.” Envy replied.

Greed suddenly became silent; the thought of the torture that he would endure froze his mind in a child like obedient setting. His hands subtly let off the throttles as Envy turned facing Tempest, the physical representation of Gail and Orbis at the current moment in time.

“Go back to Gail you pawn. And do inform him that Envy is coming.” Envy replied.

Chris cringed at the site of Envy’s Seraph staring demonically at him. He couldn’t comprehend the feeling that now ran through his veins; he just knew he didn’t like it.

“We’re leaving.” Envy replied.

The six other Night Stalkers nodded and took off as well. Chris remained staring into the now empty screen panting, struggling for air. He was perspiring at an alarming rate; there was something about the Night Stalkers, Envy to be more specific that frightened Chris. It was something that he never experienced before when in an MF.

David stood on top of his toppled Retribution staring at the pallid sky as the flickers of flames from the Seraph’s boosters slowly faded into the over casting darkness of the night.

“You ok...” Carlos mumbled.

“Huh?...oh, yeah I’m fine.” Chris glanced back over at Carlos.

“Good...it seems that the Y don’t want to get involved with Orbis yet, I wonder why....” Carlos mumbled.

“EVERYONE AT ATTENTION!” The loud familiar yet still intimidating voice of the on site Lieutenant Commander at the TA’s military base located in West Point boomed forth. The hundreds of TA soldiers quickly snapped to attention with their hands firmly raised perpendicular to their forehead as the high ranking officers made their way to the front of the pack. The sun hovered brightly in the light azure sky with only the passing ivory clouds staining the canvas. There was a gentle brisk breeze that passed through the park like area. Thousands of civilians lined up and sat on silver bleachers surrounding the park while the soldiers stood in their piloting uniforms. Every soldier there had managed to successfully complete MF training and were preparing to graduate and receive their assigned MF teams. An elderly man in his mid 60’s stood in front of the wooden podium holding firmly onto the microphone while six officers sat behind him.

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“Today is a day that will live on in the memories of your hearts for the rest of your lives. It is today that you all are officially recognized as MF pilots for the Trinity Alliance. You are the future of our great nations; you are the next generation of MF pilots that will finally be able to end this war. Be proud of yourselves, this is no ordinary minute feat that just any one can accomplish. But in this accomplishment realize that even more harder trials and tribulations await you. Some of you may survive, while others fall. The lifestyle you have all chosen is not for the faint of heart, but for the strong of will. Today, I, Admiral James T. Welsh acknowledge you all as the MF class of 106 AR!” Just as the Admiral’s speech concluded the listening soldiers broke into a state of chaotic screaming. Their ivory hats flapped happily in the breeze, the Admiral smiled looking back at the six officers sitting behind him in the metal chairs given by the academy at West Point. His glistening cerulean eyes sparkled staring at the youngest officer sitting in a chair. The young officer sighed reluctantly getting up.

“You know old man I’m not good at speeches.”

“Heh, neither am I. You’ll do fine Stephen.” The Admiral replied.

“Thanks....”

As Stephen reluctantly made his way to the podium the crowd became silent as they instantly recognized General Stephen Novus. Stephen glanced through the crowd of attentive soldiers. But it wasn’t the soldiers gawking at him with expressionless faces; it was the vibrant attractive young woman standing on the edge of the podium holding a digital camera. Right away he knew he would never live this moment down, the moment when he would have to be the voice of the military, one to inspire hundreds of MF pilots to sacrifice their lives for a cause he even was having doubts about. Ashley stuck her tongue out while the small chrome camera flashed sealing an image in the hour glass of time. Stephen sighed and turned around to face the eager crowd.

“Ahem, I am General Stephen Novus...some of you might know of me, or here me being referred to as the Crimson Knight. Well today I am here as a window into what you may or may not experience in your lives as MF pilots. It’s not an easy life; you are going to see death all the time. It is best that you prepare now, because if you hesitate on the battlefield because you’re going through the emotions of sorrow or regret then you too will most likely lose your life. Your friends knew the risks when they signed on, you knew the risks when you signed on. As horrible as it sounds, you all should be prepared for your death. If you understand this now, you will be better prepared to deal with what awaits you. You will all be assigned to your MF units after the completion of the ceremony. Like Admiral Welsh said, be proud of your accomplishment as this is no ordinary feat. Once again, congratulations.” Stephen sighed as he finished his quick spurt of words that he would call a speech.

“Not bad Novus. For someone who is obsessed with power you sure know how to explain the reality of war.” One of the Generals said.

Stephen brushed off the comment; he had heard comments like that one ever since he was promoted to General after Rebel’s failed Tribulation. He couldn’t refute the fact, he was indeed trying to rank up to a position in order to change the way things were run. It was his dream; he knew he couldn’t change the war, or the world, not as an MF pilot. He knew things needed to be changed from the inside, ever since he was 17 it was what he wanted; now at 22 he was well on his way to accomplishing his dream. The crude ignorant remarks of a few ranking officers wasn’t going to deter him from his dream.

“Hey has anyone kept in touch with Adam?” Ashley asked glancing over towards Heather and Mario who were currently stuffing their faces with cake. The ceremony had ended and the party began. Every soldier remained dressed in their uniform as they courted young women through out the night. While most of the soldiers danced throwing their inhibitions to the wind Stephen stood leaning over the balcony of the military office. Ashley, Heather and Mario sat outside enjoying the serenity of the scene as the sun slowly set.

“No, he hasn’t been answering his phone lately. I’m not sure why, same goes the apartment. I’ve been trying to reach him all day but all I’ve been getting is static. I wonder what’s going on up there...” Heather mumbled followed by a quick sip of her chardonnay.

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“Why did he decide to live on Mars anyway? I mean, what’s wrong with New York?” Ashley asked.

“Not sure either. I’m guessing because of all the memories, you know of his friends dying here and stuff. Besides he quit the military anyway. I think he thought Mars was going to be a peaceful place, a place where he could find tranquility and escape his past.” Heather replied.

“So he’s trying to escape his past instead of fighting with it like he usually does?” Ashley remarked sticking her fork into the blush chocolate cake sitting before her.

“People change Ashley. Times change people.” Mario mumbled. His head staring off into the mild serene Atlantic ocean.

“Do you think it’s because of what Leviticus said?” Ashley mumbled. Nathan Leviticus, a man who fought to the bitter end against both the TA and the EAP in an attempt to destroy them both. He felt that it was the only way to get revenge for the loss of his family which resided in Berlin. He like Carlos Rendetore believed that Earth was full of sin and the TA and the EAP were irresponsible in their war. However he was too blinded by his own pain and sorrow and rage to realize the path he took was wrong. Six months ago Leviticus built a massive weapon that radiated nuclear energy and planned to destroy the TA and the EAP and the Earth along with them in an attempt to get what he perceived as justice. The cannon, Perdition was destroyed and Leviticus had one final comment. *The past is what made me into this monster....I could not distinguish my present from my past, nor could I see the darkness that I fell into....war is such an ugly sight...* Ashley remembered the speech all too clearly. Ever since that day Adam was never the same. It was then that he began to distance himself from his friends and family and remained with Sharon on Mars in hopes of finding a new path and a new destiny.

“It’s more than likely that that is the problem. He felt that he was no different than Leviticus and that scared him. He left because he didn’t want his power to over come him and his desire for revenge to send him into the darkness. I respect that...but solitude isn’t the answer either.” Mario replied.

“Mario...” Ashley mumbled as she glanced upwards. Stephen continued to sigh staring into the rising moon that cast its awe inspiring image reflecting onto the ocean.

“You ok Stephen?” The wise tone of voice that seemed to rattle off the lips of Admiral Welsh never ceased to ease Stephen’s wound up tensions.

“I’m fine Admiral...”

“Haha, you were always a terrible liar you know that?”

“Heh...Shouldn’t you be in there drawing a crowd with your amazing stories of heroics?”

Stephen replied mockingly.

“Probably, but I think I’m needed out here. Besides...I have some information that you might find interesting.”

Stephen raised his eyebrow in curiosity.

“Really?”

“It’s about Mars...and Red Fury. You’re aware of the organization calling themselves the Earth Government correct?”

“You mean the controlling house for the Night Stalkers?”

“Hoo, I see you know your stuff.”

“I’m a General now. It’s my job to know stuff.” Stephen replied.

“I see, well they’re on Mars. And just attacked Red Fury directly in Evo.” The Admiral spoke.

“And what does this have to do with me? Red Fury isn’t my concern, no are the Night Stalkers you know this.” Stephen replied.

“I know, but Adam lives in Evo. You remember him right? You’re impulsive brother.”

“Yeah I know. But Adam can take care of himself. He’s not an idiot...heh, well not all the times anyway.”

“I see, well I thought you might have liked to know that the Night Stalkers are making their move. And Orbis isn’t too far behind either. They interrupted a battle in space recently, as well as interfering with the Night Stalker, Red Fury conflict.”

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“Orbis? Gail, out of every politician he is still the only one I don’t understand. What good does being neutral do anyway?”

“He’s playing Devil’s Advocate...or at least trying to. I’m not too sure of his intentions either; I guess we’re going to have to wait until he reveals it to the rest of the world.”

“Should we even let him get a chance to show the world?” Stephen remarked.

“I’m not sure...heh, you remind me of myself when I was young. You have a bright future ahead of you son.”

“(Do I really?...)”

“I once thought your brother had a future as well. I must admit I didn’t expect him to quit the military so suddenly. I was disappointed to say the least.”

“He had his reasons.” Stephen replied.

“But I do have respect for him though. He did come back to humanity’s aid when Leviticus threatened us with Perdition. Lots of people lost their lives because of that madman, but your brother stepped back into the cockpit in order to help. A man who can put down his sword and pick it up again without hesitation in order to protect what he holds dear is a man who deserves the utmost respect.”

“Yeah...the utmost respect...” Stephen mumbled looking back into the night’s sky.

“You’re angry at him for quitting aren’t you.”

“It’s not that I’m angry, it’s just that I question his decision...but look, I’d prefer if we didn’t get into this discussion if that’s ok with you.” Stephen replied.

“It’s completely understandable. Anyway it’s about time I head back in there. You know play my part as an Admiral. Heh, you feel better.”

“Thanks Admiral...I enjoyed our discussion...”

Stephen leaned his head into his folded arms that rested on the brisk metal balcony. His eyes wandering across the fertile grass catching notice of his friends sitting comfortably reminiscing.

Ashley suddenly glanced back at Stephen making eye contact. She smiled briefly only to turn her attention back to Heather and Mario. Stephen smirked and he moved off the balcony ledge and headed towards the stairs.

“Luscious....I....I wasn’t expecting you so soon.....” The lead scientist mumbled under his breath showing all of his emotions. Luscious stood before the quivering scientist staring at the hundreds of tubes with incomplete life forms floating in the green tinted amniotic fluid. He sighed placing his hands into the pockets of his leather trench coat. As his head jerked around his dark pony tail whipped around through the air.

“How many Betas are left?”

“Betas? You mean the first batch of clones we let out? Why are you interested in them...ummm...if you don’t mind me asking.”

“It’s fine...just look up Beta-X10SA. Is it still functioning?” Luscious mumbled.

“X10SA?...one second, just let me look in the registry here.” The scientist replied. He took a seat and began typing in a repetitive motion. As the computer LCD screen filled up with statistics on the clone in question Luscious began to smile.

“Yes sir, X10SA is still active. However its life span is pretty much at its end.”

“I see, no matter. There’s plenty of time for it to fulfill its usefulness before it meets its end.” Luscious replied.

“I’d say it has about another month, maybe a month and a half left of life sir.”

“I see...what can you tell me about Hybrids?”

“You mean the ones we sent to the Earth Government?”

“Yeah, those would be the ones.” Luscious replied. He paused for a second taking a sip of his Merlot which rested on the counter top besides him.

“Here we go; Sloth, Envy, Greed, Lust, Gluttony, Wrath and Pride. All are functioning perfectly normal sir.”

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“Good, Rebel was too impulsive, too much like my younger self. That’s why he was a failure, and why his Tribulation failed. This is much easier; manipulating the TA into this Tribulation will be child’s play. Heh...and who said dreams don’t come true?”

**Chapter Five: Dreams**

*Dreams are what fuel people to stretch for the future, to keep going even though all the odds are stacked against them. I guess I've lost sight of my own dream. People can lose sight of lots of things; after all, time does indeed change a person. Whether it is for the worse or the better depends on the situation I guess. I understand now that chaos tends to follow people around like a plague. I was hoping that Mars would be different, a place where I could escape the destruction and the deception; apparently I was wrong. Evo, for the most part is in shambles, it's been 2 days since the attack and already Red Fury is putting the majority of their effort into fixing the chaotic mess of debris that was the central square of the city. Part of me wonders why I didn't help them prior, maybe it's because I was scared, scared of what might happen if I were to step into the cockpit. After that fiasco with Leviticus six months ago my MF was thought to be beyond repair. Originally I was perfectly ok with that, but it was Sharon who insisted that I had it fixed. Not sure why, especially when she's the one praying and yelling at me so I wouldn't use it again; I swear sometimes I just don't understand what goes through her head.*

The thoughts continued to trail through his confused mind, whether or not the path he chose was the correct one. Distancing himself from his family, his friends and more importantly, his past he stayed on Mars hoping for a better life. His eyes were dull seemingly void of life or energy. His head leaned at an angle resting on the frigid fogged glass window. His dark brown hair fell covering his expressionless face as it stared at the hundreds of people and construction crews outside. Taking a deep sigh he slowly turned around glancing at the opened door leading out into the living room of the apartment. She stood quiet in the doorway, her long flowing hair caressing her shoulder. She gazed back at him, her eye brows arched and her lips budding, she didn't know what to say to him. There were plenty of times much like this one in the past, but one day she ran out of ideas on how to deal with them.

"You know I really thought you left to fight." Finally she managed to find some words, they weren't much but they were something.

He just stared back at her briefly and then looked back outside.

"You know ignoring me isn't going to make you feel better."

"\*sigh\*..." Her body quivered abruptly as he stood up from the black mattress. As he walked towards the door way no eye contact was made, he simply left the room without making as much as a sound.

"What's wrong with you? You've been like this ever since..." She caught herself in the middle of the sentence, she didn't want to make it worse; whatever it was that he was dealing with. The sound of her voice shot through his head causing him to freeze. Once again he sighed only for a second and continued towards the blaring television. Sharon glanced to the side, her eyes focusing on the small imperfections riding along the surface of the crimson carpeted that covered ground. Her hands clasped together she sighed.

"It's nothing to be concerned with..." He replied just as he left the apartment. Sharon's eyes widened at the abrupt sound of the door encasing her in solitude.

"(Why is it that no matter where I end up there is always conflict...maybe....he was right...)"

*"Hahaha...you have no clue what you're talking about Adam. Humanity is full of sinners, sinners who have no right to inhabit the Earth. This paradise that God has created!"*

The sound of *his* voice echoing in his head caused him to cringe. Those words that he heard on that day 3 years ago never left him. They remained floating in the darkest regions of his mind refusing to go away. Even in death that man, Rebel still haunted his dreams. A small family of four slowly walked through the confined hallway of the apartment complex staring at the exhausted youth. His hands slid

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along side the horrendous wall paper covering the plaster walls in the hallway, he glanced at the family that was now standing still awkwardly glaring back at him.

“Are you ok?” The younger daughter asked. She seemed to be full of innocence like every child at that age, probably no more than 8.

“I’m fine...long day is all....” He replied.

The father pushed his two children and wife along the hall passing the strained youth. Just as he passed the middle aged father sluggishly turned around.

“I recommend you get out of Evo. It’s not safe here.”

“Huh?” He turned around only to find the older man staring back at him, his eyes thinned and focused on his face.

“I know who you are. They know who you are as well, and I guarantee it is only a matter of time before they come looking for you. If you truly seek freedom from your past I suggest heading out to Abyssus, there you will find a Red Fury safe haven.”

“Who are you?”

“Me, heh, my name doesn’t concern you. I’m just trying to pass along some friendly advice. If you stay in Evo too long it’ll be too late, and you don’t look like you want to get mixed up with the chaos here on Mars. Do you? Adam Novus?”

Adam pulled away from the older man not knowing what to make of his warning. There was no true way of finding out if he was serious or just full of shit.

“How do you...?”

“It doesn’t matter how I know anything. I can’t force you to head to Abyssus, which is a decision you’re going to have to make on your own.”

“Abyssus...but that’s a desert continent. There’s nothing there but fields of barren lands, granted there are a few cities but none of which have seriously prospered.”

“Hence why they would never to think to look for you there. I’m sorry, but I need to catch up with my family. It’s Alicia’s birthday.”

“Wait...one more thing. Who are “they” that you’re referring to?”

“That is something you’re going to have to find out on your own. I can’t help you much more than this. Have a good day Adam...”

“Thanks....” Adam continued to walk down the hallway only now was he filled with even more confusion. As he came to the edge of the stairway he slowly turned his head around and sighed. “Can I ever escape....”

Thousands of screaming civilians continued their desperate cries for salvation amongst the blazing flames that spread outwards through the streets of Paris. The city was set a blaze with destruction, an event that no one person could have foretold. The EAP was on all five stages of alert investigating the events that lead to the fall of Paris. It was an abrupt occurrence that even the TA was unaware of. Many people screamed with delusions that a demonic force swept through the city inflicting unwarranted chaos. The shadows had engulfed the form so that no one survivor could describe the monstrosity’s true form, that or each survivor was too petrified to even notice. When face with possible death all people can come to think about is survival, no one else matters in this brief instant where our deepest basic instincts come to pass. This day, July 4<sup>th</sup> 106 AR would live in infamy for the rest of time. Hundreds of EAP soldiers ran through the burning streets searching for any survivors that they could find. It was a horrific sight to behold, families torn apart from each other, smoldering flames burning the fragile skin off human bones. Massive clusters of debris stained with the crimson hue of blood, ash still falling from the night sky, it truly was a hell on Earth scenario.

“Looks as if it has awakened....” Severen mumbled while crossing his right leg of his left. He leaned back into the plush leather cushion while Luscious sat taking another sip of his wine. They were in Washington, the capital of a nation, as well as the head office for the Trinity Alliance.

“It does seem that way doesn’t it. I guess the 18<sup>th</sup> life cycle has come to pass. Although, I’m not entirely sure as to why your parents started this project of theirs; this, Zenith of Artificially Created

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Humans.” Luscious mumbled as he stared at a piece of yellow stained paper with the edges torn, with his glass of wine now placed on the table he held the paper closer to his face while reclining in his chair.

“Zenith of Artificially Created Humans huh...Caleb probably knew what it was. He knew everything about our parents.”

“Well Caleb isn’t much help now is he?” Luscious remarked.

Severen paused looking back at the head of the TA, his face blank and his eyes shaking. He wasn’t certain, but he had a feeling that Luscious had a hand in his brother’s mysterious disappearance 3 years ago.

“Have you pinpointed the source of this project?”

“I haven’t...but I believe Rebel had an idea of where to look.”

“Rebel....you mean you’re failed clone...”

“Yeah, he was more involved with the pilots during the Azure Cup. Aside from Novus he was focusing on another pilot. Unfortunately I can’t figure out who it was. Anyway, I’m too busy to deal with this; you clean up after your parent’s mess. Find out who is this H-3.” Luscious replied.

“H-3?”

“The third hybrid, supposed to be the perfect combination of machine and human. He’s been a hybrid since his birth, it’s all he knows, but is unaware of what is inside him. Doesn’t make much sense for him not to be aware of the computer that is his personality, but your parents managed to figure out how to do it. Find him, and once you do either bring him here or kill him. He might be useful in the upcoming war.” Luscious replied

“That’s easier said than done Luscious. I mean, where the hell do I start looking? I mean this H-3 can be anywhere.”

“You saw the news. Go to Paris. I’m sure you’ll find something there.”

“Zach...hey Zach wake up.” Reine’s voice blared into the soft ears covered by Zach’s darkened hair. Zach’s eyes were glazed over but sprung to life at the sound of his friend’s voice.

“Huh...hey Reine...\*yawn\* what’s the matter?” Zach mumbled slowly rising from the sheets on his hotel bed.

Reine sat on his bed glued to the flickering screen of the television.

“Reine?”

“Paris.....it’s been destroyed Zach.”

Zach’s eyes shot open in suspense. A sudden feeling of adrenaline took over his body as he jumped out of bed staring at the news report which showed Paris covered in searing smoke and ash.

“How...how could this happen....”

“It’s amazing huh...I mean we were just in Paris the other night. Good thing we swung over to Rome as fast as we did huh?” Reine questioned.

“Yeah....amazing....” Zach’s voice trailed off as he found himself surrounded by a shroud of darkness. A sharp pain burned in the back of his head causing the 18 year old to collapse to the ground screaming in agony. Reine sprang into action grabbing a pack of pills that Zach constantly carries along with him. Lately the young pilot had become over run by random anxiety attacks, and migraines.

“You idiot you didn’t take your medicine yet did you?” Reine screamed throwing the pack of pills towards Zach who caught it instinctively.

“Heh....\*huff\*....thanks \*huff\*....I don’t know what came \*huff\* over me....” Zach said while swallowing the gray colored capsules. Sweat dripped from the edges of his split ends falling to the ground. Reine remained quiet, this attack was much worse than any of the previous ones he had seen. Zach was still shaking lying on the ground with his face staring at the pallid ceiling above. His chest rising and descending with each heavy breath he took.

Reine’s voice slowly faded from the plane of existence, confused and frightened Zach frantically rose from the floor and with each step he took the surrounding environment transitioned to that of a full intact Paris. People happily carrying out their nightly routines, couples floating on the gentle streams of water with a man serenading them with his romantic chords of music. Zach now found himself stuck in



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the middle of the busy streets of Paris as the moon came into full view. Once again he grabbed his head in pain collapsing to his unsteady knees.

“ARGHH!!!!” He screamed aloud only for his scream to be hidden beneath the sound of energy rounds exploding into the obsidian pavement. His eyes widened as he watched bodies fling into the air helplessly while buildings began to collapse sending a wave of polluted smoke and ash through the city. Taking deep breaths he slowly stood back up as the destruction of Paris continued about around him, in a state of helplessness he began to run through the burning flames and agonizing people. His shoes screeched to a sudden halt at the appearance of a massive orange metallic foot. Without even thinking he knew what it was, hesitantly he glanced upwards to see the intimidating MF looming over head aiming it’s plasma rifle and firing with haste.

“What are you doing?! There’s no reason for this?! WHERE’S THE ENEMY?! THEY’RE INNOCENT PEOPLE!” Zach screamed but the destruction continued on.

*Zach....wake up.....*

“Zach...wake up...” Zach found himself lead back to reality with the sound of Reine’s voice.

“Reine....what happened?”

“You passed out. Now hurry up, we’re supposed to meet with Gail Contadino in regards to our applications to Orbis.” Reine replied.

“Oh....yeah, the Orbis guy, I forgot....”

### **Chapter Six: Despair and Distraught**

Rome, home to many historical events in Earth’s past. The Coliseum which was reconstructed years ago in the early 90’s or AR was now home to many political events namely in the presence of the EAP. However the Coliseum was known as one of the many marvels of Earth and as such was not properly owned by any one faction. It was assumed that the EAP controlled the events that took place since it was located in Rome which was within the boundaries of the EAP. And yet somehow, Gail Contadino, the head of Orbis managed to secure it for his own presentation. He referred to it as a presentation, one that he hoped would inspire the people of Earth from both sides to quit their allegiances and fight for supreme untainted peace. Naturally not everyone shared his idealistic utopian dream, but some did and to him even a little can be of use. Hundreds of people from the EAP and TA alike showed up just to hear Gail preach his word. On the outer edges of the Coliseum stood in position Orbis

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soldiers, each wearing their ivory and blue uniform, wrapped around their chest was the staple of the Orbis military, a high caliber assault rifle equipped with a night vision scope for precision firing. Orbis was prepared for any and all confrontations that might have been inspired due to their gathering. They had spawned quite a reputation for getting in the way of both the TA and the EAP. For being a neutral organization they were strong and prepared for any scenario. They believed that the only way to obtain peace would be to get rid of the troublesome cancers that were the TA and the EAP. In their eyes the war had gotten out of hand; too chaotic and lost sight of what the original purpose of the war was. Originally the TA and the EAP conflicted based on the principle of greed and resources on Mars. It wasn't until after the appearance of the Chimera that the war became blurred and the true purpose lost. Currently the war is nothing more than a childish conflict where each nation is trying to prove their superiority by defeating the other. Gail acknowledged this and brought it to the attention of the world. He declared that he alone knew what was really going on in the world and that he alone was able to bring true peace to Earth and with the help of Red Fury to Mars as well. Peace; it is the one word that every man, woman and child can agree on. The desire to end all conflict and to live in perfect harmony, unfortunately a place without conflict was one that only existed in the dreams of the idealists. Gail knew this as well, but the desire, the longing for peace was more than enough fuel to strengthen his fire.

Around noon the gates to the Coliseum were opened shining in their silver glory as the sun beat down with its glorious rays of light. Both Zach and Reine paused for a few seconds to take in the serene environment that was the Coliseum. The wind was subtle and brisk; it passed through their hair quietly and swiftly. It was a day after the mysterious attack on Paris and no leads were sight.

"Wow, can you believe we're actually here? I mean this is the Coliseum, all the history that passed through this place. It's inspiring actually standing in front of this spectacle of humanity." Reine muttered while gasping for air.

"Yeah..."

"Huh?" Reine sighed detracting his attention from the monoliths before him and glanced over towards his friend. Zach appeared to be sullen, completely exhausted and side tracked. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing...sorry my mind was just wandering." Zach replied.

"You're still concerned about that Paris thing aren't you?"

"Paris? Huh? Oh...yeah the attack. It's not that I'm concerned, more like curious as to what really happened."

"Yeah, you and the rest of the world; look, it's not your problem. I understand you used to be in the EAP but now you're not. We have much more troublesome things to worry about. Like ending this war, and making Earth a better place again." Reine replied.

"And by meeting up with Gail you truly believe that we can achieve this goal?" Zach replied in a soft homely voice. His crimson eyes slowly pierced through Reine's energetic and confident demeanor making him question his own statement. Reine hated when Zach did those things.

"...of course. Gail and Orbis actually want this war to end. Both the TA and the EAP are just fighting meaninglessly, they don't care if the war ends at all; they just want to prove they're the strongest nations in the world."

"And what is wrong with that? Wanting to prove that you're the strongest? Wasn't that the whole idea behind the Azure Cup? Each pilot struggling to prove that they were indeed to the strongest?"

"That's...that's not the same! The Azure Cup was a sport, like the Olympics used to be as stated in the history books. This is war, playing with the lives of innocent people just to prove one's unquestionable strength! That's not right!"

"And you're confident that neither the TA nor the EAP wants to end this war?"

"Not from the looks of things. You've seen how much this war has dragged on!"

"True...but in order to prove their strength and confirm their existence as a strong overpowering nation they must want the war to end."

"Huh...but..."

"Both the TA and the EAP wish for this war to end. Just they want to be on top when it does so they refuse any means of treaty. But that does not mean they don't want it to end. Both sides are

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struggling to develop new technology, a weapon that would set them apart from their adversary. So saying that only Gail and Orbis wish for the war to end is a false statement, created from ignorance and idealism. The only difference is the desire for the war's end. Both the TA and the EAP's ambitions are obvious, but Gail...I'm not so sure I understand his."

"...Zach...but he said it plainly. He wishes for the war to end and for peace to occupy both Earth and Mars."

"Heh...do you honestly believe that a politician who showed up seemingly out of thin air would spend his own money in order to create an organization that boasts an irregular amount of power just for peace? There has to be another motive involved here. I only came to Rome in order to get a better grasp on the situation."

"Zach...heh, I see even after all these years has past the difference between us is still quite obvious." Reine muttered sullenly.

"Difference? What are you going on about?"

Reine sighed; his right foot abruptly swung kicking a small piece of rock into the air. He placed his hands into his denim pockets and smiled back at Zach. His dark blue hair flapping through the gentle stern breeze. Zach was caught off guard, he understood his friend but only to an extent. Reine often showed signs of bipolar personalities, at one moment he would act depressed, like the world was strapped to his back, and then seconds later he would be full of enlightened happiness. Zach didn't mind, it was Reine's personality that kept him grounded. He realized that without Reine he probably would have stayed in the EAP once the Azure Cup came to its close. Just as Reine passed through the chrome metal detector he turned around once again, but this time his face was dull, his eyebrows curved inwards and his eyes were half opened staring at the frigid ground beneath their feet.

"It...it just isn't inside the cockpit you know. You see things a lot more clearly than I do, you have a better understanding of this world and how it works while I...while I just go about life perfectly content with the outer edges of its surface, only able to see the dull reflection of reality. And when we're in the cockpit, you're able to see things and do maneuvers that I can only dream of. There is just this massive gap between us Zach."

"But...you are you and I am me. There's no point in comparing yourself to me, it gets you know where. Besides, envy is one of the sins Reine. Be proud of who you are. Now come on, the stadium is beginning to fill up." Zach replied.

"Zach....thank you..."

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"Gail it's time." A voice startled the infamous Gail Contadino causing him to place his prepared speech onto the glazed oak table in front of him. Gail smiled as he pulled his long thin strands of burnt sienna colored hair behind the slender lobe of his ear. The subtle rays of light that managed to pierce into the room reflected off the radiant silver framed glasses that magnified his thin weasel like obsidian pupils he called his eyes. He stood fully at an average size of 5 foot and seven inches; his shoulders sloped at a 45 degree angle covered in a blue suede material that made up the suit that he wore.

"Has it come already?"

"Yes sir it has. The Coliseum is currently at full capacity. Over 32,000 people have shown up to hear you speak. I believe that today will be a good day for Orbis."

"32,000 eh? That's not a bad number; as a matter of fact it's a bit more than I expected to show up here. After all Rome is under EAP control. Any word on the incident in Paris?"

"Paris...you're referring to the attack. Not really, all the information is sketchy at best Gail."

"Sketchy? That doesn't tell me much of anything now does it?" Gail replied while fixing his silver tie, his fingers struggled with the small piece cloth. He continued to fidget while the Orbis official continued talking.

"Well the EAP, they're withholding information. They've only released that Paris sustained severe amount of damage and that they most likely suspect the TA to be responsible for the attack.

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Naturally they're only feeding the public the surface story, unfortunately that's about all I can tell you on the attack."

"I see...I'm pretty sure the only reason the EAP is holding back from telling the public everything is because they have no idea what happened. I wonder if it's that H-3 I've heard about from Luscious Malum..."

"Luscious...Malum? The president of the TA? You're already having conversations with him and haven't informed the rest of Orbis?!"

"Calm down Lucian, what I'm referring to was before he became head of the TA. It was when he was still in charge of Genesis. It was right after the death of Harold Caecus. The first true Chimera incident, I was at the time a Mayoral Candidate for New York and it was only natural for Luscious to come talk to me about the incident. It was where he first informed me of the *Zenith of Artificially Composed Humans* project and its counterpart the *Reconstructed Enhanced Inhuman Neo Embryo* project. I don't know much about either so don't bother asking, but I do know that the H-3 is the bearer of amazing strength and ultimate human potential. If we are to win this war against both the TA and the EAP we are going to need to possess the H-3. So from now on Lucian you are in charge of reporting any incident that mirrors the one in Paris to me. We need to find the H-3 before Luscious does, if the TA gets a hold of it then this war will end with the TA as the victor."

"Gail...are you sure this is a wise decision? I mean this H-3 sounds dangerous, what makes you think we would be able to control it?"

"I have my secrets Lucian, allow me to keep them. Just worry about finding out about what happened in Paris and who attacked. I'm sure there's at least one survivor who could identify the monster that caused Paris to be left in ruins."

"And what about you?"

"Me? Well I have a speech to give. Currently Red Fury has the advantage when you look at MF pilots. Their only weakness is the lack of space cruisers and the ability to move from Mars to space and to Earth."

"But aren't we aligning with Carlos?"

"Youth...such ignorance it's inspiring. We aligned ourselves with the idea of Red Fury. Carlos Rendetore is nothing more than a weak eye sore. Just like Nathan Leviticus, neither of them have enough drive, enough hatred to see their plans to the end. That's exactly why Leviticus failed, he hesitated. If we're going to aide Mars, then we need to be sure that Red Fury will not falter, and with Carlos Rendetore as its leader we can never be exactly certain. But that doesn't matter; I've already taken the liberty of dealing with that problem."

"Dealing with the problem? You don't mean..."

"Lucian...do not concern yourself with such trivial matters such as this..."

There was a serene calm that swept through the seats of the Coliseum as all awaiting the eager arrival of Gail Contadino. He was to many the physical representation of their ideals and hopes for the future. A single man who was not afraid to stand up to the heavyweights that ran the world, many were prepared to put their faith into a single man, one man had not received as much faith and controversy at the same time since Jesus Christ. Gail in the general eye of the public was their hero, their salvation. Zach knew little about Gail, he believed that one man could not make a difference, one man could not change the path that the world, that humanity had chosen. Even so, Zach wished to find out more about Gail and his intentions and along with all of that, the true purpose of the organization known as Orbis.

"You seem real eager about this." Reine muttered with traces of blurred sarcasm drooling out from his lips. Zach simply shrugged his shoulders causing his long ominously dark hair to vibrate in a curved manor.

"Meh, I'll save my judgments of him for after his speech." Zach began to reply but his voice was instantly drowned out but the abrupt thunderous roar of applause that greeted Gail as he approached the podium in the middle of the historical amphitheater.

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The leader of Orbis replied with the standard political smile which consisted of a widely opened mouth displaying the abnormally perfect teeth to reflect the oncoming solar beams. It was the typical smile that every politician used before making insane promises that they could never fulfill.

“Let me start off by saying thank you to each and everyone one of you here today. Thank you for coming out, thank you for receiving my beliefs and in turn believing in my campaign; my campaign for peace!”

The sheer utterance of the word “peace” was enough to drive the crowd wild. People who lived in a world of chaos and confusion tend to cling onto any gleam of hope they might receive.

“Right now we are fighting for our survival as humans. To escape the sins that plague our lives we must abandon this petty quest for power and greed! Currently the two governing alliances of the world are struggling in a war that is stained with human greed and pride. People who believe that peace can come from sin are foolish! Now do not confuse what I’m saying, if I were to say that fighting is a sin then I would be a hypocrite. But it is what you fight for that determines if it can be sinful or not. I, no, Orbis is fighting for the peace that humanity so rightfully deserves. We can no longer stand by while the Trinity Alliance and the Euro-Asian Pact continue to decimate our world and our values!” Gail sighed; the crowd once again broke out into praise. It was clear that he didn’t need to do much work to sway their allegiances; they chose the path to Orbis well before they arrived at the Coliseum. Gail didn’t mind though, it just meant he could keep the speech short. He smiled with more confidence and pride than minutes prior to the beginning of his speech. His left index finger pushed the arch on his glasses upwards while his head leaned backwards. He began to bask in the glory of the radiant pulsating sun that hovered in the azure sky.

“(It begins....)”

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“Hey! Are you coming? Dinner is ready and I didn’t burn the meat this time!” Sharon’s crisp bellowing voice announced.

Adam pushed the strands of mahogany hair that fell in front of his eyes away from the front of his face as he turned around to face the kitchen. The apartment he and Sharon were living in was small but it was what they called home for the time being. He wished for an escape from the disorderly life that he had lived since he was 16; he was 21 now.

“Yeah I’ll be there in a sec.” Just as he stood up from his desk his eyes were drawn instinctively back to the photo gallery he called a wall around his bed. The pallid and cracked wall was filled with imperfections, but each of those minor inflictions was hidden beneath a photo; a photo of the memories that made his past linger in his mind. He had mixed feelings about the images on the wall as most of them acted like a dagger that had the extraordinary ability to pierce his soul leaving any physical part of his body alone.

“Christina....Jen....Sean....Mike...” Adam mumbled softly under his breath as his eyes quickly turned away from the beat up photograph. He paused once again and sighed. “Amy....” With a deep breath he turned his back to the images while his eyes cringed holding back the tears that so desperately wanted to come out.

“You ok?” Sharon blurted from the other room.

“Yeah....yeah, I’m ok.” He knew he wasn’t, the pain from their deaths had still failed to leave his over beating heart of agony.

Sharon stood standing behind the small crystalline table, her body masked by the steam that danced into the air wildly, emanating from the lump of steak that rested on the table surrounded by all sorts of greens and oranges. Adam could do nothing but smile and rub the back of his neck smiling widely back at her. She was smiling, her innocence radiating brightly, her straight smooth brown hair

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hung in a pony tail swaying in subtle motions, her hands propped in front of her apron clasped together; it was her first successful dinner in who knows how many failed attempts.

“Wow that looks amazing.”

“Thanks! Now let’s hurry, you promised to take me to the theater on Main Street in downtown Evo. The musical, *One Man’s Destiny* starts at 8. So that gives us 3 hours to get there and you know how traffic is on opening nights!” Sharon replied quickly as she flopped into her seat. Adam smiled, without her he would be stuck in a solitude of darkness from which he would never awake.

“I heard from Ashley this morning.” Sharon mentioned while a piece of meat was being slowly broken down by the constant chewing motion of Adam’s jaw.

“Oh?”

“Yeah...she wants to visit soon. Along with Heather and Mario.”

“I see...they can’t wait for the wedding? It’s only a month away.”

“Is that all you can say? They haven’t seen us for about 6 months now. They just want to visit, and it’s not like you’re busy anyway.”

“I don’t have to be busy; I made enough money from the military to hold us down until I find a secure job. I was an Intern at Genesis you know. I do have some mechanical skills.”

“I’m not saying you don’t have any skills, I’m just saying it would be nice to see them after all this time.”

“I guess.” Adam replied quietly as he enjoyed the juicy piece of steak that filled his mouth. His right eye glanced up towards Sharon who was currently sitting with a dissatisfied look gleaming on her face. “You remember the first time we ate together? How you badgered me about the ice in my drink?”

Sharon shrugged her shoulders. “No.”

“Really, it was the first time we met.”

Sharon seemed puzzled and quickly began to remedy the situation with an abrupt outburst of laughter. “Oh yeah haha...how silly of me. How could I forget, you were always so stubborn, thought that a drink without ice was better because you felt the ice would just get in your way. But you realized shortly how the drink was room temperature and not satisfying at all, hahaha...hahahehe...heh...” Her laughter slowly faded as Adam shrugged his shoulders and continued to eat.

They continued to eat their dinner shrouded in silence, neither one of them said a word for at least 10 minutes. Around 5:15 pm the silence broke with an erupt sharp sound, a sound reminiscent of glass shattering into pieces. Both Adam and Sharon quickly jumped from their seats at the sound looking back at each other.

“What was that?”

“I’m not sure....” Adam’s speech was interrupted by a sudden shriek that echoed in the hallway just outside their apartment door. Adam’s eyes widened and quickly motioned for Sharon to run to the bedroom.

“*NO! What business do you have here?!*” A voice, a familiar voice bellowed in response to the gasp of terror. Adam quickly darted to the door which wasn’t too far from the kitchen. His eyes peaked through the small hole revealing a warped image of the scene taking place out in the hallway. He quickly pulled himself away from the door stumbling back a few feet with his hands covering his mouth.

Two more sharp disturbing sounds, gun shots fired following by yet another yelp of agony. Just as Adam managed to stand back up he heard the same voice from before speak once again, although this time weaker and cracked.

“*Adam.... \*cough\*.....get.....out.....they’re here...for....*”

“*That’s enough old man.*” Another more rugged voice said followed by another piercing explosion. Adam’s eyes widened, he found himself struck with fear, at first he nearly forgot what middle aged parent said to him days ago, about how *people* were looking for him and that he had better leave Evo. Adam shrugged it off, thinking of it as an idle threat worth little. Apparently he was wrong, the threat was real.

It took a moment but he was able to reevaluate the situation. Sharon, her life was indanger as well. He didn’t really care what happened to him, but he could never forgive himself if another person

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close to him perished on account of his weakness. Just as the main door blew open Adam sprinted towards the bed room. Two masked assassins wearing Kevlar vests and ski masks entered aiming their assault rifles towards their fleeing target.

“Adam Novus I presume. Heh.” The first one replied pulling the trigger.

Dozens of bullets flung through the room at a rapid pace. Shelves and other sorts of ornaments decorating the apartment danced violently as bullets tore through the walls. Adam cringed as he managed to avoid a good amount of the flying bullets. Sharon remained curled up in the corner of the bedroom, her hands covering the top of her quivering head. She stared at Adam who was running and jumping over furniture trying to avoid death. Just as he neared the bedroom his right leg was clipped by some of the passing bullets. Streams of crimson blood erupted into the air as he tumbled harshly over the ivory couch. The force of his fall caused the couch to tip over just as he fell. His body struggled to move as the couch was now lying on top of him. Sharon screamed out in horror stretching out her arms.

“ADAM!” She screamed loudly but the assassins didn’t care about her, or at least not at the moment. Their main target was him, the man who stopped the Tribulation, the man that killed Rebel358.

“Err... \*cough\* \*cough\*...damn it...” Adam struggled to say as thin streams of blood shot out of his mouth. He quickly covered his shaking lips with his one free hand. He smirked as his head became covered in the shadows of his two assailants.

“Well, I must admit this was a lot easier that I originally anticipated.” The first one, the one who shot him mentioned.

“I told you, he’s not much of a threat outside of an MF.” The second one mentioned, the assassins voice, it was feminine, although she tried to hide it through an VAD (Voice-Altering-Device), but Adam could still tell, not that it made much of a difference in the situation he was currently in.

“If I may be so bold... \*cough\* as to ask why \*cough\* you’re trying to kill me?”

“Huh? Oh haha, we were hired. That’s all that matters, someone thinks you’re a threat. Although I fail to understand why.”

“A hit huh? Not quite the end \*cough\* I envisioned.” Adam sarcastically replied.

“Humor huh I envy that you’re able to keep such a level head in this situation.”

“\*Yawn...\*” The female assassin covered her mouth, she was bored.

“Will you try and act like you’re not bored you lazy bitch!”

“Does it matter, I could careless, now can’t you just kill him already so we can get out of here?”

“Not surprising, I have to do all the work. You really live up to your name you lazy slut.”

Adam stared at the two not like he had many options to choose from at the moment. The male assassin shrugged his shoulders while the female slid onto the plush leather chair behind her. Her legs hung over one of the arm rests while her head leaned on the opposite. Adam smirked.

“I don’t know what you’re smiling about. You’re dead.” His arms extended forward while his finger slowly pulled inwards on the trigger. Adam shut his eyes; he felt it was better to accept the fate being dealt to him than to fight it. The assassin was right; outside of an MF he was weak, helpless.

Boom.

**Chapter Seven: Mark of the Crimson Dawn**

Boom. A shrieking sound ruptured through the apartment as blood splattered about staining the leather couch along with the plush carpeted floor. Sharon stood quivering tremendously in the silhouette of the bed room doorway. The male assassin cringed, the assault rifle dropped to the ground just as he clutched onto his right arm struggling to keep a clear vision. His fingers caressed his right forearm just as drops of crimson blood poured out dripping onto the ivory carpet.

“What the hell?!” He screamed jolting his head back facing Sharon who was staring back with her arms extended shaking. Her fingers securely wrapped around a standard military issued 9 millimeter, smoke flowing steadily out from the edge of the barrel. With an abrupt motion she collapsed to the ground leaning against the wall. The pistol that she held onto flopped to the floor beside her vibrating thighs. Her pupils were smaller than normal, nearly faded; she was in shock, never in her life had she fired a weapon, she didn’t believe herself to be capable of such an act. But in order to protect the person they care about people are able to accomplish abnormal and extraordinary feats.

“Hahaha..” The subtle laughter emanated from the feminine assassin who slowly rose from the chair.

“You bitch what are you laughing at?”

“Look at you, holding your arm like a injured animal. It’s troublesome but I guess I have to do something.” The female assassin glanced over at the fear stricken Sharon and gave out a small chuckle. “You’re weak, you don’t deserve to live.”

Adam’s eyes widened, it was then that he began to feel his strength returning. The shock from the bullet piercing his leg sent his body into a state of numbness but now he was able to feel the muscles move.

“Sharon...get out of here!” He screamed as the couch began to pivot backwards, with all the strength he could gather he began to push his body upwards. His palms were planted flatly onto the carpet as his torso propped upwards.

“Oh...still some fight in you huh? Well, we can fix that!” The male assassin quickly kicked Adam across the face. The force exerted from his right leg at first contact caused Adam to tumble away from the couch. His body flopped around rolling on the carpet while blood burst out from his lips.

“Err...arg...\*cough\*....\*cough\*....bastard...” Adam mumbled softly under his exhausted erratic breath. He wiped his blood stained face from cheek to cheek while he struggled to stand up. His right leg shook the most as it was injured the most; he placed his right hand onto the coffee table in order to keep himself steady. In the corner of his eye he focused on Sharon who was still in a state of panic.



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“Heh, still worrying about her I see. Well then....” He paused taking the time to pick up his assault rifle once again. His right arm dangled lifelessly off his shoulder, the shot he took severely injured his nervous system, he could move it but not without pain. With his left arm he managed to raise the rifle aiming it at Adam who was no more than 5 feet away. Once again Adam found himself staring at the end of an opened barrel.

“Sharon I’m....” Suddenly the glass windows shattered violently launching thousands of glass shards piercing through the air. The two assassins bit their tongues as their suits were pierced by the torrent of crystalline jagged debris. The female assassin side jumped backwards away from Sharon as pieces of glass became lodged in her arms and thighs.

“Damn it, this is way too troublesome!” She screamed back to her counterpart who now had even more wounds scattered about on his body.

“Shit we were careless. Took too long....” He replied.

At that moment an onslaught of smoke swept through the apartment in order to cloak the special ops soldiers that flung into the apartment. Both of the assassins acrobatically maneuvered into the kitchen holding their weapons out, moving their torsos in every direction hoping that they would be prepared for an attack. Adam coughed repetitively as the smoke filled his lungs.

“Here, we’re here to help.” A rough voice muttered while extending his hand towards Adam who was once again on the ground. Covering his mouth he glanced up at his current savior. His silver hair was cut up in standard military fashion, clean and edged out perfectly.

“Who \*cough\* who are you?” Adam managed to spit out.

“I’m Eric....we’re Red Fury.”

“The upper management of Red Fury to be more exact.” Another man walked out from the now separating smoke holding two shotguns at his side. “I’m Anthony.”

“Sharon....I need to get to....”

“She’s fine.” The third and final Red Fury member stated as he walked towards Adam, Anthony and Eric. Sharon coughed a few times holding his left hand closely to her lips. “I’m Carlos Rendetore, the leader of Red Fury.”

“Hehehahaha...this is an unexpected pleasure. Looks like we get to kill 2 birds with 1 stone today eh Sloth?” The male assassin laughed whole heartily.

“Envy? What happened to keeping a low profile? You idiot.” Sloth announced. “Well then I guess there’s no point in wearing this stupid mask anymore.” Sloth replied, her lightly hued pink hair lavishly poured out from the concealing mask. As her hair rolled down her athletically toned back her thin reptilian eyes glared devilishly at the group of people standing before her. She had met the Red Fury soldiers before, namely Carlos but never had the luxury of seeing him face to face. Carlos appeared shocked at first with a terrifying frigid feeling speeding down his body and spine. He recognized the voice clearly; they were from the Night Stalkers.

“You’re the idiot Sloth. You didn’t have to take off your mask you know. Now they can identify you, moron.” Envy replied.

“Then we’ll just have to make sure that none of them make it out of here alive.” Sloth replied.

“Eh, sounds fine with me.” Envy barked back, his lips thinned out as they stretched across his pale skin forming a satanically satisfied smile. With his mask off his shortly cut green hair was able to flow freely about. He too sported the same reptilian eyes as Sloth had. “You got away last time human, rest assured that it won’t happen again.”

“Carlos?” Eric muttered.

Carlos’ head turned towards Eric who stood on his left while Adam and Sharon remained safely behind them. “Eric, Anthony....get those two out of here. I have some unfinished business with these two...” His voice was deep, focused and determined.

“Hahaha, listen to you. Going to try and bite off more than you can once again eh? You got guts for a human I’ll give you that much but you won’t be making it out of here alive that much I can guarantee.” Envy replied. He didn’t waste any time, there was too much talking going on and he hated talk; it was cheap. The assault rifle vibrated while Envy’s index finger remained glued to the trigger.

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Carlos didn't waste any time and pushed Anthony and Eric out of the way. The two Red Fury commanders tumbled to the ground while Carlos dove towards the left avoiding the stream of blazing bullets that soar by. Anthony glanced over to Carlos pleading for him to follow even though he knew it was hopeless. Once Carlos was set on a plan he refused to go any other way.

"Carlos!" Anthony screamed but it wasn't much use.

"Get out of here now!" Carlos screamed back while covering his head. The bullets never seemed to stop; it was like an endless trail of bronze bullets that continued to pierce through the leather couch that acted as a shield for Carlos.

"...."

"What are you waiting for?! GO NOW!" Carlos screamed. It was the first time that both Eric and Anthony ever heard Carlos scream that way since their first mission in the TA with him. Eric sighed placing his hand on Anthony's trembling shoulder.

"Let's go."

"Hahahaha, you're not going anywhere!" Sloth yelled as she now stood before Anthony, Eric and the others. Eric cringed; the site of an obsidian tube glaring at you at such a close range was never something to be enthralled about. Sloth grinned, her thinly slit eyes staring at Eric like a lioness stalking her prey. Her eyes slightly closed and her lips parted with a ominous grin.

"This is the end for you human..." Sloth mumbled. Just as she prepared to pull the trigger her knees buckled causing her body to lunge forward. Before she could lose control she tucked herself inwards performing a well executed and agile summersault passed Eric and Anthony. Anthony glanced back noticing Adam with his left legs spread across the carpet at a 45 degree angle.

"I owed you." Adam quietly replied.

"This is truly a troublesome affair." Sloth replied as she began to dust herself off.

"Damn, come on." Eric said with such reluctance it pained him to say it. Adam nodded grabbing hold of Sharon and began to run. He didn't get too far before the pain in his leg began to throb.

"Arg....damn leg." Adam replied.

"Here." Sharon mumbled taking Adam's right arm wrapping it around her shoulder.

"Thanks...."

Luckily they were on the first floor of the apartment complex, Adam and Sharon slowly walked out of the broken window that Carlos and the others used to enter.

"I won't let you!" Envy screamed. The human like figure ran towards the gaping hole in the wall jumping over the couch that hid Carlos.

"ENVY YOU MORON!" Sloth screamed out.

Carlos smirked as he stared at the figure carelessly flinging itself over his head.

"It's over." Carlos softly announced as his obsidian pistol rose eloquently into the air. Envy chuckled slightly; a single human had never amused him as much as this one had.

"Is it now?" Envy replied, in mid air just after the blaring gun fired his body twirled to the side avoiding the close range attack leaving Carlos completely baffled. Envy's motions were not something that could be duplicated by any human; they were of another world, graceful and intimidating simultaneously.

"Showing off again Envy? You're so damn troublesome. Those 4 are getting away."

"So go after them!" Envy screamed while he continued to deal with Carlos. His hands firmly grabbed onto Carlos' Kevlar vest, Envy glanced at his injured arm and smirked. Steam slowly oscillated off the arm while Carlos was abruptly lifted into the air and then slammed onto the cold hard wall. Carlos' head slightly tilted as blood erupted out from his throat splashing onto Envy's pale ghostly face.

"I don't feel like it, it's..."

"It's troublesome I know you lazy bitch." Envy replied as his thin crimson tongue licked the outer regions of his lips and skin soaking in the distilled blood from Carlos.

Carlos was paralyzed staring at the beast; his eyes were petrified as they were hypnotized by Envy's demonic eyes. His limbs began to shaken uncontrollably to his own bewilderment; Envy continued to grin while his fingers began to force their entry into Carlos' skin around his shoulder blade.

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Each second that passed was an eternity of agony for Carlos, the nails on the end of Envy's finger tips became dipped in blood just as they rupture the outer layers of skin. Carlos' head swayed from right to left, his teeth grinding against harshly trying to hold in the excruciating pain.

"Aren't you the tough guy eh? No wonder you were the leader of Red Fury. But I wonder just how much longer you'll last." Envy said in a low voice. Just then his lizard-like eyes widened, his eyebrows arched upwards at a curved angle, instantly Carlos began to gag on his own blood that was flowing violently out of the heart. He began to convulse violently, he tried to breath but the air refused to flow into his mouth and nose. It didn't take long for his lungs to start working at an over exaggerated pace struggling to find a way to receive the air it needed to operate. That was when he realized just what Envy was, he heard him refer to everyone else as human; Envy wasn't human, or at least by the standards that Carlos had come to know.

"Still fighting huh? Heh, it's been a while since I had to use this power so feel honored." Envy replied. His slit pupils began fade into transparency; Sloth shrugged her shoulders and fell backwards onto the same chair she occupied earlier. Carlos was suffering, experiences tortures that no human could ever fathom, illusions that seemed drastically realistic and yet unexplainable. Sluggish phlegm filled coughs echoed roughly out of his throat as saliva slowly dripped from his pale lips. He could no longer form a clear concise thought, the pain and torment took over him completely. Envy then began to cough, his head jolting forward spitting out spec of blood, hearing the sound of Envy coughing Sloth immediately stood up from the chair, she knew what was going on.

"Envy stop. You're not used to that power fully yet. If you continue at this rate...."

"\*cough\*..I know \*cough\*..." Carlos fell to the ground while Envy stumbled back as his eyes appeared normal.

On the ground Carlos was heaving heavily sucking in all the air that he could and wiping the saliva off his face.

"What... \*huff\*... what the hell are you? \*huff\* \*cough\*..."

"Heh... \*cough\*... it shouldn't matter what I am. You're not going to be making it out of here alive that much I promise you." Envy replied as he slowly treaded towards a weak Carlos.

Carlos snickered taking one final look into Envy's eyes, and suddenly it all made sense to him. He nearly forgot what had transpired months ago, when he began to think about it more clearly he realized that he didn't forget it, he just pushed it aside as it wasn't something he liked to think about.

"You're eyes....it's the mark of the Crimson Dawn.... \*cough\*..." Carlos sloppily stated.

Envy chuckled grinning once again.

"Heh, I'm impressed human. I didn't think there was anyone else who knew about the Crimson Dawn."

"Well \*cough\* I was there when it was developed.... \*cough\* The DNA element that enhances the brain's neurological patterns, increasing the productivity of the nervous system. Also heightens the brainwave patters causing an eye evolution allowing the holder to send it's own illusions of his/her imagination into a secured target; a very effective hallucinogen. A form of psychic energy, that's why I couldn't move or breath... \*cough\*, because you were imaging the situation and feeding it into my head... \*cough\*"

"Impressive, then you realize that you have no possible way of escaping here with your life."

"No I don't....not against an abomination such as yourself... \*cough\*..."

"I'm the abomination huh? I beg to differ human, you humans are so arrogant that you've tainted your world preparing for its ultimate demise. Creatures like me are the remedy for the world; we'll clean up the mess you've made."

"\*cough\*...but it looks like you're body isn't used to the Crimson Dawn just yet. You're \*cough\* of no real threat to me now."

"No threat? Heh, I truly am envious of you humans sometimes. I wish I had your sense of humor in the face of adversity You may be right, my body is not fully in tune with the Crimson Dawn just yet....but I still have more left in me. You failed to recall the other unique trait of the Crimson Dawn, the ability to send out brain waves that synchronize with a target causing the target's brain to vibrate so

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rapidly that it explodes....” Envy’s eyes widened once again staring back at Carlos. Carlos once again began to gag on his own phlegm trying to breath. Even though he knew it was an illusion for the most part, he couldn’t shake off the physical effects that it was having on his brain. Things became silent for an instant, the calm before the storm. Envy’s right eye winked and Carlos burst out in a screaming frenzy of agony. His fingers clenching onto his throbbing head he fell to the side curled up in the fetal position spastically shaking.

“This is the end for you....” Envy said as he shut his left eye.

Carlos’s eyes widened briefly as there was a loud disturbing pop, reminiscent of the rupturing of a water balloon. Blood sprayed in all directions staining every crevice and corner of the apartment in a 5 foot radius. Silence once again swept through the room as Envy smiled. Sloth sighed glancing at her weakened partner.

“Well....1 out of 2 ain’t bad....” Envy replied just as his voice began to fade and crack. His eyes closed as his legs gave out. His body became a lump of dead weight that collapsed to the ground.

“You used it too much you moron. Now you’ll be sleeping for at least a week.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The room was filled with darkness sprawling out of every inch of every corner. Sharon held tightly onto Adam’s arm as he cautiously walked through the doorway following both Eric and Anthony.

“This is one of Red Fury’s base of operations. There are many scattered all over Mars on each of the continents.” Eric said.

“Isn’t it a bit dark to be a main base?” Sharon implied.

A short click and the lights began to hum soothingly through out the room bouncing off each wall. As the massive facility chased away the shadows Adam and Sharon stood in awe. It was a massive hanger holding in its possession 4 MFs, 2 of which Adam recognized; Tempest and Red Dawn, Chris Procella and Michelle Dolce’s MFs; two of the last people he would have ever expected to find in a Red Fury facility.

“An MF hanger?” Adam mumbled.

“It’s our transportation hanger, MFs, Vipers, and normal transportation vehicles.” Eric replied.

“And why’d you bring me here?”

“Because getting you to safety is our utmost priority. We’re sending you to our desert base in Abyssus. You’ll be safe there while we conduct an investigation into why you’re being targeted.” Anthony replied.

“I see....but I think...” Sharon quickly placed the palm of her frigid hand over Adam’s mouth.

“You be quiet. Thank you very much. We’ll go to Abyssus.” Sharon replied smiling.

“But we have things to do....there’s the wedding which I thought....”

“The wedding can wait, let them find out what’s going on first, and then we’ll worry about the wedding.” Sharon replied.

“Fine....” Adam replied with reluctance so blatantly obvious Sharon cringed.

“I know what you’re thinking....you want to fight.” Sharon replied.

“....(she knows me better than anyone, almost better than myself. Although there isn’t much I can do in the state that I’m in now....I hate relying on other people, but it would be disrespectful to turn down Red Fury’s offer for a safe haven. After all they did risk their lives to save me....but that in of it self raising some questions too. Why did they save me? I thought I left this world of chaos.) No Sharon, I don’t want to fight. I just don’t want to be a burden on them is all.”

“You’re not a burden. You’re the person who went out of his way to stop the rampaging Chimera 5 years ago, the person who stood up to Rebel358 3 years ago, this is the least that we could do. Now please step this way Mr. Novus.” Eric replied.

“Call me Adam, please. “Mr” sounds so professional; I’m just another confused soul.” Adam replied.

“Heh, alright then Adam. Please step this way.” Eric mentioned.

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It didn't take long for the transport vessel to start up, a simple military truck with thick dual sets of charcoal tires. The engine roared and took off fading into the sun setting distance. Sharon's head leaned onto Adam's shoulder, her eyes tightly shut while he held her close. His eyes gazed into the burning setting sun, the fuchsia and blue lit sky settled his soul as much as it could. But he still had the events of earlier lingering around eating at his soul. The apartment was a lost cause; he knew there was a slim chance of him ever returning there in the future. He didn't mind however all that was there were tons of photos illustrating his vibrant and dark past. Photos didn't make the past real; it was the sensation in the person's heart and soul that made them real. It was time for him to leave his past behind and focus on what laid ahead. He felt the subtle shift in Sharon's position; she slid her body to the seat with her back laying flat on the cushion and her head resting on his thighs. Adam sighed as he softly stroked her lively radiantly glowing hair.

"Sharon...(I hate to have deceived you like this...but there isn't much choice. I'm ok with going to Abyssus not because of Red Fury's concerns but...because it's the current resting place for...Blue Dragon...)"

His thoughts continued to trail off as the sun finally passed away leaving the rest of its responsibilities for the moon.

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*"This just in, live coverage from Rome, Italy. We are feeding you the aftermath of yet another devastating attack. No one is 100% sure what is truly going on in Europe but this makes for the second random destructive attack. This time the attack resulted in the destruction of a historical landmark, the Coliseum located in the heart of Rome. No official word yet on the death and injured toll, and no word on if the EAP has any leads on the culprit for these...."*

The 25 inch plasma LCD screen faded to a dark black revealing the distorted reflections of Luscious Malum and Severen Prodito.

"Another attack? And so soon?" Severen blurted out. The attacks seemed random in his eye; there was no rhyme or reason to the attacks. They were nothing more than random displays of power.

"Heh...it's too early to be jumping to any conclusions. But I believe the H-3 is manifesting rather rapidly. If only that damned failure told me everything he knew before he died." Luscious firmly stated. The "failure" otherwise known as Rebel358, the 358<sup>th</sup> clone of Luscious Malum, the only one that survived past embryonic development.

"Do you really think Rebel would have shared the information with you? I mean he seemed pretty standoffish."

"No Severen. I don't think he would have told me anything, he thought I was weak and stupid. Which is why he didn't listen to me when I told him to hold off on his "Tribulation," but his existence has been terminated. There's no real point in dwelling on what might have happened. This H-3...judging by the attack on Rome it seems as if his powers are growing, we're going to need to find him quickly before anyone else does."

"Anyone else?"

"Orbis was currently in Rome for the presentation of Gail Contadino. If he stumbles on the H-3 and manages to take it into his possession then there's no possible way of knowing what will happen. I still have to deal with the Crimson Dawn, the EAP, Red Fury and the clones and Utopia. I have too much on my plate right now Severen even for me." Luscious replied. His lips took a break to soak themselves in the pure ambrosial taste of his Merlot.

"Luscious...I can deal with the clones and Utopia. The clones are already out in the public just waiting for our signal. Utopia has been kept hidden behind the barrier in the South Western territory. Both the TA and the EAP are too busy struggling in space currently. Any bases left on Earth are pretty much useless since the signing at Prosperity. The treaty you made up prohibiting any conflict from happening on Earth."

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“That’s true; the treaty did make that agreement. But with the H-3 attacks localized in EAP territory it won’t be long before they begin to blame the Trinity Alliance and begin to attack Earth bases. Then our “Earth Government” organization is handling the Crimson Dawn pretty well. It seems that they’re abilities will be fully developed by the time the true Tribulation is prepared to begin. Red Fury is the variable; I have no idea on how they’re going to act.”

“That’s true....but listen. Red Fury will be dealt with soon enough. I’ve made my own arrangements. I believe that they’ll allow for Red Fury to play right into our hands.” Severen replied grinning.

“Ooh...you’re learning. Well then, a toast to the salvation and rebirth of humanity.”

### **Chapter Eight: Phantom’s Blight**

The stars flickered with a sense of superiority in the distance of space. George Washington Space Station the first space station put into orbit by the Trinity Alliance hovered just outside of the moon’s

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gravitational field. Hundreds of soldiers gathered enthusiastically in its hanger all awaiting their orders. It had been said that an attack on the EAP's moon bases was to take place shortly. Naturally nothing had been confirmed leaving the young soldiers dreaming of the endless possibilities that an attack on the moon bases of the EAP could bring. The EAP was still working on their own space stations but had yet to get any fully functional stations up. The moon was their domain and had been ever since Red Fury took over Mars. If the EAP lost their bases on the moon the war would come to an end, an end leaving the TA with dominant control over Earth. Luscious Malum kept his aspirations to himself leaving the war in the hands of the Admirals of the TA.

Specifically Admiral Caden, the man that General Copiare put his own soldier's life on the line for a month prior. Admiral Caden had been the only TA soldier to ever be inside an EAP moon base, specifically Dämmerung. It was the EAP's first facility created on the Moon, and it was also their center of command. All newly developed MFs, Cruisers, and other sorts of weapons are first transported to Dämmerung for testing and distribution. Without it, the EAP would be handicapped and open for attack. Every soldier in the TA knew this was the best place to attack; the semi-operational space stations were like insects, a nuisance but nothing that demanded attention.

"Attention!" The resounding voice of General Copiare shouted across the hanger. The pallid walls echoed his shrewd voice that acted as a catalyst for military salutation. The ominous presence that emanated from his stern, slightly limp strut caused most soldiers to be unnerved. Admiral Caden was a quiet man, one who believed in the importance of solitude. His tales of heroism during battles such as "Tear of Dawn" and "Crimson Dusk" all taking place a few years before the turn of the century filled the hearts and minds of the soldiers of the TA and even of the EAP. He was a renowned soldier who many respected and admired. One could not tell of his warriors' soul and prowess by merely his looks. His cerulean eyes were soft and crisp, but full of stirring emotions much like a raging tempest at sea. The wrinkles in his dull skin were a true sign of age and wisdom, his square-like chin gave him a brooding expression even when he smiled.

The slightly chilled air vented through the hanger breezing through his gray thinned hair while he took the podium standing before the hundreds of eager and obedient soldiers.

"I'm sure by now you have all heard the rumors swarming around Washington and even all the way from Capricorn. The rumors that we are on the verge of an all out campaign against the EAP's major moon base known only as Dämmerung." His gentle voice swiftly maneuvered through the wind flowing into every soldier's quivering ear.

The mention of the rumor by such a highly respected and ranking officer only continued to peak the interests of the young and naïve men and women. In their minds the rumor had to have some validity for such a man to acknowledge it.

"I assure you....it is no rumor." Those words, "it is no rumor" caused an instant uproar in emotions and adrenaline. The soldiers felt teased with such an idea, the very thought of going after the EAP's nexus of intelligence and military power was very much similar to the feelings of a Christian child on Christmas Eve.

"ATTENTION!" General Copiare screamed.

"It's alright General...their enthusiasm is inspiring. I feel that the success of this mission dwells on the enthusiasm and drive of the soldiers who are to carry it out. Let them enjoy this feeling."

"Heh, these kids have no idea what they're getting into. They're too caught up in the dream of attacking the core of the EAP. It's amusing, I bet you that their attitudes will change the minute they engage the EAP at Dämmerung." Mario calmly mumbled. He leaned against the metallic foot of his MF, Anima while watching the assembly from a distance. His azure collars left unbuttoned and flipped upwards, he was hardly an example of a polished soldier.

"There's no need to bet, they're fresh from West Point after all. They have no inclination to the truth of a battlefield." Heather replied, her face slightly peeking out from Blue Angel's cockpit.

"But sending fresh pilots into such a dangerous situation? Isn't this a bit risky? I mean Dämmerung isn't a base to be taken lightly." Mario replied.

"And that's why we're going."

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Stephen slowly walked down the chrome stairwell holding his crimson helmet over his right shoulder. He was already in his flight uniform, Ashley stood behind him holding onto a clipboard, her eyes glaring at the ivory sheets of paper that were held neatly in place.

“You must be pretty damn excited.” Mario muttered.

“Huh? Why you say that?”

“Well you’re all suited up. The sortie doesn’t launch for at least another 3 hours.”

“\*sigh\*, you didn’t check your mail did you?” Ashley spoke from behind while rummaging through the papers before her. Mario in shock glanced over to the radiant team operator.

“What’re you talking about?”

“You’re such an ass. The mission launches in less than 45 minutes. You really need to start paying attention.” Heather howled from above.

Mario cringed; he jerked his head away from Stephen and the others. As his eyes glazed with embarrassment he stared at the Admiral as he dismissed the ambitious soldiers. None of the kids could be over 19, at least which the conclusion Mario came to was. His eyelids heavily began to fall over his dark pupils followed by an exhausting yawn.

“Try and stay awake ok? There isn’t a lot of time before we’re cleared to launch. We’re launching directly from Washington and heading towards Dämmerung. We’re to grab the attention of the Special Defense Forces that linger just outside the Moon’s gravitational field.” Stephen said.

“Eh, so we’re decoys? Aren’t we a bit too good to be decoys?”

“The SDF consists of highly skilled MF pilots. To be blunt they’re too good for fresh meat to deal with. That’s why we’re dealing with them.” Stephen replied.

“You know this would be a lot easier if we had the original team.”

“Well we don’t. We haven’t had the original team for 3 years now. So I don’t see how this is relevant.”

“Are you really that angry at him for leaving?” Mario questioned. Stephen glared back while Mario simply shrugged his shoulders.

With his arms placed straight at his sides he cringed; Stephen tried his best to not think about his brother and how he just abandoned him years ago but it was a lie to think he couldn’t.

“Just make sure you’re reading to head out in 30 minutes Mario. We don’t have the luxury to think about what could have been.” Stephen walked away heading towards Alpha which was docked next to Blue Angel. Mario sighed shaking his head in disappointment. He leaned back as his body slowly fell to the hard metal floor. He continued to lean on the massive foot of his MF, his knees bent as his right arm rested loosely across it. Just as his eyes began to shut he felt the shadows of Ashley looming over his relaxed body.

“What do you want?”

“You need to stop bothering him about Adam. Stephen has his own way of dealing with certain situations. You should know this better than anyone. Adam cut everyone out of his life, including his brother for what ever reasons he had. Stephen...he just feels betrayed right now. So just let it go for now.”

“You people are too deep for me. You all need to loosen up”

“Sorry we’re not all free spirits like you. This is just a serious operation, Stephen’s a bit on edge right now.”

“Oh...so why don’t you loosen him up?” Mario replied, his smirk as bright as the morning sun. His sarcasm was very rarely well received but Ashley just smiled back nodding her head with restraint.

“That’s funny, you’re a funny guy Mario...hey, where’s Michelle again?” Ashley wasn’t a person to be trifled with. She was a person of class and eloquence, but if she was crossed her tongue was as sharp as a knife willing to pierce through any ego.

“Heh...I’ll go get ready...” Mario reluctantly replied as he slowly trudged off to the locker room.

Ashley chuckled briefly, her attention soon focused onto Stephen who was staring aimlessly at his crimson MF. It was hard for her not to be concerned about him, not after everything they had been through. She stood smiling; she wanted to approach him but before her feet could lift from the ground a



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few soldiers blaring dozens of glistening awards jogged past her heading straight towards Stephen. It couldn't be helped, not anymore. After all, he was a General and a highly admired one at that.

"General Novus!" General Copiare announced standing at the standard form of attention. Stephen replied in kind but in a more relaxed form. His elbows not tucked in tightly but loose and comfortable. That didn't last as Admiral Caden approached from behind General Copaire. Stephen snapped at full attention to properly greet the superior officer.

"At ease Stephen. I just came here to wish you luck on the mission." The Admiral gently spoke.

"Thank you sir, but I don't believe in luck. At least not when it comes to this sort of thing." Stephen replied.

"I see, you are a wise man. Soldiers who rely on luck to win the day for them are already lost. Listen; there are some things I think we need to discuss if you have time."

"Oh? Yeah, I have some time before we launch." Stephen replied.

"Good, that is good. General if you'll excuse us."

"Of course Admiral." General Copiare replied snapping at attention.

As Stephen and Admiral Caden began to pace around the hanger away from his MF Heather slowly descended to the ground near Ashley.

"What do you think that's about?"

"Huh? Oh...I'm not sure." Ashley replied.

"Stephen...what do you know about the Night Stalkers?"

"The Night Stalkers? Isn't that a special operations team organized by the self called Earth Government?"

"Yes that's the general concept. But I suppose I asked the incorrect question. What do you know about the Earth Government?"

"Not much...I heard that neutral countries like Australia, Africa and South America for the most part. And that they came up with the name Earth Government because they felt they were truly working in the interest of the planet. Aside from that I know very little of their intentions. Why? If you don't mind my asking shouldn't we be focusing on the EAP right now?"

The Admiral's eyes were like burning sapphires glowing in the surrealistic darkness that now consumed the both. Engulfed in the darkened shadows that the looming MFs created they paused in their stroll.

"It is true that the Earth Government is trying to promote neutrality to the nations of Earth. Hoping that nations from both the TA and the EAP would defect and join them, although their efforts have been in vein, not a single nation has budged. I don't even know about their true intentions. All I know is that they're reckless. About 3 and half weeks ago the Night Stalkers made their appearance on Mars in an attempt to destroy Red Fury...."

"What? But that...that makes no sense. If they're trying to promote neutrality to the nations of Earth why go after Red Fury whose sole intent is to protect Mars?"

"I think they view Red Fury as a danger. That the actions Red Fury may take in the future will prolong the war's conclusion. But that isn't important. I've received word earlier today that the Night Stalkers were assigned another mission."

"Oh?"

"Stephen...it hasn't been confirmed yet. But their target this time wasn't Red Fury; it was...the Azure Knight...."

Stephen's eyes widened instantly. He wasn't quite sure why the Admiral used the call sign instead of his true name. Either way it didn't make much of a difference, he knew who the Admiral was talking about.

"Why go after Adam?"

"I'm not entirely sure...but I heard he got out safe. I just thought that you should be aware of the situation."

"I see...I appreciate it Admiral. But I have some questions."

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“There’s no time for that Stephen. You better prepare for launch. There’s only a few minutes left. The success of this mission is riding on your shoulders Stephen.”

“Huh...uh...yeah...”

With a quirky smile the Admiral patted Stephen’s tense shoulders.

“You’ll do fine. Now if you’ll excuse me.”

“Uh...yeah...” Stephen glanced back at his team staring with confused expressions. He sighed scratching the back of his scalp as he headed towards his MF. There was no telling what awaited him and the others at Dammerung, in his mind it didn’t matter; the quicker the mission began the quicker it would end.

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The rain scattered amongst the tattered roof of the facility. The night sky set the mood as the wind caused chills to run up the spines of the few people who habited the frigid desert wasteland known as Abyssus. Spiraling streams of sand particles and debris fluttered through the wind while a single person stood atop one of the many crimson dunes. His hair violently flapping through the beating wind, his ripped up thin tan cloak dancing through the irregular beat of the wind and rain.

“Everyone is looking for you.” A cold voice took away the pleasure of solitude, a solace that few people enjoy and yet many experience.

“Is that so? Sorry to be trouble.”

“Adam...we still aren’t sure as to why the Night Stalkers targeted you. It would be in your best interest to stay around the Red Fury facility.”

“Have I really fallen that far down the ladder that I can no longer protect myself? Tell me Anthony; doesn’t Red Fury have better things to deal with than me? I heard about your leader...I am sorry.”

Anthony paused for a second, he had known Carlos for years, and for his friend’s body to be found in the state that it was in was not an image that he would have liked to have been Carlos’ last.

“It’s fine...Carlos was protecting his ideals. He knew death would come eventually.”

“That may be true...but because of me. I don’t think that it was in Red Fury’s interests or aspirations to protect me.”

“You’re right; we never did think that we would have to protect the fabled Azure Knight. It was unexpected. “

“So why then? Why waste your man power just for one man?”

“Because you’ve done so much for humanity. You’ve strived for an obtainable piece while being surrounded by deceit.”

“Heh...all I’ve been able to accomplish is in getting my friends killed. It’s a tormenting cycle that never wants to end.”

“Which brings me to my next question, why did you agree to come out here?”

“Saw through me that fast huh?”

“Let’s just say that we understand each other.”

“I see...I came here to put an end to my past. I hate to ask this, but I need a favor.”

“Anything.”

“I need all the explosives you have in this facility. There’s something that needs to be destroyed.”

“Your MF?”

Adam sighed, chuckling under his breath. His MF, Blue Dragon had become a physical adaptation of his past, his pain, and more importantly his regrets.

“Yes...”

“You’re going to destroy it after all this time?”

“It’s what needs to be done in order for me to live a perfectly normal life...with her.”

“The girl? So even legends strive for normality.”

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“I’m hardly a legend. I’m more like a phantom. Walking this life as nothing more than a shell of my former self.”

“You’re just confused, everyone gets confused some times. I’m sure everything will work out in the end.”

“About the explosives?”

“We’ll see how you feel about this situation in a week, and then we’ll talk. I’ll give you 10 more minutes before I inform the rest of the facility as to where you are.”

“Thanks...” Adam replied staring back into the brightly shining stars that decorated the black canvas. His fist slowly shaking at his side.

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“Gail, we’ve just received some very reliable information as to the Trinity Alliance’s next move.”

Gail slowly turned his head around with curiosity. He had an inside man within the TA leaking all sorts of useful information to him. It was the only way he could be able to send out his forces to prevent battles from occurring. But just by looking at the report which was recently fed to him he knew this battle was going to take more than a simple intervention. The TA intended to end the war in one clean felt blow.

“So they’re going after Dammerung eh? They sure know how to start things off with a bang.”

Gail mumbled as he read aloud the torrent of information as it sat on his desk.

“It would seem like they too tire of the war. Dammerung is the nexus of the EAP.”

“Thanks Micheal, I’m fully aware of the importance of Dammerung. If this battle occurs it will be the most vicious blood spilt battle in the past few years.”

“Are we going then? To the Moon?”

“I would prefer not to, we don’t know what kind of weapons the TA is going to be boasting in this battle. But...we don’t have much of a choice. I want you to send a message to Phobos.”

“Phobos sir?... Wait...you don’t mean?”

“It’s unfortunate that the final actor had to come out so early in the show. But it seems we have no choice. The final survivor of the Crimson Dawn, Cruentus Animus.....”

**Chapter Nine: Sins of the Father**

“General...heat signatures detected, 300 meters from the Special Defense Forces position!”

“WHAT?! How many?!”

“One second....3 sir. They appear to be MFs....but not Shades. Oh my God, according to their heat signatures these MFs are....Alpha, Blue Angel and Anima. The personal squadron of General Novus, the Crimson Knight!” The young soldier screamed, his knees buckling with fear. He had just been assigned to Dammerung the previous week; he had hoped to stay on the base for at least another few months.

“Stephen Novus has been sent out here personally? This isn't good; the TA must be launching one hell of attack. Damn, we've already sent a third of our forces to Pacis Deus to act as its defenses until it was completed. Damn they tricked us....we thought the TA was going to attack Pacis Deus when they were heading here all along! Alert the SDF! Also....send out the Evertos! Dispatch Night-Wing battalions 1-8! Send out the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> AT battalions and open communications with Pacis Deus. Maybe we'll be able to stall the TA long enough to get some of our troops back!”

“General Soleil the Evertos? Are you sure, they've just come off the production line. And the pilots chosen for those units haven't even gotten in any test runs with them yet!” One of the Lieutenants standing in the background screamed.

General Alvin Soleil, one of the French military's key strategists was not the type of person to take back orders. He was well aware of the recent birth the Evertos went through. They were the EAP's finest creation, a highly mobile, well armored MF capable of heavy offensive maneuvers. The frame of

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the Everto was structured for intimidation emulating that of a demonic figure, two thinly slit crimson glowing eyes located on the side of the sleek triangular head which was attached to a curved less robotic neck. The frame itself was not like any other MF seen; its parts were molded to bare a resemblance to the smooth features of human limbs. Just underneath the metallic hands rested a slit which held two elongated metallic blades for close range combat. The knees of the MF also carried offensive capabilities, at close range a thin focused beam of crimson energy emanated from the knee to the upper part of the metal foot; it can slice through any material. Two rectangular external boosters hung from the shoulder blades, aside from providing an extra boost of speed it also acted as a weapon carrier for two Excalibur class swords.

The EAP found inspiration for what they would consider their prime achievement in warfare for any where they could think of. Attached to the smooth oval thighs were two rail cannons, they were composed of light metallic materials and were designed using data collected from the Azure Cup on Blue Dragon. The dark obsidian fingers attached to the Everto acted as a container for Capsule Missiles, tiny chrome warheads that packed quite a punch. Both hands were equipped with a maximum of 15 rounds. In total a single Everto had 8 boosters equipped allowing for extreme maneuvering skills in harsh situations. The Everto was their shining star in the shadows.

“The Evertos are our only chance of surviving this battle. The AI on each Advanced Frame will guide the pilots. This shouldn’t be an issue. Launch the Evertos and signal the SDFs. They may only be Night-Shades, but they’re our Ace pilots. They should be able to hold off General Novus while we make the necessary arrangements.” Soleil replied.

“Yes sir.!” The young frightened communications soldier jumped onto the frequencies that the General requested. “Alerting the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon of Special Defense Forces for Dammerung. Bogeys are approaching your vicinity, approach with caution and hold them off as long as you can. Dammerung is going to be under attack, I repeat, Dammerung is in danger. The AFs known as Evertos will launch, you’re mission is to stall General Novus. Please respond!”

“You hear that Mina? Looks like we’re getting some unexpected guests.” A pilot spoke with such subtlety he would be often mistaken for a woman over a communications link. His mouth gaped open as he yawned greatly.

“Oh really? What kind of guests Rey? It’s been a while since we were given a good exercise.” Mina replied pulling the long dirty blonde strands of hair that grazed across her silk like skin.

“According to the distress signal sent by Dammerung.....oooh, the Crimson Knight is on his way.” Rey’s voice instantly rose a few octaves in anticipation.

“The Crimson Knight? Stephen Novus is coming here personally? Heh....I’ve been longing for a challenge that much is for sure.” Mina replied with a sinister snicker.

“Don’t get too excited you two, there’s no way we can stop them. That’s why HQ just wants us to stall them. I’ll handle Novus, you two will deal with his comrades.” A serene voice replied. At first Rey and Mina wanted to object, but they knew better than to disobey their superior.

“Commander....we should....”

“That’s enough Mina. I’ll take care of him myself. Now go, I’ve finally caught them on radar. We have approximately 10 minutes before their arrival.”

“Commander.....don’t die.....” Her low voice fluttered into her microphone. Her eyes quivering with the suppressed force of the tears that were trying to pierce her emotional barrier, she tightly gripped onto the throttles of her customized Night-Wing. The Special Defense Forces were given the option of customization since they were considered the elitists of the EAP. Her Night-Shade was outfitted with an armor shroud that made its shoulder much broader, a blocky silver shoulder pad that protected the joints connecting to the torso. Both her commander and Rey refused to customize their Night-Wings leaving them as the standard; they were deadly enough with the standard model, they didn’t need any enchantments.

“Come on Mina...you heard the Commander. We don’t have much time.” Rey replied.

“Commander we’re going to use the hunks of metallic debris as cover. We’ll ambush them.” Rey replied.

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The Commander nodded slightly only to turn his attention back to the flickering lights that were his next opponent.

“Stephen...I have a bad feeling about this.” Heather mumbled.

“It’ll be fine...the Special Defense Forces are our only concern. Let General Copiare and his Shades deal with the rest.” Stephen replied.

Mario appeared surprised as his radar only picked up a single heat signature, that of the Commanding officer for the SDF. “I got one on radar...but the others are probably scattered amongst the debris...where did this come from...there’s so many scorched MF parts.” Mario mumbled.

“It’s probably from Leviticus, after all his ultimate weapon wasn’t too far from here. Mario, Heather, I want you two to search the debris. Find the other defenders; I’ll deal with the Commanding unit.” Stephen replied sternly.

“Huh? How do you know that’s the commanding unit?” Heather always felt like she was left out of the loop, that at times her own state of ignorance could be troublesome for her friends.

“...Hayate..... Ritsuzen.....I’ll deal with him just go find the others.” Stephen blurted out.

“...Yeah...” Both Blue Angel and Anima dashed their separate ways from Alpha heading into the collage of debris.

Alpha’s boosters ignited as Stephen stared at the silver Night-Wing in his sights. He wasn’t sure why or how he could tell that the MF was Hayate but regardless he knew it was him.

Hayate Ritsuzen, once an EAP General now nothing more than a Commander for the Special Defense Forces. He was demoted soon after he failed to kill his long time friend Nathan Leviticus. Due to his failure to act thousands of EAP soldiers were killed in the attack against Rinascita, an EAP strong hold positioned on the other side of the Moon, the original Nexus for the military. Recognizing his deeds over the years the higher ups of the EAP decided to demote Hayate to Commander of the SDF instead of executing him. They felt that watching his friend die was tormenting enough.

Hayate’s eyelids slowly covered the diameter of his black pupils; he smiled while Alpha continued its approach.

“Stephen Novus...we never got the chance to finish our battle 2 years ago.” Hayate’s voice abruptly shattered the silence that Stephen had become accustomed to.

“So it is you.....Hayate. I wouldn’t have expected you to fall back in line with the EAP, not after what happened with Leviticus.”

“Well I love my country, I love its people. And I will do whatever is necessary to protect them. You should know that much about me.”

“This battle...it will end this pointless war.”

“I know that much Stephen. It may be futile, but I will fight to protect this base. I will fight with every last ounce of strength that I have!” Hayate screamed. His hands jumped to the throttles pulling them inwards.

The Night-Wing roared into action, its right and left arms swung around in a curved trajectory flailing the dual energy rifles in the vacuum of space. Spheres of radiating energy oscillated around the tip of the obsidian barrel all in the time span of a few seconds.

Just as the two beams of highly focused energy fired Alpha’s boosters tilted at an angle sending the crimson MF flying towards the right narrowly avoiding the plasma energy that shot passed.

“Still as agile as ever eh Stephen?”

Just as Hayate finished stating his observation his Night-Wing was rocked by a crimson explosion. His thinly slit eyes widened as far as they could, the smoldering cloud of darkened smoke parted as Alpha zoomed through with its fabled dual energy saber ignited and ready for action.

“I see...you want to finish this. No wasting time....picking up from where we left off eh...THAT’S FINE BY ME!”

The pitch black nightmarish sky lit up as the two fire flies danced across the canvas engaging in combat.

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Blue Angel slowly maneuvered around the MF graveyard. The singed eroded pieces of metal floated lifeless moving at a turtle like pace making it difficult for one to see clearly. Heather was a sniper, she excelled at long distance battles and maneuvers, she was the type of person who needed to know her enemy's location at all times. The situation she was in was not her forte.

"Is he sure that there are other MFs in this vicinity? I mean maybe that one MF was the only SDF that Dammerung has to offer. ..." Her thoughts began to trail; her fingers began to ease around the throttles losing the tension. Just then her radar began to erupt in a fury of rage. Hundreds of ivory dots scattered amongst the crimson screen, her hazel eyes froze from fear. The dots, most likely missiles were approaching from all sides.

"Heh...let's see you escape from this..." Mina's voice was low; she was on the prowl, glaring at her prey.

Heather began to snicker, her eyes determined and focused. Her right hand let go of the throttle flipping the switch activating her sniper system. A grey cube like motorized scope made its way from the back of her seat. The slight humming echo of the gears turning soothed her soul, it was the music of her inspiration.

"Hope you didn't expect me to get taken out by a simplistic attack such as this one." Heather growled under her breath. Flames engulfed her pupils as her elongate rail gun pivoted over Blue Angel's right shoulder gathering energy. Mina watched from a safe distance as the silver warhead soared violently. A few missiles exploded as they clipped remnants of Shades and Night-Wings alike. The galling chirping sound of the radar pounded rhythmically in the cockpit continuing to warn Heather of the impending danger. Ignoring the radar she focused on the barrage of missiles that were approaching her MF from the front. Small clusters of pinkish clouds erupted every few seconds; she knew that her opponent didn't think the attack through otherwise they wouldn't have launched a missile shower in an area cluttered with debris.

As the missiles packed together she pulled the trigger sending out a hulking beam of pure crimson energy. Mina's eyes grew in stature as she watched the beam evaporate the missiles giving her enemy more than enough room to evade the remaining batch.

"Damn, this one's clever." Mina whispered to herself, she lightly tapped on the accelerators causing her Night-Wing to fly from her hiding spot in order to find a better one.

Heather glanced to her right at the sound of the subtle movement of the Night-Wing. Mina's exterior armor was new, yet to be scratched or dulled. Due to this its armor greatly reflected the source of light that emanated from Heather's beam. Heather's pinkish lips thinned grinning across her slightly tanned skin.

"Got you." Heather mumbled. Just as the remaining missiles approached Blue Angel jerked to the right turning its torso. The chrome rectangular weapons shot by leaving Heather ample time to lock onto her target. Her chest palpated smoothly as the glowing green lock on box solidified around a hulking cluster of destroyed MF limbs. Mina's eyes shot open, her radar was blaring as dozens of text messages with the words "Locked" appeared on her numerous display screens. Her nerves tensed up, never before has her prey located her without her wanting them too.

"Impossible!" Mina screamed. She forcefully applied her weight down on the accelerators sending a violent thrust out from her boosters. Just as the Night-Wing flew from the barrier at a 45 degree angle each piece of debris exploded as the massive beam launched from Blue Angel collided with the pieces. The resulting shockwave from the explosion sent the Night-Wing into an aerial spin, Mina's gauges spun erratically as she lost control of her MF. In the corner of her eye she saw Blue Angel dashing towards her with an ivory energy rifle lifted gathering energy.

Just as Blue Angel's rifle recoiled backwards the Night-Wing spun around on its side regaining stability. Heather brushed it off like it didn't make a difference. The fuchsia beam shot by narrowly missing the Night-Wing as it tilted onto its right side.

"You caught me off guard once; I won't let it happen again!" Mina screamed, her voice quivering from the intense octaves she was pushing.

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Rey laughed manically as he continued to fire his dual energy rifles towards Anima. Mario continued to nimbly dance through the beams avoiding a collision. The orange Night-Wing that Rey was piloting flew towards the ivory MF firing blindly; grace, let alone strategy wasn't Rey's style.

"Is this all? You know I was expecting some heavy resistance from the so called Special Defense Forces. I really don't see what's so special about you guys anyway."

"What?!"

Mario began to grin as Rey's anger continued to swell.

"Yeah, tell you the truth, I don't think you're worth my time."

"I'll show you...how dare you!" The Night-Wing burst towards Anima still firing blindly. Anima dashed to the right avoiding the beams of sporadic fire, both arms flung inwards as the two metallic whips launched towards the Night-Wing. Rey's mouth gawked from shock as the two whips wrapped tightly around the legs. Rey's body flung around inside the cockpit from the tremor as the whips began to emanate a pulse of electricity that engulfed the lower torso of the Night-Wing.

"\*sigh\*...not even a challenge..." Mario mumbled in despair.

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"General Copiare! General Novus and his team have engaged with the Special Defense Forces!"

"Good...that's our signal. Shades are green to launch. Don't hold anything back, attack Dammerung with everything you have! The war will end once that base is destroyed!" The General screamed.

Ashley nodded, not only was she the operator for Stephen's squad, she was also the head Central Intelligence Operator (CIO) for the entire mission. She turned around facing her console wasting no time to issue the command.

"All Shades are green for launch. I repeat all Shades are green for launch!"

Her sweet sounding voice filled the heads of every eager and shaking soldier confined in a cockpit. The docking gates on the massive cruiser slowly opened revealing the frigid surreal environment of space. One after another Shades launched taking to the stars, it was only a matter of time before they would engage with the EAP.

Approximately 200 Hundred Shades occupied the space region above Dammerung, 50 launched from each of the 4 TA cruisers that approached undetected due to their stealth transmitters.

"General Soleil! 200 heat signatures detected!" A frantic EAP soldier screamed out.

"What?! Where the hell did they come from?!"

"I'm not sure sir, they've...they've appeared to come out of nowhere!"

"Damn the TA...stealth transmitters...what's the status on the SDF?"

"Not good General, they're currently engaging with General Novus...you don't think?"

"That Novus was a decoy? Damn we fell right into their hands. Launch every Night-Wing and AT battalion we have. Put the Evertos on standby...NOW!" The General's voice resonated through the control room.

"Yes...yes sir...All Night-Wings and AT squadrons you are clear to launch. Fire at will, protect Dammerung!"

"The TA already? Damn, this is too troublesome!" One of the Night-Wing pilots screamed as he launched into space. As dozens of Night-Wings scurried out from the moon base 5 massive ATs rolled over the cold surface of the moon.

"Oh my God...this can't be good..." Another Night-Wing pilot shouted. On his screen was an image, an image of the 200 hundred Shades fiercely descending towards him.

"Calm down! We have to protect Dammerung no matter what!" A fellow pilot screamed back.

It didn't take long for the forces to collide and when they did tons of explosions littered the shadowy sky as blows were exchanged. It was one of the most chaotic scenes ever conjured up by



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humanity, metallic limbs burned being tossed aside like garbage. The ear shattering screams of a person being slaughtered or caught in an explosion; it was war at its most primal stage. Dozens of grenade shells tore through Shades as they launched from the massive cannons equipped on the Armored Tanks of the EAP. Night-Wings were cornered and outnumbered severely, it was a massacre. Blood floated with a strange sense of eloquence in the void; it didn't matter whose blood was spilt, it was a sign of the man's hunger for conquest; for victory.

"ENSIGN! DID YOU GET IN TOUCH WITH PACIS DEUS YET?!" The General screamed, the signs were all apparent; he was losing his calm brisk composure.

"Not yet sir, something's jamming the signal!"

"DAMN IT! WE'RE THROUGH IF THIS KEEPS UP!"

In the far distance staring at the fireworks glistening through the void a small transport slowly made its way towards the Moon. It was a long way from Phobos even with extra high-end thrusters equipped. A single man stared through the pane glass window, his snow white hair covered his ghostly face and crimson reptilian slit pupils. His pink vibrant lips parted slightly, his ivory teeth glistened from the light created by the numerous explosions in the distance.

"Humans...always fighting and for what? For peace? They don't wish for peace, they always manage to find an excuse to create even deadlier weapons. Would a race desiring peace perform such an action? Oh well, they live for this purpose. Every person lives for a purpose, to deny that purpose is sinful. I too live for a purpose...to validate my superior existence...and that can only be achieved on the battlefield. Gail must be truly desperate to let me out...heh, I shall not disappoint..hehe....hahaha....."

**Chapter Ten: Undying Tears of Innocence**

The loud primal scream of battle flooded through the cockpits of every MF pilot around Dammerung. The crew of the moon base could do nothing but watch and hope that their scarce forces would be able to hold off the TA until they could get in touch with Pacis Deus. Shards of signed metal and armor fluttered weightlessly through the atmosphere of the moon painting a nightmarish image of death and destruction. The EAP proved themselves to be excellent combat experts managing to take out more Shades with a smaller amount of forces than previously thought to be possible. And yet it still looked grim, for every 5 Shades that fell at least 10 Night-Wings erupted into flames.

“This is insane! How the hell can we protect Dammerung like this?! We’re still severely out numbered!” A young pilot screamed. The silver Night-Wing dashed to its right avoiding a barrage of missile sent out by a single Shade. The Night-Wing retaliated by firing an onslaught of energy beams instantly. Just as the beams erupted the young EAP pilot turned around his blonde hair flowing through the brisk air conditioned cockpit. It was brief but millions of images shot through his head like a slide show just as a crimson energy beam from a Shade’s energy saber sliced through the torso of the Night-Wing piercing his fragile human body. Pints of blood gushed outwards staining the cockpit for a few seconds until the MF exploded leaving nothing more than a trail of damaged armor and caliginous clouds.

“DEREK!!!! YOU BASTARDS!” Another Night-Wing appeared behind the Shade that had just taken another EAP life. The sheer speed that the Night-Wing displayed caused the Shade to freeze in fear only able to hold out its solid triangular shield. Flying on pure rage the EAP pilot increased his speed holding out the Excalibur sword, its jagged edge pointing straight towards the shield of the Shade. Time slowed down for the Shade pilot as he watched the tip of the Excalibur sword penetrate the shield, the sound of the crunching metal echoing loudly only to be drowned out by the explosions resonating in the background. The TA soldier’s pupils widened as the metallic blade pierced the outer armor of the MF’s torso crushing the cockpit. The walls began to collapse onto his body, his green helmet shattered; thousands of plastic shards spurt out in all directions accompanied by the soldier’s crimson blood. The death was painful only lasting about 10 seconds, but pain like that made it feel like a lifetime. An eye for an eye, but on a battlefield things could never end with equal footing. Only life will always be left un-avenged.

The deaths continued, a Shade would fall and then so would a Night-Wing. It was down to a science, things were not looking good for Dammerung. The AT battalions had be destroyed whittled down to nothing more than golden ash staining the gray jagged surface of the Moon.

“Things aren’t looking good General Soleil....our Night-Wings have been reduced to half capacity...we have no more than 35 MF’s out there, not to mention that all the ATs have been destroyed. The TA is in much better shape than we are; I count 125 Shades still remaining.”

“...Just a little longer. Tell the men to wait just a little longer, the Evertos aren’t ready yet. But I promise once they launch the tide will turn for sure!”

“Yes sir!”

“Just what I expected from the great Crimson Knight!” Hayate screamed. His Night-Wing swung both Excalibur wielding arms towards Alpha only to miss at the last second. Alpha dodged leaning to the

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right allowing the Night-Wing to lunge forward from its own velocity leaving its back open for attack. Alpha's right leg swung upwards crashing into the arched torso of the Night-Wing. Hayate's head suffered from minor whiplash from the shockwave of the collision.

"Hayate...you can't stop it. This war will end here. With Dammerung destroyed there will be no way for the EAP to continue this pointless war." Stephen yelled

"Heh....that may be true. But is it the best thing? Will a TA victory bring peace to the world? If I recall it was the TA who brashly dropped a nuke on Germany. Are you aware of how many innocent people died? How the hell can a nation such as that one possibly be good for humanity?!"

"It was different then Hayate....Revelations was in control of the TA. Vincent Avidus..."

"What makes this time so different? The leader of the TA is Luscious Malum, the at one time head of Genesis the world's leading manufacturer of MFs and military weapons. Do you truly believe that he wants a peaceful world?!" The Night-Wing shot back on the offensive swinging its Excaliburs brashly through the void. Stephen sighed as Hayate became engulfed in his frustration he lost the prestige skill that he had once held onto. The right arm of the Night-Wing soared, the blade of the Excalibur piercing through the weightless atmosphere. With the slightest movement from his arms Stephen forced Alpha to retaliate.

A blinding flash engulfed the upper torso of the Night-Wing; silence lasted for a few moments while the sizzling metallic silver right arm floated lifelessly holding onto the elongated sword.

"You can't beat me if you're filled with rage Hayate. I thought you of all people would realize that."

"I can't be brought down! Not here! Not now!" Hayate screamed. The thrusters on the Night-Wing exploded with force, the silver MF blazed towards Alpha with its remaining arm arched backwards preparing for a devastating blow. Stephen side quickly docking his energy saber, the Night-Wing swung with all the force it could gather. The Excalibur flung towards Alpha's torso; just before the point of impact Alpha's hand clapped together catching the blunt of the blade just before it could slice through the armor. The abruptness of the defensive maneuver shocked Hayate's nerves, no one had ever caught is blade in mid strike before.

"I told you Hayate....this war needs to end. And I'll make sure it ends here." Stephen calmly replied. His eyes glazed over with sorrow and grief he sighed once more. The two cannons resting on the shoulder of Alpha began to charge.

"And what will you do once the EAP is forced to surrender and the war ends?"

"I've always wanted to get enough power to change things Hayate. It was the reason I stayed in the TA. But....when I got more power I always believed it wasn't sufficient enough so I kept fighting....kept pushing. I'm a General now; this is about as far as I can go now. I'm not nearly old enough to become an Admiral. I think I never left because I was afraid....afraid to face the reality outside of the TA, so I stayed forcing myself to believe that I needed to gain more power. But...I finally realized I can't keep running anymore. To answer your question Hayate, I will fight. I will fight to make sure a world without greed comes to fruition."

"...finish me then....it is necessary."

The two cannons roared thunderously as they fired.

Anima hovered over the singed remains of his opponent. Mario sighed; he shrugged his shoulders while staring at the bursting explosions.

"I truly hope that this war ends today."

"Mario....how are you holding out?!" Heather's voice boomed through the receiver as an image of her face appeared on his communications display.

"I'm fine, my opponent wasn't much of a threat. You?"

"Still dealing with mine. She's not too dangerous but she's extremely agile. You hear from Stephen?"

"No..."

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“I see...anyway if you’re done go help out our forces at Dammerung. I hear that the EAP is giving them a hard time. They might need your help.”

“Roger. Maybe it’ll pass some time.” Mario replied grinning. Anima quickly launched heading towards the battlefield while Heather and Mina continued to exchange blows.

Mina screamed her frustrations out into the depths of space as her Night-Wing was running low on ammo and energy. Her exterior armor shroud had been destroyed leaving her MF weakened.

Blue Angel continued to keep a long distance from the Night-Wing; it was how Heather continued to hold the upper hand during the entire fight. Her rail cannon was down to two more rounds, although she only needed one to finish the job. Her hazel eyes glared through the scope, her lips smiling as the lock on box solidified around the Night-Wing. Mina’s MF was in a horrible condition; its right arm had been torn clean off revealing obsidian wires flipping around from the electrical currents that surged through. The leg units were hanging loosely by the joints, Mina was not in a position that she was used to.

“I don’t have time to play around; I need to finish this off in one shot.” Heather whispered to herself. The crimson box surrounded the lower part of the Night-Wing’s torso, with a clean shot she could hit it and end the battle. That would give her enough time to go help out at Dammerung. The missile packs equipped behind Blue Angel’s torso abruptly burst open as hundreds of silos shot out in a curved trajectory.

“Missiles?! This entire time you’ve had missiles? (Bitch....is she just toying with me?)” Mina screamed out as the ivory dots scrambled on her radar.

While the Night-Wing began to move with evasive intent Heather held her calm following every slight movement that Mina made with ease. No matter how many times the Night-Wing would move Heather kept a steady lock on her target. Mina was too busy avoiding the cluster of missiles that continued to fall like heavy pounding rain that she wasn’t able to differentiate between a “locked on” alarm and the standard “incoming” alarm. She fell into the sly trap that Heather set.

One round left in the rail cannon was all that was needed, knowing that she only had two she knew she had to make them count.

“It’s over.” Heather mumbled as she pulled the trigger. The rail cannon fired sending a thick beam of energy towards Mina.

It was too late when Mina noticed the beam heading in her direction. If she moved to avoid she would be bombarded by the remaining missiles, and if she tried to avoid the missiles she would be hit by the energy round. It was truly a checkmate situation.

“I’m sorry Hayate...I failed...” Her voice drowned in the thunderous explosion that engulfed her Night-Wing’s lower torso. Pieces of armor flared out adding to the MF graveyard. The cockpit remained intact floating effortless amongst the rumble. Mina’s eyes closed as she fell unconscious.

Heather glanced over her shoulder and quickly sped towards the raging battle around Dammerung.

“GENERAL! I’ve lost all signals from the Special Defense Forces! I’m also detecting two heat signatures coming this way!”

General Soleil ran towards the young CIO soldier, he was shocked to find out that all of the SDFs were defeated and in such a short time. It also didn’t help that the number of Night-Wings on the battlefield continued to drop while the Shades continued to remain steady.

“Damn....it appears we no longer have any choice. Launch the Evertos.”

“Are you sure sir? The pilot synchronization is only up to 85%. If we launch them now there is no telling what could...”

“DON’T QUESTION ME! I have the best interest for this base in mind, launch them now!”

“Yes...yes sir..... Attention Evertos 1-8 you are green for launch. Please launch now.”

“Hehehe...you hear that, it looks like we get to have some fun finally....” The pilot of the first Evertos mumbled.

“Yeah....those bastards have no idea what’s in store for them now. Launching!”

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Just like that the eight demons of the EAP launched from the hanger of Dammerung. It was no ordinary launch; their entry into the scene was full of tormenting screams and roars. Their presence alone shook the foundation of every pilot, TA and EAP alike. The battle halted for a moment, Shade pilots and Night-Wing pilot paused staring at the 8 demonic figures that recently launched.

“What the hell are those things?!” A pilot from the EAP shouted.

“I...I think that’s our back up...” Another pilot replied.

“What are you guys doing? There’s only 8 of them! Take them out now!” A TA commander screamed. The 85 remaining Shades erupted from their positions all heading towards the Evertos. They were no longer concerned with the Night-Wings, there were only 15 left. Every Shade dashed aiming their energy rifles at the new comers.

The Evertos appeared to grin, no other MF any pilot had ever encountered emanated human expression. Crimson streams of energy flushed out from the back of the Evertos as the 8 separated. Their speed was astonishing, just as fast as they appeared on radar the Evertos vanished from every Shade’s radar system.

“Where?! Where the hell did they go?!” A frightened pilot mumbled. His sweat rolling down his eyelids blurring his vision, his fear didn’t help his situation any.

“Right here...” A single pilot replied just as his Everto materialized in front of the Shade. The TA soldier screamed in horror as he tried to raise his energy rifle but it was far too late. The thigh cannons pivoted upwards firing through the Shade instantly causing an explosion. The pilot’s screams rung through every TA unit frightening every pilot.

“What the hell?! They can teleport? I’ve never seen such speed!” Another TA soldier yelled just before an Everto shot by slashing through the MF diagonally with an Excalibur sword. As the Shade slid in two raging streams of flames shot out briefly surrounding the demon in darkened smoke.

The tides began to turn in favor of the EAP; the Evertos single handedly chopped the TA forces in half within mere seconds. Their ability to move around undetected made them even deadlier giving the illusion of teleportation to the TA soldiers. Each Everto was equipped with a stealth pulsator which covers the Everto in a cloaked aura of energy making them undetectable by radar and by the human eye.

“This is insane! We can’t...UURHGGH!!!” Another TA soldier was slain by a passing Everto. The Evertos moved in silence making their next move unpredictable.

Every EAP soldier gawked from inside their Night-Wings as the Evertos acted as the Grim Reaper taking soldiers to Hell as they pleased. The 15 remaining Night-Wings gathered around each other forming a cluster. Just then two thin green beams of energy fired through 2 more Night-Wings causing them to explode.

“What the hell?!” An EAP pilot gasped as he saw Anima approaching at an alarming rate firing its energy rifles.

The 13 Night-Wings dispersed while randomly firing their weapons only for Mario to dodge them eloquently.

“You won’t be able to hit me like that!” Mario screamed.

“But I will...” An eerie voice echoed out from space as an Everto appeared behind Anima swinging its Excalibur. Mario at first was shocked but quickly chuckled. Anima’s torso arched forward causing the Everto to miss. Just then Anima swung its arms around flinging out its electrical whip. One of the whips wrapped around the thin smooth left leg of the Everto while the Everto grabbed onto the second whip snapping it in two. A sudden electrical surge burst onto the Everto’s leg only for nothing to happen which shocked Mario even more.

“What the hell?!” Mario yelled.

“Don’t expect to take me down so easily.” The mysterious pilot replied.

The Everto’s left leg began to produce an aura of crimson energy that suddenly sliced through the remaining whip. Anima dashed backwards creating some distance only for another Everto to appear. In the corner of his eye Mario took notice and managed to pull Anima away from the thick blade that swung down. As he avoided the attack the first Everto fired a cluster of missiles that impacted onto Anima sending the ivory MF into an uncontrollable free fall.

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“Just what the hell are those things?! They’re not normal MFs!” Mario screamed. Suddenly he felt his voice run thin as three more horrifying Evertos began to circle around Anima.

“Shit...” Mario muttered as the three Evertos had their way with him. Two Evertos sped past slicing off both of Anima’s arms while the third fired both thigh cannons, the two plasma beams of energy pierced through the lower torso of Anima destroying the joints that held the legs to the core. Mario screamed as his body was thrown about in the cockpit crashing from side to side. Anima lay in ruins covered in sparking currents of cerulean electricity, its arms floating not too far from its location while both leg units were hanging by a few cables. Like vultures the Evertos circled above their prey preparing for the final strike.

“Leave him alone!” Heather’s voice ruptured the moment that the Evertos created. A thick beam of energy shot through the formations that the Evertos created. Just as Blue Angel spurt onto the scene guns blazing another Evertos swept passed her tearing through the lower half of the MF. Heather screamed as the computer consoles exploded from the trauma of the attack. Pieces of plastic flung through the air, flames rummaging across the cockpit, it was a scene of chaos and Heather was stuck in the middle of it. The automated defense systems in the cockpit activated as frigid bursts of fluid sprayed to extinguish the fires.

Blue Angel just like Anima now floated lifelessly through the void due to an attack from an Evertos. Heather fell unconscious from the attack while the four Evertos that occupied the area vanished, heading back towards the remaining Shades that flew through the air attacking the remaining 12 Night-Wings.

“General Copiare!!” Ashley screamed grabbing the General’s attention. “I’ve lost signals from Anima and Blue Angel and about 50 Shades. Also 8 new heat signatures have appeared that have never been seen before!”

“What?! What the hell is going on down there?” The General screamed back.

“Also, I’ve detected another ship heading this way. It’s fast.”

“Just what the hell is happening? They were at their wits end a few minutes ago! Where is that new ship coming from?!”

“Tracing trajectory....it’s coming from Phobos!” Ashley screamed.

“Phobos....Orbis...Gail you bastard. We need to hurry! Orbis is on they’re way here. If they get here then all of this has been a waste!” The General screamed. “I was hoping that we wouldn’t have to do anything....that our MF battalions would be enough. But it looks like we’re going to have to get involved. Have every Serpent prepare their Positron Cannon and have them lock onto Dammerung. We’ll take out that base!”

“Yes sir!” The crew of the ship responded.

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From the surface of Mars the battle for Dammerung was apparent. Conflagrant spheres flickered brightly in the night sky above Abyssus. It was serene and quiet, most of the Red Fury soldiers were sleeping; they had received orders to prepare to launch into space early in the morning. They were joining up with Orbis in space; this was decided by the new leader of Red Fury. With the death of Carlos Rendetore Red Fury needed a new leader and both Anthony and Eric were preoccupied in Abyssus. They felt it was only the proper decision to give the job to David Lepidus. He was one of the early members of Red Fury and someone that Carlos respected greatly.

Adam stared at the burning sky, his hair flapping through the breeze that surged through the land. It was a lot stronger than any normal breeze that would pass through, the stench of death aided the wind in its travel; it was something that he had become accustomed too.

“So this is where you were....” Sharon said softly as she approached him.

Adam nodded not saying a word, his eyes glued on the opaque canvas above.

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“You’ve been like this ever since we came here....I’m worried.” Sharon mumbled.

“I’m fine, no need to worry.” Adam replied.

“If you’re fine then why do you come out here every night and just stare at the sky?”

“I come here to think. I’ve lost my path Sharon; I need to find it again.”

“And your path is out here?”

“I’m not sure. But something isn’t right.....” Adam mumbled. He grabbed onto Sharon’s trembling shoulders while he scanned the crimson dunes of the area. It was true that everything was quiet, sniper-like quiet. A small amount of movement in the far distance caught his attention; a small dune slowly collapsed sending flurries of sand and debris into the air.

“Damn...someone’s here. Come on we need to get back to the base!” Adam yelled.

“Huh?! What’s going on?!”

“Don’t ask questions just come on!” Adam screamed.

Sharon was frightened, her pupils were wide but she did as he asked, and didn’t ask any questions.

“Damn, the target is heading back. Should I just attack the base now and get it over with? I’m kind of hungry”

*“Try and make it quick you fat bastard. I don’t want to know what the boss will do to us if we fail again. I still don’t know why he sent your fat ass to do the job.”*

“Sloth....just make sure you have all sorts of cake waiting for me when I get back. I’ll destroy this base and take him out in one shot you just watch!”

*“You better not fail you gluttonous pig! You have your Seraph so this shouldn’t be a big deal.”*

“Just watch and get the food ready. I’ll be back before you know it!” Gluttony screamed.

The gears on the behemoth began to turn as the Seraph moved out from its hidden position. Adam’s eyes widened, petrified at the image of the titanic monstrosity lingering not more than 100 meters away from his position. Sharon glanced up into the sky screaming at first site of the Seraph.

“What is that thing?!” Sharon screamed as she clutched onto Adam’s shoulders as tightly as she could.

“I don’t know...I’ve never seen anything like that before. Come on, we need to get back to the base!”

Dozens of alarms and sirens blared loudly inside the Red Fury facility causing every soldier to jump out from their beds. Both Anthony and Eric sped out from their rooms only to pause in fear at the sight of the Seraph. They rubbed their eyes with the edges of their knuckles as they recognized the Seraph as one of the MFs that attacked Evo.

“Eric, what the hell is that thing doing here?!” Anthony screamed.

“Probably here to finish us off!” Eric replied.

“Damn it.....where’s Adam?!” Anthony yelled.

The ground shook with each step that the Seraph took towards the facility. Its 4 tails separated from the back of its torso flying into the air. Each tail booster around in random formations while gathering clusters of glowing energy around the tips of the tail. Anthony’s eyes widened, he knew what was coming next, everyone did.

Adam’s feet got caught under a pile of rocks just in front of the base causing him to trip. His chin collided with the ground while Sharon ran ahead slowly.

“Adam!” She screamed turning around her angelic face, she prepared to head back for him but he waved her on.

“Get to the base, and then go to the shelter. You’ll be safe from the attacks there!” Adam screamed.

“But what about you?!”

“I’ll be fine! GO!”

Sharon reluctantly nodded heading straight for the base while Adam stood back up wiping the sand off his clothes. Suddenly the night sky lit up brightly with traces of fuchsia energy. The tails of the

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Seraph continued to fire relentlessly towards the facility. Piles of sand and debris flung into the air as each beam of energy exploded into the ground. Adam's eyes widened as a beam of energy crashed into the ground 100 feet from his position. The eruption sent his body flinging into the air along with the rest of the sand. While his body twisted and turned in the air his mouth gawked as he watched Sharon make it to the facility but his eyes were drawn to the 3 beams of energy that closed in on the base. He stretched out his arms as if he could grasp Sharon and take her away from the oncoming attack even though he knew he couldn't.

Things went pitch black for a few moments, Adam found himself staring back at events from his past. He screamed as he was forced to watch Amy die once again due to his lack of power, shaking his head violently he woke from his surrealistic nightmare. Blood trickled down his forehead in between his eyes running over the crevices of his face. His head pounded harshly and his back was sore, his arms managed to push his body up and out of the piles of sand that covered him.

As he stumbled into the air his eyes widened once again, tons of caliginous streams of smoke rose dancing around the Red Fury facility. From within the smoke emanated a glowing pair of devilish eyes along with the searing sound of burning flames.

"Sharon....." Adam mumbled. He ran as far up the dune of signed sand as he could before his knees buckled from his injury. There it was, the Red Fury facility reduced to nothing but ash and broken buildings. The Seraph loomed over the facility scanning to make sure it accomplished its task to perfection. His nerves tightened and his heart raced heavily. He knew the feeling all too well, it was a feeling that he had hoped to never experience during the remainder of his life.

"Sharon.....no.....she could have survived....." He mumbled to himself, going through the motions of denial.

The Seraph then began to fire even more beams of energy into the already destroyed facility causing a thick mushroom cloud to advance into the night's sky. Adam's eyes began to quiver in fear, he knew there that there was no way anyone could have survived an attack such as this. His emotions ran wild, a thick rock caught his attention and he instinctively grabbed onto it. Even though he knew it wouldn't do anything, he threw it towards the Seraph anyway. He watched the obsidian mineral fall from the sky collapsing into the ground.

Adam fell to the ground heaving trying to catch his breath that was robbed out from under him.

"NO!!!!!!!!!!!" He screamed letting out all of his emotions in one felt swoop. In the corner of his eye a silver door glistened in the pale moonlight. His pain and sorrow quickly transcended into anger and determination.

*"Gluttony?"*

*"What do you want now Sloth?"*

*"I'm just checking up on you? Is it finished? Has the target been eliminated?"*

*"I'm pretty sure he's dead. I just evaporated the Red Fury facility. There are no signs of life. So how about that cake?"*

*"You're such a fat bastard you know that?"*

*"And you're a lazy bitch what's your point? I succeeded where you and Envy failed!"*

*"....."*

A slight repetitive beeping sound echoed in the cockpit of Gluttony's Seraph causing him to raise an eyebrow.

*"Gluttony? What is that sound?"*

*"....."*

*"Gluttony?! Are you there!? What's going on?!"*

*"Ummm Sloth...I'll have to get back to you. Just make sure that cake is ready for my return."*

*"Gluttony?!?!?"*

Gluttony turned off the communications radio as the ground began to shake violently. The radar continued to alarm at a loud rate.

*"Just what the hell is going on?!"*



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Gluttony's eyes widened as the ground continued to shake a massive cerulean beam of energy erupted from the desert ground in the distance. The bright light emanated taking away from the glory of the battle raging out in the depths of space. Gluttony began to grin, his wide paunchy cheeks rose as his mouth widened devilishly. His adrenaline flowed vigorously through his veins, his reptilian eyes focused on the silhouette hovering before him in the cerulean dusk.

### **Chapter Eleven: Broken Wings**

*System analysis complete.....Status, Nuclear Generator, 100% capacity, Particle Ion-Thrusters, green, Radiator, green, FCS, online, Angel System.....green.*

The cockpit had collected dust in every corner, the humming lights only made it more apparent. His fingers wrapped around the throttles that he had grown to despise over the years. Never again did he want to find himself strapped into the cockpit of an MF. It was odd since his entire childhood and teens he was dead set on being a pilot. Piloting an MF was his dream, his aspiration, and more importantly it was the only thing he was good at. It appeared that it was predetermined by a higher power that he was supposed to be in the cockpit fighting for his dreams. He could deal with that, he could even come to accept that fate, but he couldn't understand why people had to die around him constantly.

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He was trying to escape this life of fighting, he felt that by leaving it in the past it would the lives of the people around him safer, unfortunately that wasn't the case. This behemoth had shown up and ruined everything for him. His mind wasn't stable and he was aware of that fact. If any man held a sturdy frame of mind in this situation they would be seen as cold and heartless.

Gluttony stared at the motionless frame that floated in the air.

"So is this him? Sloth is going to owe me a lot of cake when I get back." The slit like pupils began to glow emanating a soft green aura, the tubes that protruded into the back of his spinal cord and cerebellum continued to pump bubbling crimson liquid into his body. His plump fingers outstretched around the throttles, drools slowly slid down his rosy lips; he was hungry.

The Seraph growled loudly as its massive boosters ignited forcing the beast into the night's sky. The 4 silver angular tails launched from the back of the torso and instinctively headed straight for their target. Gluttony grinned as he watched his weapons do his bidding, he controlled them with the slightest thought of his mind; the Seraph was created especially for the bearers of the Crimson Dawn. Heated beams of crimson energy fired towards the motionless MF, his devilish grin continued to widen, the saliva dripping down onto his stomach. No longer could he control his appetite for death. His heavy feet slammed onto the accelerators; the Seraph flew towards the MF while the 4 angular weapons circled around the smoke that was fuming into the darkened horizon.

It was hard for him to contain his excitement, it blinded him; his logic, his extraordinary battle skills that set him apart from normal pilots. The raging clouds of polluted smoke continued to fuel the night's sky as the massive MF roared through the air. The thin angular funnels that acted as the Seraph's tail finally stopped their assault; they remained hovering in the shadows.

"\*Grr\*...that seemed a bit too easy...\*growl\*..Ugh, I'm not sure how much longer I can go on without eating something. This is just too much for one person to take." Gluttony screamed out, his hands caressing his overbearing stomach in hopes to ease the hunger pain.

The flames continued to emanate in the background towering into the sky above the previous location of Red Fury's base of operations. The thrusters on the Seraph slowly began to repress its flames and the 4 tails interlocked back with the unit. Believing his job had finally been completed Gluttony once again opened communications with Sloth. It didn't take long for his comrade to appear on the communications display, her pale skin a bit flushed and her eyebrows arched; it was safe to say she was angry.

"What the hell just happened you fat prick?!"

"Calm down Sloth, is my cake ready?"

"You're cake? Ugh...just tell me what the hell happened. The boss wants to know."

"The boss?...\*gulp\*...is he mad?"

"Not yet he isn't."

"I did it Sloth. I did what you and Envy failed to do. I killed the Azure Knight." Gluttony mumbled with pride.

"What?! So that's what happened. He showed up after all..."

"Yeah..." *Beep Beep Beep*... the radar inside the Seraph's cockpit blared loudly; Gluttony's reptilian eye widened causing his pupils to dilate. "Damn...."

"What is it now? Gluttony?!"

The smoke slowly began to dissipate in the distance unveiling a brilliant torrent of flowing cerulean energy coming out from the back of the darkened silhouette.

"You killed her..." The voice crept into Gluttony's mind passing through his ears. It was the gift and curse of the Crimson Dawn. Each bearer of the mark had abilities far more advanced than any human on Earth and/or Mars. It continued to repeat through his head, "*you killed her*" over and over. It bothered him, frightened him, the voice inside his head was crisp and clear with a lingering vindictive intent that pierced Gluttony's nerves. His head began to quiver, his hands let go of his stomach as he began to cradle his head in between the palms of his hands. His eyes were shut tightly, his breathing patterns became erratic and all Sloth could do was watch as her comrade broke out in a nervous breakdown.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Get out....get out of my head.....get out....GET OUT!!!” Gluttony screamed, his head jerked backwards, he was no longer in control of his own powers. Sloth gawked as she watched Gluttony react to the Crimson Dawn telepathy, it was something that each of them had to grow accustomed to. It had taken countless hours of training to be able to handle the strain that was pushed onto one’s mind. Gluttony had never managed to truly master the telepathy making it a dangerous asset to his body.

“(If he doesn’t learn to mend his telepathy there’s no way he’ll survive) Gluttony!” Sloth screamed.

*“You killed her....”*

The voices continued to pound through his mind as he unwillingly channeled the emotions of the pilot facing him into his head. It was too much for him to control at such a low level. Once again he shut off the communication link with Sloth; he never wanted his comrades to see how he still had yet to master the telepathy of the Crimson Dawn.

“Get out....GET OUT!!!” Gluttony screamed once again only this time it seemed that the voice had finally left allowing Gluttony a moment of silence. Breathing heavily his quivering hands managed to find their way back to the throttles; slowly he lifted his head upwards glancing at the front display screen. Suddenly the Seraph lost its footing as beams of cerulean energy continued to pound relentlessly onto its outer frame. As the Seraph stumbled Gluttony managed to shake off the resounding effect of his telepathy. Just as the Seraph turned it was bombarded with more beams of fizzing energy.

“You can’t take me down...do you know who I am?! I won’t lose here!” Gluttony screamed. The four angular funnel tails once again launched from the back of the massive MF. As the clouds of smoke that surrounded the Seraph evaporated the azure MF that lingered became visible. The light from the stars and pinkish explosions in the sky glistened off the metallic armor. The wings extended outwards as the glowing stream of cerulean energy kept the MF afloat.

“You killed her...after all I did in order to get away from....it still ended up like my dream. Why? Why did you come here?!” Adam screamed. The head unit of Blue Dragon flickered as he hit the accelerators fueled with frustration and guilt. Just as Blue Dragon prepared the strike the Seraph the four angular orbits flew in its way firing beams of energy. Blue Dragon nimbly avoided most of the beams while using the energy saber in its right hand to deflect the remaining energy beams. The ground rumbled as the titanic MF rose once again, as it rose, spheres of particle energy gathered around the core preparing to fire.

In a fit of rage the massive beam of energy soared out from the Seraph heading straight towards Blue Dragon. In the midst of the torrent of energy the 4 orbits from the Seraph got in the way as they continued to fire at the blue MF and exploded instantly. With little thought the thrusters ignited violently allowing Blue Dragon to avoid the blast. Just as Blue Dragon dodged the Seraph once again went on the offensive firing plasma blast after plasma blast. The ferocity and rapidness of each attack forced to Adam to remain on the defensive for awhile. His breathing patterns became sporadic; his heart was burning with the flames of anger fueling his adrenaline. He knew he couldn’t lose; there was still a chance, a small chance but still a chance that Sharon had survived. But if he didn’t beat the MF here and now he’d never get the opportunity to find out for sure.

“I WON’T LOSE!” Adam screamed as he jolted the throttles inwards. Blue Dragon danced through the torrent of energy that splattered through the clouds. The fireworks continued to radiantly light up the sky as Gluttony locked his fingers around the trigger button on the side of both of his throttles. The massive feet of the Seraph planted firmly into the rocks and minerals clustering around the lightly hued crimson sand. An elongated rectangular obsidian cannon flipped under the right arm joint of the Seraph. A small cluster of opaque smoke fluttered just over the back unit of the monstrous machine as the joints and gears turned rapidly. Gluttony’s lips began to moisten as his drool dripped down plopping onto his pilot suit.

“I need to end this....\*growl\* ugh, I don’t know how much longer I go on like this.” Gluttony’s crimson pupils widened as Blue Dragon dashed through his barrage of energy with both of its energy sabers drawn out glowing brightly. “He’s fast!”

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The right arm swung forcefully but the tip of the energy saber missed its target just as the Seraph's torso turned 45 degrees to the left. Adam cringed and swung the left arm this time able to make contact. The cerulean beam of intensified energy burned through the first layer of armor plating. Sparks ignited spurting out in all directions, Blue Dragon swayed to the right just as the eight wings flung open releasing the orbital wings. Just as each azure weapon pod flew the Seraph turned once again but this time with the cannon charged and ready to fire. As the crimson and fuchsia energy gathered into a set location in front of the barrel Blue Dragon began to speed away in order to create enough distance between him and the Seraph.

"Running? You think that running is going to save you? This cannon alone has enough power to wipe out the entire area. You can't hide from it hahahaha \*growl\*...(ugh...soon, real soon.)" Gluttony laughed as he basked in the glory of his main weapon. The readings on the plasma cannon showed that it was almost ready at 93%.

Blue Dragon suddenly made a rough turn heading back towards the towering Seraph. Adam just stared at the cannon and the gathering energy around it. It was true that the cannon was powerful, but it took too long to fire, that was its weakness. As the thrusters flickered the orbital wings spread out flying in random patterns locking onto the Seraph. Each wing erupted with energy all firing towards the right side of the Seraph.

Dozens of energy beams cluttered his screen as Gluttony leaned forward gazing at the illuminated LCD. His nerves were tense but only for a few seconds. His gluttonous smile returned to his drooling demeanor the second the cannon signaled the completion of its preparation. His hunger continued to swirl in his stomach causing him to flinch, in that second of flinching, the orbital wings began to pound relentlessly onto the metallic armor. Gluttony was tossed around inside his cockpit, the repetitive blows caused the Seraph's lower joints to crack and lose their balance. A small tremor ran through the ground around the feet of the MF causing sand, rocks and other minerals to burst into the air as the left foot flung out of the ground. Just as the Seraph began to stumble to the side Gluttony struggled with the controls somehow managing to fire the particle plasma cannon.

Adam's eyes widened as the thick wall of energy surged forward causing the eight wings to explode. Azure debris dispersed into the air only for a few seconds before disintegrating from the intense heat that the energy wave created. Adam's hands firmly held onto the throttles as he forced them to the side. He spit out the small drops of sweat that rolled into his mouth through the small crevices in between his lips, his eyes managed to stay open even through the countless drops of sweat that rolled down his face. The temperature inside the cockpit continued to rise with each passing moment as the beam neared.

"Damn...(I have no choice but to now...)" Adam glanced over to the right control panel inside the cockpit.

*Angel System EX Mode Engaged.*

It had been about a year since he used the system. In that long of time his physical and mental strength had weakened, he was no where near the caliber pilot that he was during the Azure Cup. His eyes flinched due to the pain that sprinted through his chest and spine. His fingers quivered as they struggled to find their way back to the throttles. The wave of particle energy continued to soar towards his position at alarming speeds. The thrusters ignited once again, glowing cerulean energy rapidly poured out as the generator continued to feed the six thrusters power. The wing binders acted as 4 extra thrusters when the weapon pods were not attached, each wing thruster contained 5x more power than the standard Particle Ion Thruster giving Blue Dragon the extra speed it needed. In a flash of light the blue MF shot through the sky vanishing from sight just as the energy wave erupted through the sky heading straight for the atmosphere. The darkened sky glistened as the beam gave light to the surrealistic environment.

Gluttony began to chuckle lightly under his breath, each thick finger began to loosen up away from the throttle as his stomach extended while he sighed.

"\*huff\* It's over, finally....\*growl\* Stop getting impatient. I'll put food in you soon enough...." Gluttony froze just as the radar system alerted him of the presence of an MF. Quickly glancing at the energy levels of his cannon his fear quickly found its way back into the pit of his empty howling stomach.

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Adam's cold expression glared through the armor surrounding the cockpit instantly piercing Gluttony's mind. For the first time Gluttony saw Adam's face through his telepathy. He was paralyzed by the ice glazed eyes that remained motionless, statuesque. Adam's lips remained closed while his hands wrapped around the throttles once again. Gluttony's eyes widened as the thigh cannons lifted up firing instantly. The two cerulean beams of energy exploded on the armor of the Seraph causing an outburst of caliginous smoke to sweep through the air. Wires flung violently as electrical sparks raged around the gaping hole that revealed Gluttony's rotund body to Adam. Suddenly the thigh cannons reverted back to their confined state giving Gluttony a moment of relief.

"You killed her...you brought this on yourself." Blue Dragon grabbed onto both energy sabers quickly igniting the two close range weapons. In a swift movement Blue Dragon violently stabbed the core of the Seraph. The beam of radiated energy engulfed Gluttony's body causing it to explode, the blood and internal organs to flush out instantly evaporated in the heat causing a shrieking telepathic scream to pass through the remaining 6 bearers of the Crimson Dawn.

"What the hell was that?" Greed mumbled as he glanced over at Lust who just shrugged her shoulders.

Flames ruptured through the joints and armor of the Seraph, Adam simply sat in his cockpit watching the brilliant display of destruction that he created with his hands. The Angel system disengaged relieving the stress from his body. His chest palpated, his hair was soaked with sweat continually dripping to the steel panel floor of the cockpit. It took him a few seconds to realize what had happened, the sizzling flames and charcoal smoke in the background snapped him back to reality.

"Sharon!"

Blue Dragon abruptly turned around bursting into the distance heading towards what had remained of the Red Fury facility. It took him a few minutes to reach the blood stained singed grounds that once acted as his refuge. Blue Dragon slowly descended towards the ground, the wings slowly retracting back into a stationary position as the thrusters flickered gently until the MF landed onto the ground. Adam forced the cockpit open, grabbed onto the descending cable and began to scan the area for any signs of life while he approached the ground. Just a few feet from his MF his eyes caught sight of a few rocks rolling down a pile of debris. It was the first sign of life that he saw, and he wasn't about to let it get away. 10 feet from the ground he jumped of the cable upon hitting the ground with his feet and hands he sprinted towards the debris pile. Suddenly he saw it, a thin frail hand protruding from just under the debris, trickles of blood ran down the curves of the hand but the fingers were moving slightly. Adam began to throw the pieces of singed metal and rocks away from the pile. With each second he drew closer to uncovering the person who was buried.

"Oh my God....Sharon..." Adam mumbled as he caught sight of her cut up face. With new energy flowing through his veins he continued to move the debris to the side until he was able to move her injured body out from the rubble. Once his hands made contact with her body her eye lids quivered and lips shook. Her chest was moving in up and down at a quick pace, she was still alive. Adam cringed from the pain that shot through his ribs and back as he lifted her up holding her close. Her legs dangled from his left arm, her arms lifelessly hung from his right.

"Sharon...please...please say something..."

"\*cough\*....\*cough\*...." Her swelled cut up lips opened letting out hoarse sounds. Tears began to squeeze their way out from Adam's eyes, she was indeed alive. Her head gently turned as her eyes slowly opened. Her blurred vision of Adam began to come into focus. "...Adam....\*cough\*" She struggled to say, seeing him gave her strength to talk and to even move.

"Sharon...\*sniff\*...you're alive....thank God.." Adam stated.

Sharon struggled to smile. "I am alive....I'm \*cough\* \*cough\* \*cough\*..." Sharon's head began to jerk forward as she coughed uncontrollably. Adam's eyes widened as spurts of blood shot out into the stale air.

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“Sharon! Hold on!” Adam screamed, his knees folded as he gently placed Sharon down onto the grassy field just outside of the burning ruins. “I’ll call for help, stay here!” Adam shouted.

Just as he prepared to dash towards Blue Dragon he felt the weak hand of Sharon grab onto his right arm. His head turned around, tears flowing down more rapidly at this point and his heart pounding heavily.

“Don’t.... \*cough\* ...go.... \*cough.\*”

“But I have to. If I don’t then you.....”

“I’m dying anyway.... \*cough\* ...Adam I’m sorry.... \*cough\*”

“What? What are you sorry for? Stop this nonsense; you’re going to be fine! \*sniff\*”

“Adam...”

“YOU’RE GOING TO BE FINE!”

“No.... \*cough\* ....I won’t.... \*cough\* ....There’s something I need to tell you before I die...”

“Sharon....” Adam collapsed to the ground wrapping his arms around Sharon’s heated body. Just as he touched her skin he moved away in confusion, she was emitting heat, a lot more heat than a human body would normally give off.

“These past years have been wonderful \*cough\* ....but I’m sorry... \*cough.”

“Sorry for what? What are you talking about? I’m the one who should be sorry.....I couldn’t save you! I should have saved you!!! DAMN IT! WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE LIKE THIS?” Adam screamed whipping the tears away from his face.

“\*Arg\*... \*cough\* \*cough\*” Sharon’s right arm slowly rose as the tips of her fingers gracefully caressed his face, taking the tears away. “....remember don’t forget who you are.... \*cough\* ....stay kind, no matter what happens stay kind.... \*cough\* ....you have to fulfill your future, your....destiny... \*cough\*....” Her hand abruptly fell from his face collapsing to the ground. Her eyes shut for the final time in her life. Adam stared in awe, unsure of how to react. The tears were flowing, there was no damn to prevent them from moving forward. His breath struggled; mouth was open as he began to break down. At times he sounded like an exhausted dog gasping for air and others he sounded like he was hyperventilating. It started out soft and quiet but quickly changed to loud and uncontrollable. He screamed out as the tears gushed from his face dripping onto Sharon’s lifeless body. Adam leaned forward pounding the cold ground repeatedly until his skin was pierced by the jagged rocks causing his blood to stain the green vegetation.

“SHARON!!!!” He screamed at the top of his lungs for a moment as all of his anger, his sorrow and grief jolted out from his body.

A slight fizzing sound soon entered his ears grabbing his attention. His glazed brown eyes turned towards Sharon. What he saw rattled his soul, his eyes widened; the tears began to stop flowing. He began to crawl towards her body that was decomposing right before his eyes. With the brisk gentle breeze Sharon’s skin turned to dust evaporating into the wind. Adam just sat there horrified as he watched Sharon’s body become replaced with mahogany ash.

**Chapter Twelve: The Final Survivor**

Clots of blood floated in the depths of space amongst the burned remains of MFs from both the TA and the EAP. For a while it had seemed that the Trinity Alliance would finally succeed in toppling the EAP; that was until the arrival of the Everto; a sleek, agile demonic force that was able to cut the Shade battalion in half. The tides quickly turned back in favor of the EAP, giving the soldiers hope for the future.

The stars shimmered in the backdrop of the abyss as fiery explosions filled in the gaps of charcoal black.

“We can’t win like this!” A frightened Shade pilot squealed as he watched horrified while an Everto sliced through a group of 5 Shades. The soul quivering glowing eyes stared back at the stirred up Ensign. His fingers continually slipped off the edges of the throttle, he tried to catch a grip and move but nothing happened. His body remained frozen in time as the Everto quickly locked onto his position.

The burnt sienna hued machine abruptly surged past the fidgeting machine in a matter of seconds. The heat brimming off the silver tinted blade pierced through the cold metal armor of the Shade. The TA pilot paused, gasping for air in the void that swept into his opened cockpit. The brunt of the attack caused a tremendous amount of pressure to shatter his helmet. His vision was lost, not that it mattered as his life had come to an end. Within a tenth of a second his internal organs froze from the oxygen deprivation and frigid void of space.

The Evertos as an offensive force had single handily raised the EAP’s chances of survival in the battle for Dammerung. The battle had taken most of the EAP soldiers by surprise, not that they weren’t expecting an attack, the abruptness of such an onslaught of power and at a time when their defenses and in general resources were at an all time low seemed anything but coincidental. However, none of that matter anymore. The Evertos had turned the tide against the TA with ease, making even their elite soldiers fall in seconds to their agility and aggression.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

A low sickening number of Shades remained in the TA's offensive, a mere 7 production line MFs against the 8 Evertos and a few Night-Wings. The reddish orange spheres of budding energy flared through the darkness while debris flung in all directions.

"Heather! Can you hear me?!" Stephen's commanding voice shouted along with static through the speakers. Her body hanging over the right side of her chair she barely received any sound waves that were being emitted. Her eyes dull and frightened, never before had she experienced such fear. It wasn't until about the 7<sup>th</sup> time that her name was called that she responded.

"\*cough\*...I'm hear..." She replied out of breath, her lungs being as over worked as they were caused her to bare irregular breathing patterns making it difficult to talk at a normal healthy rate.

"What the hell happened? Last time I checked our forces were at a healthy number? And you two, I didn't expect Night-Wings to get the best of you?"

"Whatever they were they definitely weren't Night-Wings. They're without a doubt new models. And fast ones at that, I couldn't keep up." Mario interjected. His exhausted face suddenly appeared on Stephen's display screen.

"New units? Damn..." Stephen's head jerked to the right, his radar shrieking. There was no need to think about it, danger was heading his way and it was fast.

"Mario too took notice of the oncoming swarm of flickering lights. 4 lights in total, the thought of the Evertos sent shivers down his spine.

"Stephen! Don't fight them by yourself it won't do any good!" Mario screamed.

"What?" Stephen began to glance towards his friend but found himself turning back to stare at his main display panel. The 4 Evertos continued to head towards him in a rotating formation. He was amazed at how close they were to him now when second prior they were much farther away. There was no point in arguing with Mario or Heather about the new units. His most basic instincts told him to run, to run away as far as he could go. But for some reason unbeknown to his inner ego he remained where he floated. Alpha's right arm grabbed onto the dual energy saber whipping it around in front of its crimson core. To the surprise of the 4 Evertos pilots and even to the surprise of Mario and Heather the dual saber ignited, the thrusters slowly flickered brightly. Stephen was not going to sit down and wait for his new opponents to reach him.

"You're going to fight them head on? Are you crazy?!" Heather screamed.

Stephen sighed; maybe it truly was an insane idea to go up against something so strong. To him it didn't matter, this was nothing more than another obstacle in the way of the war's end. Through everything he had experienced through the years it was what he truly wanted; the war to end by any means necessary.

"Maybe it is crazy...but it's still my decision." Stephen replied just before he closed the communications link to the lifeless Blue Angel and Anima. Reddish flames erupted from the thrusters and Alpha flew towards the oncoming clusters of MFs.

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"Are you sure you want to head up there? I mean the TA and the EAP are in the middle of a major battle. It's going to be chaotic, you could die." The pilot of the recently launched transport shuttle bellowed back to his only passenger. His wrinkled face creating an image of concern, it may have been for the passenger or for his own well-being. But for who he was concerned did not matter, not anymore that is. The silver oval shaped shuttle was already surging through the Martian atmosphere and it'd only be a few minutes before they would reach the border of space.

"Just get me there. And leave me alone until we do get there." Adam replied. His voice soft yet stern without falter, his head leaning over his intertwined fingers while staring at the dull gray tiled floor.

"Sure..." The pilot mumbled.

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Alpha dashed to the right narrowly avoiding the Excalibur blade that swung through space. Some how Stephen managed to keep himself alive and Alpha in good condition, but going against four Evertos was demanding. He was already exhausted from his encounter with the Special Defense Forces, Alpha's generator was running low on energy, there wasn't much else that he could hope to accomplish.

"Damn, I'm not sure if I can hold out much longer..." Stephen mumbled.

One of the Evertos suddenly appeared on Alpha's right and another on its left. Stephen's eyes widened from the shock of their speed and organization. Just as the two legs of the Evertos swung towards the torso of Alpha with thin beams of energy humming Stephen disconnected both energy sabers. Alpha blocked with both sabers, the beams of energy crackled against one another as Stephen struggled to stay alive.

"Not bad...but you're out numbered." One of the Evertos pilots said softly. Stephen had briefly forgotten about the other two Evertos that were still in his area. The remaining two Evertos sped towards the defending Alpha one in front and the other behind. Stephen was completely cornered with no room for escape.

"Don't take me too lightly; it will be your downfall!" Stephen screamed.

The two energy cannons flipped down, the left cannon turned forward hanging over the torso of Alpha while the right cannon flipped in the opposite direction. The two Evertos pilots froze in an instant as the two cannons fired fiercely. The cerulean beams of energy dispersed as they collided with the two oncoming Evertos. Just as the two Evertos flopped backwards steaming with smoke Stephen stepped on the accelerator and zoomed away from the two Evertos that were locked in close combat with him. The abrupt departure caused the two Evertos to lose their stability, twirling through space they watched as Alpha headed straight for Dammerung.

"Damnit! That one is a lot stronger than the others. We have to head back to Dammerung...wait a minute...do you guys see what I'm seeing?" The pilot turned to his radar which was beeping loudly.

"Yeah, something else is heading our way. Erg... we'll let Evertos 01-04 deal with that red machine. We better find out what the hell is coming our way!"

"I got it! It's trajectory...its coming from Phobos!"

Suddenly a massive surge of energy swept through the region causing the debris of fallen Shades and Night-Wings to evaporate due to the intense heat that was radiating. Just as the 4 Evertos began to move the beam swept past them. Their armor quickly began to peel off, their cockpits glowing with a crimson aura from the various "warning" text messages that flickered on every display screen. The demonic MFs howled as their limbs were ripped from their hinges with little effort. Small outbursts of flames highlighted the machines until the chirping sound of electrical malfunctions were drowned by the sadistic screams of their pilots burning, their flesh flapping off their muscle and bones. Their blood disintegrated within a few seconds of leaving the body. The plastic visors on their helmets shattered from the pressure exerted by the beam of energy, all of this happened in a matter of seconds.

Both Mario and Heather watched in horror as the 4 machines disappeared from sight along with the trail of energy that took them.

"What the hell was that?!" Heather screamed.

"I...I'm not sure...my radar has been done ever since I was taken out..."

Both pilots paused, gasping in awe as a silver machine soared past their destroyed MFs. The angular boosters left a spectacular display of energy in its wake, the jet-like unit continued on its path paying no attention to the two dismantled machines to its side.

"Hmpf, radar indicates another 4 of those machines, plus a few Night-Wings, a few Shades and...well, this was unexpected." The white haired ghostly pilot, Cruentus Animus muttered under his breath. He was a part of Orbis, a part that Gail had hidden underneath the guise of the abandoned Orbis Resource Satellite in between Phobos and Mars. Cruentus being the final survivor of the Crimson Dawn he had collected a lot of malice from being tossed aside and labeled as a "failed product." His fingers slowly wrapped around the throttles of his machine, his ankles pivoted applying pressure to the steel

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accelerators. The two massive boosters roared as the fighter jet like unit entered the field of battle just over Dammerung.

“GENERAL SOLEIL! Another unknown object....wait a minute this code....it can't possibly be correct.”

The French commander jerked his head around glaring at the confused CIC soldier.

“Just what are you talking about soldier? What code?”

“The identification code for the latest unit approaching is...XCD-00666V....sir, it's the Diabolos.”

“The Diabolos? But that unit was said to have been destroyed years ago. How the hell is it here?! Just what the hell is going on? Send the Evertos to intercept it!” Soleil screamed.

“They've already begun their attack pattern....also, Evertos 05 to 08 have vanished from radar.”

“What? What the hell could have taken out those units?! How about the rest of our forces?”

“Not good sir, there's only a few Night-Wings left, 3 to be exact. Luckily the Evertos cut down the Shade forces to about the same number. Also, Alpha's heat signature has been detected as well.”

“Damn it! Anything from Pacis Deus yet?!”

“Nothing sir, the communications link is still full of static. We're on our own.”

“If we truly are alone then....Dammerung will be lost.”

“General Copiare another heat signature detected....it's....it's identical to that of the EAP's Diabolos!” Ashley yelled. The mention of that name, the Diabolos sent chills down every TA soldier's spine on board the Aries, the premier TA battleship.

“So the Diabolos has made its return then. First those 8 unidentified machines and now this. The EAP sure won't give Dammerung up without a fight I see.”

“Sir, the Diabolos is engaging with the EAP forces....”

“What? That could mean only one thing then. Gail has managed to get a hold on that machine. I was wondering when Orbis was going to interfere. It's unfortunate I suppose, I had hoped I would have gotten a chance to get rid of them at the same time as I got rid of the EAP. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Bellulus, is the Titan ready?”

“The Titan sir? We're really going to use that weapon?”

“Of course, we're going to end this war in one fell swoop. With Dammerung gone the EAP will be nothing more than a scattered and chaotic force. Their only other main location would be Pacis Deus, and that isn't even fully operational yet. Because of the treaty that President Malum brought up limiting our battle to space this war has never been closer to coming to an end.”

“....the Titan is at 87% charged capacity. Ion-particles are charged, and the nuclear fusion has been stabilized. Since the percentage for use is only 75% the Titan is ready to be fired. But I must advise....”

“Thank you 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, that will be all. I have a war to end. Have the rest of the fleet prepare their Titans, after the Aries fires ours have the Apollo and the Hermes follow up with their Titans. One shot should be enough to wipe out the remaining forces and deal significant damage to their MF producing facilities.”

“YES SIR!” Each and every soldier screamed flinging their hands in the air saluting what they thought to be a true hero for their cause.

The Diabolos continued firing at the 4 Evertos that were flying towards it. Stephen glanced over at the intense battle that was occurring just as Alpha tore through the EAP's final Night-Wing.

“The Diabolos? Just what the hell is that thing doing here?!.....Orbis....”

Alpha abruptly changed its direction and began to head straight towards the Diabolos and the Evertos.

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“Is this the limits of your machines? Hahahaha...hehehahaha! I have yet to begin!” Cruentus screamed. The gears began to crank and squeal, the fighter jet form of the Diabolos receded as it once again took the form of a formidable MF. As Stephen approached he could only think about the memories of his first encounter with the machine 2 years ago when he was sent out with the 181<sup>st</sup> unit of the TA.

One of the Evertos launched its 15 missile silos from its hand, it was obvious that not even the speed of the Evertos could keep up with the Diabolos in close combat, keeping a long distance was a must. Cruentus smirked devilishly as the missiles approached, the boosters turned upwards revealing two energy cannons that fired once the gears stopped turning. The 15 silos vanished from sight leaving nothing more than a trail of dark smoke and frightened EAP pilots. One Everto shot through the circular rotation of the smoke wielding both of its Excaliburs. Just as it descended the Diabolos fired its cannons piercing through the sleek torso of the Everto causing an instant explosion.

“Hmpf, 3 left.”

*Beep Beep...*

“Oh, you’re still here?” Cruentus muttered as he took notice of Alpha.

Just as Alpha grabbed onto both of its energy boomerangs the Diabolos threw its Excalibur sword downwards while striking another Everto with its bare mechanical fist. Stephen quickly launched the boomerangs and jumped right into evasive maneuvers. Alpha moved slightly to the right narrowly avoiding the elongated blade.

“Why are you fighting?! Why are you helping the TA? Aren’t you with Orbis?!” Stephen screamed on a neutral communication frequency.

“Orbis? I never agreed to join Orbis of my free will. I was caged! Caged like a rat by Gail, now that I’ve been set free I’ll do what I want! And what I want above all is revenge! Revenge on the EAP for sacrificing my life, taking me from my family and making me a test subject for their Crimson Dawn! I want my life back!” Cruentus screamed.

Stephen’s fingers began to loosen from the throttles, he had heard of the Crimson Dawn when he first ran into Hayate 2 years prior. But he had never known the true horrors behind the fabled project of the EAP.

Cruentus with all his anger finished off the final Evertos laughing at the horrified screams of its pilot. Reveling in the blood that floated frigidly through space and amongst the burned debris of smooth armor.

“More...I want more...” Cruentus began to mutter.

Stephen’s eyes widened, the Diabolos once again took flight but now heading straight towards Dammerung.

“He’ll kill them all...damn it!” Stephen screamed. Just before Alpha could move his radar detected a frigate, a small transport ship that had just broken through the Martian atmosphere and making it into space. “Now what?”

“Becareful out there, it looks pretty chaotic.” The transport pilot mumbled.

“Just open the hanger. I’ll be fine. (But the EAP won’t be...neither will the TA. It’s their faults. I will never forgive them until I find the truth behind what happened. Their arrogance will not be tolerated.) Adam Novus, Blue Dragon launching.”

**Chapter Thirteen: Act's Finale**

“General Copiare, all EAP units have been destroyed. Dammerung is completely defenseless.” Ashley screamed as she turned back glancing at her commander.

“I see! This is our one and only chance to end this war! What is the status of the Titan?” Copiare yelled. His determination fueling his pride he knew this was his time; his time to end everything and finally bring peace to humanity regardless of the high amount of casualties that both sides would suffer. It was at this time that he realized the true value and worth of a human life, a physical body is fragile but the soul could transcend this plain of existence and become something more. The exchange of souls in order to create a peaceful place for the rest of humanity was a fair price and his men knew this. If by any chance they could bring a better future to their family, friends and peers they knew that their life would have meant something, something that would create a legacy that could last forever in the hearts of many. His tears were excruciatingly hard to hold back, being a soldier in a commanding position it wasn't something that he was able to show in front of his men. The word “emotions” wasn't something in a commanding officer's vernacular.

“Titan is...” Ashley stumbled her words a bit fearing what tragedy would occur once she finished speaking. At the whim of the General's courteous glance and nod she managed to muster up the strength to finish. “Titan is 100%...”

“(Well then...this is indeed the final act of this war.) Ensign Lewis, release the limiter cap and fire the Titan at full capacity. Target...”

Turning in his chair the young blonde haired Ensign stared back at his commanding officer wide eyed and innocent, a soldier who had yet to have his life tainted by the emotionless discourse of battle. “Yes commander?”

“Target the Dammerung hanger...”

“What?! Just the hanger? But sir, they no longer have the means to attack? Wasting a perfectly good shot of the Titan on that would be meaningless. The central hub of Dammerung will at most receive minimal damage, power shortages and maybe a few collapsed walls!” A soldier in the ranks of Lieutenant Commander screamed. He gave little thought to his actions, screaming at a ranking officer while questioning his orders. But he like every other soldier on board the Aries wanted this battle to come to a quick end.

“I know that...if I can spare any unnecessary deaths by relying on the shockwaves of the explosions then maybe...just maybe I'll be able to make it into Heaven. Have the Apollo and the Hermes fire at locations with the same distance between it and the central hub that the hanger is. Hopefully the shockwaves from each explosion will be enough to wipe out Dammerung's communication systems along with their computers. They will have no choice but to surrender, thus, ending this war.”

“But sir...that plan...it's the most illogical path I can think of. The military rule book states that “One must put aside his/her emotions and take actions that directly lead to ones' victory.” This decision you're making does not fit...”

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“I KNOW THE DAMN RULE BOOK LIEUTENANT COMMANDER DOBBS!” The General’s voice towering over the bridge, his veins nearly moments from becoming visible on his forehead, his authority was undeniable during the mission. “The rule book also states that “You must follow the orders of a superior officer without hesitation.”

“....sir....Yes sir!” The sudden realization of his actions pierced his psyche, and like a perfect soldier he snapped to attention in the presence of his superior officer.

“Now enough stalling and fire the Titan!”

“Yes sir, firing the Titan.”

The oval cylinder just under the hull of the Aries slowly spun counter-clockwise revealing the silver barrel of the cannon. Brightly glowing spheres of energy along with crackling electricity circled the end of the Titan. The humming sound of power congregating raged onward as the ship shined with a brilliance of radiant power.

In the corner of Stephen’s eyes he saw it and instantly knew what was about to transpire. Not being aware of General Copiare’s intentions he feared the worst, even though the EAP soldiers were his enemy, he still valued their lives. In the split second that he took to gaze back at his ship the Diabolos struck. The dual Excalibur ripped through the metallic limbs of Alpha severing its right arm. Stephen held tightly onto the throttles as his MF spun sporadically through the region of space, Cruentus could hardly contain his twisted excitement.

“You’re weak! How could I ever think of you as a powerful opponent! You’re still driven by your petty human concerns for others! You could never be a true warrior!” Cruentus continued to scream.

Stephen tried his best to ignore the words spewing out of the Crimson Dawn survivor’s mouth but it was hard, much harder than he had anticipated. The thoughts and “what-if” scenarios of past events began to cloud his mind along with his judgment. In every person’s life there are events that they would want to go back and rewrite its ending by choosing a different path, a different attitude. Normally Stephen wouldn’t be bound by these trivial matters, but feeling as powerless as he did at the present time he was much more vulnerable to this kind of mental attack.

In the corners of his retinas’ he watched as Diabolos quickly transformed back into its fighter jet like form. The cerulean thrusters ravished through the region sending the monstrous machine towards Dammerung.

“Damn it....is this how it will end?” Stephen mumbled. His fingers wrapped around the throttles tightly. “No...it won’t end like this!” Alpha’s head unit brightly lit up as the one armed MF blasted out from its position following Diabolos.

“General Soleil!!” The CIC soldier screamed.

The General already with a splitting migraine from all the screaming he had done and heard within the past few hours sharply turned around.

“There’s a large massive energy source rapidly approaching sir!”

“What?!”

“It’ll hit us in approximately 45 seconds....our defenses are drained, we can’t avoid it.”

“What about Pacis Deus? Have they responded yet?!”

The younger CIC soldier quietly shook his head; words weren’t needed to understand the severity of the situation. The EAP’s final fortress, Pacis Deus had yet to be armed with MFs and had no means of offering aid. Dammerung was in fact the EAP’s last means of offensive capabilities.

“Then....it is over.” Soleil softly announced. “There is nothing that we can do, not anymore. Everyone has, fought bravely.” Realizing his defeat he turned to his men and women raising his right arm for what he thought would be his final salute. The screens behind him and all around the command central began to glow with an eerie crimson light as the energy beam from the Titan had approached the outer regions of Dammerung in its final preparation to land. In a short lived silence that spread across the room each and every soldier quietly prayed that their families on Earth and on Mars would live on and continue to survive, and that peace would finally reach humanity’s grasp.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

The massive beam tore through the hanger causing a tremendous uproar of smoke and debris riding on the nearly invisible energy shockwave that began to sweep through the rough and rigid surfaces of the moon.

“Look at that...those damn TA bastards got here before me.” Cruentus mumbled. His excitement slowly vanished from his adrenaline. He had no true purpose other than to fight, this was the destiny of a man who was robbed of his humanity. “Damn them...this was my fight! MY REVENGE!” Cruentus screamed. The gears turned as Diabolos once again took MF form just in time for Alpha to appear only a few feet before it. Electrical surges continued to spew out from the severed joints on Alpha’s right arm, the MF was running dangerously low on power and energy but none of that stopped Stephen from fighting. Down to one energy saber firmly clutched in Alpha’s left hand he sped towards Diabolos swinging.

“Heh, still have some fight left in you I see!” Cruentus screamed echoing with laughter.

“I won’t let you kill anyone else!”

“All I did was kill your enemy you blind moron! I helped you, not that it was my original intention, and it just happened to be that your enemy was mine at the time.”

“It doesn’t matter! You don’t have a path, you’re just fighting blindly for your own tainted purpose and beliefs!” Stephen screamed.

Cruentus continued to dodge Alpha’s blatant and obvious attacks when he noticed the smoke began to clear on Dammerung. To his surprise the central hub was still standing.

“I’ll be damned, looks like I still can have my revenge!” Cruentus screamed.

“What?!” Stephen yelled taking his attention away from Diabolos for a mere second to notice that Dammerung was damaged but the central hub was still standing. “Copiare...heh, looks like we are on the same wavelength after all.” Stephen smiled only for a moment.

Diabolos surged past Alpha one final time, this time taking its left arm with him. Alpha was thrown to the side following a small explosion as the crimson MF lost another limb.

Cruentus floated above Alpha debating on whether or not to finish off his enemy. With a grinning sadistic smile he began to laugh at Stephen’s expense.

“You’re not even worth finishing Stephen. You’re too weak for me to even acknowledge you.”

“Mario can you tell what’s going on over there?!” Heather yelled back.

“Not at all...my camera’s dead...this sucks! All we can do is sit here and wait to be picked up. I don’t think we’ve ever been this damaged before!”

“...hey, is your radar working?”

“Huh? Yeah why...what the hell?”

“You see it too then?”

“Yeah, it looks like another machine is heading this way, and fast.” Mario replied.

“Wait a minute...now I’m detecting nine objects all together!” Heather yelled.

“Holy shit, me too! And they’re right above us! Heather what is it? What do you see; I’m completely blind over here!”

Heather’s eyes widened, her lips parting their ways as she watched in complete awe. At that instant thousands of thoughts pierced through her mind, her words were getting mixed together preventing her from saying anything meaningful to her partner. All of this happened in the blink of an eye and the MF was gone along with its eight objects.

“Heather are you okay? What’s going on?”

“Mario.....that was.....”

“Have the Apollo and the Hermes fire now!” General Copiare screamed. He could see it, the end of the war only inches away from his grasp. With this final blow the EAP would be left with little pride and offensive power. Like a boy on Christmas morning he was eager for the next few moments to come.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

The two remaining Constellation class warships fired their Titans all at locations just outside the central hub per General Copiare's request. As the beams zoomed through the region Cruentus caught wind of the two massive energy surges approaching. Fearing that he would forever lose the chance to get revenge on the people who took his humanity he sped as hard as he could towards the EAP base.

Stephen shut his eyes slowly knowing there was nothing else he could do, not in the condition of his MF. But his rest didn't last long; the beeping sound of his radar echoing in his mind forced him to open his eyes.

"NO! This is my revenge I won't allow you to interfere!" Cruentus screamed. Just as the Diabolos began to transform eight azure orbits began to circle around the silver machine all firing in quick succession. Cruentus' eyes widened as the cerulean energy beams impacted his machine in random areas throwing off the transformation process. Diabolos was tossed around between the objects for a few moments just long enough for the two beams of energy to connect with their targets causing a damaging explosion of energy to sweep through the remains of Dammerung.

Walls caved in, fires burst out scattering along the central hub. Bodies were flung through the air due to the massive amount of energy that swept the central hub. It was a tragic sight to watch but casualties were kept to a minimum. When it was all said and done Dammerung was no longer capable of radio contact, offensive or defensive maneuvers. In only a couple of hours the EAP lost their window to outer space, there would be no way for the EAP to attack newly developing TA space stations or to prevent attacks from any orbiting weapons put in place by the TA. In a sense the war had unofficially come to an end. General Soleil struggled to crawl through the burned debris that covered the tiles, the darkness that engulfed the central hub made it difficult to see where one would be going, small flickers of flames were the only source of light in sight. The moans from his officers fueled his determination to find them and to survive. But in the pit of his stomach he knew, he knew that the EAP could no longer fight this blood filled and tragic war.

"I'm sorry everyone \*cough\*....we have failed...."

"No...no...NO!!!" This was supposed to be my revenge! How dare they take this one thing away from me! The one desire that drives my sole existence! They will all pay; I will take every TA life and crush them with my own hand!" Cruentus screamed.

Just as Diabolos began to head towards the three TA ships the orbits once again began to fire repetively. The silver MF began to nimbly dodge every attack and continued in its heading. Just then the blue MF zoomed in between the ships and the Diabolos. The eight azure orbits quickly interlocked back in the wing binders of the MF as Adam stared back at the Diabolos. Cerulean energy flowing out from the back thrusters, his eyes focused only on the MF before him. His anger had yet to subside from his body; he was acting on impulsive anger and loss alone. There was no rhyme, no reason for the actions he was taking. The loss of Sharon, clone or not was too much for him to bare, he realized that he sat by and watched the war grow long enough.

"You..."

"..." Adam wasted no breath on responding to Cruentus.

Blue Dragon's arms extended outwards with the two energy sabers igniting. His actions were going to be his main means of communications from now on.

"I see...so that's how it's going to be then. I accept!" Cruentus screamed.

Both Blue Dragon and Diabolos sped past one another exchanging blinding blows with each pass. Small explosions of light spurt out from each collision that occurred grabbing the attention of every TA soldier on the sight.

Stephen stared from Alpha; he wasn't sure what he was supposed to feel at the moment. He knew something had to have happened in order for Adam to return to his cockpit, and something tragic had to have happened in order for him to come all the way to space.

"What happened Adam...." Stephen whispered under his breath.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“General Copiare an unknown MF is engaging with the Diabolos!” A young soldier announced.

“That MF...it isn't unknown...it's heat signature matches that of Blue Dragon...(Adam...what the hell are you doing here?)” Ashley mumbled.

“Is this all you have to offer me? I'm severely disappointed in you!” Cruentus screamed.

“Shut up...”

“Hahaha, have I struck a nerve with you boy? Hahahaha.”

“I will kill you.” Adam replied. His fingers burning with pain as they held onto the throttles, his grip tightening with each second, as much as he tried to make sense out of his actions he could only think of Sharon dying in his arms and then blowing away with the gentle breeze of the wind. His anger was undeniable; his rage uncontrollable, there was no way of predicting what he would do next and it scared him.

Blue Dragon sped around Diabolos as the silver MF swung its dual Excalibur through the region. Cruentus' eyes widened as his blade pierced through the trail of energy left by Blue Dragon's boosters. Suddenly the eight orbits flew off from the wing binders and began to relentlessly attack Diabolos. While Diabolos began to dodge the attacks Adam pushed forward. Blue Dragon's hands forced both energy sabers together, the thrusters increased in velocity and raced forward. Just as Cruentus caught wind of the attack it was too late. Blue Dragon forced its energy beam through the torso of Diabolos. The searing beam of energy melted the armor plating surrounding the cockpit, Cruentus cringed as the sparks of electricity combined with flames ruptured through his control panel burning his pilot suit. His eyes widened as his body felt the burning sensation of the heat now surrounding him, in reality it was less than a second but for the final survivor of the Crimson Dawn it was nearly an eternity. His flesh burned as his blood boiled, he began to laugh instead of howling in pain as the beam of energy vaporized his body.

Adam remained quiet as the energy saber sliced through Diabolos. In the background the silver machine exploded violently sending out shards of burnt debris in all angles.

Stephen watch on horrified as his brother destroyed the Diabolos and its pilot. No longer able to control his own emotions he flipped open the neutral communication link that would make it possible to connect to any machine in the area.

“What the hell are you doing here?!” Stephen screamed.

Adam glanced up glaring at his display screen and the image of his brother, a person who he hadn't seen in over a year.

“Leave me alone.”

“Just what the hell is it that you're thinking?! You're the one who left to get away from the violence and now here you are doing this!” Stephen yelled.

“Just drop it! You have no idea what I'm dealing with right now!”

“Then tell me damn it!” Stephen yelled.

Adam's fist began to quiver, having to relive the events that happened only less than an hour prior. “Just let it go!” Adam screamed.

The thrusters on Blue Dragon lit up as the MF sped towards Alpha.

Stephen's eyes widened as Blue Dragon sliced through Alpha's right leg and continued on its path. For a quick moment Adam and Stephen caught eyes with one another, and in that moment Stephen was able to see all the pain and torment that was swirling in his brother's eyes.

“STEPHEN!” Ashley screamed nearly jumping out of her seat on the Aries.

“I...I can't go back, not to the TA. The war is over, now all the remains is Luscious Malum. He is the head of the TA now....making the TA my enemy....along with all of you....my friends....”



**Chapter Fourteen: Remembrance**

“It’s been 3 days since that incident, aren’t you the least bit concerned about him?” Ashley tried to say in a soothing tone, but when his brother was the topic it was hard to be smooth.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders as always, his eyes glaring through the window which revealed an awe inspiring skyline to New York. Since the EAP had declared its defeat and unconditional surrender 2 days prior every TA soldier were given 2 weeks vacation time. There was no longer any need for active soldiers. For now the world could only eagerly await the plans that President Malum would announce later on that day.

The day was bright and full of energy, like always the city was bustling with activity. The sound of the city would be stressful to most, but to those who’ve lived there it was soothing, a sign that they were in fact home.

“Something bad had to have happened, there’s no other reason why he would have attacked you I know it.” Ashley replied.

“I know, something definitely did happen while he was on Mars, that much I am certain of. \*sigh\* unfortunately I have no clue what transpired up there, and until I come in contact with him I won’t know.”

“But aren’t you the least bit concerned....” Before she could finish Stephen moved away from the window ledge.

“No, not really. He can take care of himself; he doesn’t need me to be concerned about him. I’m more curious about what Luscious Malum intends to do with his new found power.”

“You know you don’t have to wait long for that Stephen.”

“Yeah I’m aware, 5 hours to be exact. Still, now that the entire world is essentially under Luscious’ command I’m not sure he’ll handle it for the best. Man tends to become corrupt with power, and we all know he was shady when he was running Genesis. It only makes sense that he might take things too far with this much power.”

Sighing, Ashley stood up from Stephen’s plush couch, there were many incidents that she had wanted to forget about but with the mention of Luscious’ name along with Genesis could only stir up the hidden memories. As she approached the door of his apartment she abruptly stopped in position, her light brown hair fluttering through the air as her head tilted back.

“I think its time you gave up on this crusade that has been fueling your life. You said it yourself; this is as far as you’re going to go in the military. And as high of a rank as you are, you still are not in a position to change a thing. Sometimes you need to risk your dream in order to do the right thing. All these years you’ve been putting off your life as you clung to the dismal hopes of being able to change everything that is corrupt about this world.”

Stephen turned away from her piercing eyes, Ashley rarely stated her opinion but when she did she did it with passion. No longer could he stand staring back into her green lively eyes, he knew she was right, that he had been putting off his life for so long. But something continued to stir in the bowels of his stomach, his heart ached from all the tragedies that he witnesses since joining the Trinity Alliance; things no man should ever bare witness to.

“This is the path that I have chosen. If I suddenly move off this path then all the years I put into it, all the tears, the sweat and the deaths would have been for nothing. It’s not easy to just drop the ideals that you’ve believed and the plans that you have followed for over six years. I can’t stop now, not when this world is so close to its own redemption.”

“Redemption? Haha, don’t tell me that just because the war between the TA and the EAP is finally over that you believe humanity is close to its redemption.”

“What else can come Ashley? Another war?” Stephen said. His voice hollow and quiet. His right fist softly placed against the brisk glass window, his body arched as he leaned his head up against his right arm.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Yes Stephen, another war can come. Did you forget about everything that is happening on Mars? Did you forget about Red Fury? And what about the Night Stalkers? Just because the EAP has backed off doesn’t mean that every evil, every conflict in this world has vanished.”

“If I leave....if I decide to give up on my path then what....”

“You’re not the only person who can save the world you know! Stop trying to place every burden upon yourself like it’s your destiny to carry it!” Ashley screamed, her emotions running rampant, so much so that she didn’t even allow Stephen to finish his sentence. Stephen’s eyes widened, it may have been the fact that he never realized that she was right, that he was trying to carry everything on his own back. Turning to the side he slowly moved away from the window.

“You’re....you’re right. I just never saw it before....maybe I am stubborn, maybe I am trying to carry everything on my back. But...I can at least trust myself to get things done!”

“Is that what this is about? You don’t trust people?”

“How can I? People are lazy; they come up with excuses when things need to be done. Our government is no better, they just sat by as the war continued to get out of hand. Governments....no, politicians are controlled by the very corporations that create every weapon on this planet. Instead of paying any attention to the people who live here and their needs the politicians focus on money and power. For it is in their eyes that those two nouns are the essence of life. I will change this perception, I will change this....”

Storming around Ashley swung her right arm through the air, her beige purse whipped through the room crashing back onto the couch directly in front of the 50 inch plasma television screen.

“YOU CAN’T CHANGE EVERYTHING BY YOURSELF! Why can’t you realize this?!” Her voice shrieking, echoing in the small living room of his apartment taking Stephen by surprise; he had seen Ashley upset before but never like this.

“Ashley....I....” Once again he was unable to complete his thought. Ashley wouldn’t allow him to speak anymore.

“You say how stubborn Adam is. And how he won’t listen to anyone but you can’t even see that you’re the same exact way. At least he was able to detach himself from this binding world of the military. At least he made a choice after seeing where things were heading; he saw how chaotic things were becoming and left. You however stay here trying to convince yourself that you’re supposed to change everything and that you’re the only person who understands anything in this world! If anything you’re the one who can’t let his friends in not him!”

Ashley quickly grabbed onto the strap of her purse lifting it from the crevices of the couch. As she turned her vibrant hair whipped around smacking the air in which separated her and Stephen, with nothing else left to say her fingers slowly caressed the keys on the computerized door leading out of Stephen’s apartment.

“Am I really like that? What do you think....Nick?” His words came out along a soft eloquent rhythm as he picked up a frame. In the frame was a picture of Nick, and Adam along with himself when they were children just before their fates spiraled out of control. The day was starting to come to its close, the skyline faded to a crimson dusk while Stephen stood holding his frame which acted as a canister for his childhood memories.

“Maybe it’s time I gave up this quest...what do you think Nick? What’s the point if it only hurts the ones close to me?” Stephen sighed as he gently placed the frame back on the coffee table. His knees buckled and he collapsed onto his couch where his eyes slowly began to fade into the darkness.

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*Rain is a means of cleansing; A way to cleanse the soul of the sins that taint it.*

*-Unknown*

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

The weather monitoring system set up during the terraforming of Mars had been busy for the last 3 days, mainly on Terrenus, the eastern continent on Mars. Rain flooded from the darkened skies above the generally under developed continent. The fact that it was still in the process of development made it ideal for the outcasts of society to flee to. Red Fury was still in a drought, after the loss of their leader Carlos Rendetore and then their Abyssus camp sight it seemed that their days were indeed numbered. Terrenus was the perfect spot for a site hidden beneath the shadows of the Mars' wasteland. Approximately 150 members of the rebellious faction gathered at the Red Fury base known to most as Salvation. A shell of its former glory Red Fury was in the process of adapting and preparing for what the new leader of Earth was going to do, leader of Earth was the dubbed name given to Luscious Malum by the inhabitants of Mars.

It was clear to them that his power was continuing to grow with each passing day. It was only logical, the man who went from corporation executive to the leader of a three country alliance was meant for bigger things and it was only a matter of time before all of the countries of Earth would just merge together. But for now, peace seemed to be possible, and that was all the members of Red Fury needed for the moment. The loss of their leader and his friends, the founding members of Red Fury needed to be mourned.

The current members in the vicinity all sat in plastic chairs dressed in darkened colors; most black each bearing the Red Fury crest on their chest. Each individual member, whether they personally knew Carlos, Anthony or Eric all mourned the devastating loss. The day was dull and void of sunlight, the overbearing surrealistic clouds showered the area with frigid drops of water along with casting shadows. A slight breeze whisked through the blades of grass causing them to dance along with the beat of the wind.

Adam Novus, a man who has suffered a number of losses in his life stood amongst the grass, his hair gently flowing through the wind that surged through. His eyes quivering, trying to suppress the confusion, the rage, and the sorrow all trying to escape from his body at once. He merely glanced back at the mass gathering behind him all for people who he had met briefly. Regardless of the thought that he met these people, Carlos, Anthony and Eric for all but a moment they still made an impact. So much so that he found himself back with this rebel group known as Red Fury. It made no sense, he was the one who tried so desperately to get away from organizations, groups, and factions whatever the category it didn't matter to him, he just wanted to get away and yet he found himself drawn back into a group. He thought he was a loner, a person who could decide his own destiny on a whimsical notion, but that wasn't the case, at least not anymore.

In his hands he held three deep colored pink roses and a single red rose, these roses were held tightly in between his fingers and his palm while the droplets of rain bounced off the dark green leaves that protruded out from the stem. Water drops rolled off the black suit that he wore, falling off his shoulders and dripping off from the ends of his hair.

"It's started....I've lost count how many of these I've been to ever since I started piloting that damn machine....too many, that's for sure." With a subtle gesture Adam took a single deep pink rose and brought it out into the air leaving the remaining in his left hand. As the fingers in his right hand began to move away from his palm the pink rose fell to the drenched ground. In mid fall with his left hand along with the remaining roses he saluted the fallen rose and repeated the process for the last 2 pink roses.

"I hope that you're arrival in Heaven is not for nothing. I will defend what it is that you have started Carlos. If I can't then I will die trying."

Taking in a deep sigh Adam brought the red rose to his line of vision. It was the only rose that had barely attracted any water. A few drops drooled from here and there, but it still managed to glisten in the darkness as if it was never touched. His throat began to choke up a bit, tears finally managed to make their way out from under his eye lids.

"Sharon...I'm not entirely sure what to make of the recent events that have transpired. I mean you're body....it just vanished. If I had to guess, I'd guess that you were a clone of the original Sharon Amare. And that should make me happy, because that would mean that there's a chance that the real you is alive, somewhere. But it doesn't, maybe it's because of the fact that you were cloned that bothers me.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

Why would Genesis have a need to clone you? You have nothing to do with the politics of this world; you were just an innocent beautiful girl who I had the privilege of meeting that day. It's all so damned confusing....." He paused trying to catch his breath and emotions. His knees began to lose their stability until he collapsed to the ground. His fingers digging into the moist soil and mud that accumulated around his feet. "DAMN IT! Why the hell did this have to happen?!" The rose slowly left his grip falling to the ground near the other three. Thunder crackled in the distance as Adam heaved on the ground.

Slowly rising to the ground he whipped the tears away from his eyes, now standing proudly staring into the dismal sky his right hand clutched onto a Red Fury crest attached to his shirt.

"I will put an end to it all; it's time I stopped running...." Adam said confidently, his back turned around facing the roses that he left on the mud clotted ground. As he slowly began to make his way towards the rest of the Red Fury gathering the rain began to tatter the red rose. It wasn't long until the stem was all that remained.

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"Can you believe this? After all this time Genesis is just closing us down, damn what the hell am I going to tell my wife?" A middle age security guard for Genesis' Safe House Facility replied.

"I can't say that I'm surprised, I mean with the war finally over there's no reason to have this facility opened anymore. Besides I'm sure you'll find another job."

"It's not that simple Jake....I need to feed my family, I can't not provide for a week or two."

"I understand, but still it's not there's anything we can do to change Severen Prodito's mind."

"I know....hey, haven't you ever wondered just what the hell this facility is for? I mean it's not like we see people come in and out of this place often....if ever."

"Not sure entirely. I've heard the rumors though. They say that Genesis places their employees who defy them or the employees that cause problems. Not sure if that's true though."

"\*sigh\* what does it matter now anyway....hey, wait a minute. What the hell is that?!" The security guard screamed. His fingers pointed towards a cluster of bushes next to the metallic gate that enclosed the facility.

"What are you talking about Jake?"

"Over there! I saw something, there's something moving in there!"

"Will you just give it a rest man, you didn't see anything. You're just losing your mind from the stress."

Putting his flashlight onto the table Jake sighed. "I guess you're right, it was probably nothing. I seriously need to get home..."

The bushes continued to rustle softly, as two people continued to sprint from one cluster to another looking for a way out of the facility.

"You think they saw us dad?"

"Not sure, but with the announcement that Genesis is going to close this place it shouldn't matter. This is the perfect opportunity for us to escape."

"But where the hell are we going to go. Do we know anyone in Florida?"

"Don't worry about that now, once we get out of here we can worry about that."

"Do you think everything's alright? I mean....they've been out there....taking our place for years now."

"Stop worrying, their life span wasn't that long. By now they should be gone. We need to tell the world about what Genesis has been doing. And we need to get you two back together."

"Dad....it's not that simple. We met once, it's not like it was anything serious."

"I know that but still....you need to find him. I don't want to think about what happened since we were locked up in this damn place. And now with Luscious on the verge of controlling all of the countries on Earth we can't sit around and do nothing!"

"Well how the hell are we going to find him anyway? There's no telling where he is!"

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“Trust me, we’ll find him.”

“Dad one another question...just why did they clone me anyway? It’s not like I was anyone important.”

“But you are someone important, you had his attention and to Luscious that made you one of the most important people on this planet. You see Luscious always intended to manipulate him into doing his bidding, but he could never find a proper way to control him. But if he could control the person who held his heart, well then, manipulating his decisions would be child’s play.”

“But I...”

“Don’t worry about that now; right now we need to find a way to get out of here.....there we go.”

“What is it?”

“I managed to pick this lock, now we have to find a way to get to New York.”

“And how are we going to do that?”

“Don’t worry about that, I’ll get us there.”

“I know you will dad...I know you will.”

### **Chapter Fifteen: Earth Government**

“Hey, you going to watch or not? The broadcast just started!” Mario’s voice loomed over the shoulders of Stephen. It was just a few minutes to 8:00 PM and the long awaited Luscious Malum address was beginning to go through its final stages of preparation. Not many, if any people knew what to expect from the leader of the Trinity Alliance and it was the mystery that made the address the most watched televised broadcast in the history of the world. This all accomplished before Luscious took to his podium.

“I can hear it fine from here, there’s no real reason for me to see a man speak when it’s the words that are important.” Stephen replied from his office across the hall.

“Pft, whatever man. I’m sure this is going to be the hottest party in town! We won after all.”

Stephen’s eyes were glued to his glowing laptop screen. “Considering you once were a part of the EAP I didn’t expect you to be this excited over their defeat.”

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“Man that’s history; I put them along with my past behind me. I only look to the future, and to whatever cute girl that gets in my way. Hahaha!”

“Whatever man, you might want to consider settling down. You never know just how much longer you have left in this world.”

“What are you talking about man? Pft, you need to stop taking things so damn seriously sometimes. I swear if you continue at the rate you’re going at you’re going to die young!”

“Whatever...I don’t have time to deal with you right now. Why don’t you just sit quiet and watch the address when it starts.”

With a swift swing of his arm Stephen closed the oaken wood door to his office concealing him inside the plaster walls of solitude. His display screen flickering with images of machines produced by both the TA and the EAP, it was information that he had secured during his final confrontation with Hayate of the EAP. In Hayate’s final breaths he had told Stephen to keep fighting for his beliefs, and to not believe anything either government throws out to the world. It was the dying wish of a superb fighter and good friend.

“I don’t get it Hayatae...what the hell am I supposed to get from all of this?” In his state of frustration he pounded his fists onto the area of the table a few inches from his computer. “I...I...”

“Luscious, they’re finally ready for you.” Severen’s voice, a voice that Luscious had become accustomed to over the years blared grabbing his attention. As he tightened his tie Luscious arose from his seat, slowly turning around to face his one time young protégé.

The tiny rays of light that peaked through the darkness clouding the room illuminated Luscious’ face a bit, but more than enough to throw Severen into a state of shock. Luscious’ eyes were thinned, his lips already moved into a devilish smirk. To him, Luscious was always calm, and rather good at suppressing his emotions. Something seemed to be different this time, eerily different.

“Luscious...”

“Severen? What’s with the face? You look like you’ve seen a ghost. I know we haven’t seen each other in some time with the war and all, you didn’t forget my face did you?”

“No of course not, it’s just that...well, you look different.”

“Of course, things have finally fallen into place my boy. This world is only mere moments from complete unification. And once that occurs humanity’s fate will have been sealed.”

“You’re referring to the Tribulation?”

“Of course. I’ve received word from the facilities on Mars that our clones are ready for combat.”

“The Southwestern Territory?”

“Utopia... but yes, that area. With all the commotion in space I managed to drive everyone’s attention from it, until now.”

“Until now? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Severen my boy, you’re telling me that after everything we’ve been through that you still haven’t figured me out. Hmpf, I’m disappointed.”

Shocked, Severen just stood in Luscious’ omnipotent manor. His smirk still chilling the bones that quivered within Severen’s body. Luscious was something more than he had ever been before, his presence more demanding, his tone of voice more threatening.

“You’ll figure it out soon enough, you’re a smart boy. Just make sure to watch this address with your full attention. It will be something no one will ever forget.” Luscious mumbled calmly as he trolled past Severen heading towards the ramp to the stage. A few seconds dwindled by before Severen was able to recollect his composure.

“Luscious...you seem more like Rebel with every passing moment...”

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Rain tattered the sky that lingered above Terrenus, Red Fury’s main camp site ever since the abandonment of Evo. The majority of their forces crowded together in the main mesh hall where

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President Malum's address was going to be broadcasted. Their futures rode on the words that were going to flow out from the TA's president. Whether they were bad or good they would seal the fate of many men and women who put their faith into the dream that Carlos Rendetore created. As hundreds rushed to organized plastic seats Adam stood in the back of the room, his back leaning against the barren wall of newly painted plaster. His arms crossed across his chest he stared blankly across the room. Directly in his line of sight was the image of a man who made an impact on his life, a man who managed to show up in every corner of his nightmare; Luscious Malum.

"Pft, such a waste." He mumbled to himself while the rest of Red Fury was fixated on the young politician.

"Hey."

A soft feminine voice brushed along the breeze of chilled air that flowed through the room, Adam slowly glanced over to his right as a woman pilot walked towards him. Her movements were eloquent, a perfect display of grace and strength. As she drew near he began to recognize her face, a face that his friend, Mario was once in love with. Michelle Dolce, a pilot who once originated from the Trinity Alliance but like many others believed in the dream that Carlos presented. It had been years since the two had seen one another.

"I thought it was just a rumor, a farce if anything. I guess I was wrong." Michelle mumbled.

"Huh? What are you talking about?" Adam continued to act if he wasn't interested; he did that a lot in Red Fury.

"You, that you had joined Red Fury."

"I'm here because I have no where else to go. It's not as if I believe in what Red Fury is doing."

"You could have gone back to Earth."

It was true, returning to Earth was an option, but to him he felt that it wasn't. His face turned away from her, afraid of revealing any emotions to anyone who wasn't himself. His eyes began to squeeze together trying, hoping to seal in the tears that had seemed to never sleep.

"No, I couldn't."

"Why..." Her voice carried around the walls just as the volume on the television screen rose. Luscious was speaking, his commanding voice was like a black hole, grabbing everything and drawing it to his center. Nearly forgetting about Adam Michelle turned forward glaring back at the soul piercing eyes that Luscious had been born with.

"It would be extremely cliché for me to start off this speech announcing who I am. So I've decided to take another route. Instead of beating around the politician bush I'm going to drive straight to the point." Luscious took a quick breath, gazing across the front lawn of the White House in Washington. The thousands of people that stood staring back at him, feeding his ego was a feeling that he had been longing for years.

"You are all aware of the war that had been raging on for the past 5 years. A war that many of you felt was not going to end. But it has ended, and the Trinity Alliance has succeeded in bring that end to the rest of humanity all over Earth, along with the people living on our sister planet, Mars. I know most of you if not all of you wished for an answer, a single answer that would explain why the Trinity Alliance and the Euro-Asian Pact remained in turmoil for so many years."

The crowd along with the billions watching from their own comfort inched to the edge of their seats waiting. Hanging onto every word that Luscious muttered, hoping to know why their friends and family had sacrificed their lives for so long.

"Unfortunately I can not give you a clear answer. All I can tell you is that it started out based on simple human greed and pride. Greed to have control over the resources that were mined out from the Martian surface, and the pride to be the single supplier of them. From there on out both governments blinded by their rage and hatred for the other lost sight of what was truly important; their people."

"\*Phew\* He is smooth." Mario spoke softly under his breath as the broadcast continued onwards.

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“He says what needs to be said in order to motivate the people to support him. He’s a business man Mario, he knows exactly what to say to make his staff work, and he knows that without the people he has no power.” Ashley remarked. Both Ashley and Heather managed to arrive at Stephen’s apartment a few moments before Luscious began his speech.

“I guess. Yo Stephen, what do you think about all this?” Mario yelled hoping to reach Stephen who was still in the solitude of his office.

“How long has he been in there?” Heather mumbled.

“Not long, maybe 15 minutes. But he’s completely cut off the rest of the world. Whatever the hell it is he’s working on, it must be important.” Mario replied.

“There is no point in discussing what went on in the past. Everyone knows what happened and I didn’t come out here to give a review. I came out here to talk about our future, humanity’s future.” Luscious said, his smirk grew as with each second his audience continued to react to his words. They were motivated and he knew it, they didn’t know what they were motivated to do, all they knew was that Luscious was going to guide them and they like a good flock would follow.

“To the nations in Europe and Asia, I have no intention of stripping your lands and resources, or make you assimilate into our culture. I offer my hand to you; I humbly ask for your assistance along with every other nation of the world to help prosper humanity. We should no longer view ourselves as independent nations, but view ourselves as an Earth Nation. In this world there are now 2 planets, and Mars is steadily growing and as she is growing she is departing from our grace. We need to stand together and pull her back to us; we shall stand as one government, a unified Earth Government!”

The crowd at that exact moment lost control of their inhibitions, their arms flailing into the sky, their vocal chords stretching as screams ruptured into the sky.

Red Fury could do nothing but stare in amazement over the power that this one man held onto. Adam sighed in the background, he knew Luscious well, he knew how much of a salesman he was. The words that Luscious threw out to the people of Earth was the proper preparation for another war, a war on an interplanetary proportion. David Lepidus stood up abruptly as his small dull chair was flung to the side. His face rigid and determined, he had taken up command of Red Fury after Carlos’ untimely death.

“This Luscious...I had hoped that he would end things and leave us alone. But it is painfully clear that we will never be left alone. He plans on coming after us, and if he does follow this through then that means that no one here is safe! Mars will not be safe!” David screamed.

“He’s right! Luscious is baiting the people of Earth; his greed won’t be satisfied until he has Mars in his clutches too!” Alex Diaz screamed as he too stood up next to his partner.

“But what are we going to do? We can’t stand up to an entire planet!” A voice screamed from the cluster of chairs.

It was to be expected, everyone has doubts residing inside them and it is the fear of death or discrimination that brings it out.

“Unfortunately there is nothing we can do right now. If we strike hastily without preparation or thought then it will look like we’re being too offensive and will be labeled as outcasts and as a danger to society. And if that happens then we’ll be walking right into Luscious trap!” David replied.

As David continued his speech so did Luscious in the background. The ground began to quiver a bit, nothing too noticeably but still it shook.

*“This Red Fury, they have wandered from our sights and are in the way of our Utopia! Our original goal of obtaining our Utopia on Mars, our goal of exploring the Southwestern Territory that was cut off by a mysterious barrier some how managed to disappear from our minds due to the corruption of the war! Well I do not intend to let this dream go! We will find paradise; we will find the paradise that God hid from us! And those who get in the way of that will be punished!”* Luscious’ voice echoed from the flickering screen behind both David and Alex.



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The small tremors that passed through Terrenus grew in intensity causing the chairs to fall to the ground as people jumped up from fear. Adam too lost his footing as Michelle tripped over her feet, falling into his body. Looking down at Michelle Adam cringed, he knew what this meant.

“Are you okay?” Adam mumbled. His eyes scanning the few window panes that were placed along the top edges of the walls.

“Yeah, I’m fine. But what was that?”

“It’s...a battalion of MFs.”

Michelle’s eyes widened from shock. The thought of MFs making it to Terrenus undetected was spine shattering.

“You can’t be serious, you have to be exaggerating. There’s no team of MF’s that could make it here without...”

Michelle’s abrupt loss of words grabbed Adam’s attention causing him to bring her up to his eye level.

“What is it?”

“It’s...”

“Who is here?!”

“If...if anyone made it here and if there really is an army of MF’s coming then the only ones that could make it here undetectable...”

“The Night Stalkers.” David interrupted.

Adam quickly turned his face towards David who was now only a few feet from his position.

“Night Stalkers? What the hell is that?”

The Night Stalkers is a unit of pilots who have been exposed to the Crimson Dawn. They pilot massive weapons of destruction that tower over any MF. I believe you’ve experienced their power already.”

Adam froze, it was true. He did encounter one of the Night Stalker’s MF’s before. It wasn’t something he could forget, despite all his efforts, the memories from their encounter still haunted his dreams.

*“You can’t take me down...do you know who I am?! I won’t lose here!” Gluttony screamed. The four angular funnel tails once again launched from the back of the massive MF. As the clouds of smoke that surrounded the Seraph evaporated the azure MF that lingered became visible. The light from the stars and pinkish explosions in the sky glistened off the metallic armor. The wings extended outwards as the glowing stream of cerulean energy kept the MF afloat.*

*“You killed her....after all I did in order to get away from....it still ended up like my dream. Why? Why did you come here?!” Adam screamed. The head unit of Blue Dragon flickered as he hit the accelerators fueled with frustration and guilt. Just as Blue Dragon prepared the strike the Seraph the four angular orbits flew in its way firing beams of energy. Blue Dragon nimbly avoided most of the beams while using the energy saber in its right hand to deflect the remaining energy beams. The ground rumbled as the titanic MF rose once again, as it rose, spheres of particle energy gathered around the core preparing to fire.*

The voice of the Seraph’s pilot filled his head briefly as he recalled the incident that had transpired only a few weeks ago.

“Yes...I’ve seen the machines.”

“Then you’re aware of how difficult this task of surviving is going to be. It appears that Luscious didn’t waste any time coming after us....that bastard.” David said.

*“With all the strength we have on Earth we shall move the obstacles out of our way as we press forward!”* Luscious words continued to echo as the shockwaves increased in intensity.

Dust along with tiny pieces of debris began to fall from the ceiling causing a panic to spread like fire.

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“Damnit, I was hoping they would keep calm.” Alex mumbled.

“Alex! How many MF’s have been transferred here?” David screamed.

“Damn, not many. I’d say including ours four.”

“Just four? Shit, there’s no way in hell this is going to be easy.”

“Five.” Adam replied quietly.

“Huh?” David, Alex and even Michelle both stared back at Adam in awe.

“What do you mean 5? Our records only show 4, mine, David’s, Michelle’s, and standard Shade.”

Alex replied.

“I have mine in a separate hanger.” Adam replied. As he turned his back and began to walk towards the door at a slow pace he turned his head. “Red Fury will survive, it’s not it’s turn to die. It’s not mine yet either....”

### **Chapter Sixteen: Dawn for Destiny**

“(Sometimes I wonder why I sit here...)” His thoughts penetrating the silence brewing inside his cockpit. He sat alone in the darkness while he waited for the docking hanger to open. His eyes cold and lifeless like he was stuck in an endless trance, this was his home now, the cockpit of a frigid metallic machine.

*Adam Novus, you are clear for launch. Good luck.* It was a serene sounding voice, feminine much like every other liaisons manager he had dealt with in his life. Trying to smirk Adam nodded while applying little pressure onto the accelerator. The thrusters slowly began to flicker while the generator gathered the energy required to launch. Disregarding the sweat that was clustering his pores he took a deep breath preparing to launch. Most would wonder why a man who has suffered as much as he would even think of stepping into the cockpit once again. It was true that his actions, along with its justification were an enigma. No longer did he view himself as a “thinker”, nor a “strategist”, he was merely Adam Novus, an avenger.

“Adam Novus, Blue Dragon launching.”

With his fingers clinching along the rough edges of the throttles he shot outwards into the crimson dusk of the Martian atmosphere with little knowledge of what awaited him. The azure MF sped through the slow moving nimbus clouds leaving the Red Fury assisting units in the dust of his cerulean trails. No more than 30 seconds did David, Red Fury’s current commander appeared on Blue Dragon’s communication display.

“What are you doing? Don’t be so hasty!” David screamed, his voice distorted by the array of static that fluttered the communication link.

Adam sighed, even when he was in the Trinity Alliance he never enjoyed being questioned by other soldiers, regardless of their rank. Even in his current situation and after years of growth and maturity manifestation he still retained that slightly arrogant quality.

“I’m not officially part of Red Fury. Don’t question me....ever again.” Adam replied just before he pushed the switch on his control panel. David, becoming bewildered realized that he couldn’t waste time worrying about a man who had not sworn his allegiance fully to Red Fury and their cause.

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“Stubborn prick. Listen up! Alex, you and Michelle head East, our intelligence is saying that two massive energy sources are coming up just behind the ridge leading to the ocean. I along with...I’m sorry I didn’t catch your name.”

“Oh!” The young soldier excited that his leader spoke to him snapped to attention. His right palm flattened slightly at a 45 degree angle just as he pronounced his name in a rigorous fashion.

“Sir! I am Kyle Flannigan, sir!”

“Heh, relax kid, we’re not the army. Anyway, you and I will continue in the North direction. There’s another two heat sources coming from that direction.” David replied.

“Don’t get killed David. We’ve lost enough leaders already...” Michelle mumbled.

“I’ll come back, trust me on that. Retribution has been upgraded since the last time I went up against that ungodly machine...the Seraph.”

Even muttering its name sent sharpening chills down his spinal cord. To him it still didn’t seem possible, a weapon of its size able to function properly without over heating or running out of energy.

“(I sincerely hope we make it back alive...)”

Blue Dragon spun through the clouds flying through the air. Adam kept the velocity at a steady pace in order to keep the generator cool along with keeping booster noise at a minimum. He couldn’t be completely invisible, but he could come close to it. It was almost soothing to fly through the clouds gazing back down at the barren rust colored land below. It had a way of sneaking up on you, a feeling of comfort; any lesser soldier would have already been affected, losing any sense of defensive awareness. Adam glanced back to his right side, it was a side littered with pictures of his family and friends. Shards from his shattered hopes and dreams that he felt kept him sane. But looking at the images of Sharon Amare, or better yet, a person who he thought to be the real Sharon only agitated him more.

*Beep Beep...* His radar sounded abruptly causing him to jump a few inches from his seat.

“What the? Already huh? Just in time I suppose.”

*"... I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the Seraphim; each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew."*

*Isaiah 6:1-3*

“A Seraph...” Adam mumbled.

The atrocious machine loomed over the crumbled rocks and minerals as if it was scanning for prey. The angular weapons that Adam remembered were missing from the back of the enlarged MF.

“Damnit! When the hell did they!?” Adam screamed. Quickly he pulled the throttles inwards just as he cut off the boosters. Blue Dragon suddenly flopped from the air falling towards the ground. Just as the blue MF fell from grace 9 beams of crimson energy pierced through the clouds causing them to disperse instantaneously.

Adam cringed as he engaged the boosters once again. Blue Dragon quickly regained it’s balance in the air and spun around with it’s head unit facing the Seraph below. With a new found ferocity the eight wings shot open preparing to launch. Just before they were able to fire from their binders the nine angular weapons flew past Blue Dragon and began to connect to one another. Each weapon interlocked with the one next to it until all nine transformed into a hovering circular object.

“What the hell is going on?! Why didn’t my radar detect them earlier?!” Adam screamed.

*You’re weak, that is all there is to it.*

Adam lost his concentration the instant he heard the sullen raspy voice shoot through his mind like an unnerving echo.

“What the hell is this? How are you in...?”

*Unlike Gluttony, I am fully in control of my telepathic capabilities. You won’t defeat me as easily as you did him. This is your end, it has been foreseen, now....FACE MY WRATH!!*

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“Like hell I will!” Adam screamed.

The circular weapon now free falling in front of Blue Dragon began to spin clockwise, during its rotation it let off sparks of electricity while energy gathered in front of the center. Blue Dragon jerked to the right due to the boosters pivoting at a 45 degree angle. While in motion Adam tried to obtain a lock on the weapon that he was presently facing, both energy rifles quivering in the frigid metal hands of his MF. The turbulence that was impacting the machine continued to cause FCS errors; at the rate the wind was blowing there was no way for an accurate shot.

“Damn...”

Suddenly the circular weapon fired; the massive static electricity field that surrounded the beam of energy dispersed as the wave soared. Blue Dragon swayed to the left narrowly avoiding the beam, but the electrical discharges still radiating from the beam caused the computerized navigational controls along with radar to malfunction causing the MF to spin into an uncontrollable freefall. Adam stared back towards the ground where the Seraph calmly awaited, his hands fidgeting on the throttles, his heels pressing on and off the accelerators but still nothing. The boosters flickered as if trying to ignite, but to no avail.

“This is too easy. I must say I am disappointed in your performance. And to think Gluttony died by your hands. Pfft\*, such a joke.” Wrath mumbled.

“I won’t...”

“Huh?” The slight sound of Adam’s voice protruded through his mind. Wrath was the most proficient with telepathy than the rest of the Crimson Dawn, it was his specialty. He quickly turned back around giving the descending MF all of his attention.

“I won’t be defeated...I still have too much left to do!” Adam screamed. His right fist soon found the edge of the control panel as it impacted with tremendous force. His dark brown hair swung through the air as he removed his helmet. “DAMN IT!!” He screamed loudly, his eyes tightened shut only to quiver from the amount of tension Adam exerted.

Suddenly with out warning the computerized systems and diagnostics turned on lighting up the darkened cockpit. The slight sound of the computer engine stirring brought him back to his current situation. As his eyes opened widely he stepped on the accelerators causing the boosters to erupt loudly with flames of energy. Only a few 100 meters from the ground Blue Dragon turned on its back so Adam could see the circular object clearly. With a smirk on his face he engaged the Angel System. The eight wings ripped from their binders shooting into the air. The trail of energy flushed out like a fountain just as Blue Dragon flipped around now to face the Seraph that was before him. The orbital wings locked onto the circular weapon above taking that pressure off Adam’s neck while he was able to focus on the behemoth in front.

“Hmpf, don’t feel like going down that easy huh? I had hoped for a more invigorating battle. I shall truly enjoy this.”

“Michelle can you see anything yet?” Alex glanced over at his companion just as both Red Dawn and D-Block continued to tread over the Martian landscape. Their MFs were able to fly but the amount of energy that was drained would leave them in at a disadvantage with the enemy. The gears turned slowly with each step that the gigantic machines took, clusters of dust clouds fluttered into the air from each thunderous step taken. From a further distance the border ridge that separated the vast ocean from Terrenus appeared to be smaller in stature, but as the two Red Fury soldiers found out, it was far from small. The ridge was more like a miniature mountain at a very steep incline.

“Shit, we can’t climb this. We’re going to have to fly over.” Michelle muttered.

“Damn if we do that then we’ll be at a severe disadvantage.”

“Energy wise, we can make due.”

“That’s not what I’m referring to. We’ll end up flying right into their view, leaving us wide open to attack.”

“What about the stealth extensions?”

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“Won’t do much good if they can see us with their eyes. Right now it’s the only thing keeping us hidden, that and this freaking mountain in front of us.”

“So what do you suggest we do then?”

“Do you still have a good supply of ERMs?”

“Energy missiles? Let me check.” Michelle replied, she quickly turned towards her diagnostics computer which read a list of part, weapon and radar stats. “I still have one whole launcher full of them. That’s about 50 warheads left. Not to mention I have 10 left in my other launcher.”

“Good, are you able to lock onto anything past this mountain?”

“I have something, it’s weak but I can still launch from here.” Michelle replied. Her targeting system was one of the best in all of Red Fury; she had designed it herself during the Azure Cup along with Mario Liberalis. The lock on box was saturated with a blue color signifying that her missiles would track the current position, but would not be able to alter course in mid flight if the target moved.

“Good enough. When I give you the signal I want you to fire the maximum amount of ERMs that can launch in a single lock. Once you do that I’ll swoop around from the right. Hopefully the missiles will distract them long enough for me to get in a good attack. The positron rail cannon I stole from an abandoned EAP facility should pack enough punch to damage one of them. Unfortunately it will drain nearly all my energy so you would be on your own for about 10 minutes.”

“10 minutes? I can survive for 10 minutes. And besides, it’s the best plan we have.”

“It’s the only plan we have. Remember, these machines are terrifyingly powerful, so we’re already at a disadvantage. If we want any chance of surviving then we have to follow this plan to the letter.”

“I know...”

“Good. As I head to the right, fire the ERMs.”

“Right...good luck Alex.”

“You too.” He wasn’t even sure if his plan would work. If it would even make a mark on the titanic machines, but Alex was a fighter; the type of person who would always try and find a way to pass what ever tests were thrown before him. D-Block’s thrusters ignited softly as the slate colored machine sped off into the distance. Michelle’s nerves were tightened ever since she left the sanctity of the Red Fury base. She had engaged in dozens of sorties in the past, but none of them were as intense as the one that faced her now. Her hazel eyes glistened with glazing sweat which rolled down from her auburn strands of hair dangling in front of her forehead. In only a few seconds did D-Block become nothing more than a blackish blur engulfed by the shadows forecasted by the mountainous terrain.

“I can do this...” She continued to mutter this sentence under her chilled breath every few seconds lining in sync with her rhythmic heart beat. Finally able to catch her breath and nerves she tightened her grip along the outer ridges of the control throttles. She stared deeply into the display screen before her as the ERM launcher pivoted into firing position. The lock on boxes quivered around the two heat signatures that the FCS verified, neither one ever turning a full crimson for a complete lock. But that wasn’t the objective; it wasn’t what she was looking for. Michelle knew up close she wouldn’t stand a chance and that being a decoy was the best contribution she could provide to her comrade.

“I am not a worthless pilot!” Michelle screamed as her thumbs pressed inwards forcing the circular buttons to cause a reaction that would launch the ERMs into the blush dusk of the Martian sky.

The cluster of missiles erupted into the air, climbing the side of the mountain. Alex glanced over his shoulder smiling, the first part of his plan was set into motion and he couldn’t help but feel confident.

“What the hell?!” Michelle screamed as each missile exploded in air leaving nothing more than an obsidian cloud of polluted smoke hover above. Alex upon hearing the abrupt explosion quickly turned his MF around to face Red Dawn.

*Beep beep...*

“What the?!” Alex turned to his radar to find 7 heat signatures heading his way.

“Michelle get out of there now!” Alex screamed, but it was too late. 7 thin iron weapons pierced through the quivering smoke glowing with energy.

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Michelle sat frozen as the weapons quickly locked onto her MF. Red Dawn quickly turned into a statue with its pilot unable to move. The ground abruptly began to shake due to massive tremors now flowing through the landscape. D-Block jerked around as a side of the mountain erupted sending out shards of minerals along with a beam of intense energy. The heavily armored frame was sent towards the ground crashing into the crimson dirt and rocks. Alex held on tightly in his cockpit as he was thrown around. His eyes were opened wide, his breath palpitating at an irregular rate; he had quickly been reduced to an injury animal; prey if anything.

“Hahaha, I was beginning to wonder when you two were going to attack.” The raspy voice of a female echoed in and around their cockpits. Sloth slowly moved her Seraph through the gapping crevice which passed through the mountain. With each mighty step the behemoth took Michelle’s breathing patterns ran into bumps causing minor hiccups. She wanted to move, to attack but her nerves weren’t responding to the orders being sent by her brain.

Three of the hovering weapons flew back towards the Seraph that now stood glaring down at D-Block. The shadows hid the majority of the Seraph giving it a surrealistic nightmarish look, a look that paralyzed Michelle. Alex was left defenseless as the Seraph was in the more promising position.

Sloth brushed her dangling pink hair behind her smooth and sensual right ear. Her moist lips thinned as they extended along her face.

“Are you going to just stand there, or are you going to try and save your friend here?” Sloth mumbled as the Seraph raised it’s bazooka towards the fallen MF before her.

Michelle’s eyes widened, she wanted to help Alex. She wanted to save him but her limbs still failed to respond.

“I...I...”

“What a pity...” Sloth replied, shrugging her shoulders in disappointed she turned her attention to the easy prey laying beneath her.

Alex cringed, his fingers tightly wrapped along the throttles; he was not about to die.

To Sloth’s amazement D-Block’s thrusters engaged flourishing with energy. The slender MF bolted out from the ground, the shock of her opponent’s determined nature caused her to miscalculate in shooting. The thick shell ruptured the ground below only missing the original target for which it was intended.

“MICHELLE! GET A GRIP! YOU’LL DIE OTHERWISE!” Alex screamed. D-Block quickly turned around aiming the elongated positron cannon at the core of the Seraph. Sloth began to laugh the instant her radar notified her that she was locked onto.

“Fire if you dare.” She muttered as if to call any bluff that Alex might have been laying down.

It was hard for him to not fire; this may have been his only opportunity to deal damage. But something didn’t stir right with him, he knew the Seraph’s were walking tanks with impressive defense, but even so, a direct hit to the core would do it in and yet the Seraph remained still. His right eye thinned, staring through the scope that lowered from the cockpit’s ceiling. His index finger shaking around the trigger button, it was a tense situation indeed.

“(Why can’t I do anything...why....)” Michelle began to think to herself, she was lucky in the fact that the current Seraph was leaving her alone and focusing only on Alex.

*Beep...beep...*

The sound of her radar echoing was a sound that she would never become accustomed too.

“Oh shit!!” Michelle screamed. Her head tilted upwards just in time to catch another terrifying sight. Crimson flames of energy flickering in the sullen sky along with the tremendous shadow overcasting the mountain a few feet away; the second Seraph had appeared.

“The other one...I FORGOT ABOUT IT!” Michelle screamed.

“Hehehe, humans, such inferior creatures. Sloth! What the hell are you doing?! Finish him already!”

“Mind you’re business Pride. I want to have some fun for once.”

“Fine, I’ll let you have your fun. But don’t become accustomed to it!” Pride yelled. “I’ll take care of this one.”

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Pride's Seraph quickly aimed its dual rail guns at the statuesque Red Dawn.

"MICHELLE!" Alex screamed, his emotions flared causing him to fire his cannon without fully realizing his actions. The cannon exploded with energy causing a recoil intense enough to send D-Block flying backwards only to crash into the ground once again.

"Shit! I wasn't paying attention! I didn't bother to adjust the motors in the legs and arms! MICHELLE GET OUT OF THERE!" Alex screamed.

Sloth smiled as the beam of surging energy approached. Suddenly the three angular tails on her Seraph separated into the air while dispersing a vaguely visible wall of energy. The six tubes protruding from the back of Sloth's neck distributed the liquids from the medical canisters hidden behind the seat into her cerebellum. Her eyes thinned out just as she began to type quickly on her keyboard. Somehow finding enough time to reconfigure the energy wavelength that was being sent out by her weapons and changing it to mirror the wavelength from the energy fired from D-Block. The beam of energy collided with the wall only to evaporate into thin air instantly like the beam had never existed. Alex just stared back in awe as the Seraph's energy barrier faded and the weapons returned to their original position on the Seraph's back.

"Is that all you have boy?"

"Alex..." Michelle managed to mutter just before the Seraph fired.

**Chapter Seventeen: The Avenger**

Blue Dragon dashed sideways allowing two beams of energy to slide by. Adam held on tightly as the gravitational forces from Mars continued to pound on his body. The battle that roared through out Terrenus caused destruction and chaos across the land. The Seraph wasn't equipped for air battles due to its tremendous size, but with its towering size the Seraph wasn't necessarily handicapped.

"This is going nowhere. He's a lot tougher than the one I fought weeks ago." Adam mumbled. He barely had any time to think for himself, suddenly his display screen was radiating with a beam of oncoming energy. With quick sword play Blue Dragon swung it's right arm, the cerulean beam of energy collided with the oncoming beam. Vicious streaks of electricity shot out from the center of impact as Adam tried to force the beam away. Blue Dragon continued to struggle with the beam of energy unable to deter it from its path.

"You won't be able to stop it." Wrath screamed.

Adam shot his head around instinctively once his radar began to alarm. The 9 angular weapons were once again tearing through the clouds on a collision course with the blue MF.

"Damn it." Adam grabbed the throttles and abruptly turned the MF's torso around. The instant the right arm moved the beam of energy surged past Blue Dragon singing the outer layer of armor on the shoulder. The thin layer of paint melted away leaving a rust colored tint as a scar. It didn't make much of a difference to him; if he didn't allow the beam to pass he would have been left completely defenseless.

Blue Dragon boosted forward with its energy rifle firing relentlessly, Adam's eyes glared back at the weapons that were dancing around his attacks effortlessly. At the end of his ropes his feet pivoted forward leaning onto the accelerators causing the thrusters to send a bigger output of energy into the air. As a result the MF's speed dramatically increased, Adam suddenly docked his laser rifle in order to grab onto his remaining energy saber which he ignited instantly.

Just as Blue Dragon swung the 9 weapons dispersed in opposite directions leaving Adam in mid air, both energy sabers flaring brightly.

"Hahaha, this is amusing."

Wrath's anxiety began to get the better of him. He stared back at the battle above him and began to snicker. Suddenly the 9 pods flew back towards the Seraph much to Adam's surprise.

"I won't let them get away..."

He quickly activated the Angel System as the azure wings launched from the back of his MF. Each orbit weapon began to fire simultaneously at the weapons heading back towards the Seraph. But like before each weapon easily avoided any attack that was being unleashed. At that moment Blue Dragon surged past it's own orbital weapons once again with the energy sabers lit. The speed that was being shown was nothing like Wrath had ever witnessed prior to his current situation. Before he could even react Adam sliced through four of the weapons causing explosions to riddle the sky.

"You....how dare you...."

Adam's eyes widened as energy began to gather around the torso of the Seraph. He didn't notice it before, but this Seraph had a plasma cannon lodged on the core.

"Shit, not good." Adam said. The beam suddenly fired catching Adam off guard; luckily for Adam he was able to avoid the full brunt of the attack. But the resounding energy from the blast tore through the right set of wing binders. The damage done sent Blue Dragon crashing into the ground causing an uproar of sand and minerals to flutter into the air. Adam's head was thrown into the screen in front of him. The force of the impact caused the screen to shatter sending shards of plastic tearing through his skin on his face. Trickle of blood stained his mahogany hair while dripping onto his flight suit and floor board.

"Hehe...heh, I'm not so sure about this one Sharon..." Adam mumbled just before his eye lids became heavier. Weaving in and out of reality his vision blurred and could no longer make a clear image of the Seraph that was now walking slowly towards his position.

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## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“MICHELLE!” Alex screams continued to resound loudly.

The immense Seraph steadily fell towards Red Dawn while firing both weapons. Both rail guns were glowing with energy while Michelle could only find herself paralyzed before what could possibly be her demise.

Suddenly a small explosion riddled the outer armor of Pride’s Seraph. The force of the explosion cause both rail guns to fire of course. The intense energy beams tore through the crimson ground to Red Dawn’s right and left side. The blush colored MF lost its footing collapsing to the ground. Michelle’s breathing patterns were erratic but she was still alive due to the intervention.

“Michelle what the hell are you doing? How can you just sit there and wait for your death!” David’s voice rattled the insides of Red Dawn much to Michelle’s surprise.

To much of everyone’s surprise Retribution was now hovering next to the behemoth.

“David! I thought you were....”

“Michelle, you’re better than this! What is going on with you?!” David screamed just in time to cut Michelle’s sentence short.

“I... I...”

Pride grinned maniacally as he looked over at Retribution. Pride’s Seraph had been upgraded as well since its last outing. The four angular tails moved up towards the shoulders of the torso of the MF, just as it finished docking into place each angular pod opened two metallic flaps on each side that suddenly began to disperse tremendous amounts of energy that worked along with the two H-Ion Thrusters (Hyper Ion Thruster) to keep the monstrosity in the air.

“I hope you are prepared to deal with the consequences of damaging my machine human.” Pride quietly announced.

David soon found out that he had no time to waste in his situation. Retribution once again went back on the offensive firing all weapons at once. Two grenade launchers flipped over the shoulders in between Retribution’s head unit, both hands firmly grasped onto high powered rocket launchers while the a hanger opened widely off both shoulder units revealing missile pods. David’s hazel eyes thinned focusing on the 5 lock on boxes that solidified crimson around the Seraph.

Suddenly every weapon on Retribution fired an onslaught like no other. Dozens of warheads twirled around in the air until they exploded on the core of the Seraph. Two immense rockets joined the fulminating attack along with the swirling orange cluster of fire that shot from the grenade launcher. The attack caused an uproar of smoke to flourish out into the atmosphere nearly covering the entire Seraph within its grasp.

“Holy shit David!” Alex yelled.

“Heh, I wouldn’t be focusing on him, you still have to deal with me!” Sloth screamed.

She was right, Alex had for the moment dismissed the Seraph that was looming over D-Block. Sloth abruptly zoomed forward catching Alex off guard. The massive right hand of the beast firmly grabbed onto D-Block’s head unit causing the radar and FCS to go berserk and unstable. Static spread across the screens in Alex’s cockpit distorted the real time images from outside the machine. Alex struggled to get free but the Seraph’s grip was too strong.

“Damn! The cannon is still recharging and my energy is only replenished half way!” Alex screamed.

Just as Sloth began to laugh the three tails attached to her core launched back into the air only this time heading towards the fallen MF. In the corner of his eye Alex was able to catch wind of it but only continued to struggle, he was essentially useless now.

Michelle brushed her hair away from her eye just as her radar began to buzz.

“What....” Each weapon began to fire onto the unsuspecting Red Dawn. Grabbing onto her left rib cage Michelle began to move the throttles. The thrusters quickly activated and Red Dawn flew off the ground just avoiding the attack. Huffing she looked above her to see Retribution not letting up for one second, each attack David launched caused even more thunderous explosions to echo. She then glanced over towards D-Block where it looked like Alex was in a one-sided battle.

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“I can’t be the one...I won’t be the one to hold everyone back...” Michelle mumbled under her breath. Red Dawn began to approach Sloth at a rapid pace holding both energy sabers ignited. Her face stern and determined she was being driven on her determination alone.

Sloth glanced over her shoulder. “Oh? Hehe, finally have some fight I see.” Sloth mumbled.

“LET HIM GO!” Michelle screamed just before the Seraph spun around with D-Block still attached to its hand.

“If that is what you want.” Sloth replied with a quiet chuckle.

“MICHELLE WATCH OUT!” Alex screamed but it was too late. The cold metallic fingers of the Seraph released D-Block just as it faced Red Dawn. D-Block was hurled into the oncoming MF crashing together into the ground below. Both pilots were flung around in their cockpits from the tremendous amount of force exerted by the collision. Michelle’s head whipped into the back of her seat knocking her unconscious. Alex sustained a few injuries causing him to bleed but nothing too severe.

“Michelle...Michelle are you ok?!” Alex screamed as he moved D-Block off of Red Dawn. At the moment he looked back at his comrade’s weapon he saw the sparks of electricity spewing out from each and every metallic joint. Red Dawn was in no condition to move, and even if it could it wouldn’t last much longer.

“You’re still able to move I see...well, play time is over. We have a deadline.” Sloth replied.

“A deadline?!”

“Nothing personal, but you’re in the way.” Sloth screamed.

“\*huff\* \*huff\* \*huff\* Did I \*huff\*, did I do it?” David asked himself as he stared at the cluster of darkened clouds before him. Hearing nothing but the slight humming of rustling clouds he began to feel at ease. Retribution’s arms fell to the side and the grenade launchers slid back into their original position.

“Hehe...hahaha.” The laughter abruptly cut through David’s sense of security and no sooner did he hear it did he see the Seraph burst out from the smog heading straight for him. David’s eyes widened from shock, his body leaned back into the crevices of his leather seat as the Seraph’s right hand reached towards him with a glowing aura surrounding the minute crevices around each finger. With little time to react Retribution swung its left arm in front in hopes of blocking the attack. Pride grinned knowing that a single arm wouldn’t be enough to put a halt to his attack. The Seraph’s hand grabbed onto Retribution left arm and with a single pull ripped it apart from the joints connecting it to the core.

Wire dangled in every direction as flames raged outwards. David cringed as he swung Retribution’s right leg but the Seraph merely countered by knocking the leg aside with the arm it took from Retribution. The collision knocked Retribution out from the sky, sending it spiraling towards the ground at an alarming rate.

“This is pathetic. Sloth! Finish up, we are running out of time!” Pride screamed.

“Yeah yeah. I’ll get to it.” Sloth replied.

Sloth’s Seraph held up D-Block, or rather the singed frame that remained of Alex’s MF. The MF was tattered and ready to crumple, the head unit was destroyed and the only limb that remained was half of its left leg. Alex himself wasn’t in any better of a situation. His vision was blurred due to the concussion he endured earlier, and his ribs felt like they had collapsed. His breathing was irregular; it was a struggle just to remain conscious.

The Seraph like the rest of its kind was equipped with a dual positron cannon attached directly under the torso. With D-Block hanging lifelessly before it the cannons began to charge the energy required to fire. Sloth moved her pink stringy hair to the side away from her face and tucked it neatly behind her right earlobe. Her reptilian eyes glistened with the desire of kill, a desire that had been subdued for too long in her opinion. Just behind Sloth Pride touched down onto the Martian ground in order to deal the final blow to Retribution.

“I will say this before I kill you. You were a very determined human, one who had the potential to change the fate of this dying world. It is unfortunate for you that someone who has already realized

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their potential wants you dead. You could have become someone truly important, truly worth of God's grace." Pride mumbled as he stared back at the cold crimson machine glaring back at him.

"Just do it already..." David said softly. It was hard for him to deny the strength of his opponent, it's not that he wanted to give up on the dream developed by Red Fury; he felt that his death would only inspire Red Fury to do what was necessary.

"If it is your final wish, then I shall make this quick." Pride replied.

The Seraph's devilish like eye glowed scaring away the shadows lingering near the top of the behemoth. Raising it's right leg Pride slowly reached over Retribution in preparations of stomping on it like the insect it truly was.

"NO!" A young scratchy voice screamed from the distance as it was accompanied by a beam of crimson energy. Pride looked away from Retribution for a second only to be hit by the dense beam of energy.

David quickly turned back to see a single Shade speeding towards his location.

"Kyle get out of here! You're no match for them!" David screamed. But his attention was soon driven to his left as he watched D-Block crash into the ground with smoke searing off the rusted machine. His eyes widened, he soon felt his stomach cave in on itself. A feeling of sorrow quickly engulfed his soul as he watched his friend fall not knowing if he was alive or not.

"ALEX!" David screamed.

While David mourned over the possible death of his friend the single Shade continued to fire relentlessly at the Seraph.

"Go away knat." Pride mumbled as he quickly sent the Shade crashing towards the ground with a single shot from his rail gun.

As the Shade fell flames ruptured out from the armor until the entire machine exploded into thousands of pieces. The explosion brought David's attention back towards the Seraph standing over him and the young pilot who sacrificed his life in order to save David's.

"Kyle..." David muttered, his fists began to quiver with anger as he shifted his attention to the Seraph. "You...you call us humans as if you were something different. Something superior, just who the hell do you think you are?!"

"Heheh, we are superior to humans in every conceivable way possible. We are the remaining Crimson Dawn." Pride replied.

"The Crimson Dawn? That's impossible...they're supposed to be a rumor. A rumor cooked up by the EAP to frighten the TA..."

"I assure you human, we are no mere rumor."

"Then why...why are you doing this?!"

"You wouldn't be able to understand our reasons. You have potential, but you lack purity. We are the representations of humanity's sins, and we've come to collect on your debt." Pride screamed.

"That's..."

*Beep beep...*

Pride quickly turned his head at the sound of his radar. What he saw surprised and tormented his mind.

*I failed....he's not human Pride....he can't be human....*

"Wrath?!" Pride screamed.

*I thought I had him, thought he was done. But I was wrong, I let my guard down and then it happened....he came at me with such unrelenting fury, I couldn't block....*

Finally Wrath's Seraph came into view; the massive weapon was merely a shell of its former self. Tears in the Seraph's armor were deep and clean, the massive machine could barely fly steady without dropping out of its flight pattern for a few seconds.

"I see...WRATH BEHIND YOU!" Pride screamed.

Wrath slowly turned around only to see a blue blaze surge past. The speed of the MF caused the Seraph to lose its balance. Just as it happened Blue Dragon jerked around with sparks radiating around the destroyed side of the wing binders aiming both energy rifles along with the energy cannons on its thigh.

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“...”

“HE’S NOT HUMAN!” Wrath screamed just before the onslaught of energy pierced through the cockpit of the Seraph. The beams of high heated energy overflowed Wrath’s body causing his skin to boil and burst. It only took a second but it was the longest second in Wrath’s life, his screams went unheard and in an instant it was over. The Seraph exploded from the inside, a thick ball of flames took the place of the Seraph. Smoke floated towards the ground along with the singed pieces of debris.

Both Pride and Sloth watched in horror as another one of their Crimson Dawn comrades fell prey to the once called Azure Knight.

“WRATH!!” Sloth screamed.

Adam simply gazed back at the two Seraphs that stood over the remains of Red Fury. His eyes half opened and pale as if he wasn’t even registering the events that were occurring. Blue Dragon’s wings shot open launching the remaining 4 orbital wings into the sky. At that moment of launch the remaining wing binders suffered a cluster of minor explosions that dislodged it from the back of Blue Dragon’s core. The blue MF managed to defeat the Seraph but sustained a ton of serious damage to it’s outer frame. As the wing binders fell to the ground Blue Dragon boosted towards the Seraphs along with the 4 wings.

“I see, that’s how it is then.” Pride mumbled. “Sloth, we’ll deal with him and finish our mission.”

“Right!”

Suddenly both Seraphs began to make their way towards the oncoming Blue Dragon. Just as Sloth began to fire her dual positron cannons the 4 orbital wings began to fire. Like earlier Sloth’s 3 weapons began to circle around her Seraph negating the energy attacks that was launched. Adam merely ignored it and headed straight towards Pride. Blue Dragon dropped both energy rifles as they were empty and ignited both energy sabers. Right before coming in contact with Pride’s Seraph Blue Dragon forced both energy sabers together forming a dual energy saber.

Pride smirked as his Seraph caught both of Blue Dragon’s arms in mid swing preventing any damage.

“What the hell!?” Adam screamed from the shock.

“So you’re Adam Novus.” Pride remarked.

“\*Erg\*...”

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Shut up!” Adam screamed as both energy cannons fired. The beams collided with the head unit of Pride’s Seraph knocking it off balance allowing Adam the time to escape. But just as Blue Dragon left the clutches of Pride Sloth’s positron cannon fired catching Adam off guard. Blue Dragon turned away but not fast enough. The beams tore through the right side of Blue Dragon destroying its arm and part of its torso.

*Right arm destroyed.*

*Right sided Ion Thrusters and Boosters offline.*

*Energy reduced to 50%*

“Wonderful...” Adam mumbled. Blue Dragon continued to fall towards the ground engulfed in smoke until Pride’s Seraph grabbed hold onto Blue Dragon’s right leg. The abrupt halt in movement caused Adam to fall out from his restraints as they snapped in two. His head once again crashed into the front display screen causing even more blood to flow. The sudden loss of blood caused his joints to become weak; his stomach stirred roughly much to his dismay.

“You are weak. You will never survive the Tribulation that awaits humanity. We were sent to deliver this message.” Pride replied.

“\*cough\* shut up... \*cough\*...” Adam managed to reply just before his eyes shut sealing him off in his own unconsciousness.

Pride sighed just before he threw Blue Dragon to the ground. Just as the blue MF crashed into the crimson sand Pride fired his rail gun destroying the left arm and both leg units of the highly acclaimed MF.

David could do nothing but watch as it all transpired.

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“We were sent here to eliminate you. But I can sense that you are troubled, you are no longer the person you used to be. You are no longer the elite pilot, you are nothing more than an anger driven berserker. I would like to fight you as the person you used to be. I will let you live so that one day I can have that fight.” Pride mumbled. Turning to Sloth he nodded.

“Let’s head back, we’re finished here.”

“Right...Pride.”

The two Seraphs began to head out leaving their mark on the chaos that spread through the land and the destruction that tainted the once pure ground.

### **Chapter Eighteen: Weight of the World**

*Tokyo, Japan*

*0300*

*Euro-Asian Central Intelligence Office*

Days had already managed to pass since the interplanetary announcement made by Luscious Malum. The world which had suffered enough due to the bitter sweet war had once again found itself in a state of confusion. The words that the TA President spoke were influential to most, a death sentence to some, and bewildering to few. Since falling to the overwhelming circumstances at Dammerung the remaining EAP leaders quickly found it a necessity to flee to protected areas. Representatives from Japan, China, Germany, France, and Italy managed to make it to Japan unscathed while the remaining representatives from other European countries all met their respective ends, their cause of death had remained undetermined.

The last functional EAP CIO was protected by Japan’s superior energy barrier defenses which became mandatory to hover around the island after the attack it suffered 3 years prior. Located in the center of Tokyo the 5 representatives along with the current leader of the EAP, Laine Priam sat around an

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ivory glossy circular table surrounded by dozens of Japanese soldiers, each wielding high active assault rifles equipped with night vision.

Many decisions were needed to be made in order to comply with the new world order that Luscious Malum was preparing to create. Even though it would seem in the EAP's best interest to join up with the TA forces the remaining reps for the defeated faction still remained hesitant at best.

"What do you really think President Malum is trying to do?" Edward Diederich, Germany's elderly representative stated breaking the awkward silence that encased the room.

"I don't know...his wishes seem to be straight forward, and it does appear that he has everyone's interest in mind. I mean he did bring up a good point in his address." Abigail Desiderosa replied. She was known throughout Italy for her pacifist ideals and for being the one politician in Europe who was truly against the war and did everything she could to keep Italy out of it. Her attractive demeanor and looks aside, Abigail is easily manipulated due to her desire to be liked by everyone. She is young and inexperienced, and it was her inexperience that allowed the EAP to take advantage of Italy's own resources.

"Like what Abigail? I heard nothing more than a typical businessman trying to get the world on his side." Replied Jacques Haine; France's pompous strict borderline dictator.

"We all lost focus of our original goal. We lost site of Mars, and look what happened, now Red Fury is running around freely doing whatever they please. The resources on Earth are drying up, and Mars is the only place where we can gather up fuel and other sources of energy. As it stands now Red Fury controls Mars, along with the resources." Replied Ashi Tanran, one of Japan's most respected military strategists that was appointed to represent Japan in it's time of need at the creation of the EAP.

Laine Priam, the youngest out of all the EAP politicians sighed under her breath. She had grown tired of all the conflict that spread; it was at times like this that she would fall back into a sentimental state thinking of her father; the man who in her eye stood for justice and equality, a man who could have brought about a different ending to the war if his soul wasn't extinguished in Berlin all those years ago.

"(I'm sorry father...I've failed you and all of the people who believed in us...)" Her mind wandered while the remaining representatives continued what she felt was pointless babble.

"Laine? Is something the matter?" Abigail mumbled as she noticed Laine's slumped position and glossy eyes.

"Huh?" Quickly wiping her eyes she nodded with a forced smile. "I'm fine, it's nothing."

"Well then, we should get back to our agenda. Is it wise to trust Luscious Malun? What will prevent him from taking our technology and then simply throwing us to the winds?" Edward questioned. It was a novel point that he brought up; in all likely hood Luscious could just absorb the EAP weaponry, MFs and BXTs into his already powerful army.

"It is possible that the hypothetical event could happen, but there really is no benefit for Luscious to toss us aside. If he truly wants to unify this world then he's going to need use who knows our half to do it. There is no way the people will just jump to his will." Ashis barked.

"I suppose that is true, but if you've read recent reports from our remaining space satellites you'd see that Luscious hasn't wasted any time." Jaques brought up.

"What are you talking about?" Laine muttered.

"Give me a second to bring up the report." Jaques replied. It took only a few taps on the keyboard for the French representative to bring up a hologram that acted as a slide show featuring images captured from Mars; more specifically from the Terrenus continent.

"These are..." Edward stuttered as he tried to catch his breath, but the sight of the Seraphs was too much for one to grasp.

"The Night Stalkers correct?" Ashis replied.

"Ah, so you've heard of them. The elite unit working for what the supposed neutral nations called the Earth Government. The same title that the TA president is trying to force on the rest of the world, even a child could figure out that Luscious is behind the Night Stalkers." Jaques replied.

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“If that is the case then there’s no telling how much manipulation is running through this world. If this is true, that Luscius Malum is controlling the Night Stalkers along with the neutral nations at one time then it means that we’re the only ones not tainted by his hand.” Abigail mumbled.

“Exactly, and that means that we’re not safe. Luscius Malum is a conniving, manipulative bastard who continues to do selfish acts for his own gain. We’re in serious trouble here; we need to upgrade the security measures for the remaining EAP offices.” Heng Chao, the Chinese rep replied.

“This is the only remaining office. All offices in Italy, France and even Germany have already become occupied by TA soldiers all starting at 0400 2 days ago just after Luscius’ speech.” Laine commented.

“If that’s the way it is then so be it. Japan has the most advanced defenses in the entire world. Not even the TA can match it. The Jinketsu has finished production. Granted in terms of power and ferocity it is no where near the Everto, but it can easily out match any Shade, Night-Wing or the average customized MF.” Ashis mentioned. He slowly reclined back into the folds of his leather chair smiling as he convinced himself that he had figured everything out.

“You know this is in clear violation of the treaty that we signed at Washington. We agreed that we would halt any MF production lines that were not sanctioned by the TA. If we use the Jinketsu it would only cause even more problems for us. We’re already at the mercy of Luscius Malum, we can’t risk it.” Laine replied.

“You’re still so young Laine, so innocent, and yet so naïve. The Treaty of Dammerung was not made public Laine, so if you’re concerned about our public diplomacy then you have nothing to worry about. And besides, the Jinketsu is only to be used as a defensive tool in case Luscius Malum does indeed betray us.” Ashis replied.

“But...” Still too young to comprehend what Ashis was saying she found herself in an awkward position created by her age. She was well aware that her position was not earned, that it was handed down to her from her father a man that every one in the Euro-Asian Pact respected and admired. They were tremendous shoes to fill and in her mind she felt she could never live to fill them.

“Laine, I know you’re not comfortable with this. But you need to understand the world is going through changes and Luscius Malum is directing those changes. We can not stand by defenseless. Now before you jump to conclusions, I’m not saying we need to stand up against him; I believe we all know we wouldn’t stand a chance. But what I am saying is that we need to be prepared to defend ourselves. As humans we are entitled to that right.” Edward replied.

“I...I know... make the necessary adjustments. We’ll stay here in Japan. I just hope that we’re wrong about Luscius Malum...” Laine mumbled as she fell into a deep consciousness staring out into the starry night that lit up Tokyo.

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“Tell me again why we’re out here?”

A heavily armored battle cruiser rode the subtle currents of the Pacific while the young female officer began to question her superior’s orders. The ship’s superior officer glared back at the gorgeous brunette that stared back with her wide eyes bustling with innocence. He was an intimidating sight for most who knew little about him personal, his stringy piercing black hair covered the sides of his face hiding his obsidian eyes; eyes that acted as a damn holding in all the years of torment that had left a hole in his soul. He stood tall in his purple flight uniform in the front of the auditorium as his faithful crew all looked onward.

“Admiral Falden you can’t tell me that you believe this is justified. The war is over!” The younger female CIC agent replied.

“Ensign, you’re new to the 181<sup>st</sup> so I’ll cut you some slack. We don’t do things because we want to. We do things because we have to. If you didn’t want to deal with situations like this then you should have stayed in your comfy home off the coast in Florida. This is an order given to me by the Secretary of

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Defense Von Schuler. I have and will always trust in his decisions. If you fail to follow my orders or the orders of my subordinates then you will be tried for treason. Now sit down and shut the fuck up!” Marcus screamed back. His adrenaline had been in high effect for the past several hours ever since the battle ship “Preservation” set sail from Guantanamo Bay.

Turning away from his defiant little CIC agent Marcus once again began to go over the situation and the strategy that he and his fellow soldiers were going to use.

“Marcus, you are aware that this is a covert operation right? I mean, we can’t just barge in flaring our guns.” Drake replied smirking.

“Shut the fuck up, I know well aware what this mission is. That’s why we have radar jamming equipment running at full fucking capacity. OZ has already been outfitted for this mission, after all these years you’d think you’d trust me by now, asshole.” Marcus replied.

Natasha stood in the background leaning against a support beam giggling. Her arms crossed across her chest, her golden blonde hair caressing against the slight muscular ridges of her shoulders. She and Marcus had a close relationship, they knew each other’s strengths and their weaknesses, it was something that she treasured deeply and would never allow anything to endanger that bond. She had been with the 181<sup>st</sup> for a long time by this point, she knew its crew and their personalities, and starting sarcastic banter with their superior was always a must.

As a crew they had partaken in many battles, most, if not all would always end in close calls. Even after the war had ended the crew refused to disband and decided to stay with Marcus until their deaths, they truly represented the meaning of loyalty. And the moment the 181<sup>st</sup> was asked back into action, neither member had to even think about their answer, it was instinctual that they would return to the front line.

“Commander, we have visual confirmation of Tokyo Bay. I would suggest getting to your MF’s now. Our radar jamming equipment will pretty much be useless at any range closer than 1200 meters.” Arturo mentioned over the loud speakers. Marcus’ eyes twitched a little at the sound of the word “commander.” For the majority of the 181<sup>st</sup>’s existence he was a Commander in rank, and it had become accustomed to hear his comrades refer to him as such. But ever since his promotion to Admiral at the signing of the Dammerung Treaty a few weeks prior he had become extremely prideful of his new title.

“I’m a fucking Admiral, pay attention ass!” Marcus screamed back.

Arturo tried to hold in his laughter only to reply, “I’m sorry Admiral. Either way, I’d suggest launching in your MFs to avoid detection. The target is approximately 1900 meters from our current position.”

“Fine. I will launch first. Arturo as soon as I launch fire a smoke screen to cover the Preservation from detection. I highly doubt these cowards have any machines prepared to launch. After all that worthless piece of paper forbid them to continue any production.” Marcus screamed back as he ran through the hallways holding his headset close to his face.

“Yes sir.” Arturo replied.

It wasn’t long before Marcus found himself glaring back at OZ, his staple MF. The only TA produced MF that ever received the honor of having a production line based off its specs. The infamous frame glared back onto its pilot and creator as if it was bellowing out, begging to see action once again. Marcus could only smile at the thought of being in the middle of all the chaos once again.

“Has it been so long already...will this be the final battle? Will enough blood finally be spurt in order to satisfy your lust?” He mumbled softly as he walked slowly to the belly of the beast. His seat belts firmly locked into place, his fingers finding their familiar comfort zone around the throttles, and his eyes once again adjusting to the digital display screen before him.

“Marcus Falden, OZ...launching!” Marcus screamed. The subtle yet powerful sound of thrusters igniting, lighting up the darkened hanger sent chills through his blood stream; OZ erupted out from the cruiser quickly disappearing into the night sky.

Arturo smiled as he watched his commanding officer once again fly into the night blazing with power and determination.



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“It’s inspiring to see him out there once again isn’t it?” Natasha said as she quietly crept up behind Arturo’s Captain chair.

“That it is Natasha, it certainly is.” Arturo replied.

“*Hey you lazy bastard! Can we launch now?!*” Vladmir screamed abruptly through his head set.

“Calm down, we’re about to fire our smoke screen. Once the smoke screen is fired you can launch. But until then be patient!” Arturo commanded.

*Beep Beep...*

The young Ensign, Sandra Boyle nearly jumped out of her CIC chair. It was the first time she was on active duty, and the first time a bogey ever showed up on radar seemingly out of thin air.

“What’s wrong Ensign Boyle?” Natasha questioned as she quickly ran over.

“Something’s on radar...and it’s heading this way fast!” The quivering teen replied.

“What? Let me see that!” Natasha screamed. She suddenly jumped into the CIC chair only to gasp in fear.

“Natasha?”

“...” But there was no reply. It was rare for a soldier of her quality to become stricken with fear, Arturo instantly knew something wasn’t right at all.

“NATASHA!” He screamed out once again.”

“It’s a massive heat signature, possibly an MF. And it’s locked onto us.” Natasha managed to mutter.

“An MF? That’s impossible, we were careful not to be discovered, just how in the hell...”

“I DON’T KNOW. But it won’t change the fact that we’ve been locked onto.”

“Then we’ll fight back, we’ll take it down!” Arturo screamed.

“You’ve got to be kidding me Arturo. This isn’t the Iron Fist! This is a standard TA cruiser; we can’t possibly stand up to this thing!”

“*What the fuck is going on?!*” Drake screamed from his cockpit.

Glancing over to his display screen Arturo sighed. “An unknown MF has targeted us, and is about to attack. We’re going to have to inform the Admiral.”

“*No! We’ll take care of it! Drake and...ARGGG!!!!*” Drake’s voice became replaced with crackling static just as the Preservation shook violently from an outside explosion. Every soldier clutched onto something to keep them in place but Arturo could only stare at the now static filled display screens with a nauseating feeling stirring around in his stomach.

“DRAKE! VLADIMIR!! ANSWER ME GOD DAMNIT!”

But nothing returned anything that could be considered an intelligent response, only static greeted him. Natasha, horrified covered her face trying to hide from the reality of the situation.

Once again the ship was tossed around in the currents of the ocean as the unknown MF soared by causing a thunderous boom to shatter the windows of the control room. Every soldier hit the floor with their heads ducked under their arms in order to escape the shrapnel of glass that burst through the room.

“Natasha! Are you ok!?” Arturo screamed.

Taking deep breathes Natasha could only nod while her stomach lay pressed on the ground, her head being held by both her hands.

“I think so....oh my God....” Arturo mumbled.

“What is it?”

“It’s.....it’s the Devil Natasha.....he’s come to collect our souls from all the sorrow and deaths we’ve caused.....our sins have come to pass....”

“Arturo? What the fuck are you saying?!” Natasha screamed with a passionate outburst.

“It’s my time....survive. Somehow, live.” Arturo replied.

The confident and respected Captain slowly rose from his chair and began to walk towards the window before him where the darkened MF stared devilishly back at him.

“Why are you still here? The Commander would never forgive me if I let you die here. GET OUT!” Arturo screamed as he abruptly grabbed his pistol and fired a few feet away from Natasha’s quivering feet.

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“But...”

“NO! GET OUT OF HERE!”

“Arturo...” Natasha mumbled just before her confidence suddenly swept back into her arms. She quickly jolted out of the control room and began to head towards the escape pods which were located only a few 100 feet away from the control room.

Marcus finally unable to ignore the beeping sound of his radar turned around. His eyes widened at the sight of thickened smoke rising from the back of the Preservation.

“WHAT THE FUCK! YOU ASSHOLES, WHY DIDN'T YOU LISTEN TO ME?!” Marcus screamed. Just as OZ quickly turned around the sound of a sharp, powerful and passionate language burst through his communications radio.

<You are unauthorized to enter Japanese territory. Head back at once, or be considered as an enemy.>

“Fucking Japs, now of all times. Wait a minute...they're probably trying to distract me as they attack the Preservation...YOU FUCKING ASSHOLES!” Marcus screamed. Thoughts of his crew screaming due to agonizing injuries and even dying due to his absence flowed through his mind like a nightmarish slideshow from hell. But more importantly he saw Natasha in all her golden Greek goddess-like glory covered in her own blood just like the time when he saved her life; only this time in his vision she did not survive.

“I WON'T LET YOU DIE!” Marcus screamed as OZ quickly shot back towards the Preservation. As he neared he caught a glimpse of the lone MF shrouded in darkness flying away. At first Marcus wanted to follow after it, not just follow it, but destroy it and watch as its pilot suffered a slow and agonizing death. But seeing the Preservation tip topside, slowly sinking into the blue abyss as the engulfing flames died out once they touched the ocean's surface he knew he had more important things to take care of.

“No...oh God no.....NO!!!” Marcus screamed. Oz's boosters seemed to be running at low capacity in Marcus' head, he felt like time slowed down and that he would never reach his team, his friends.

Oz's right hand outstretched as if trying to grab the sinking ship and bring it back into God's grace. But as his MF came near to the ocean the last of the ship was swallowed by the sea causing larger waves to rush outwards. His eyes quivering at the sight, the thought of Natasha's death along with the others was all that bombarded his mind.

*Pzzt....Marcu....pzzt.....*

At that moment Marcus' eyes lit up, it was full of static, but he could tell that it was Natasha.

“NATASHA! YOU'RE ALIVE!” Marcus screamed.

*Pzzt....Marcus.....they're all dead.....pzzt...that MF....pzzzt... killed them all....pzzt....in a single shot....*

“Drake.....Vladmir.....Arturo.....you all died.....because you stayed with me....NOO!!!!: Marcus' screams burst out echoing through out the cockpit and spread out across the night's cold, crisp sky. Suddenly his face jerked to the side, now facing the direction in which the unknown MF headed in. His fists quivering holding in his anger as trickles of blood ran down the crevices of his palm from his fingernails digging deeply into his skin.

“You'll pay.....”

### Chapter Nineteen: And Life Goes On

News spread quickly about the tragic events that raided Tokyo a few days earlier. Televisions screens out on display in every electronic store all played the same news feeds that continued to run. Radio stations were no different; every form of public transportation that was not equipped with LCD displays would end up playing news stations from the radio keeping its passengers on edge.

Her head leaned up against the pane glass window on the side of her seat; the dew from the moisture building up kept her cool. Her eyes were half opened as she stared out into the raining evening. She no longer had any clue as to where they were, all she knew was that she was on her way back to New York after years of being held in some secluded facility that Genesis had kept watch over.

“You ok? You haven’t said anything since we left South Carolina.”

Sharon shrugged her shoulders not even bothering to respond to her father’s interrogation.

“You know we’re almost back in New York. Only a few more hours then we should be hitting the GW.....\*sigh\* Sharon, I know this is hard, but you need to keep strong.”

Sharon continued to ignore her father as she cuddled up under her blanket, her eyes continuing to look out of the window even though if she was asked what she saw she wouldn’t even be able to give a straight answer. Her mind was wandering, thinking of the past 5 years, and how the person she might have had feelings for was with another; a false presentation of the person she was. But above all of these feelings her grief, her anguish was over trying to find a reason for her life to have gone the way it had been going the past few years.

“Once we get home we’ll make it right....I’ll make it right I promise you Sharon.”

“How dad...\*sniff\*...” She finally managed to utter up some words along with the sniffing tingling sensation in her eyes.

“It’s my fault that all of this happened. I should have never let things continue to go the way they were going. Genesis, the Chimera Project, the Novus’ Dragon Project along with the development of the Angel System, I should have put a stop to it when I had the chance. Then maybe none of this would have happened.”

“You can’t undue the past dad...\*sniff\* so stop trying to.”

“What else can I do Sharon? Tell me what you want me to do then I’ll do it.”

“What I want?” Sharon turned around, her eyes bubbling with tears as she looked at her father. A man who was a shell of his former self, the wrinkles in his skin was a sure sign of to his age and

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experience, with each wrinkle came a different sin, and along with that an emotional scar that would never leave his plain of existence.

“I want you \*sniff\* to stop beating yourself over the past...\*sniff\*. I want to help, they’ve messed with my life also dad, I want to make things right.” Sharon replied.

Mathew Amare, at one time a great scientific mind stationed and employed by the global conglomerate Genesis, and now he found himself playing a role he had never learned to play; he was a father. Slowly opening his arms wide to embrace his young determined and hurt daughter he tried to smile despite all of the horrors he knew awaited their newly chosen path.

“I see...well then Sharon. I think you’re ready to see it.”

“Huh?” Sharon before returning her father’s open arms glared back at him with wide eyed expectations.

“Impetus, you’re ready to see it. It will all make sense to you once we arrive in New York. Until then Sharon, get some rest.”

Mathew replied just as he grabbed onto his daughter tightly. At first she was a bit reluctant, still a bit confused over what her father was trying to tell her. But at the hedonistic moment it didn’t matter. Her emotions overflowing her body she embraced her father as the rain tapped lightly against the window behind her.

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“So it appeared once again...” Luscious’ voice echoed in the darkness of his oval office.

“Yeah...the H-3 is becoming much more violent with each attack. I’m not sure how much longer we have until we can pin point its exact location.” Severn replied.

“Yes I know, this is taking much longer than I originally planned. But at least the H-3 took care of what we wanted. With its attack on Tokyo it easily keeps us in the clear. I have to admit I was a bit concerned with Secretary Von Schuler’s decision to send the 181<sup>st</sup> there. While I agree that the remaining EAP representatives posed a threat to my unification plan, the course of action he was planning on taking was a bit brash and could have backfired on us.” Luscious replied. He slowly stood up from his chair, taking a sip of his merlot.

“I know Luscious, but that didn’t happen. The H-3 took care of it. And you immediately began to send supplies over. Which might I add should arrive there in the hour.”

“Did anyone survive from the 181<sup>st</sup>?”

“Yeah, two of them. Admiral Falden and Major Natasha Sullivan survived.” Severen replied.

“I see, we’ll have to deal with them shortly. Aside from you, me and Von Schuler those two are the only ones who knows what really happened there. We can’t let them interfere with the plan.”

“Von Schuler sir?”

Luscious paused for a second, only to place his merlot on the edge of his finely polished table. Glaring back towards Severen who sat comfortably on his leather couch he began to laugh.

“I’m sorry how could I forget? I have a 1 o’clock appointment with the highly renowned Secretary don’t I?”

“Yes you do. And knowing the Secretary’s stance on punctuality he’s probably waiting for you outside of your office right now.” Severen replied with a grin.

“Ms. Suarez, please let the Secretary in.” Luscious said as he pressed a button on his direct phone line to his secretary.

“*Right away sir.*”

Within a few seconds the elderly man walked through the door entering into the President’s office.

“Mr. President if you don’t mind me saying.... Urgh....”

A silent boom echoed in the room as smoke seared off a 9 millimeter pistol being held in the President’s right hand. Smiling Luscious once again took a sip of his distilled wine while clots of crimson

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blood burst into the air as the Secretary collapsed to the floor. Severen, sitting near the entrance glanced over his shoulder and shrugged his shoulders.

“I was wrong, only one shot... how much was it for again?”

“\$50.”

“Ah, \$50 it is then.” Severen mentioned as he stood up walking over the fallen corpse of the Secretary, his hands rustling in his pockets trying to find a money clip.

“Hmm...” Luscious grumbled as Severen handed Luscious a fifty.

“What is it? You think the blood will stain the carpet?”

“No, that’s not it. I’m out of wine.”

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The sun managed to sneak up on him, unsuspecting as it may have been Stephen continued his run through Central Park. The leaves were rustling on the surrounding tree branches as he made his way through the cement pathway. Paying little mind to his surrounding he continued to stare forward, his mind reflecting on the events that were engulfing the world. He saw images of space, of Dammerung, of the Azure Cup tournament, images of Rebel358 and the chaos that he brought to the world 3 years ago. And finally of his brother and his reckless random actions that he performed at Dammerung.

“Damnit Adam...just what the hell happened...” Stephen mumbled as he ran.

The people to his sides became nothing more than distorted motion blurs as his pace picked up from each triggered memory. Sweat rolled down the tanned skin staining his cloth, with each impact on the ground he moved even closer to the exit of the path where a charcoal convertible awaited his arrival. Stephen’s eyes widened once he made contact with the machine now only a few feet before him. Ashley stood there smiling, leaning against the passenger side door. The wind was blowing slightly causing her blonde hair to wave through the air along with the edges of her cerulean shirt and black skirt.

“Ashley...” Stephen mumbled.

“I just got a call from Mario. We need to go, hurry up.” Ashley screamed.

“A call?” Stephen began to ponder what Mario could want that would cause Ashley to come pick him up from his daily run. Needless to say Stephen finished his run quickly, he pushed his legs to the limit as he sprinted the remaining distance between him and the car.

“Over do it?” Ashley mentioned chuckling, her hand covering her budding lips trying to hold in her laughter. Stephen just cringed as he panted grabbing onto the plastic water bottle on top of the hood.

“Anyway get in. We need to head out to Penn Station.”

“Penn? Why?”

“I’ll explain it once you get in. You know how much of a bitch traffic is in this city.” Ashley replied smacking Stephen on the back of his shoulder. Her finger briefly grazed the button on her key chain causing both the driver’s side and passenger’s doors to slide upwards. Stephen slid into the leather chair which was somewhat sticky due to the heat wave that was passing through the lower New York state and Long Island. Moving his body from side to side in an effort to become truly comfortable he finally grabbed onto the seat belt and locked it in place.

“So what exactly is going on?”

Ashley glanced over at Stephen as she ignited the electrical engine of her 04 Stallion, a sleek yet powerful looking car. The hood slanted downwards to a triangular edge, the head lights of the car were thin and angular like a triangle. The back was smoother with less angular edges and thin strip like tail lights. Since it was an electrical car it had no exhaust system, only four vent pipes to discharge the heat build up in order to keep the engine and the car cool.

“Remember when Adam appeared out of nowhere at Dammerung?”

“Of course, why?”

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Ashley suddenly put her Stallion in gear and shot forward forcing her way into the ongoing traffic. The sudden movement caused Stephen to be thrown into the crevices of his seat.

“Holy crap Ashley, slow down!” Stephen yelled.

“Oh calm down you cry baby. You pilot an MF that goes at ground breaking speeds and you can’t handle a jump from 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>? Wow, Stephen, wow.”

“That’s not the point....car! CAR!” Stephen screamed pointing his finger outwards at the back of a car that was coming closer to their car.

Ashley laughed as she jerked the steering wheel to the left causing her car to narrowly avoid a collision. Ignoring the sound of the horn flaring at her she continued towards Penn Station.

“Jesus Ashley...you’re dangerous.”

“I know I am, that’s what’s so attractive about me. Heheh.”

“On to the point please.”

“Oh right that, well I have some news on some events that happened on Mars during our amazing President’s speech.”

“...”

“Well, since you’re so interested. A Red Fury base camp located on the out skirts of Terrenus was attacked by a group of MF’s known as the Night Stalkers.”

“Night Stalkers? I’ve heard of them. Not entirely sure whose jurisdiction they fall under but I’ve heard that they’re extremely dangerous. Why?”

“Well according to Intel, Adam was there.”

“What?!” Stephen yelled, his attention turned fully towards Ashley.

“Yeah, it seems as if he’s taking up camp with them now.” Ashley replied as she glanced over at Stephen.

“So he’s joined up with them now....what does this all mean?”

“There’s more.”

“More?”

“Yeah a lot more Stephen. Mario received a phone call some time last night just before the attack on Tokyo. The person on the other line was Mathew Amare.” Ashley muttered.

“What?!”

Stephen dropped the water bottle from his fingers, his eyes widened and quivering from shock. For all he knew Mathew Amare had died 2 years ago in a Genesis facility. Hearing that he was alive was significant enough to freak him out.

“I know...he was thought to be dead. But that is clearly not the case. Stephen, Genesis cloned him, and according to Mathew cloned his daughter, Sharon as well.”

The bombs continued to drop in Stephen’s opinion; it wasn’t something that was far fetched after all he knew well enough about the clones that Genesis was producing. The only unknown was their purpose.

“So you’re telling me that the Sharon Adam is with is a clone....But why would Genesis bother to make a clone of a girl who has no political influence? It makes no sense to me.”

“That’s what I said at first, but Mario told me the rest. The only reason Mathew and Sharon were cloned was to be able to manipulate Adam. Luscious Malum is planning something and he obviously wanted Adam out of it.”

“So he used a cloned version of Sharon because he knew he could control it unlike the real thing. But why is Adam so important....unless....”

“Unless what?”

Stephen turned his head to his right staring out at the blurs that would be buildings in the greater New York area.

“Our parents were working on an MF that would be able to react to the adrenaline being produced by its pilot and increase performance. But do it in a way that wouldn’t harm the pilot like the Chimera Project. The result was the NVS-X104-Dragon, along with the Angel System. For some reason he wants to keep that MF and Adam away from his plan. But what is he planning....”

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“Who knows, but we’re going to have to find out soon. Because the world is on the brink of accepting him as a global leader... and also, there’s one more thing. The clones had a limited life span, and Sharon’s clone reached her limit weeks ago. So it’s extremely probable that the Sharon Adam knows has died. That most likely acted as a catalyst to the events that followed.”

“So he thinks she’s dead...shit, he needs to know this.” Stephen replied sternly.

“And how do you propose that? He’s on Mars, and with Luscious’ policy on Mars right now, we won’t be able to get there easily.”

“We’re going to have to figure something out soon. Because with the way things are going it won’t be long until Luscious attacks Red Fury.”

“I know Stephen...I know...”

“Just get to Penn Station as fast as you can. I need to find out the truth behind everything. And Mathew Amare should be able to enlighten me...”

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“Gail...”

Gail turned at the sound of his voice.

“What is it? I’m already aware of the H-3’s latest appearance. Have you made any progress on the situation?” Gail replied. His eyes glued to the television screen that was setup a few feet before him inside a glorious entertainment center.

“Yes actually. A recent satellite report has confirmed a heat signature for the target based on its prior incidents at Paris and Rome. It’s a hypothetical heat signature but if our radars ever detect any MF close in a signature then we’ll be able to locate it.”

“Good work, I’m impressed Lucian. We need to acquire the H-3 before Luscious Malum finds it. If Luscious were to gain its power then, well...then the upcoming war will become a massacre...”

“War? What war?”

“Don’t be naïve Lucian. Red Fury will most likely retaliate. Luscious has drawn first blood by attacking them directly at Terrenus. He’s manipulating them into attacking, if they do that then in the public’s eyes they would appear to be nothing more than an evil organization trying to disrupt the newly found peace that was given to the world. You need to remember that no one is aware of the attack on Red Fury. Luscious is a slick man Lucian, he is very manipulative and as such is known as a sweet talker.”

“I see, and is that why we’ve been supplying Red Fury with new technology?”

“Exactly. I do not believe that Luscious Malum’s ideals are just. We need to stop him and with Red Fury’s current strength it would be nothing short of a slaughter. That is why it is imperative that we find the H-3.”

“I will do my best to achieve that goal Gail. For the pride of Orbis and all of humanity I will not fail you.”

“Thank you Lucian, you always were my closet friend.”

“What can I say, we grew up together.”

“That we did. That we did...”

His eyes opened slowly, his vision was blurred at first allowing him to only make out smooth unrefined images. As he tried to move he cringed feeling aches and pains throughout his entire body.

“Ah, you’re finally awake. Another nightmare Zach?” Reine said softly as he entered the room.

“Huh...yeah, something like that. What time is it?”

Reine shrugged his shoulders glancing at his wrist watch. The digital display read 1:45 PM.

“It’s a quarter to 2 Zach. You’re always sleeping in late these days. And having nightmares all the time isn’t normal. Are you sure you’re ok?”

Zach managed to slid up from the ivory pillows that were acting as a cushion. Sweat dripped from the edges of his hair falling to his sheets. He took a deep breath as he took a glass filled with water from the end table next to his bed.

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“I’m fine. I swear.” Zach replied taking a big gulp of the water.

Reine sighed as the sound of jets soaring over the building’s roof caught his mind. They had both followed Gail and Orbis during their tour of Europe and Asia. Currently they were camping out in a small village on the outskirts of Beijing. After catching Gail’s speech in Rome they both became intensely curious with his future plans. But the continuing chaos that spread through out the nations in their vicinity only furthered Reine’s fears.

Still feeling the need to prove himself to his friend, and to himself he stuck it out; bottling up his concerns and reservations deep within his subconscious.

“Are you ok? Here you are worrying about me and yet you’re the one daydreaming.” Zach humorously stated.

“Yeah, I’m ok. Hurry up; we’re supposed to meet up with Gail by 3 for the next conference.”

“I’m hurrying alright, jeez...so impatient.”



**Chapter Twenty: Death's Song**

The burning remains of the Red Fury facility littered the sky with polluting toxins. Most were in shock that their lives were still intact while others were not as fortunate. The attack on their base and the loses of soldiers was hard on all of those who still believed in the brightly lit dream of Carlos Rendetore. The garage was bustling with activity, new MFs from Shades to Night-Wings had finally arrived thanks to quick thinking on Gail Contadino's part. Ever since Gail decided that he would aide Red Fury in their quest it seemed that Red Fury would be able to fight, regardless of whatever loses they sustained.

"Is he still in there?" Michelle asked. She and Alex were updating their OS for their respective MFs. They wanted to be more prepared for another attack, because they knew the Night Stalkers wouldn't just leave them alone, that they would return.

Alex shrugged his shoulders glancing briefly at the remains of Blue Dragon. The MF for the most part was unsalvageable, only the core remained. The singed metal coffin was hanging on wires keeping it in place. For the past few days since the attack Adam remained cooped up in his cockpit for whatever reason. On occasion David or another Red Fury soldier would go check up on him, try to get him to come out but each try always ended in the same way; he refused.

"It looks like he took it pretty hard. I don't know if he'll ever come out of there." Alex replied.

"Pft, what a fool he is. Why are we sheltering him anyway? At this rate I don't think he'll be much help to our cause." One Red Fury computer technician mumbled.

Michelle immediately dropped her diagnostics sheet of paper and looked out of her cockpit. It was easy to tell that she was offended by the ignorant remark that the technician made, she did after all spend time with Adam and his friends during the Azure Cup tournament 3 years ago and in doing so did get to know the man and become his friend.

"What the hell do you know?! He's dealt with a lot of shit; enough shit that would make an average person break down and stop fighting. But he fought through it, he fought to protect us even though he lost which he once fought to protect! Show some respect!" Michelle screamed.

The computer technician instantly began to blush red from embarrassment, feeling weak and defenseless he slowly turned his head back to his laptop which was connected to D-Block by a few cables and continued his diagnostics test.

"Damn Michelle, you didn't have to freak out on the kid." Alex replied with a slight chuckle.

"I'm sorry, it's just that I know what he's going through and I easily get frustrated when people say ignorant things like that." Michelle replied as she sat back in her chair. Picking up her sheet of data she once again began to tediously type in the new OS adjustments.

"(Is there anything left for me to do? I've fought to my breaking point Sharon....and because of the extra pressure I exerted I broke the very blade that has been protecting me and everyone else I care about. I...I think this was supposed to happen, that I am supposed to stop fighting. Maybe I am no longer needed....)" His thoughts echoing around the walls in his minds. His fingers rustled through a photo album that he kept on the side of his chair. Each glossy image acting as a window into his subconscious, each one a reason to keep fighting, to not give up, but in his current situation there wasn't much left that he could do.

Ever since he was 16 he found him stuck between two extremes of emotional states, depression or anger. Very rarely did he manage to find the balance between the two, and in his mind Sharon Amare was that balance. Death surrounds everyone in existence, but death oddly enough seemed to follow him around like a loyal dog. Times came in his life that he cursed the path that he had chosen, the MF at first was like a game to him, something that he enjoyed to do. But it quickly turned into a curse, something that brought deaths to those around him. When his childhood friends died due to their knowledge about

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Genesis and the Chimera Project he wasn't sure how he could go on, but then there was Sharon. A physical embodiment of hope, something that kept him going through the tough times and now, for all he knew she was gone. Gone because of his curse, because of the decisions he made. How could he move on knowing this?

"Crap...." Adam screamed as he punched the side display screen in his cockpit. His fist shattered through the plastic LCD causing jagged shards to pierce his skin staining the surroundings with his blood. Briefly he cringed from the pain, the sharp sensation that tingled through the area of impact; he watched as his blood flowed like a thin river around the ridges of his knuckles, he then chuckled.

"This isn't a dream after all...." He mumbled under his breath. He allowed his right arm to hang over the edge of his seat while his blood dripped to the floor with every passing second.

"Are you ever going to come out of there?"

Adam's head turned as David peeked into the remains of Blue Dragon's cockpit. A band-aid covered the area on his forehead just above the ridge of his nose, most likely covering up a cut he received during the battle that took place a few weeks prior.

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk, do you have time?" David asked, only to pause briefly as Adam stared back at him eerily. "Heh, of course you have time."

"What?"

"Listen, I'm sorry for what has happened, but you can't let it effect every decision you make. Because to be blunt if you keep this up you're going to die."

"And you're point?"

"My point is that you're still alive because there is much left for you to accomplish. It would be such a shame for you to get killed for nothing."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"Actually I do. You see I've been there before. I've lost all of my family due to the war, and most of my friends. But the difference between you and I is that I know how to focus on the lives they lived, and not the lives they'll never live. You're stuck in the past Adam; don't you think it's time you moved forward?"

Adam began to start speaking only to pause in mid motion, his eye lids closed halfway, his neck turned inwards towards the right as he glared at his injured hand. The blood was still dripping off his dangling finger tips staining the frigid metal side panels. What David was telling him was the truth, and it was never that he disagreed with what David was saying; in fact it was the exact opposite. He knew he was living in the past; it was comfortable to surround one-self with enjoyable memories that would never betray the moment. Adam sighed pulling the strands of dark brown hair that flowed over his eyebrows and face. His knees quivered and his hands began to push upwards. David at this moment began to smile, he slowly moved away from the cockpit's entrance allowing Adam to exit.

"You're right....I need to move on. I need to celebrate the lives they all lived, thank you. I guess I always knew this but needed someone else to clarify its meaning." Adam replied.

"So what do you intend to do now?"

Adam turned facing David who was now standing on his left with one hand leaning against the burnt core and the other gripping onto the frigid metallic railing.

"I don't know...with Blue Dragon gone I don't have any means to fight. I wouldn't be much use to you guys outside of an MF." Adam replied.

"Heh, so does that mean you're staying?"

"I guess it does..."

"Good. Why don't you take a Shade for now? We'll modify it for you for better flight time."

"A Shade? Hehe, guess it's better than nothing." Adam replied with a grin.

"Alright then, what do you want us to do with the cockpit?"

"Destroy it. There's no need to have this thing lingering around anymore....it's time to move on right?" Adam chuckled as he replied sarcastically.

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“Hehehe, yes indeed. But here...” David reached into the cockpit grabbing onto a leather bound photo album. “Moving on is one thing, but if you want to celebrate their lives then you’ll need this.” David said as he tossed the album through the air. Adam turned around not expecting the falling book; he caught it with both hands and quickly brought it back in clutching it to his chest. Looking back up at David he grinned and nodded.

“Thanks...” He meagerly replied just before stepping onto thin obscure looking elevator.

David nodded back waving his right hand in the air; it was a short wave, the kind that people use as a substitute for “goodbye”.

“Looks like things are finally falling into place... we can’t afford to wait much longer...” David mumbled under the short quips of breaths he took.

Adam walked through the hanger at a slow pace, paying no mind to the dozens of Red Fury soldiers passing him by. He was amazed at how many MFs they had obtained even if they were a gift from Gail and Orbis. Obtaining Shades and Night-Wings were no small task, especially due to the near perfect condition they were in. For some reason he began to feel like himself for the first time in years. His breathing was relaxed, his eyes opened widely so to observe everything that was in sight. Maybe he just needed to hear someone say exactly what he was feeling, or maybe it was just a random inner epiphany, either way it didn’t make a difference to him. Harsh times were ahead and he knew that quite possibly more than anyone else.

With the clear mind he was able to remember his original plan, his plan to avenge his friend’s deaths and find out exactly what Luscious Malum was planning to do. There had been so many bumps in the road that diverted his attention elsewhere, making him weak, making him question his true purpose.

“Sharon...why did you’re body decompose? Were you really nothing more than a failed clone?”

*A slight fizzing sound soon entered his ears grabbing his attention. His glazed brown eyes turned towards Sharon. What he saw rattled his soul, his eyes widened; the tears began to stop flowing. He began to crawl towards her body that was decomposing right before his eyes. With the brisk gentle breeze Sharon’s skin turned to dust evaporating into the wind. Adam just sat there horrified as he watched Sharon’s body become replaced with mahogany ash.*

Sharon, the beautiful angel on Earth that he knew was really a lie. A tool of someone to manipulate him into a sense of depression, that much was obvious to him now with a clear mind. Adam stopped as a machine began to call out his name as if saying “chose me.”

“Will I really be able to help out in this thing?” He mumbled as he began to approach the silver colored Shade before him. Wires spread out on the floor around the feet of the machine, sparks of fire radiated outwards from the tools that the mechanics were using to finish tuning up the Shade to make it more maneuverable in and out of space.

“So you’re going to take a Shade then?”

Adam shrugged; he knew the sound of the voice that was beckoning him far too well. With every octave of her voice came a memory of her and Mario bantering, arguing, or just making normal conversation. Adam turned back smiling, something he hadn’t been able to do for months.

“Looks that way doesn’t it.” Adam replied.

“Sorry that they can’t repair Blue Dragon...”

“Meh, it’s not a big deal. To be a well rounded pilot you shouldn’t be confined to one unit.”

“Heheh, interesting way of thinking. You and Mario are truly two different people.” Michelle replied giggling.

“Mario...I haven’t seen him in about a year come to think of it. What about you...”

“No...we haven’t talked since we went our separate ways....but hey, that’s in the past we need to look towards tomorrow right?” She continued to try and act cheery, giving the defensive front in order to

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protect her true feelings; feelings she felt needed to be bottled up in order to give her full attention to Red Fury.

“I see...leaving your friends behind is difficult isn't it...we're just a bunch of stubborn fools eh?” Adam replied, he smiled back at Michelle whose body language skills were horrible, unable to control her feelings; they were always apparent.

“Listen, I'm going to calibrate this Shade's OS. If I don't I'm going to become antsy, we'll talk later ok?”

“Huh...yeah. Hey, would you mind umm...helping me with my training.”

Adam's eyes widened, it wasn't something he was expecting to come out of her mouth. He stared back at her, her eyes focused, determined, unlike the quivering eyes she had during their encounter. “I...I don't want to ever go through that fear again. I never want to put my friends in danger's path because of my inability to act.”

“I see...ok then. I need to get used to the sluggish controls of the Shade anyway. It'll be good for both of us.” Adam replied.

“Thanks Adam....”

\*\*\*\*\*

*Nagoya, Japan  
0700*

“Did that all really happen Marcus...I mean they can't be dead...”

Marcus Falden, a soldier at first, and a human last had just survived one of his most challenging endeavors yet. His eyes were lacking the vibrancy they once had come accustomed to having, his entire demeanor was different. He heard Natasha's act of denial but chose to ignore it, he just sat in a wooden chair staring down at his Ramen noodles, the steam still floating in the atmosphere around his face. For the past 15 minutes his fingers spun his chop sticks around cutting through the sullen atmosphere that surrounded the small restaurant.

“Are you even listening to me?”

“Huh...sorry...”

“You haven't, you've just been sitting there, twirling your chop sticks.”

“Natasha now's not the time. My mind is somewhere else.”

“You can't change what happened you know.”

“Grr\*, don't you think I know that. I can't change the past; no one can change the past. So there's no reason harping over it...you taught me that when you saw me in such a disgusting weakened state. I will get them revenge....that MF....just who the hell was that?”

*“NATASHA!” Marcus screamed as he thrust the accelerators forward sending OZ into a barrel roll, his adrenaline pumping vigorously through his veins allowing the g-forces that were pushing against his body to feel like nothing, at that moment she was his only concern.*

*Just before OZ could reach the escape pod a surging beam of positronic energy sped over the waves of the Pacific heading straight for OZ. Marcus' eyes glanced over to the side taking full notice of the oncoming attack.*

*“That son of a bitch!” Marcus screamed.*

*OZ's left arm quickly moved in front of the MF's torso as Marcus moved in front of the escape pod floating defenselessly over of the ocean. Just before the brunt of the beam collided OZ's energy shield ignited spreading outwards in all directions. He cringed as the massive beam exploded on the outer edges of his shield. The impact was intense, much more powerful then he was used to dealing with. But with Natasha in mind he kept his position, in any normal situation his sense would have told him to leave, to dodge the attack and take as minimum amount of damage as possible. But this was different, he did the logical thing then Natasha would die.*

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*“YOU SON OF A BITCH! IS THIS ALL YOU GOT!” Marcus screamed.*

*Ignoring all heat warnings and other internal messages Marcus pushed his thrusters at full capacity. OZ began to slowly move forward towards the beams point of origin. Finally unable to take much more damage the armor in the left armor began to crack, flames ignited around each crack and the energy shield began to lose its power. Marcus cringed, he knew what was coming.*

*With a loud explosion flames ruptured through the left arm unit of OZ, the silver MF lost its balance and crashed into the unrelenting waves below while the left arm flung through the night's sky.*

*“No....I can't be defeated here...I'm Marcus fucking Falden!” Marcus screamed as OZ erupted with a blaze of glory out of the Pacific. With one arm left he equipped his positron cannon. The elongated cannon rotated underneath the arm joints and into firing position. With out hesitation he fired. The cannon roared loudly sending the destructive beam forward. In the far distance he could see it, he saw the mysterious MF that caused all of his current anguish. The MF was surreal in appearance, shrouded in the shadows of the night. Marcus sat on the edge of his seat in anticipation only to be disappointed. The MF dodged at the last second and the beam was sent into the heart of Tokyo causing a tremendous ball of fire to erupt allowing for chaos to spread.*

*Marcus....*

*“Marcus...are you ok?” Natasha mumbled as she placed her hand on top of his.*

*“Huh....I'm fine. You think that friend of yours can fetch us a transport? We need to head back to America. The Secretary is going to want to know what happened.” Marcus replied.*

*“I can ask him, it wouldn't surprise me since he's holding OZ for us. You're just lucky that I toured here when I was in the Reserves.”*

*“I know....”*

\*\*\*\*\*

*“It's been a long time Stephen”*

*Stephen extended his arm out to the elder, Mathew Amare who gladly accepted.*

*“It has, we thought you were dead.” Stephen replied.*

*“I'm not surprised. Luscious made a clone of us for a reason. It's only natural that he'd use it to manipulate everyone who knew us.” Mathew replied.*

*“I see...but what I still don't understand is why he would clone you and your daughter. What possible gain could he achieve through that.?”*

*“5 years ago I confronted him about the Chimera Project, and it didn't go to his liking. He threatened me with the well being of Sharon...”*

*This is wrong Luscious...”*

*“I am fully aware that manipulating human DNA is blasphemy. But....I kind of enjoy the role of God.”*

*Professor Amare's eyes widened, he quickly jerked around to look at Luscious but was greeted with only darkness.*

*“I'm right here Professor.” Luscious replied as he suddenly appeared on the right side of Professor Amare. The speed of Luscious appeared to be not human and caused the Professor to lose his grip on the control throttle.*

*“This is the second time you have gone behind my back in an attempt to betray me old friend. First you give away the Dragon, and now you're attempting to destroy this Company's greatest project. Do you want us to fail, you do realize that if we fail than this country's defensive and offensive*

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*capabilities become outdated and we become open for attack and possible invasion. Now you wouldn't want that to happen would you? Think of your daughter."*

*"I am thinking of Sharon..."*

*"Hmm, interesting. Well old man, we had a deal if I recall. Why are you trying to break my back here? I like you, I like your daughter, don't make me do something I find pleasure in doing."*

*"Luscious...please, leave my daughter out of this...I won't say anything about Chimera or C-2..."*

*"I could care less about Chimera or C-2 being leaked out. Both of them will only be traced back to the government. All the paper work was filled out by them, Genesis in terms of legality have nothing to do with either project." Luscious replied grinning.*

"So what is it that Luscious hopes to gain from everything?" Ashley questioned.

"I don't know...that is what I intend to find out." Mathew replied. Looking back at Sharon and then again at Stephen. "Will you help us?"

"Stephen?" Ashley asked.

"That bastard has played around with people's lives for long enough..." Stephen replied, his hand shaking by his side.

### **Chapter Twenty-One: Those Chosen by Destiny**

A silo of ERMs burst in the air causing a torrent of thin focused beams of energy to rain down onto an unsuspecting Shade. Adam quickly pulled back on the throttles causing the boosters to move at a 45 degree angle. With the new angle in place his feet pivoted onto the steel pedal, following the move both boosters let out a howling scream of energy and the Shade entered evasive maneuvers. Beams of energy fell at every side that Adam looked at, his quick reflexes allowed him to dash from side to side, weaving in and out of the net of energy that plagued the land.

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“Not bad Michelle, but you’re going to need to work on your accuracy and timing.” Adam muttered.

Red Dawn flew around the Martian ground, spurts of crimson dust fluttered into the air from the high velocity machine that flew at such close ranges. Michelle listened to every bit of advice Adam continued to give her but never responded verbally, only with actions. Her hazel eyes locked onto the silver MF before while her FCS struggled to obtain a solid lock.

“(Who would have thought he would be this capable in a Shade. Red Dawn is easily 5 times more powerful than that production model, and yet...I can’t hit him!)” Michelle screamed at her inner thoughts.

Suddenly the Shade performed a barrel roll causing it to turn towards Red Dawn. In the middle of the performing action the Shade extended its right arm and began to fire. Red Dawn jerked to the right avoiding the first barrage of attacks that were flung in her direction but at the same time Adam increased his speed heading to its left on course to intercept Red Dawn.

At first Michelle was surprised by the oncoming Shade but quickly shook off her bewildered state. Dropping her machine gun Michelle reached for Red Dawn’s energy saber.

“You’re too slow Michelle! You’re going to have to recalibrate your OS to respond quicker to your commands!” Adam shouted just before his Shade swung its right arm slicing through the saber which was firmly grasped in the metallic fingers of Red Dawn. The small explosion knocked the crimson MF off balance, as Michelle fell backwards the Shade placed its right leg behind the lower knee joint of the MF. Upon contact Red Dawn completely fell to the ground causing a minor tremor to spread outwards through the ground.

“Damn...” Michelle sighed placing her face in the palm of her hands from frustration.

“I think that should be about enough for today. I’m not sure how much longer I can deal with this OS configuration. You did pretty well, just make the necessary OS configs and you’re response time should increase a great deal.” Adam replied.

The Shade’s right arm extended towards the fallen MF with its hand opened. Michelle sighed and Red Dawn took hold of the hand before her.

“Thanks...”

“David you mind if I come in?” Alex asked. He stood outside of the main office for Terrenus’ Red Fury HQ. The facility was essentially new with unfinished paint jobs lining the hallways and tiles instead of carpet for the color.

David looked up from the folder he was sinking his head in. He carefully placed the collection of information on his desk next to his laptop.

“Yeah, come in.”

The doorknob turned and Alex entered the dull office. It was small and still unfinished like the walls in the hallways. For the most part the office was plain, only a few 2x3 windows a leather couch and David’s desk.

“Listen I’ve been thinking about this, maybe it’s time we moved our operation to the HQ in Aetherius...you know, go back to Evo.”

“Evo? Hmm, the only problem with that is that people have begun to continue with their lives. Living in peace, or in as much peace as they can find, right now we’re a marked organization. Where ever we go chaos is sure to follow.” David replied.

“But we can’t stay here...they know we’re under staffed and low on offensive and defensive capabilities.”

“Do you even know who “they” are Alex?”

“The Night Stalkers.”

“That’s not what I meant. I mean do you even know who’s behind that group.”

“Well...no I guess I never thought about it.”

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“Well I did. I managed to get a hold on their credit history; I knew all of those weapons couldn’t have come out of thin air. They had to have been produced somewhere. It seems that the Seraphs were in fact developed by Genesis.”

“Genesis manufactured them? I could have sworn one of the small organizations like Revelations would have built them. You know, in order to compete with Genesis.”

“That’s what I thought at first, but after the death of their head of office, Vincent Avidus Revelations seemed to have dwindled out like a weak flame. But what matters is that Genesis built them and were then transferred to the “Earth Government” the organization created by the neutral nations of the world.”

“But that doesn’t make much sense. If they’re neutral then why would Genesis be selling them weapons?”

“That’s the thing, Genesis never sold them. They transferred them. The contract was a fake one, created as a means of eye candy. It was never meant to check through, probably because they thought no one would ever deep this far down.”

“So what exactly are you saying?”

“I’m saying that the neutral nations were never neutral. They have been manipulated by the Trinity Alliance from the beginning. Luscious Malum is using them as a means of performing unspeakable deeds without ever having to be put under question.”

“Then when the Seraphs attacked...”

“Yes, they were sent by Luscious Malum. It seems that he does intend to get rid of us by force. This Utopia that he speaks of...it has to be something tremendous for him to be getting ready to start another war over...”

“So what do you plan to do David? We can’t just stay put; we’d be placing everyone who believed in Carlos’ dream in danger.”

“\*Sigh\*... I know, it’s a difficult decision. But that’s where Carlos and I differ. He believed in just defending Mars when attacked and in leaving the rest of the world alone. I do not believe anything will ever be accomplished with that type of thinking. We need to prove that we should not be taken lightly.”

“You’re not suggesting...”

“Yeah I am. It’s time that we retaliate. We still have access to the EAP satellite cannon that is floating between Earth and the Moon. We’ll start off with that.”

“You’re going to fire it...but how many deaths will there be because of this?”

“There are always going to be casualties Alex. But those deaths will be a ray of hope for everyone else. We’ll target Washington, the TA’s capital. This will be their only warning. Red Fury is not going to sit around and do nothing...not anymore.”

“Then what? What do you intend to do after we fire the cannon? Invade the Earth?”

“We have Gail’s support don’t we?”

“You...you’re serious. You’re planning on invading Earth...”

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On the outer edges of Long Island City in Queens the atmosphere was eerie to say the least. On the corner of 43<sup>rd</sup> avenue and 9<sup>th</sup> street near the East River was a facility if it could be labeled as such. The walls were rotted and the paint was chipped, the shingles were hanging loosely over the 2 windows on the second story, the windows themselves were shattered leaving nothing more than rough jagged edges connected together through intricate spider webs.

“You sure this is the place? Ashley asked, her voice was dry and mellow, you could tell that she was praying that the answer would be no.

The 04 Stallion slowly pulled up towards the mangled cement curb in front of the broken down shack like facility. As the car came to a halt she placed her arm behind the passenger seat looking back at Mathew Amare. Mathew was strapped tightly in the back seat with Sharon’s head leaning on his shoulder.



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“Yeah...I know it doesn't look like much but this is the place.” Mathew replied.

“Is it even safe?” Ashley asked.

“It's just the outside that looks ill cared. It's a front to keep what's inside under wraps.” Mathew replied.

Turning around Stephen glanced back with curiosity.

“What is inside anyway? You made it pretty obvious that this was the top of the priority list.”

“Come in and you'll see for yourself.” Mathew replied.

As the door opened Mathew turned over towards Sharon placing his hand gently on her shoulder. With a slight push her eyes began to open as she awoke. Looking up towards her father she rubbed her eyes as thin strands of her hair swept down covering her eyes and cheeks.

“Dad?”

“We're here Sharon.”

Stephen moved his seat up allowing for Mathew and Sharon to exit the car. Ashley stared at the wasteland like facility holding her blonde flowing hair still on her right side as the wind's gentle breeze passed through.

“Stephen do you have your TA clearance card with you?” Mathew asked once he approached the front door of the facility.

“Umm...I should one second.” Stephen replied as he took out his wallet. “Yeah, I have it, why?”

“Because I'm pretty sure by now Luscious has revoked mine.”

“So we're going to have to try mine then.” Stephen approached the digital card reader located next to the molted door. With a single swipe the crimson light changed to green along with a ringing sound. Mathew and Stephen moved away from the door as it swung open.

“Looks like we're in luck.” Sharon mumbled from behind.

Within taking a few steps into the facility it began to hum causing every light to flicker on revealing a well organized hanger. Ashley's eyes were wide from the shock of its inner appearance, being a CIC agent she figured that she would have access to all different TA facilities, at the very least having knowledge of their existence. But this one was off the map, a facility that was secret and hidden from the world. Sharon walked in standing close to her father while Stephen just stared at the object before him. Attached to metallic binders and cables was an MF, one he had never seen before. It wasn't a Shade, it was something else. Silver in tint, with head unit somewhat reminiscent to Blue Dragon only with two vent horns off to the side and a more rounded shape, the shoulders were angular and smooth while the core extended outwards to a smooth rounded end with vents on both the right and left side. Like Blue Dragon this unit was attached with thigh-cannons only thinner which made them lighter. The legs were biped, with two extra thrusters attached to the lower parts of the legs.

“Mathew what is this?” Stephen asked.

Smiling Mathew glanced over at Sharon briefly and then approached the MF.

“This MF is the sister project of the NVS-X104A-Dragon. This unit is the NVS-V84A- Impetus.” Mathew replied.

“Impetus?” Ashley mumbled.

“Yes, it is another MF that Stephen's parents build using the Angel Drive OS. The Angel Drive is the name of the OS that enables the use of the Angel System. However they made this one under the nose of Luscious Malum and Genesis. Luscious ordered them to make the Dragon along with the Chimera. But in the process they were able to build two more machines. This one, the Impetus, along with that one.” Mathew replied pointing towards yet another MF that was covered by the shadows.

Stephen glanced at the second MF, his lips parted from the initial shock. Instantly he turned back towards Mathew.

“Isn't that...”

“For the most part yes it is...that is the second project... the NVS-X104B-Dragon MKII.”

“So they did make another one...why?”

“It was in case Luscious ever got hold of both the Chimera and the Dragon. It was made with the capabilities to take down both of them. The Dragon was made focusing on power; this one was made with

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an emphasis on speed. Its speed is unmatched, while its power is slightly less than the original Dragon. We need to get it to its rightful owner before the war breaks out.” Mathew replied.

“War? What are you talking about? The war is over!” Ashley interrupted. She walked behind Stephen placing her fingers gently onto his shoulder.

“War dad? What do you mean?”

“He’s right...there is going to be a war. A war between Red Fury and the TA...no, if Luscious has his way, then the United Generation of Earth, otherwise known as the UGE.” Stephen mumbled.

“The UGE? Where the hell did you hear that?” Ashley screamed.

“I’m a Major remember...I hear a lot of things.”

“Luscious Malum intends to bring the nations of Earth together and then attack Red Fury in order to conquer Mars.” Mathew replied.

“Mars? But what’s so important about Mars now? We’ve already gathered enough resources from the planet. It’s just another piece of land to expand humanity.” Ashley replied.

“There’s more than that. There’s his Utopia. The South Western Territory.” Mathew replied.

“The barrier of energy that prevents anyone from entering and the original reason of the war. Most believed whoever claimed what was inside the barrier would be strong enough to control both worlds.” Stephen mentioned.

“Is this world ever going to be able to get rest?” Sharon asked.

“We can only hope...when Luscious is out of the picture.” Ashley replied.

“So how exactly do you plan on getting this to him anyway? He’s currently on Mars, with Red Fury.” Stephen replied.

“So Luscious managed to get him up there then...damn. This brings about a few issues.” Mathew replied.

“You make it sound like Luscious was plotting on him going to Mars.” Ashley replied.

“He was, why do you think he cloned Sharon? He saw how they connected that one day, it was after that meeting that he decided to make a clone. With that clone he was able to manipulate Adam into doing pretty much whatever he wanted. Rebel358 for example, he was a failed clone of Luscious Malum, something that could have brought the great TA President down. He needed it exterminated, hence why he had the Azure Cup tournament. That and to analyze the pilots of the world. Luscious Malum has been pulling the strings of just about every major event that has gone down in the past 5 years.” Mathew replied.

“He took away my life...and what could have been my life. I want to pay him back for that.” Sharon interrupted.

“I know Sharon, that’s why the Impetus is yours.” Mathew replied with a grin.

Sharon slowly moved away from her father, mostly from the sudden comment that flowed out of his mouth. Although not too surprising to her since he mentioned its name on the bus heading back to New York. But the sheer thought of her piloting an MF, especially one as advanced as the Impetus seemed absurd.

“You can’t be serious. Just what the hell am I going to do with that thing?”

“You’ll pilot it off course. You’ve had the proper training since you were 5. You remember how you would just hang around the office with and played with the VR sessions because you were bored. Just because you haven’t been in an actual cockpit doesn’t mean you don’t have the mental capacity to make it work.” Mathew replied.

“You’re making this sound much easier then it is.” Stephen said sternly.

“Just trust me, I’ve been working on this for years, been planning it out.” Mathew mentioned.

“That may be so but still, getting this machine to Adam isn’t going to be easy.” Ashley interrupted.

“You mentioned that he was with Red Fury if that’s the case then he will be coming back to Earth when the war starts. Its unfortunate, but it seems like we’re going to have to wait until that happens. Stephen, as a General you have the authority to bring in new pilots and assign them to MF infantry units correct?”

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“Yeah, why?”

“Then I need you to do me a favor. Take Sharon; get her in the military somehow. Get her to be with you guys. I’m confident that if she’s with your unit that she will be able to meet him again.” Mathew mumbled.

“Dad...I’ve never actually piloted an MF before. Just in simulations, I need time. I can’t just jump into the seat and fight.” Sharon shouted.

“If you’re serious about this Mathew, then I’ll do it. But until Red Fury makes their move I intend to train her. Get her used to piloting in a real environment.” Stephen replied.

“Stephen! You can’t be serious about this!” Ashley yelled.

“I am...her and Adam’s lives have been screwed around with. If I can do anything to make it right then I intend to do it. No matter how illogical it is.”

“But I...” Sharon paused looking back at her father. She sighed; it was true she wanted to make a difference. To make things right, in the back of her head she wanted to meet Adam again. She wanted to pick up where they left off, she wanted him to get to know the real her. “Alright...I’ll do it.”

“Thank you Sharon. Thank you Stephen.” Mathew mumbled.

“I really have a bad feeling about this...” Ashley groaned.

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David stood once again before his Red Fury comrades. The Terrenus base had suddenly changed into a ray of hope for the dying dream of Carlos Rendetore. As David stood in front of the stage leaning against the wooden podium before him, Michelle, Alex and Adam sat behind him as Generals for his army.

“I’m sure all of you here are wondering what I intend on doing about the attack we suffered about a week ago. I bet most of you think that I’m going to switch our base of operations to another secluded area on Mars. But I have bad news for those of you who think that. I have no intention of hiding anymore. The attacks will never stop if we go in hiding, they will only stop when we stand up and do something about it! Luscious Malum wants to exterminate us, he wants to stomp on our dream and replace it with his own. I will not let him accomplish this goal!”

Taking a breath the crowd of a 100 plus soldiers erupted in screams while Adam remained quiet, leaning back in his chair with his arms folded across his chest.

“Today we stand up and fight back! We have acquisitioned the EAP satellite cannon that 3 years ago was preparing to fire onto Earth. Today, right now, we shall complete that task and fire down onto the TA’s capital and send this warning that we will no longer stand by and watch as they destroy our camps and kill our people!”

Adam’s eyes widened, he leaned forward gawking at the words that David said. While everyone else jumped out of their seats cheering for their new leader.

“Nothing good can come from this...” Adam mumbled under his breath.

“We have no choice anymore Adam, if we allow these atrocities to continue then it wont be long before we all die.” Alex replied.

“But...this will only cause more innocent deaths...” Adam whispered.

“Then...then we go to Hell.” Alex replied once again.

“I hold here in my hand the control to the cannon that is now hovering in between the Earth and its Moon. Get ready, as this day is the day that will change our destiny. No, it will change the destiny for all of humanity.” David immediately pressed the button as he embraced the open cheering that he received.

In the depths of space the cannon began to turn slowly as surges of electrical energy burst around the elongated cannon. And then, it fired.

**Chapter Twenty-Two: Colliding Worlds**

*Washington DC, Maryland*  
*0700*

“SIR! Massive energy source heading straight for us!” A soldier screamed.

“What?!” The superior officer for the TA command center yelled back.

“It has just passed through the outer atmosphere. We don’t have much time!” The soldier yelled. His fear was more than apparent; sweat rolled down his face, the heat was intense. His nerves tightened up, his legs shaking, and the back of his feet tapping against the tiled floor. He wanted to run, to get out of the command center, but he knew, he knew in the back of his mind that there was no place to go. His death was pretty much foretold.

“How long?”

“Umm..5 minutes....no wait, 7....oh God, no that’s not it....”

“HOW LONG?!!”

“6 minutes and 45 seconds sir.”

“Jesus, we have to get the President out of Washington NOW!” The superior officer screamed.

“No time. By the time we get in touch with the oval office we’ll already have wasted 2 minutes. And....and there’s no place for him to go. This explosion will take up at the very least 20 meters in the surrounding area.”

“Then it’s a good thing President Malum left for New York an hour ago.” Another voice mumbled. The president’s secretary entered the room, her hair flowing through the air conditioned atmosphere.

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“That’s a relief...but what’s more important...where did this beam come from? Can we at least determine that? And send all information regarding this matter to West Point?”

“Yes...it’s possible. No way....this data, it’s from the EAP Satellite cannon....”

The young naïve soldier’s voiced was muted the instant the beam dug into the base. It happened so fast, the destructive power of the energy ray sent was unrivaled. And yet with all the chaos and destruction it was silent. The command center was eradicated in mere seconds and the soldiers inside incinerated instantly; only God could hear their screams. The flames extended into the early morning sky as the orange orb of destruction singed the ground clean of life. First blood had indeed been drawn.

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“Sir... Washington DC has just been....”

“Destroyed? Yes, I am aware of this unfortunate series of events. Pray for the lives lost John.”

“Who would do such a thing...hold on...Mr. President, we’re receiving a last minute transmission from the TA Central Office...it was sent just seconds before the attack.”

“I see, read it.” Luscious mumbled, he turned his face away from his Secretary of Defense John Lengrin only to be greeted with the serene beauty of the passing clouds.

“Yes sir... Oh my God.”

“What is it?”

“According to this, it was an EAP weapon that caused the devastation. Do you think it was an act of rebellion from within the EAP ranks?”

“No, the EAP no longer has any spirit left. With their representatives gone they’re nothing more than an empty shell awaiting proper filling. This is more like an act of terrorism.” Luscious replied quietly. His charcoal eyes half opened staring out at the flock of crows as they soared through the ivory clouds.

“Terrorists?”

“Red Fury John. Right now Red Fury is the only organization with the resources and the spirit to do such a terrible thing.”

“Red Fury...such a pestilence on society. But to think they would go so far as attacking the capital...no, not attacking; Purging it from the map. Who knows how many innocent lives were lost...” Secretary Lengrin’s fists began to tremble against the plastic lining of the arm rest. The anger swelling inside, twisting and turning, blood nearly boiling was nothing more than the typical first response to a tragedy of this scale. Sniffing the animosity like a canine Luscious began to smile, his eyes closed while his back leaned into the leather embroidered seat.

“Calm down John. Red Fury has just delivered the first blow, and with it has guaranteed the creation of the UGE. They will have no place to hide now, with the public’s eyes distorted crimson and their rage focused on Red Fury any action we take will be seen as justice with no sign of questioning in sight. Every human on Earth will become patriotic, filled with pride for their planet. People will jump at the chance to take a swing at the traitorous Red Fury. So while this is indeed a sad day for Earth, it is at the same time a triumph for our cause giving us all the justification we need to start our plans moving. It couldn’t have worked out any better if I had planned this all myself.”

“Mr. President?”

Sighing Luscious turned towards his troubled and grief stricken Secretary.

“Don’t worry about anything John. Just pray for the grieving families, God will help them through this troubled time.”

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“So he really went through with it then.” His words wisped under the brisk breeze, he slowly stood up from his perched position staring through the crimson dusk set beautifully before him.

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“Yeah...I have to be honest, I never expected David to go through with it. But regardless, I stand by his decision. It's the only way the people of Earth will take us seriously. Now maybe things will change.”

Adam knew what was preparing to come, the death, the sacrifice of innocent lives never brought up a good change; only more death. He turned around facing Michelle who was trying to hold in her anguish. The conflict that was burning inside her soul was apparent through her eyes, bright hazel with a crystalline like shimmer.

“This won't bring the type of change you guys hope for. It's no different than Berlin 3 years ago. In you're eyes this is no more than a retaliation sprung about from the constant Night Stalker attacks, but the people of Earth will only see this as a form of terrorism. It will spark the public's affection for Luscious Malum and thus cause instant war. And you have to know that with the combined forces of the TA and the EAP along with the neutral nations, Red Fury doesn't stand even a minute chance of victory.”

“Don't you think we know this? We don't care if we're out gunned; we will not sit down and be pushed aside like pawns in a game of chess. We will stand our ground and fight until our dreams are a reality.”

“You're ground if any, is Mars and not Earth. Right now you're nothing more than an invading force. You will not find any acceptance outside of the Martian atmosphere.”

“Then so be it. Unlike a political election we don't pride ourselves around popularity. We do what we feel is right, unfortunately the majority of the people do not realize what is right, they merely cling to a leader who seems to be fluent with his or her thoughts. And instead of fighting for their own beliefs they fight for his or hers.”

Michelle slowly began to walk away; the wind began to pick up speed dragging the darkening clouds with it. Adam sighed, his hair flapping through the booming winds slightly distorting his view of Michelle.

“So what makes David any different then the archetypes you mentioned?” Adam mumbled. “Are you really fighting for what you believe? Or are you just clinging to his ideals?”

“I'm not really sure right now. The same goes for you? Why are you staying here? Are you standing up for your own beliefs? Or are you using David as a cushion from your own nightmares?”

“Heh...” Adam slightly chuckled under his breath, his feet moved forward away from the rugged rock ledge as he started moving away. “Wish I knew, right now I'm doing what I think is right. I don't believe in Luscious Malum, I don't know what he is planning but I know he needs to be stopped. So for now I'll take whatever path that will lead me to getting in his way.”

“So you're just using us? That's a bit selfish don't you think?”

“Call it whatever you want. But either way, you guys get an extra knight right? And I get to put a stop to Luscious Malum. So both parties are happy in the end.”

Waving his hand he passed by Michelle leaving her face expressionless and borderline pale.

“You're still kind of weak on your right. You might want to work on building up your defense on that side.” Adam jokingly muttered a few seconds before his body disappeared into the shadows cast by the metallic door leading into the Red Fury complex.

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“David, you do realize what's going to happen next don't you?” Alex stated. He stood before David only a few feet away from his desk while the current Red Fury leader sat staring at the drops of rain that was began to fall.

“\*sigh\* Yes, I know what's going to come. It's too late now to feel sensations of regret. What's done is done, our point has been made. President Malum knows now that we won't sit down waiting for him to come eradicate us.”

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“I understand David, but I’ve been keeping an eye on the news over the web. All of Earth is in an uproar. Pretty much every man, woman and child is now a supporter of Luscious Malum. We are out matched, devastatingly outmatched David, there’s no way we can win this.”

“You worry too much Alex. Trust me. We may be out numbered, but I’ve developed a way to give us an advantage.”

Alex’s eyes nearly went pale, even though he wasn’t 100% sure on what it was that David was talking about he had a good enough idea. There was a prototype weapon that the EAP had developed in the wake of Prometheus and the Crimson Dawn. It was a weapon 100 meters in length, coated in a special polymer that would be able to sustain energy damage with little destruction to its outer armor, a massive ECM jammer that would render an entire battalion of MFs and fighter planes useless. Along with jamming radar and FCS functions, the weapon was able to disable energy and electrical currents causing a system failure rendering frames useless, making them nothing more than a defenseless statuesque machine. Not one person outside of Prometheus ever saw a physical rendition of the machine, and currently it is nothing more than theory. But something in David’s eyes, his confidence along with his eerily calm demeanor which allowed him to fire the cannon told Alex that there was more to the theory; that maybe, just maybe it did exist.

“Please tell me you’re not referring to that EAP Jammer. The one that was nothing more than a rumor.”

“Haha, who said anything about a rumor? I assure you Alex, it is real and I have it under my possession. You see the difference between Carlos and I are the lengths we would go for Red Fury. I am much more of a risk taker, but at the same time I plan ahead. If we were to fight the TA head on we would be crushed. However if we use this weapon we’ll easily even the score. Once we reach Earth in 10 days you’ll see that I’m right.” David replied, his chair spinning away from the pane window. The lack of oil on its joint was apparent as the bolts squealed like a dying pig while the chair relieved itself of the tension once David stood up.

“10 days? If we’re going to make it to Earth in 10 days then we’d have to leave tonight. Look, David you know that I stand by your decisions, but this is starting to get absurd. Do the rest of the Red Fury facilities know about this?”

Walking slowly to the edge of the wooden bookshelf filled with countless strategy books, namely *The Art of War*, David shook his head from side to side while his grin glistened widely.

“Evo is aware of the situation and their units are already preparing for launch in a few hours. Abyssus as well, they’re all just awaiting my final word.”

“But what about the soldiers stationed here? I know you didn’t mention it to them yet.”

“Follow me then Alex. They’re going to find out now.”

“Now? Don’t you think this is a bit abrupt for an invasion? I mean, this is kind of rushed. There’s no way every person here will be able to get ready in time! David, you’re my friend and I respect you as the current head of Red Fury but you need to understand...”

“I know what I’m doing Alex. If you want to question every decision I make then I suggest you leave. Because every decision I make will be the one that Red Fury acts upon. This is the perfect opportunity to attack the TA. They’re already scrambled from the attack on D.C., if we attack now, only a mere 14 hours after the fact we get an even better chance for victory.”

“David...I believe in the dream that Red Fury is founded on. To protect Mars and prevent it’s inhabitants from becoming tainted like the nations of Earth. And I have to be honest I’m seeing the thin line that connects your goal and Red Fury’s mission statement thinning and becoming more distorted with each waking moment. I will stand by your side because for the moment you are Red Fury.”

“If that’s how you feel then I’d suggest keeping your mouth shut and backing me up with actions.” David replied to his friend with a stern tone. It was the first time since they were little that Alex heard him talk like this. Something was clearly different in the way David was speaking. His mannerisms were completely different now, it was certain, at least in Alex’s eyes that his good friend had lost sight of what was important for Red Fury. His goal now was more of a parallel to Luscious Malum.

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David left the room only for Alex to sullenly follow. Alex glanced at the floor staring at his feet while he walked behind his leader. No longer did he feel the unrequited passion for his cause and for his friend. He had seen great people collapse under the power and persuasion of authority and had hoped David would have been different. But from the looks of things, it seemed as though he misjudged his long time friend. With his thoughts trailing he could only wonder what would become of Red Fury under the guise of David Lepidus and his merciless campaign against Earth.

The cockpit of the Shade was smaller and more confined than Blue Dragon, but it was something Adam was forced to become accustomed to in a short period of time. He reclined back in the chair in hopes to find a glimpse of rest. After spending 12 hours reconfiguring the OS to respond quicker to his actions he was finally able to find a setting that was comfortable to his piloting abilities. He and Michelle had both finished 3 training sessions with one another before they were each able to call it the day. Even though he still managed to have the advantage of Michelle's clunky and unbalanced controls, he still felt that he was lacking; that he wasn't ready for what lay ahead.

The loud speaker crackled as David's voice echoed along the hallways and hangers. To Adam's unfortunate dismay he was finally falling asleep only to have it robbed in an instant.

"Asshole...of all the times..." Adam muttered.

*"As you all are well aware. The satellite cannon has indeed struck its target. The TA capital is now nothing more than darkened ass and crimson flames. But do not rejoice just yet as this is only a minor victory. I know what I am about to say may indeed be abrupt and rushed, but I feel it is the proper time to end this whole tragic conflict. Every MF pilot should suit up and report to their appropriate MF's, we will along with the Red Fury bases in Abyssus and Aetherius launch towards Earth and within 10 days will arrive onto Earth. We will strike with a fury that no one has ever witnessed and with that fury we will take Earth and defeat those who oppress us!"*

David's words continued to push forward through the facility but Adam could do nothing short of laughing under his breath while his eyes began to shut from fatigue.

"You are rushing this David...you're impulsive behavior will bring about the end of Carlos Rendetore's dream, and along with that, take the lives of his obedient followers. Haha, I know this will fail...and yet, I still intend to fight along with them if it means I'll be able to get back to Earth and get me that much closer to Luscious Malum..." His words softly faded as he embraced himself in his slumber.



### Chapter Twenty-Three: War of the Worlds

“This will only cause more casualties....if Red Fury does indeed follow through there is no doubt in my mind that every man woman and child will support Luscious Malum.” Stephen mumbled softly.

He leaned forward, away from his wall while Ashley and Heather remained in the kitchen brewing coffee and Mario sat quite comfortably with his legs hanging over the arm rest of the couch.

“\*Yawn\* Not much we can do about it is there? I mean this Red Fury has always marched to their own beat. Even if they do attack, the TA will simply push them aside. I still don’t see why you guys are making such a big deal out of this anyway.” Mario muttered.

“I’m well aware that the TA will make short work of Red Fury. That’s not the point. According to what Adam told me right after the false Tribulation, Rebel358 was indeed the clone of Luscious Malum. And with that being the case I’m sure that President Malum can not be trusted. We all know of the atrocities that Genesis performed, I’m not sure if it would be wise to keep Luscious in power.” Stephen replied.

“Yeah I remember him mentioning something along those lines. It still sounds like science fiction to me, but after seeing those things in space, with the Crimson Dawn I’m not sure where the line between fiction and reality is drawn. I’ll be the first to jump and agree with you that Luscious Malum is a manipulative prick, but I will also be the first to tell you that he holds all the cards right now and there is no way we could ever stand up against him. We’re nothing more than soldiers with big mouths at the moment.” Mario replied.

“\*Sigh\*....I know, for the longest time I continued to fight hoping that one day I would gain a position that would grant me enough authority to change the way of the world. But I’m starting to realize that it was nothing more than a childish dream. Maybe Red Fury is right in their decision....maybe they’re doing what everyone wants to be doing.” Stephen sighed as he spoke.

“You don’t honestly believe that do you? That Red Fury is fulfilling everyone’s inner most desires?”

“Not sure, but all in all they are stepping up to Luscious Malum.”

“You want to join them don’t you?”

Stephen turned away from his window glancing back at Mario. He wasn’t even sure what he wanted, in the pit of his soul he hated Luscious Malum and the TA for what they had been doing. But at the same time he felt torn, torn between his dream and reality.

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“No, I don’t want to join them. But I don’t want to fight for Luscious Malum either. Unfortunately until I have a much better understanding of what Genesis started, the Chimera Project, Rebel358 and the South Western Territory on Mars I have no choice but to stay where I am.”

“So you still want to dig then?”

“Yeah, you don’t have to if you don’t want to. This is purely something for me to do; I will stay with the TA and continue to gain their trust. Hopefully this won’t be a dead end.”

“Nah, I can’t let you do this by yourself. You’d probably die if I wasn’t around to watch out for you.” Mario chuckled.

“Stubborn as always I see.”

“Of course, I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

The two friends began to chuckle slightly while Ashley and Heather pretended to ignore their conversation. They deluded themselves from the danger that was going to approach, and continued to prepare the food for their dinner.

“Ashley do you think this is right?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean forcing ourselves to fight for something we don’t believe in.”

“So you’re going to stay with those two idiots and fight against Red Fury too then..” Ashley mumbled.

“Yeah...I can’t leave them now you know.”

“Yeah I do...if I don’t watch over them they won’t last very long out there.” Ashley replied smiling as she elbowed Heather on the side.

“Haha, yeah, they’d be lost without us wouldn’t they?”

“Very much so. Hopefully once this is over we can all finally move on...”

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“President Malum the press is waiting.”

Luscious Malum slowly turned away from his desk placing his wine glass gently down onto a wooden coaster. The lights in the room were dull, as night had caressed the remains of the once great city of Berlin. 3 years following its destruction a memorial had been built by the EAP as a form of remembrance of those souls that were lost in the burning light of chaos. Currently it has been adopted as a neutral territory for the TA and the EAP to join together along with the neutral nations of the world. A small facility was constructed for the purpose of mirroring the United Nations. It was the hope of Luscious Malum that it would become the new home of the newly found UGE. It was on this day following the attack on Washington that the acting head of the EAP along with Luscious Malum and representatives from the neutral nations of Australia, Africa, and other islands would join together and sign the treaty that would officially form the United Generation of Earth.

“So it begins Severen. You’ve done an excellent job with Genesis and preparing the clones on Mars. I assume everything is ready for the attack.”

“Yes, the Utopian forces are just awaiting orders.”

“Good, once Red Fury’s first wave enters our atmosphere we will unleash the army on Mars. We will attack them from both Earth and Mars and will in the process wipe them out completely.” Luscious replied.

“What about the Night Stalkers. There’s only 5 of the Crimson Dawn left.” Severen mumbled.

“The Crimson Dawn are the least of my concern. Have them do whatever they wish. Once this battle is over their lives are up anyway. Let them at least have some fun with the limited amount of time they have left.”

“Heh, of course Luscious.”

“Thanks, I always knew I could trust you Severen.”

Luscious slowly walked past his associate patting him on his shoulder. What awaited Luscious now was the dozens of reporters who were still engulfed in bewilderment from the abrupt attack on

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Washington. With each step he took his smile grew in stature, after all the years of waiting; his plans were finally being implemented. His confidence and ego were merging and with in mere moments his unrelenting power over all of Earth would be official.

As his hands parted the ivory drapes that were before him Luscious arrived to blinding flashes and bellowing voices. It was crowded, every corner was booming with photographers and news cameras all pointing in his direction. It would be a lie to say he didn't like the attention, after all this is what he had been waiting for.

"If you would all please take your seats and I will be more than happy to answer any questions asked of me." Luscious humbly mumbled.

Like trained puppies every reporter quickly found their seats planting down onto the cold metal objects. Suddenly dozens of hands flew up into the air like a classroom filled with eager students.

"Yes, Mr. Kendrix from Fox News." Luscious muttered.

"Is it true that the brutal attack on the White House was organized by Red Fury? And if so what do you intend on doing about it?"

"Give me a few moments to answer this one Kent, as it is a complex one. Yes Red Fury was indeed behind the barbaric attack on D.C. I had hoped that we would have been able to settle our differences without hurting innocent lives. But from what I can tell Red Fury is composed of nothing more than hotheaded terrorists who want nothing else but to disrupt our lives here on Earth. As you all know, today officially acts as the birth of a new nation under God. The United Generation of Earth, we have finally come to terms and have united for the sake of our wonderful planet."

"I apologize Mr. President for saying this, but you still haven't answered what your intentions are."

"Heh, it's quite alright Kent. I said it was a complex answer. As of right now we are preparing our forces which is composed of soldiers from both the previous TA and EAP along with soldiers from the at one point neutral nations. Each group brings unique forms of technological advances to the UGE and there is no doubt in my mind that we will be able to bring Red Fury down and take back Mars."

"So you intend on retaliating then?"

"In a way yes. We have reason to believe that Red Fury will be advancing their troops soon, we are unaware of how many MF's are being launched against us or if there is anything else we need to worry about. But right now our main objective is the commandeered EAP satellite cannon that Red Fury has managed to get their hands on. Right now the same engineers of that cannon are working with the UGE military Generals and NASA to come up with a way to shut down the cannon. Once the cannon has been deactivated Red Fury will lose most, if not all of their momentum. Unfortunately Kent this is all I am able to tell you. But I promise that Red Fury will not get away with this act of terrorism."

"Mr. President, Stephanie Star for CNN, with the formation of the UGE does this mean that there is going to be an elected leader? And if there is going to be an elected leader would it be far fetched to say that this person would be in a sense the Emperor of Earth?"

Luscious began to laugh, he wasn't sure if anyone would have caught on to that one incidental as quickly as this one young reporter had.

"Miss Star, yes there will be an elected leader of the UGE. And yes this leader would indeed be recognized as the lead representative of Earth. But calling him the "Emperor of Earth" is a bit much. The UGE exists to prevent this one man from having complete control of the entire planet. The UGE is like a parliament or congress, they will have to approve of any action that the head of the UGE would want to take." Luscious replied.

"I see, has the head of the UGE been determined yet?"

"Indeed, I Luscious Malum am the head of the UGE."

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Space, it's nothing more than a void of darkness that swirls through existence with little change. It had only been 10 days since the first battalion of Red Fury fighters launched from Mars. The first wave

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in David's opinion was going to be the pinnacle of the upcoming battle. The lead ship was a refined EAP battle cruiser equipped with dual particle cannons, anti-MF missile barrage packs along with EMP missile launchers. If the battle was to take place in the depths of space it would be a worthy weapon. But for David's purpose it was nothing more than a massive transport ship for 15 MF's.

David had been taking bold moves ever since he took Carlos' place as the head of Red Fury showing no signs of slowing down.

"David how much longer until we reach Earth's atmosphere?" Michelle asked just as she entered the captain's quarters. David turned around in his cushioned chair grinning nearly from ear to ear. He had been quietly staring out into the wonders of the abyss, the glistening stars lighting up the darkness along with the faint glowing aura of Mars.

"I'd say at our current speed about another 12 hours. Luckily the EAP scientists and engineers were very well endowed with intelligence. The Planetary Drive Engine (PDE) uses the energy surrounding the ship along with the gravitational pull from the closet planet and combines them along with the solar radiation from the sun. In turn the PDE manages to create a tiny worm hole around the ship allowing for quick travel between planets. Naturally for this to work you have to have a clear setting, again luckily for us each ship we're using has an artificial computer OS that is already targeted to Earth. So we can just sit back and enjoy the ride. Don't expect me to explain this anymore than I already have, because I barely understand the physics behind it myself and won't pretend to know what I'm talking about."

"Thanks David but I wasn't looking for a physics lesson anyway. I came to you because I have some concerns."

"Concerns? About what?"

"About this entire crusade. Do you honestly believe we're going to be able to stand up to Luscious Malum and everyone on Earth? We're going to be perceived as the invaders, they already look at us as terrorists."

"I see...listen Michelle, I don't care what they think about us. Quite frankly I only care about defeating the Earth and expanding our area of control. We will defeat them, and we will take Earth back."

"So your intention is invasion then...you don't care about Red Fury. About Carlos' ideals of separating from the chaos that the TA and the EAP brought about. You're just trying to prove your own strength. What happened to you David...you were never this selfish."

"Nothing happened to me...if anything my eyes have finally been opened. I understand now that power is the only way to make a difference in this world. Without power you're nobody, you're a pawn to be manipulated by the people who possess power."

Michelle began to quiver, never before had she heard such arrogance flow out from the mouth of her friend. Her heat continued to race from the extreme amount of tension that was being placed upon her body and soul. Her feet began to move backwards, away from David. But with each step David moved a bit closer. His eyes focused, staring back at her with malicious intent. His lips dry and thin, smirking, as if mocking her.

"You of all people should understand what I'm saying Michelle. Don't you want power as well? Didn't you feel helpless and useless when we were attacked by the Night Stalkers? Don't you want power in order to protect your friends?"

"NO! I'm not like that...I have confidence now...I know what I have to do."

"Oh really? And what is it that you have to do Michelle?"

"I can't let you go through with this David. You're not yourself anymore...you're a different person. The real you would never talk like this. What happened to the gentle soul who just wanted to get away from the war? To move to Mars, to follow Carlos Rendetore and live in peace, where did that person go?"

"Hehehe..." David began to chuckle as he sprinted towards Michelle. Michelle's eyes widened from fear, her torso turned around as her leg muscles began to move. She could see the door only a few feet in front of her and yet still so far away. She could feel David now right behind her, but she knew she had to ignore that feeling. She was running on pure instincts now, to get away, to find help. Her fingers

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outstretched towards the door but feel short of escape. David's muscular body appeared in front of her. His movements were fast, faster than they had ever been. The abrupt shock of his speed caused Michelle to gasp and fall backwards. Her body crashed through the glass table that was behind her, shards of glass burst outwards into the air while some scraped through her Red Fury uniform drawing blood. She cringed from the agonizing pain that surged through her body.

"Michelle, Michelle, what are we going to do with you. We very well can't have you running around the ship like this. You'd cause a panic, and in turn jeopardize the mission and we can't have that." David mumbled, his hands caressing his belt just under his leather jacket.

In a trance of fear Michelle crawled or tried to crawl backwards, her palms bleeding forcefully as they crushed into the jagged pieces of glass that lay on the floor.

"What...what are you doing? David..." Her voice was soft, having barely tonal depth.

"I can't have you on this ship in the shape you're in. You'll do nothing but contradict me and endanger the mission. And as you know Michelle, this mission is extremely important and I can't be distracted by you."

"You're not David...you are not the person I knew. You're nothing more than a deluded maniacal arrogant bastard." Michelle screamed.

"Well put..." David replied. His right hand moved away from his belt revealing a 9-milimeter pistol. The metal glistened in the light on the ceiling. Right away Michelle knew what was coming next.

"So you're going to kill me then..."

"Kill is such a strong negative word. I'd say I'm releasing you from this chaotic nightmarish world." David replied.

Michelle finally found the strength to rise up from the ground only for David to sprint behind her and grabbing onto her arms at the same time.

"Ugh..." Michelle uttered as David forcefully made her kneel on the ground. Her face staring at the door, which was now 10 feet away. Her body quivering due to the cold metallic barrel nudging at the back of her scalp.

"So this is it then... after all the years we've known each other. You're the one who is going to kill me...I hope you realize David that you will not succeed. Red Fury will not be able to defeat the Earth. Not the way you're going about it."

"I have no intention of beating Earth. I'm just following orders. Hehe, since you're going to die I have no issues with you being aware of that fact."

"Orders?...you...you're sending Red Fury to die....you're going to kill thousands of people and for what?!!"

"I'm assisting the true bringer of Humanity's Tribulation. Sins will be wiped clean and humanity will be put on trial...hahahahaha"

"You are not David Lepidus...you are not my cousin!"

"Oh will you shut up with that already?"

David's finger pulled the trigger. The bullet exploded out from the barrel violently as it soon pierced through Michelle's head causing an eruption of blood to fill the room. As her lifeless body collapsed to the ground David dropped his gun only to begin whipping his shirt.

"Sigh\* Silence...finally."

Adam stared out the window as the ship continued towards Earth. His eyes focused on the floating debris that lingered in space. They were now passing through the original location of the Azure Cup. He could only wonder to himself why he still remained with Red Fury and why he was going along with David's ridiculous plan to attack the Earth. Still despite all the disagreements he had with David's plan this was the only way he could get back to Earth, the only way to get back to Luscious Malum and finish things. The more he thought about it the less he understood his hatred for the TA President. There was no concrete evidence that connected him to the clones being produced by Genesis. For all he knew the Prodito brothers, Severen and Caleb were behind this. But there was the issue with Rebel358, the

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failed clone of Luscious Malum. The man who defeated him in the finals of the Azure Cup and the man who almost brought about the destruction of humanity.

“Heh...once again I find myself turning to this picture...” Adam mumbled.

In between his fingers was a picture of Sharon smiling, sticking her tongue out towards the camera. A carefree spirit who would constantly find a way to make him smile, she was the first person he truly loved. Amy was the first person he found himself attracted to, but at the same time intimidated him so much more. That’s what was different with Sharon, she was beautiful, smart, and much easier to talk with. She never expected him to be anything else but himself. She was his inspiration to strive for greatness.

“I know you’re not dead...I can feel it, and maybe that’s why I still stride, why I still fight. Maybe I’m not going back to Earth for Luscious Malum, maybe I’m going to Earth to find you. That person I was with...the person who died could not have been you. She looked like you, but never had your spirit...no body just turns to ash after death...that’s how I know that you’re still alive.” He whispered under his breath.

*We have reached our drop zone. This is the beginning of the end for the people of Earth. Every pilot report to the hanger for dropping procedures, once dropped our forces on Prometheus will engage the ECM Jammer, this will give us the upper hand. The main forces will attack the United States, focusing on West Point first. Our secondary forces will advance on Tokyo, once those two bases fall we will advance towards Berlin. Our intel states that the unified governments of the world are stationed there. If we take them out Earth will be left in shambles and will be ripe for the taking!*

Adam sighed, in his opinion the so called plan as David put it was filled holes. Then again there wasn’t much he could expect from a low rate military organization. He knew the plan would never work, David was planning on scattering his forces which would leave each bundle of MF’s weakened, instead of sending out a full strong force he was sending out more weak forces.

“Idiot...he’s forgetting about the Orbis factor. I wouldn’t be surprised if Gail took action to stop this war from happening.” Adam mumbled under his breath.

Placing the picture of Sharon on his table he quickly grabbed his helmet and left the room. As his door shut he saw Alex standing before him.

“You ready?” Alex asked quite abruptly.

“Yeah, are you?”

“Heh, I have no choice but to be ready. Come on, we’d better get to the hanger.”

“Yeah...I have a question for you. You know David probably better then anyone else in Red Fury.”

“Yeah, what’s your point?”

“Does he actually think this half ass plan is going to work?”

“Heh, so I’m not the only one who has doubts then.”

“Apparently not.”

“To be honest I have no idea what David is doing anymore. It just seems that he changed so abruptly ever since that last encounter with the Night Stalkers. It’s like he’s a different person.”

“I see..well I guess there isn’t much point in debating this. We’re out of time as it is.”

“I know...it seems that we’re going to West Point first, you going to be able to fight against old comrades?”

“I’ll make do somehow. My ultimate goal is to get back to Earth soil.”

“Then congratulations, it would appear that you are moments away from fulfilling that goal.”

“It would seem so...” Adam replied.

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“Are you ready for this Stephen?” Ashley asked. Her face illuminated Alpha’s cockpit while Stephen continued to prepare for the upcoming battle.

“I don’t have a choice. I must say I’m still surprised that Red Fury is coming here this quickly. But according to our Intel it would seem that West Point is one of their main targets. And why am I not surprised that my battalion was assigned to the defensive squad.”

“You think something is foul then?”

“Wouldn’t surprise me. I know I’ve been on thin ice ever since I was promoted to General. My ultimate goal was to gain enough trust to find out every secret that has been kept from the public. But it would seem that I accomplished the exact opposite.”

“It would seem so, I mean only your battalion was assigned to protect West Point. Either they have an enormous amount of trust in you guys, or they want you to fall along with West Point. Either way I don’t like what’s going on.” Ashley replied.

“I agree...but we both know I don’t have much of a choice here.”

“Stephen...I know you don’t think I’m ready, but I’m here anyway.”

Stephen turned his head to see the Impetus, the machine that Mathew Amare gave to his daughter.

“Sharon? What the hell are you doing here? You’re going to get yourself killed!” Ashley screamed as her image popped up on Sharon’s communication display.

“\*Sigh\*...Sharon, I won’t stop you from doing this, but I will advise against this.” Stephen interrupted.

“Father asked you help me learn how to pilot this thing. And in the past few weeks you have. I’m confident enough to help you now. I don’t want to sit and do nothing.” Sharon replied.

“You think you’re going to see Adam again, that’s why you’re here isn’t it?” Stephen mumbled.

“...yes...” She muttered.

“Sharon...there has to be a better way than this!” Ashley yelled.

“Stephen.”

“Yeah Sharon?”

“How do I shut her off?”

“Heheh, turn off communication signal Beta 2.” Stephen replied.

“What? Stephen you can’t be...” Suddenly Ashley lost her connection to both Stephen and Sharon. She stood infuriated staring at the screen. “Those assholes...”

“Well then, let’s get this over with shall we?” Stephen mumbled.

“Yeah.”

The garage hanger slowly opened wide revealing the burning sun, West Point was nearly abandoned aside from the 4 MF’s in its hanger.

“Heather Pertencia...Blue Angel launching!”

“Heh...one more time eh? Mario Liberalis...Anima launching!”

Stephen glanced over at Sharon nodding. “Don’t get killed.” Stephen mumbled.

“Same goes for you.” “Sharon Amare...Impetus launching!”

“Sorry Ashley...it’d be best if you were kept out of this one.” Stephen mumbled.

As he watched the first three MF’s launch Stephen smiled placing his hands on his throttles.

“Stephen Novus...Alpha launching!”

“I hope to God that this is the right path... Adam Novus...Shade launching!”

### **Chapter Twenty-Four: Sprial of Chaos**

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Luscious Malum sat at his desk reclining comfortably in his chair while he watched the satellite feed of West Point. Specifically of the Red Fury MF capsules that were spiraling towards the ground at a rapid rate. With a smirk on his face he took a sip of his wine, twirling the glass in his right hand.

“Isn’t it beautiful Severen?”

“What is?”

“The thought of everything we’ve planned for finally coming to fruition. Red Fury has officially become this world’s scapegoat, now every man, woman and child will look at me as the savior of this planet. They will cling to me like I am their God. And with this power I will put an end to every sin that has been brought into existence.”

“You mean the Tribulation?”

“Yes, we’re still a few months away from the actual Tribulation. But this feeling of the wheels of destiny turning is fantastic. West Point is under staffed at the moment, so I don’t see how General Novus will make it out alive. Once he is gone we will have little left to concern ourselves with.”

“I still don’t see what’s so threatening about General Stephen Novus.”

“For the past 6 years of his enrollment in the TA military he’s been plotting to revolt. Of course for the first 3 years of his service I wasn’t involved with the military aside from providing them with the technology needed to fight. But still I am aware of his character and his glorified ambitions. I was informed of them by his previous superiors along with your brother Caleb, if anything Stephen is much more idealistic than his impulsive younger brother. He firmly believed that with each promotion he gained valued trust, trust that he hoped one day would give him enough backing to revolt against the government for his own goals. If he were to stay within the military any long he would only pose a problem. It wouldn’t surprise me if he had started talking with other ranking officers; he might have gotten lucky, and might have persuaded some of them to join his crusade. But if he’s taken out now, then any soldier who has been infected by his ambitions will not be any concern.”

“I see... what if he does make it out alive?”

“I don’t see that happening Severen. Red Fury is focusing the brunt of their attack on West Point because they believe we have a secret weapon lying beneath the surface. I already know that a portion of their forces is on their way here, to Berlin. They believe that we’ve left Berlin with a weak defense force. So they will have no idea what is going to hit them once they show up.” Luscious replied.

“And what about the UGE?”

“What about them Severen? Did you forget? I’m in charge of it and along with that, the entire world. My word is supreme above anything else. I have them preparing their machines; it appears that the EAP had a stash of hidden weapons lying underneath Berlin. They appear to be the same models that were used in our attack on Dammerung. The ones that tore through our offensive lines like butter.”

Luscious muttered.

“So in other words you have this completely planned out for any possible scenario then.”

“That I do. One other thing, what about Von Schuler’s lapdog?”

“Admiral Falden? I’ve received word from an associate in Nagoya that he and Major Sullivan are heading for West Point.”

“Really?” Luscious took his final sip of the merlot, placing the wine glass on the edge of the table he stood up pushing the chair to the side.

“Yeah, I found that quite amusing as well. It seems like we’ll be able to kill two birds with one stone. I talked to this associate about 3 days ago. They should be arriving there with a few hours. Most likely in the midst of the battle, and knowing the Admiral’s track record, I’m confident that he’d get involved. Hopefully he’ll die along with General Novus.” Severen replied.

“I see, well then. I’m going to head down to the UGE defensive facility just below the ruins. I want to see first hand these Evertos.”

“Are you sure you only want to go see the Evertos?”

“Severen? What is it that you’re implying?” Luscious replied sarcastically.

“Nothing, I just heard that a certain machine had arrived in the hanger.”



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“The Omega? Yeah it arrived. After I check out the Evertos I’m going to configure the Omega’s OS.”

“Had a feeling. Anyway Luscious I have to head back to the States. Need to check up on Genesis, I haven’t been there in a while. I need to make sure everything is running smoothly. I will keep you posted on what is happening in West Point.”

“Don’t bother Severen. I’ve set up the Omega’s OS to have a direct link with our satellite so when I’m in there I’ll be able to see what’s going on. I appreciate the offer though Severen.”

“Don’t have too much fun. Hehehe.”

“Severen, just make sure General Novus and Admiral Falden do not make it out of West Point alive. If you have no choice use it.” Luscious mumbled.

“It sir? Are you sure? I mean we don’t even know if it’s fully functional yet.” Severen replied.

“Doesn’t matter, it should be enough to finish the job. I’m trusting you Severen.” Luscious replied as he walked towards the door.

The door slowly shut leaving Severen alone in the office to ponder what he had to do if things came down to it. If there truly was no other way.

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“Gail it would seem that we’re too late. Our satellites have detected several heat sources all descending towards UGE facilities. Currently only West Point and just on the outskirts of Berline. It would seem that Red Fury has decided to attack.” Lucian mumbled.

Gail sighed as he turned away from the window. It had been raining for the past 5 days in Beijing the current location for Orbis’ tour.

“We knew this day was going to come Lucian. I had just hoped it would have been postponed.”

“So are we going to help them? As it stands Red Fury will be slaughtered.”

“No...as hard as it is for me to say this but we can’t help them right now. Our forces are scarce on Earth. Right now the most important thing for us to do is to find the H-3. Once we find the H-3 then and only then can we assist Red Fury against Luscious Malum.” Gail replied.

“But Gail...we have no idea where the H-3 is. Granted we have a heat signature to go off on, but if there isn’t any MFs in the area then there’s no point in that data. I don’t see how Red Fury can hold out against the UGE, if by some miracle we do find the H-3 it will probably be too late.”

“I know...but we have to find it. That is our priority. It will give us an advantage over Luscious Malum. It hurts to see his dream die, but Carlos was prepared for this outcome. I knew once Carlos died that Red Fury wouldn’t be able to last long on its own. This David Lepidus, I never did trust him and it would seem I had good reason not to.”

“What are you talking about Gail?”

“He’s a brash young boy. He rushed into this war and because of it he will fail and Red Fury will die.”

“So we’re just going to sit here and let it happen?”

“There’s not much else we can do. I want you to head to Oxford, London. Once you arrive I want you to investigate the ruins of the once prestigious university. I’ve heard that there is some information on the H-3 and its creation there.”

“Gail...”

“I’ll stay here and continue looking. If you find anything, anything at all contact me immediately.”

“Of course, but are you sure you’ll be safe?”

“I’ll be fine, those two kids who’ve been following us since Rome. They’re MF pilots, pretty good ones at that. Just go, who knows, maybe we’ll find the H-3 in time to make a difference.”

“I don’t like it Gail, but as you’re friend, I’ll do it. Just don’t die while I’m gone.”

“Same to you friend. Make it back alive.”

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“So how much longer before we actually see some action?” Mario broke the silence that was brewing.

Ashley turned towards the radar screen to her right. She pulled the thin strands of blonde hair that swung in front of her face to the side.

“I’d say about another 10 minutes until the Red Fury capsules make it into targeting range.”

Ashley replied.

“10 minutes? Are you serious? I’m getting all antsy over here!” Mario yelled.

“Oh will you shut up for once. You are aware that your voice isn’t the most pleasant to listen to.” Heather interrupted.

“Oh ha ha ha. You ain’t so peachy yourself.” Mario barked back.

Sharon chuckled, holding her right hand close to her lips. She found that laughing was the simple, quickest way to ease her anxiety.

“Stephen, how many are coming?” Sharon asked as she turned to face Alpha.

“No one can be sure, but I’d say at least 15 MFs up front.”

“Just 15?”

“At first yeah, after that it’s hard to say how many Red Fury is going to throw our way.”

“I see...I’ll do my best.” Sharon muttered.

“That’s all any of us can do...our best. I’ll try to cover you as much as I can.”

“Thanks...”

“So Stephen, you think Luscious is trying to get rid of us?” Mario asked.

“It would seem like. These odds are definitely not in our favor, that much is for certain.”

“Heh, then that’s all the more reason to beat them. Wouldn’t you say?”

“Yeah Mario...that’s all the reason I need.” Stephen replied.

Each crimson capsule contained an MF, both Adam and Alex were the first two capsules dropped from the transport ship followed by 14 more Red Fury soldiers. Adam still wasn’t used to the small cockpit that the Shade provided him, every few seconds he found himself squirming to find a comfortable position.

“So you ready for this?” Alex asked just as an image of his face showed up on Adam’s display screen.

“Don’t have much choice do I?”

“Nope. Haha.”

“Hey, where’s Michelle? I had been meaning to ask that, I haven’t seen her since we launched from Mars.”

“I don’t know, I think she’s heading out with David towards Berlin.” Alex replied.

Suddenly at that moment alarms began to buzz loudly in each and every capsule. Flashing red lights glistened abruptly around each frame.

“Hehe, looks like we’re ready to go. Now since you’re in a Shade I hope you realize that your air time is limited as those frames were built for ground combat.” Alex replied.

“I know, I’m fully aware of the limitations of this machine. That’s why I had it customized before we left. I had the mechanics outfit it with some wing parts from Night-Wings. The jet-like wings will give me some added mobility. I still won’t be able to remain in the air for long, but it’ll help out a lot.” Adam replied.

“Hehe I see. You truly are an amazing pilot...oops, here we go!” Alex screamed.

“See you when we get down there.” Adam replied.

At that moment each capsule exploded open, along with a few streams of darkened smoke each MF fell out. Only a few seconds past before each machine ignited their boosters and began to fly towards the Earth at tremendous speeds. The G-forces pounded hard on each pilot nearly bringing them to the point of a black out.

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Adam cringed holding onto the throttles, the lack of support inside the cockpit didn't help his battle with the G-forces, his right eye closed tightly as he tried to regain control. His struggles didn't last much longer as the wings pivoted downwards against the wind current so that the Shade could regain some stability. By this time the clouds had moved away from his line of vision and for the first time in months, he stared back at the Earth and the oceans below.

"Adam be on the look out. It seems that we have a welcoming party." Alex mumbled.

Adam glanced over his shoulder to see D-Block hovering beside him. Suddenly a swarm of Shades and Night-Wings surged past both Adam and Alex heading straight towards the ground below, towards West Point.

"Welcoming party? How many?"

"Let me check...4. 4 MF's in total."

"Just 4? Why the hell would Luscious only have 4 MF's defened an entire facility?" Adam questioned.

"Who knows, but this should make things a lot easier on us." Alex replied just before D-Block once again began to head towards the ground.

"Just 4...something isn't right..." Adam mumbled.

"Here they come!" Mario screamed.

"Heather start things off. It only seems like there's 14 of them. Heat signatures are reading Shades and Night-Wings. Use your positron cannon to separate their forces!" Stephen screamed.

"Got it!" Heather replied.

Blue Angel slowly knelt onto the ground just as the elongated cannon flipped over the right shoulder. Inside the cockpit her scope descended from the ceiling covering her right eye. 14 lock on boxes popped up on her FCS, each descending frame was open for attack and defenseless.

"While Heather gathers the energy we all need to defend her. Since it's just us we're going to have to look out for one another. Mario and I are designed for aerial and high maneuver combat, Sharon so is Impetus, but since you're still getting used to the machine it would be best for you to limit your air time as much as possible." Stephen stated.

"Got it." Sharon replied.

Adam stared forward, finally within range for his radar to detect heat signatures. As the Shade's OS began to read the data his eyes widened from shock.

"Damn it! Alex, have every one move away from one another! There's a high heat source radiating and preparing to fire! (And if I know her and I do, it'll fire straight down the middle.)"

"Shit! Everyone move away!" Alex screamed.

Suddenly the intense beam of energy fired loudly scorching through the skies. Unfortunately for some pilots they didn't have enough time to avoid and found themselves being engulfed by the wave of energy. 2 Shades and 3 Night-Wings exploded violently in the air as the flames and debris rained down to the ground.

"Damn it...this is not what I wanted to deal with..." Adam mumbled. "Alex...I'll take center stage."

"What?! You can't be serious! You're in a fucking modified Shade!" Alex screamed back.

"Trust me..." Adam replied. His feet pounded on the accelerator forcing the boosters to erupt with blazing flames.

The Shade surged past D-Block heading straight towards the cluster of MFs standing on the ground. It took all of his strength to go forward with the attack since he knew who it was that was standing before him. In the brief seconds that followed his initial rush dozens of thoughts scurried through his mind. He began to doubt his dedication to Red Fury, if he was only helping them in order to get to Earth then he had already succeeded and no longer needed to fight. But at the same time his friends were fighting for the very essence of evil that he sought out to destroy. No matter which way he looked at it, he was screwed.

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“Damn it!” Adam screamed.

“Shit, good job Heather. But it seems that one made it through!” Stephen yelled.

“Sorry...I have to recharge. I won't be much use to you guys for the next 5 minutes.” Heather replied.

“It's fine. Mario, you and Sharon watch Heather. I'm going up there!” Stephen replied.

“Good luck...and be careful.” Sharon screamed.

“Thanks”

Alpha's boosters began to flicker as they charged. Stephen's eyes thinned staring back at the oncoming machine.

“Stephen what the hell is that? It looks like a Shade, but it's been customized.” Mario mumbled.

“It's still a Shade. A few customizations won't change that.” Stephen replied just as Alpha violently launched into the sky.

“Why am I not surprised that you launched first...” Adam mumbled.

The Shade sharply cut to the left just as it docked its laser rifle on its thigh. Stephen kept his eye on the Shade and started things off. Alpha began to fire the energy rifle in its right hand. With each glowing beam of energy the Shade swatted it away with its energy saber. Stephen cringed only to continue to fire. Adam sighed avoiding the majority of the attacks and knocking the others aside.

Before he knew it the Shade was only a few feet to his right side with the energy saber searing. Just before the Shade attacked Alpha grabbed onto the energy boomerang on its left shoulder and swung downwards conflicting with the energy saber that was being swung.

“I had a feeling I was going to run into you sooner or later. I have to admit, I wasn't expecting it to be in the form of a customized Shade.” Stephen announced over the neutral radio line.

His statement echoed through every MF cockpit for every pilot to hear. Mario glanced over at the image of Ashley in bewilderment.

“What the hell is he talking about?!” Mario screamed.

“I...I don't know...” Ashley too was confused; even though she had her suspicions she still didn't know what to make of it.

“How could you tell it was me?” Adam asked.

The sound of Adam's voice also rung throughout every cockpit bringing states of shock with it. Both Mario and Heather's faces nearly went pale at the sound of their friend's voice. While Ashley turned away from her control panel, she had a feeling in the pit of her stomach that Adam was in that Shade. It would have explained Stephen's brash decision to switch his communications signal to neutral.

“No matter what machine you pilot you're still as predictable as ever.”

“Oh...attacking you on the right...heh, what can I say it's a habit.”

While Alpha and the Shade continued to struggle Alex and the remaining battalion of MFs quickly began to fire upon the stationary MFs.

Adam glanced out of his window, part of him wanting to break away from his brother and to attack the Red Fury MF's, and the other part of him wanting it all to just end.

Electrical sparks of energy seared away from the conflicting beams of energy while both Alpha and the Shade continued to try and overpower the other.

“Before we go any further with this, I need to ask you one thing.” Stephen mumbled.

“What?”

“Why are you fighting with Red Fury?”

“Because I don't believe in Luscious Malum. He's done too many things to me, he's beyond the point of forgiveness!” Adam screamed.

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“One other thing, that day we came into contact with each other. By Dammerung, what happened to you?”

Adam’s eyes widened, he had nearly forgotten about their previous conflict about a month and a half ago.

“Sharon...died.”

“I see...Adam we need to talk.”

“No more talking Stephen. I need to stop Luscious Malum, and as it stands you’re in my way!”

Adam screamed.

The Shade’s left hand grabbed onto another energy saber and quickly swung. Alpha quickly back flipped avoiding the attack. During mid flip Stephen threw the energy boomerang towards the Shade. Adam pushed the throttles to the sides but not before the boomerang pierced through the right side of the wings. The metal crunched as the beam of swirling energy tore through.

“Damn, I was careless!” Adam screamed. He forced the accelerators to ignite, the Shade rushed into Alpha causing the crimson MF to fall from the sky along with the Shade. In mid descent Adam slashed through the right leg of Alpha causing flames to rupture out from the metallic armor.

“ADAM! SHARON IS ALIVE!” Stephen screamed.

“What....” Adam’s voice and body went numb, his eyes widened and his pupils thinned.

Sharon continued to fire her dual energy rifles into the air forcing the Night-Wings to move away from Blue Angel who was almost done recharging. Suddenly she stopped as both Alpha and the Shade crashed violently into the ground causing a thickened cloud to roar into the sky. Dust particles along with crushed pebbles poured from the sky following the collision.

Sharon’s eyes began to quiver, trying to hold in her tears as she stared at the cloud of smoke surrounding both MFs.

“Adam....”

### **Chapter Twenty-Five: Twilight in the Darkness**

Alpha’s knee joint continued to dig into the chest of the Shade, forcing it even further into the ground. Adam struggled inside the cockpit, both physically and mentally. Having his uttermost dreams and thoughts confirmed in the heat of battle was more of a shock than a salvation. He knew his mind was wandering away from the conflict at hand, his brother’s frame above him, nearly crushing the exterior armor of an inferior frame.

“She’s alive...is this for real Stephen or are you just messing around with my mind?”

“You’re such an ignorant bastard. Why the hell would I play mind games with you? I’d prefer to beat you head on.”

“Where is she?”

“Heh, I thought that would knock some sense into you.”

“I think I deserve to know that much Stephen.”

“First tell me everything that’s been going on. You say that Sharon died explain that.”

“Isn’t it obvious, the Sharon I was with was nothing more than a clone. Once again Genesis messing with my mind, it never ends brother. It never ends. I was trying hard to stay away from the battles, and all the destruction. But it followed us both...we were attacked by the Night Stalkers...I believe that’s who it was. But one thing led to another and we ended up at a secluded Red Fury base only to be attacked once again by a Night Stalker. In the end Sharon lost her life, and I found myself once again sitting in Blue Dragon’s cockpit. But when Sharon died, in my arms, her flesh began to burn, and in front of my eyes she slowly began to turn to ash and evaporated in the gentle wind. At first I didn’t know

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what to think, but eventually it all began to make sense She wasn't the real one Stephen, and I don't even know if I ever met the real Sharon or if I've been with a clone the entire time. I need to see her again to find out." Adam replied.

"Mathew Amare is still alive as well Adam. We've talked, and I can assure you the first time you met Sharon was when you met the original. So stop this, there is no way that Red Fury will be able to stand up to the UGE."

"I see...but I'm sorry. I will not stand here while Luscious Malum continues to play God." Adam screamed.

The Shade's head unit flickered as the gears turned heavily. Stephen's head backed away from the screen from the initial shock. Alpha quickly grabbed onto both energy boomerangs, each weapon brightly ignited with pulsing beams of energy. The light from the beams reflected off the dull armor of the Shade just as they began to descend.

At the last moment the Shade turned to its side, causing Alpha to lose its balance. Suddenly Adam ignited the back boosters and the Shade blew out from the small crater launching back into the sky while sparks of electricity fluttered out from the massive slash on the right side wings.

"I thank you for telling me that she is still alive Stephen. But as long as you fight for Luscious Malum I can never hold back."

"Adam calm the hell down!" Mario's voice blasted out from the side. Adam quickly turned around to see Anima flying towards him flinging both electrical cables in his direction.

"Mario this has nothing to do with you!" Adam screamed.

The Shade moved hastily to the right avoiding the first cable strike only to be caught by Alpha. The crimson MF held onto the Shade tightly, with its arms wrapped under the Shade's arm joints.

"\*Grr\* Stephen..." Adam cringed.

"You need to calm down and think this through. We're fighting to protect the innocent lives in the vicinity. Not for Luscious Malum, think you idiot. If we were really in the trust circle for Luscious Malum do you honestly believe he would just leave us 4 to fight off an invading force? You need to open your eyes for once!" Stephen yelled back.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"We are in the middle of a battle right now, let's talk about this after we finish this!" Mario screamed.

Anima closed in on the confined Shade whipping both cables towards the machine. Adam glanced back at Stephen and then began to smirk.

"I have things to take care of, I can't be stopped here." Adam mumbled.

The Shade began to bend forward taking Alpha with it, at that moment Alpha's back became exposed facing the oncoming cables from Anima.

"Damn it!" Mario yelled just as he pulled the throttles back hoping to halt the attack before it was too late. Just as Stephen let go of the Shade to avoid Mario's attack the Shade shot around kicking the crimson frame on the right side. Just as Adam escaped from his brother's grasp an intense beam of plasma energy pierced through the sky forcing the Shade's escape route.

"Heather..." Adam mumbled, turning to face Blue Angel who was now once again weakened and forced to recharge.

Adam turned around to see two of Alpha's energy boomerangs head straight for him. Just before they could come close to the Shade D-Block surged by slicing both weapons in twine.

"Couldn't let you have all the fun now could I?" Alex muttered.

"Thanks...but maybe I should deal with them."

"Nah, we've lost a few more soldiers thanks to the ground MFs. Can you take care of these two up here? I along with the remainder of our forces will deal with those two MFs." Alex said sternly.

"It'll be difficult in a Shade. But I know how they both fight, that should at least give me a fighting chance." Adam replied.

"Good, then it's settled. Don't die."

"You too."

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

D-Block quickly turned its attention towards Blue Angel and Impetus leaving Adam to handle Alpha and Anima. Following Alex was another cluster of 5 Shades and 2 Night-Wings. Anima suddenly streaked through grabbing onto two Shades with its cables. The abrupt netting caused both Shades to lose control, unfortunately for Mario he didn't take into account the two frame's velocity and Anima began to plummet with them.

"I guess that's what I get for being too impulsive." Mario joked.

Just then both Shades began to quiver violently as streams of electrical currents spread throughout their frames. Mario snickered as Anima released its grip causing the two machines to crash into the ground. Looking over his shoulder he smiled back at Stephen.

"I'll help those two out. You knock some sense into your brother."

"Thanks...make sure you all stay alive." Stephen replied.

"No doubt, wouldn't have it any other way."

Alpha abruptly shot forward decreasing the amount of space between it and Adam's Shade. Adam cringed leaning back into the curves of his leather seat as his brothers' MF suddenly appeared before him.

"If you want to stop Luscious Malum that's fine. But fighting along side Red Fury is not the answer!" Stephen screamed.

Alpha's right arm swung upwards with a wave of energy dissipating from the motion of the moving energy saber. The Shade arched its torso to the side at a 45 degree angle narrowly avoiding the attack. Adam replied quickly, the Shade's right hand twisted inwards gripping its energy saber, as the beam of burning energy approached Alpha's torso the two cannons resting between the crimson frame's shoulders pivoted downward firing instantly. The attack forced Adam to back off once again increasing the distance between him and his brother.

"You shouldn't preach Stephen. Red Fury has a better grasp on what's going on then anyone else in this world."

"Pfft\* You don't really believe that do you? Or are you just trying to delude yourself from the truth? This battle between Red Fury and the newly established UGE is pointless. Do you really think what they did to Washington D.C. was justified? You are well aware of the amount of casualties that the city sustained."

Adam sighed, he knew his brother was right, he didn't really believe in Red Fury. At least the Red Fury that David Lepitus had created.

"No.....I don't believe it was justified. But even so, the UGE struck first, sending their Night Stalkers to attack us, nearly killing us!"

"And that's where you lost it isn't it?"

"...."

"I was beginning to wonder why you were piloting a Shade. This wasn't a choice, your machine was lost. And this was the only way back to Earth. If that's all this was, then what's the point of fighting this battle so passionately? Don't you find it wrong to fight for something you don't really believe in?"

"You wouldn't know how I feel!"

The Shade once again went on the attack swinging both arms carelessly through the air, never once hitting their mark. Alpha easily avoided the attacks and only struck back upon the 6<sup>th</sup> miss. Stephen with one clean and swift stroke sliced through the Shade's right arm causing it to explode into pieces. Adam stared, gawking in surprised as he watched the silver arm tear to sunder and its remains falling through the air.

"I get it now. You're fighting on rage alone, there's no rhyme or reason, and while you try to force your subconscious into believing there is a just reason you still can not find one. Allow me to make this clear to you one final time. Sharon is alive, she wants to see you again, she wants to regain the life she had lost. And if you keep this up I'm not sure if you'll ever get the chance to get a second life. Not many people are given the opportunity to regain what they have lost, take it!" Stephen screamed.

"Stephen...." Adam mumbled.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

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“\*Phew\* Seems like we picked a bad time to show back up here.” Natasha mumbled. She slightly elbowed the gut of Marcus Falden. After dealing with the unfortunate deaths of their friends and comrades they had decided to investigate the matter much more thoroughly. To much of his discontent Natasha had tried to advise him to stay in Nagoya just to stay low. But staying low was never his strong suit.

“What is it?” Marcus abruptly grumbled.

Glaring back at his darkened eyes Natasha simply pointed towards the small circular window on the side of the transport. Shrugging his shoulders Marcus glanced through the small pane glass window. What he saw shocked him, he was vaguely aware of Red Fury’s current actions, but had never expected them to attack. Conflagrant spheres of fire lit up the cerulean sky, the waters below the vessel were splashing violently from the shockwaves being exerted from the action.

“What the fuck is going on?!” Marcus screamed, his eyes now fueled with intensity, wide awake.

“Looks like Red Fury couldn’t wait much longer.” Natasha sighed.

“Shit...and that old man still isn’t answering. Just what the hell is going on these days!?”

“Marcus...wait a minute. I’ve seen that look in your eyes before. You’re not planning on going out there are?”

Marcus began to grin as he quickly un-strapped his safety belts nearing hurtling over his seat. While his energy continued to pump through his veins Natasha struggled with hers like she was a child fidgeting with a childproof lock. For some reason it seemed impossible for her, she could do nothing aside from reaching out towards the fading Admiral, screaming his name; hoping that he would stop.

“Sorry Natasha. I’m still a TA soldier...I won’t stand by and watch these bastards take one of our most precious bases!” Marcus screamed back.

“Ugh...Finally!” Natasha screamed as her straps let loose allowing her to stand.

She immediately began to run after Marcus only to be stopped by a hand that roughly grabbed onto her shoulder. It was her informant, a man by the name of Devon Syrius. A former grunt for the TA who served with Natasha in Cuba early in her career; it was apparent that it was him since he was the only other person on the transport ship.

“Listen, Devon I need to...”

Natasha paused at the slight frigid sensation that rode up along her spine. It was a familiar one, one of a small standard issue pistol. Needless to say that her expression went blank.

“Let him go Natasha. He isn’t worth dying for. He’s a marked man Natasha, and so are you. But I can get you out of it but Marcus...he’s too high up on the list to be spared.” Devon replied.

“What the hell are you talking about? A marked man? He’s a friggin hero to the TA!” Natasha screamed.

“I’m a soldier Natasha, a low one at that. I am only carrying out the orders which are handed down to me.”

“You know something you traitorous asshole!”

“\*Sigh\*...I am sorry Natasha...but Marcus Falden, the hero of the Iron Fist has to die in order for peace to prosper. In order for humanity to be judged properly he has to be slain. I am sorry Natasha.”

“You asshole...\*arg\*” At that moment Devon’s pistol clashed with the back of Natash’a head. The blunt end of the handle crashing into her skull, it didn’t take long for her angelic blonde hair to become stained with the putrid red liquid that secreted out from her wound. Her pupils became pale and her eyelids heavy. Her knees buckled and her torso collapsed to the cold metallic ground. Devon shook his head from side to side, grinning as he watched in his peripheral vision OZ flying out across the ocean.

“For your sake, and for Natasha’s I hope you don’t make it out of this alive. Just do us all a favor and die along with the rest of those bastards.”

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## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Are you sure this is ok? If they find out that you’re in contact with me during such an important battle I’m sure they will mess around with your life as well.” Mathew mumbled as he sat in the passenger seat along with Ashley.

Ashley simply turned around and with her ravishing looks just smiled.

“It doesn’t matter anymore. I’m not sure how much longer I’m going to be connected with the TA...no, it’s the UGE now isn’t it?” Ashley mumbled.

“But you’re putting yourself in danger by doing this.”

“It doesn’t matter any more. We’ll all be in danger if we don’t get this to West Point. It was a good thing I had this transport leave just before I arrived here.”

“You’re hiding something Ashley.”

“You’ll understand when we get there. I just hope everyone’s doing alright while I’m gone...”

The camouflage encased transport continued on its way, the tires dug deeply into the sand sending pebbles into the air and making tracks. Mathew could do nothing but gaze into the scene as the explosions continued to grow in size and power. The shockwaves traveled through the ground making the trip less comfortable. With each explosion the framework of the transport shook.

In the corner of his eye he saw OZ speeding by, holding tightly onto its plasma cannon. He knew the chaos was already beginning to spread like wildfire.

“Heather are you alright?!” Mario screamed.

Anima burst in front of 2 Night-Wings just before they could attack Blue Angel. Heather was relying on her long-range tactics to help everyone out, and therefore needed constant backup. She sat in her cockpit taking heavy breaths, the sweat rolling off her skin due to the intense heat that floated through the air.

Anima sliced through one of the Night-Wings causing yet another explosion to riddle the foundation. But with each frame that fell it seemed like 2 more took its place. Red Fury continued to drop MF capsules, reinforcing its army. The Night-Wings and Shades weren’t much of a concern, but it was Alex and his MF that posed the most problem. Mario became so entangled with the MFs going after Heather that he had inadvertently forgot about Sharon.

Sharon had been holding her own, forcing herself to persevere in her current situation. Impetus turned its torso from side to side firing both energy rifles, most of her attacks missed since she wasn’t used to moving targets, but every now and then she would make impact. Her attacks were random which is what made her even more deadly. It would be nearly impossible to predict where her attacks would end up.

Following yet another explosion Alex could no longer contain his anger. He had yet to hear from David or Michelle, and knew nothing about any of Red Fury’s other advance. D-Block sped in and out of the energy beams that sped outwards. Sharon began to quiver in fear as D-Block continued to approach her position unscathed.

“...hit him...hit him....HIT HIM!!!” Sharon screamed with each pull on her throttle. But to her dismay each attack missed D-Block as Alex continued his approach. Strands of her dark brown hair fluttered before her eyes dripping with tear drops of sweat. Her chest pulsated deeply from her anxiety. No longer did she know what to do, Mario was still preoccupied with the MFs attacking Heather, and Heather was too busy gathering energy.

“ADAM!” Her voice blurted out his name unintentionally. She could no longer hold in her emotions, as clouded as they were.

Stephen suddenly came to a halt as did the Shade in front of him. Adam’s eyes widened, his attention immediately turned to the MF on the ground just a few 100 meters away from Alex.

“Sharon?” Adam mumbled.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

At this point instincts took over completely. The boosters on the Shade roared loudly as the machine took off towards the ground. Stephen smirked as he watched Adam swing into action. A noise on his radar forced his attention elsewhere. Another MF was approaching and fast.

“Another one? From the Atlantic...heat signature registering....” Suddenly Stephen’s eyes widened, he could hardly believe what he was seeing. “OZ eh? Heh, who would have expected to see him as backup.” Stephen mumbled.

Just as D-Block prepared to fire its grenade launcher, a bright beam of crimson energy tore through the air, eventually piercing the massive weapon attached to D-Block’s right arm. The shock of the attack caused the joints on the frame to lose balance. Alex struggled with his throttles, trying to regain control.

“What the hell?!”

The Shade touched down onto the ground roughly, the knees bent inwards from the gravity being inflicted upon it.

“Adam!? What the hell are you doing? We’re on the same God damn side!” Alex screamed.

“It’s...it’s a long story. But I don’t think I can keep fighting for Red Fury. You see Alex, the thing I’m supposed to protect is here. And I almost failed once again. I can’t let that happen again.” Adam replied.

“But the mission! You can’t betray us now! Not when we’re so close!”

“You forget, I never officially joined Red Fury. And you know that this isn’t the right path Alex. Stop deluding yourself.”

“David was right about you. He said you couldn’t be trusted and it looks like he was right.”

All at once Adam’s radar screeched out loud as every Shade and Night-Wing in the vicinity locked onto him.

“So it’s like this then...” Adam mumbled.

“Yeah, it’s like this.” Alex replied. “Destroy that Shade!” Alex screamed.

“Hehehe...I was just trying to prevent you from killing someone very important to me. I had no intention of fighting you guys. But if you want things to play out like this, then I hope you’re prepared.” Adam replied.

Two Shades sped around D-Block firing rapidly at Adam’s Shade. Adam cringed forcing himself to endure the attack. Because he knew if he moved Sharon would take the full brunt of the attack.

One beam tore through the Shade’s left arm causing it to explode, while another one was deflected by a massive beam of energy that burst down from the heavens. Suddenly both Shades exploded into flames, tons of bellowing smoke poured out from each destroyed machine leaving only glowing auras flickering in the darkness of their shadows.

Alex’s teeth began to grind deeply as D-Block stood alone before two MFs that were staring back in his direction.

“Took you long enough to come to your senses.” Stephen yelled back. “But it would seem that you’re pretty much useless now.”

“Shut up...that’s the last thing I want to hear.”

“Still as pathetic as ever eh Novus?” A voice boomed through the communications link. The tone of the voice, the deep commanding voice only caused Adam to feel disgusted even more.

“So that’s who the other one is. This Shade doesn’t have OZ’s heat signature in its database. Still...what the hell are you doing here anyway?!”

“Shut up punk. I ain’t here to help you, I’m here to defend the all might Trinity Alliance!” Marcus screamed with pride.

“Umm...you are aware that the TA no longer exists right? It’s just the UGE.” Adam sarcastically replied.

“Shut the fuck up. At least my machine still has both its arms.”

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

Adam turned away from OZ, glancing back at the Impetus. The frame that was holding Sharon Amare in its core. A person who he had thought died at one time. And after all the pain, after all the trials he managed to find her once again.

“It would seem as if Red Fury has sent its last batch of reinforcements. My radar is only picking up 10 capsules. So with the four of us, that’s roughly two each, Marcus and I will deal with this MF here first. After that Heather you start this upcoming battle off the same you started the last one. Then Mario, Marcus and I will finish off the descending forces.”

“The fuck put you in charge! If I recall I’m the top ranking officer here General.” Marcus replied.

“I don’t care whose in charge! I will defeat you all in the name of Red Fury!” Alex screamed.

Marcus began to grin as D-Block began to charge with an unrelenting rage. It was obvious that Alex saw his failure and was only trying to deny its validity. With no long range weapon left D-Block was forced to rely on its single energy saber, which it was wielding carelessly. With each hard-hitting step in the ground it seemed the young Red Fury soldier only sealed his demise.

“I’ll finish this one.” Marcus mumbled.

“FOR THE GLORY OF RED FURY!” Alex screamed.

With a single move OZ ignited its Excalibur and swung at an angle. D-Block rushed right into the attack, the edge of the blade easily tore through the outer layers of the MF. Sparks rampantly burst outwards as OZ’s arms continued to force through determined to cut cleanly through. Alex screamed manically as the warning bells screamed. Wires tore from their ports, small clusters of flames scattered amongst the tiny cockpit engulfing Alex in a sea of heat from which he could never escape. Marcus let go of the weapon grinning as he watched D-Block slowly move backwards with the Excalibur still lodged into its torso with electrical currents pouring out like human blood. With his final words Alex’s eyes began to shut.

“Don’t...give up on your dream David...I will always fight to protect it...take care of Michelle.....”

D-Block stopped moving only to collapse to the ground followed by an explosion, which trembled the ground sending shockwaves out in every direction.

“That was a bit excessive don’t you think?” Stephen questioned.

“Shut up.”

Adam closed his eyes tightly, his fingers tightly knit close to his palms shaking at both sides of his body. Turning away from the smoke that was rising into the sky while burnt pieces of metal collapsed to the ground he punched the side of the small cockpit.

“Another one...why did another person need to die?”

“Adam?” Sharon’s voice muttered, bringing him out of his angst instantly. Impetus slowly made its way towards the crippled Shade.

“Sharon...”

“It is you isn’t it...it’s been so long.”

“I...I don’t even know how long. I don’t know when the last time was that I was with the real you...I have no idea what is real right now and what isn’t...”

“The last time we were together was that day when we met at Genesis. The restaurant, it was after you shipped to Mars that Luscious took my father and me away. We never even had a chance...”

“Sharon...I’m sorry. I’m sorry for all of this.”

“Don’t apologize, none of this is your fault. We’ll just have to make up on lost time.”

Adam began to smile once again while he looked back onto Sharon and Sharon onto him.

“Hey love birds, how bout saving that for later?!” Marcus screamed.

“The hell is that?” Mario exclaimed. Animus suddenly pointed towards a large transport vessel that continued to speed down the high way heading straight towards the heart of the battle.

Inside Alpha’s cockpit Ashley’s face appeared on Stephen’s console once again.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“I still can’t believe you shut off my communication link before! You’re such an asshole!” Ashley screamed.

“You’ll get over it. But after you get the hell out of here! What the hell were you thinking?!” Stephen screamed.

“ME? What was I thinking?! I was thinking about helping you out you stubborn son of a bitch! What frequency is your idiot brother on?” Ashley screamed.

“Just save yourself the trouble and set it to neutral. And hurry up, this isn’t a conference call!” Stephen yelled.

“Stick it up your ass. Can you hear me Adam?” Ashley asked.

“Ashley? It’s been nearly forever...” Adam mumbled.

“Good, I’ll make this short and sweet. I’ll yell at you for you’re ignorance and immaturity later.”

“Heh, glad to see you haven’t changed a bit.”

“Whatever ass. This is yours. Come get it.”

“Huh?”

“Just hurry up, there isn’t much time. I didn’t have time to gift wrap it so you’ll have to forgive me.”

“Hehe....guess I don’t have a choice. I’ll forgive you this time.”

“Welcome home....”

### **Chapter Twenty-Six: Pride**

The damaged Shade slowly took steps towards the transport vessel before it. Adam fought the urge to look at the scattered remains of D-Block. Alex and he had never been close friends, but they did share some amount of respect for one another during their time on Mars. The small amount of down time they were given allowed him to reflect on his brash decision to stop fighting along side Red Fury. It didn't make much sense, if any sense at all to him; it took the sound of her voice to make him understand what his original intentions were. Maybe what his brother was saying was true, that he was still fighting out of his rage, trying to mask the pain of loss by dealing pain to others.

"You might want to hurry up with this. Those reinforcements should be arriving in about 10 minutes." Mario muttered.

"Pft\* Let them come, I'll tear them asunder with OZ!" Marcus screamed.

Heather simply stared out from her scope, glaring into the sky watching the tiny dots fall, growing in size with each second. Something then took her breath right out from her mouth; two of the 8 dots vanished following a quick flash of light. She turned to her radar only to see nothing but the 6 remaining dots flickering.

"Maybe I'm just getting delusional." She mumbled to herself.

But her fear and intuition got the best of her, forcing her to continue looking. And her feelings were justified when 3 more vanished like the first two. Her hair wiped around her face as she turned facing the others.

"We have a problem!" Heather screamed.

Both Stephen and Mario turned, facing Blue Angel who had finally recovered the last amount of her energy.

"What's going on?" Mario asked.

"I had 8 capsules on radar, and now only 3 remain. Someone's destroying those capsules as they're falling!"

"That's absurd; I can't detect anything on radar. Your FCS is probably on the fritz again." Mario joked.

"Stealth..." Stephen mumbled under his breath.

"Stealth? But current technology doesn't allow a weapon to remain hidden while firing. So even if we couldn't detect it, we would still see something right before a capsule exploded." Adam interrupted. The Shade finally stopped moving just near the transport. "Now what?"

"Hold on, you're so damn impatient." Ashley replied.

The back end of the transport began to pivot upwards, rising into the sky standing at around 23 meters in height. Adam glanced back at Blue Angel who was still staring into the sky.

"Shit...I think things are about to get much worse." Mario mumbled.

"What? What is it?" Sharon screamed.

"You can't see it now?" Stephen asked.

"See what?"

"God damn girl, look at your freaking FCS. It's not hard to miss the giant blob of energy flickering!" Marcus screamed.

"What the hell is that?!" Sharon exploded.

"That, would be one big fucking problem." Mario mumbled.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“I think I can hit it from here!” Heather exclaimed.

“No, even if you could the amount of damage would be equivalent to a scratch. We’re going to have to hit it hard once it gets closer...” Stephen replied. “Adam, take your present, unwrap it and meet us up there. Come on Falden.”

“There you go, acting all superior. You’re a fucking General!” Marcus screamed.

Alpha launched into the air with OZ not too far behind.

Adam sighed, he knew what it was. There was no mistaking it; it had to be a Seraph. The sheer size alone gave it away.

“Ashley let’s hurry this up!” Adam yelled.

“Geez, you’re so damn pushy.”

“Mario, you watch over Sharon and Heather. Marcus and I will engage the machine, luckily for us there’s only one of them. It would seem the UGE wants us to die here. Red Fury has been held off and now they’re sending in their big guns to make sure none of us survive.”

“Thanks, you really are the observer of the obvious aren’t you?” Mario muttered.

“Just do your job, we’ll do ours.” Stephen replied.

“Understood.”

Pride continued to laugh as the smoke from the exploded capsules floated around his Seraph’s torso. The Hyper Ion Thrusters continued to keep the behemoth floating silently amongst the ivory clouds and burning sun. His senses reacted to the slightest buzz from his FCS indicating the oncoming Alpha and OZ.

“So it begins. These two will be the first to go.” Pride mumbled.

The 4 angular pods detached from the back of the core and began to fly downwards towards the two MFs.

“Orbital weapons huh...It’s a distraction, don’t focus on them. Concentrate on the machine itself!” Stephen yelled.

“Don’t you think I know that?” Marcus screamed.

Both Alpha and OZ quickly separated from one another allowing the weapons to streak straight by. The moment the 4 pods missed their targets they instantly turned around, their miniature thrusters igniting they headed back for the two MFs.

“They’re on our tails!” Marcus screamed.

“Dodge the attacks, but focus on that thing!” Stephen screamed.

As the two frames pierced through an upper layer of clouds they finally bore witness to an incarnation of power. The Seraph, its sheer size was enough to frighten lesser pilots. With the Hyper Ion Thrusters gone the beast was falling towards the ground at a dangerous rate. It was when the beast neared that both Stephen and Marcus realized it, the machine was charging its dual rail cannons preparing to fire.

“Shit...” Marcus screamed.

“It’s going to fire! Flank left!” Stephen yelled.

Both Alpha and OZ dashed to the left at the exact moment the cannon fired narrowly avoiding the beam. Just as they avoided the attack the Seraph appeared only meters on top of them still falling. Once again Stephen and Marcus went on to evasive maneuvers getting out its way.

“Damn, this is going to be much more difficult than I originally thought.”

“No shit Novus. No shit.”

“Look we have the advantage now, just start firing!”

“Finally, I was getting tired of pussy footing around!”

OZ’s plasma cannon flipped inwards, just under it’s right arm joints. The edge of its barrel collecting the necessary energy needed to fire while Alpha fired every available weapon. The two shoulder cannons fired repeatedly along with the energy rifle being held in its right hand. Every beam of energy dissipated on contact with the Seraph’s armor much to Stephen’s surprise.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Special coating? Shit, it seems normal energy weapons won’t do the trick.”

“Yeah, normal. That’s why I’m extraordinary, Novus!”

Marcus fired the plasma cannon, the immense beam of radiating energy tore holes in the clouds standing in its line of sight. The recoil sent OZ flipping through the air, the adrenaline fueled Marcus’ angst and enjoyment as he laughed and screamed loudly.

Pride grinned just as the four pods flew behind him creating an energy barrier just in time to negate Marcus’ attack. The sky flickered brightly from the spectacle, the beam of energy continued to try and penetrate the barrier but to no avail. Smoke swept out from all angles just as the beam evaporated into the air. Marcus could only stare in awe over his failed attack.

“So much for extraordinary eh?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Looks like we’re going to have to get close with this one and fast; at the rate he’s going he’ll end up hitting the ground in a few minutes!” Stephen screamed.

“Damn it, the thing is still coming our way. Heather!” Mario screamed. Anima turned facing Blue Angel who was already on its knees, cannon in position.

“I know I know.” Heather mumbled.

The initial charge required began to enter its final stages as the cannon began to subtly vibrate with energy. Heather’s eyes squinted at her target just as a lock on box solidified around the descending Seraph. It was an extremely big target, making it hard to miss a lock on.

“This is my final shot, so if I miss you better come up with something and fast.” Heather yelled.

“I’m not much of a strategist, so let’s hope you don’t miss.” Mario grumbled.

“Useless.” Heather’s pointer finger gently pushed inwards along the trigger. A thunderous boom echoed outwards as the beam of energy soared into the sky.

“Humans are such interesting creatures. Predictable but interesting.” Pride yawned. Now only a few 1000 meters away from the ground the 4 angular pods separated yet again to form the energy barrier. And just like before the attack was nullified leaving only sparkles of glitter-like energy raining towards the ground. The ocean waves rippled outwards violently from the blast’s shockwave.

“Shit... you have a plan?” Heather asked.

“You’re kidding right?”

“Sorry... was delusional for a moment.”

“Hahaha, you humans have a tremendous amount of courage. I have not seen such bravery displayed in a long time. But I will be the first to admit that my pride prevents me from being intimidated. You will all perish at my hand.” Pride spoke.

The Seraph’s thrusters began to light up, the burning streams of energy pulsated at a heart-pounding rate just as Pride lunged from his stationary position. The sudden movement and increase in speed shook Heather who watched her attack vanish in thin air only a few moments ago. Each pod separated causing the energy barrier to vanish, the remaining trails of energy shattered as the Seraph tore through with its sights set on Blue Angel and Anima.

“HEATHER, MARIO!” Stephen screamed.

Pride upon hearing his radar rattled looked upward to see Alpha descending rapidly with its dual energy saber ignited.

*<Trying to get in close eh? Sorry, it won’t work.>*

Stephen’s eyes widened, at first he thought he was hallucinating, hearing this eerie voice boom from thin air. It caused him to lose his concentration and thus letting up on the attack.

*<I can do that, hahaha. If you attack me at close range you would only increase your chance of dying. But if you don’t believe me you can by all means try.>*

“Get out of my head!” Stephen screamed as Alpha once again charged forward with OZ doing the same.

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The head unit of the Seraph slowly turned around just in time for the edge of the front end of the energy saber to pierce through its armored layers. Pride gasped from shock, it was the first time in his existence that he was caught by surprise. The burning metal smoldered as the Seraph began to fall towards the ground. Alpha's hands firmly gripped the back end of the energy saber disconnecting it.

"You're not invincible!" Stephen screamed.

"\*Grr\* Pest!" Pride yelled.

"Novus pay attention!" Marcus' voice screamed.

The four pods flew around the back of the Seraph locking onto Alpha.

"Well then why don't you lend a hand instead of just staying there?!" Stephen screamed.

"Since you asked so politely."

OZ began to fire its plasma cannon towards the cluster of pods causing them to dash apart. With the current distraction Stephen saw his opportunity, Alpha's left arm began to descend preparing to strike the Seraph's neck joint in hopes of dislodging its neck. But just before he struck Stephen suddenly got a closer view of the ground.

"Shit, wasn't paying attention." Alpha quickly jumped off from the Seraph's back instantly igniting its boosters just before the massive titan crashed into the hard brownish ground. A massive tremor swept the area from the impact, sand and all sorts of minerals and soil launched vertically in the air. Both Stephen and Marcus stared down at the massive clot of caliginous clouds that formed around the zone of impact.

"That was close \*huff\* \*huff\*..." Stephen muttered.

*<Haha....heeheehahahahahaha Well done....but not nearly enough to save your lives.>*

Both Marcus and Stephen leaned back into their chairs, glancing to one another in horror.

"Did you just hear that? Please tell me you just heard that." Marcus asked.

"Yeah...I did. It would appear that this pilot is a Crimson Dawn." Stephen replied.

"It would appear so. Bah, I've killed them before! Remember the Diabolos! I'll just do it once again!"

OZ's thrusters violently ignited, the g-forces pounded onto Marcus' body sending him deep into the cushions of his chair. To normal men the pain would be excruciating, but to Marcus Falden it was a rush.

"Don't rush in you fool!" Stephen screamed.

"Shut the fuck up General!" Marcus screamed back.

OZ once again fired its plasma cannon, the beam surged into the pit of clouds crashing into the ground.

Just as the beam went through the 4 pods fired. Using the smoke as cover each pod was silent from both OZ's and Alpha's FCS, it was the perfect cloak. To Marcus' surprise four greenish beams of energy pierced through the outer rims of the smoke heading straight towards him.

"Son of a bitch!" Marcus screamed acting on his impulses alone. OZ's left arm quickly pivoted across the torso as its energy shield engaged just in time to block the attack. But the force of four beams was too much to hold off. All four beams exploded at once on the shield creating a strong enough force to knock OZ falling backwards. In the middle of its fall the machine let go of its plasma cannon. The elongated weapon hit the ground while OZ did the same. Marcus' body was thrown like a frail doll inside his cockpit. His head, arms, and legs all crashing into some form of metal object. The skin on his forehead tore from the impact causing minor leaks of blood to emerge. His eyes began to shake causing his vision to blur while streams of crimson rivers flowed over his face. With each flowing cell of blood his eyes blinked as his vision became distorted with a red hue.

"Marcus you alright?" Stephen screamed but only to different forms of static.

Suddenly the Seraph burst out from its current coffin firing all missile pods attached to its limbs and torso. The swarm of missiles screeched through the air, each single warhead separating at different angles each still locked onto Alpha's distinct heat signature.



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“Damn...heh, well at least with one leg missing Alpha’s mobility should have increased a little.” Stephen chuckled.

Taking a deep breathe he placed his hand on both throttles, his right foot began to flex outwards applying a small amount of pressure to the accelerators. Finally as some of the silos approached Stephen acted.

Alpha dashed to the right avoiding the ones heading in from the center. Only a few seconds after his first evasion his radar warned him of another cluster approaching. But this time from behind. Alpha soared through the sky, barrel rolling around another set that appeared from in front. As he avoiding the ones coming from in front of him they exploded with the set coming in from behind. Following the explosion even more missiles approached, each one determined to make its target.

“Damn...” Stephen mumbled as he glanced behind. “Can’t seem to shake them.”

“Heather...you’re out of ammo right?” Mario asked.

“Yeah...”

“Alright, stay here. I can’t just stand here while that monster attacks my friend.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Heh, you know I don’t plan ahead.” Anima suddenly took off heading straight towards the Seraph.

*<I hope you realize attacking me from behind will not work.>*

“What the fuck?!” Mario screamed. “Are you in my fucking head?!”

*<Does it matter? You’re only going to die.>*

“Shut up!!!” Mario screamed. Anima’s whips launched quickly wrapping around the right leg of the Seraph.

“You’re not even worth my attention.” Pride mumbled turning his back towards Mario.

“What?! Don’t you dare underestimate me!”

Electrical surges began to wrap around the Seraph doing no physical damage but causing its FCS to collapse.

“Heh, impressive.” Pride mumbled.

Much to Stephen’s joy the remaining missiles exploded in the air since their targeting systems were no longer active.

“Phew...” Stephen sighed.

“Well it seems you my friend are in quite the hurry to die.” Pride started as the gears roared loudly once the Seraph began to turn towards Mario. The four pods now flew in front of the Seraphs preparing to fire along side with the two energy cannons attached to both arms.

Mario began to move his throttles hoping to get out of the way, but found them to be unresponsive.

“Is there a problem? You used all your energy trying to stop me leaving you defenseless to recharge. Such a pity, you had such potential.”

To the shock of Pride two explosions erupted on the Seraph’s back causing it to tumble forward. His reptilian eyes moved to the right as he turned the Seraph around.

“You are all such pests!” Pride screamed.

“We have unfinished business if I recall correctly.” Adam replied.

Pride’s eyes widened, his lips parted grinning with glee at the sight before him.

“I was wondering when I would be able to fight you. It would seem that I made the correct choice in leaving you alive. Do not disappoint me.”

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Adam glanced at the side of his new cockpit. Unlike the Shade there was much more room, it was actually enjoyable to sit in. The azure MF floated elegantly in the sky only a few meters away from the Seraph.

“Adam, you still haven’t configured the new OS. Blue Dragon will respond but you will most likely still feel a bit sluggish in its movements.” Mathew said over the radio.

“I figured as much. But its still much better than a Shade....and Mathew.”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.”

Adam began to smirk as he stepped on the pedals. The eight wings spread open and the thrusters ignited brightly creating a cerulean spectacle of energy floating out from the torso’s back. Pride was taken back by the speed the new MF presented, to the normal eye it seemed like a blur, but even to Pride’s advanced configuration he still couldn’t properly track Blue Dragon’s movements. Once again finding a reason to smirk Adam attacked. The edge of his energy saber slashed through the middle torso of the Seraph tearing through the armor and wires. Debris flew in all directions, singed, and burnt fluttering down towards the ground along with the electrical flames to burst out from the wound. Pride was thrown back from the force and the Seraph was forced to take a few steps back from the attack.

Blue Dragon slowly moved away from the Seraph and began to rise to its eye level.

“Is this what you wanted?” Adam asked.

*<It would seem that you are no longer clouded in judgement.>*

“It would appear not..”

Pride chuckled.

*“We were sent here to eliminate you. But I can sense that you are troubled, you are no longer the person you used to be. You are no longer the elite pilot, you are nothing more than an anger driven berserker. I would like to fight you as the person you used to be. I will let you live so that one day I can have that fight.”*

Remembering that moment on Mars Pride’s adrenaline began to pump thoroughly through his veins. His face lit up devilishly with a deep grin, his eyes glowing from the excitement. His fingers tightened around the edges of the throttles, his mouth nearly seething from the anticipation.

“I will enjoy this.” Pride gestured.

## **Chapter Twenty-Seven: Wings of Rebirth**

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

The sun was slowly setting in the distance, the waves in the ocean had finally calmed into a subtle peaceful pattern of waves rushing along the shore. The Seraph towered over the land, its darkened shadow placing an over cast above the terrain along with the frames surrounding it. A small outburst of reddish flames sparkled along side the diagonal gash across the chest of the machine. The crimson flames flushing out from Alpha slowly dissipated as Stephen's feet eased up from the accelerators. Pride watched cautiously as the red machine descended. It was hard for him to look at the current scenario with the same amount of confidence as he did earlier. It would be safe to say that his pride was shot; his Seraph had never sustained the amount of damage as it was standing with.

His eyes blinked a few times as he tried to calm himself down. The thin slits that acted as pupils were dilated from the brewing frustration, his vision had become distorted, blurred mainly. But being a Crimson Dawn he was superior to humans in every way, his mental strength alone could destroy the mental stability of a person resulting in a nervous breakdown and even worse, in death. Something about his personality prevented him from using his abilities in battle; he had always taken great pride in his accomplishments and would never let anything stain his reputation. All in all, the current scenario was not the one he pictured when he accepted the mission. That aside, he truly was enjoying himself.

"Hehhahahaha...it has been a long time since I've felt such joy in the midst of battle. It was quite possibly had been before I was sent to that hellish of a space facility." Pride exclaimed, his lips were widely open, saliva dripping from his teeth. The sound of his laughter resonating in the incased cockpit as well as through the neutral communications system and even through the minds of every person within a 100 meter radius.

"Adam, this machine...it's too powerful." Mario mumbled just as Anima swayed away from the monstrous shadows engulfing him.

At a time he would acknowledge the superior power that emanated before him, he had seen it plenty of times. But he had also triumphed over the most adverse situations. The last time Adam encounter this particular Seraph his wings were torn from him causing him to fall to the ground. But here he was, once again staring at the same machine, with his newly reborn wings.

"I'm not too worried. It's only a machine, it isn't invincible." Adam replied.

Blue Dragon dismissed anything subtle and jumped into action. The nimble machine flew towards the Seraph with both energy sabers revealed.

"Close range this time will not benefit you. That much I will guarantee." Pride remarked.

"Pft\* It doesn't matter." Adam mumbled.

Blue Dragon was forced to sway to the right just as a beam of energy boomed out from the Seraph's right palm. It wasn't something he remembered from his previous encounter but it didn't seem to matter. As expected the Seraph went on the offensive once again, the torso began to spin clockwise, slowly at first, but with each second its rotation picked up speed. As the machine became a silver blur, dozens of energy beams shot out in all directions. Adam's eyes widened and quickly pulled the throttles back and began to fly around as many beams as he could. Just as the blue frame dodged another volley it was tagged hard from behind. Adam's body was thrown at full force forward, the restraints expanded to their fullest keeping him from crashing into the display screen before him. Blue Dragon began to fall towards the ground in a spinning spiral decent while the attacks continued to spread outwards. Dozens of explosions lit up the sky, buildings tumbled from the forces being sent outwards.

"Stop it! Who knows how many innocent lives are going to be killed because of this!" Adam screamed.

"Everyone dies, no matter what happens lives are going to end!"

"Damn you..."

Blue Dragon barrel rolled just as Adam flung the throttles forward and to the side. The MF recovered its balance, the wings swung outwards and quickly departed from their binders. The boosters ignited ferociously and once again Adam went on the attack.

Each orbital wing dodged the energy beams that were being flung through the air in time to fire an attack of their own. The 4 pods from the Seraph moved in position to create another energy barrier, which deflected the attacks from the orbital weapons. Knowing what he had to do Adam changed his

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attention to the 4 pods unique to the Seraph. The first pod was in range, docking the energy sabers Blue Dragon took hold of both rifles and began to fire without hesitation. Just as each beam of positron energy neared the targeted pod would change its position moving quickly through the air.

“Damn... a little help would be nice!” Adam screamed.

Blue Dragon’s torso bent to the right just avoiding a beam of energy once again.

“Its only a matter of time until you die! How much longer can you withstand my fury? I wonder...”

At that moment two boomerangs flung through the sky, one of them missed its target as the pod dodged only for the second one to slice through. The explosion littered the sky with metal debris causing the energy barrier to disappear. As each boomerang followed its curved trajectory Alpha grabbed them in mid flight just as the crimson machine appeared next to Blue Dragon.

“Sorry, had to replenish some ammunition. Mario and Marcus are doing the same, they should be along shortly.” Stephen replied.

“Heh... its funny, just moments ago we were fighting. And now, here we are once again fighting together.”

“You woke up. What else can I say?”

“Heh, I guess that’s one way of looking at it.”

“We’ll discuss this later. Right now, our main focus should be on surviving this battle.”

Their attention quickly moved back towards the Seraph, thunderous booms resonated with each step the machine took. As the armored feet rose from the ground leaving deep rectangular trenches both Blue Dragon and Alpha made their way towards the beast. With the energy barrier disabled, their attacks would now be able to do some damage.

“I’m going right this time. I’ll attack it on its left.” Adam exclaimed.

“Heh, does it bother you that much that you’re so predictable?” Stephen laughed.

“Eh, not really. It’s just that if you’ve noticed the Seraph’s more vulnerable on its left. Most of the damaged it sustained is on that side. I’m hoping that we can take it down much faster this way.”

Smirking Adam applied more pressure to the accelerators while Stephen began to head in the opposite direction.

*<I hope you two don’t think you can beat me just because you disabled my barrier! My pride will not allow it!>*

“Ugh, will you stop with the psychic crap. It was impressive the first time we met. Now it’s getting old. You’re like a one trick pony, show me something new!” Adam screamed.

Blue Dragon turned to the right avoiding another beam of energy, Adam’s eyes widened when he noticed the three remaining pods fly in his direction. He knew there wasn’t any room for dodging; he would have to take the brunt of the attack head on and hope for the best. The boosters turned inwards at a 56-degree angle just before more energy managed to squeeze out from the generators.

Turning the torso abruptly around Adam began to fire his rifles. The intense beams of cerulean energy surged past the pods, Adam punched the right side of his cockpit; his fist slamming into the cold bumpy surface of his side control panel. His aim was accurate, but he still wasn’t able to compensate for the agility of that each pod had. They were like a cluster of flies, extremely nimble and difficult to hit. Unlike his orbital weapons it seemed that Pride, and the rest of the Crimson Dawn pilots were able to mentally control the movements of each individual pod. If that was the case, then it would be nearly impossible for him to predict the pods’ movements, unlike a AI OS, patterns would not be developed in a short amount of time. There would be no logical deducing in order to determine the most appropriate path; it would be based on sheer instincts. And instincts are nearly impossible to predict.

It was only a matter of time before the pods began to go on the offensive along with the Seraph itself, and then Adam knew he would have to switch to a strictly defensive strategy.

*<I told you, you can not defeat me!>*

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Adam glanced towards the Seraph, staring in disgust while his hands and feet controlled the MF's actions. Beams of energy along with missile silos flooded the air forcing Blue Dragon to fly around, with barely any time to counter. The heat had finally begun to take its toll, Adam's eye lids were starting to get heavy, the perspiration dripped over his pupils blurring his vision. His hands began to slip off the throttles all due to the dew mounting over the plastic outer layering.

"Damn it..." Adam screamed, his right hand moved away from its throttle in order to wipe the sweat dripping off his bangs. His hair normally a dark shade of brown was looking more black than brown. His helmet lay on the floor of the cockpit, fog finally evaporating off the visor, and the inside padding still dripping from all the sweat that was accumulated from the past few hours of battle. He shook his head forcing himself to stay awake; to stay away from the unconscious feeling that was creeping up upon him.

A beam of energy smashed into the core of Blue Dragon sending the machine spinning towards the ground. Adam's head collided into the headrest, his restraints still keeping his body in a safe position.

*<You're getting tired! That is the difference between you and I, between humans and Crimson Dawn. We lack your frailties, you lack our strengths, and yet, we bare all the sins of humanity!>*

Each and every booster on the Seraph began to ignite slowly lifting the unit into the air. Each pod continued to zip around and through the skies in random formations, all the while dodging any attack that Adam managed to let loose.

As the Seraph prepared the positron cannon Pride's eyes trickled with an eerie sensation. The feeling of being watched, studied overcame his demeanor. Even though he was not technically human, he still was endowed with their senses and fears, even if they were not as direct.

"Typical, dogs attack in packs." Pride mumbled.

Suddenly the positron cannon changed direction, folding underneath the Seraph's right arm joint. The slight humming that breezed through the winds swept quickly around the sky. Marcus Falden had spit in the face of death hundreds of times, but this was much different. There had never been an opponent like his current one. In the pit of his swirling gut he knew it too, and yet like a true soldier he kept his cool and broke forward. The red and purple trails of energy dissipated in the atmosphere as it eloquently cut through the clouds.

"What the fuck is that?!" Marcus yelled as he finally took notice of the glowing energy clustering around the upper back of the Seraph's core.

*<It's too late now.>* Pride's nefarious voice muttered through the mind of Marcus Falden.

"Head games? That shit won't work on me asshole!" Marcus screamed.

Being the type of person to attack challenges head on Marcus' hands moved away from the throttles, preparing OZ's own positron cannon to be readied. Knowing he had little time to act on his impulsive decision he had to act fast, even go into evasive maneuvers if he deemed it necessary. The cannon flipped underneath the left arm joints while it continually collected the energy particles necessary for the firing process.

Smirking Pride glanced over his shoulder, it didn't take long for Adam to jump back into the fray along with his brother. Both Blue Dragon and Alpha dashed towards the behemoth with their weapons locked and ready.

"You're getting a bit sluggish Adam. I think all that time in a Shade has hindered your performance. I'm not too sure you can keep up."

"Ha, well it's easy for you to go faster with one less leg."

"Funny, at least your sense of humor hasn't become dull." Stephen replied.

*<The bond you two share shall be shattered here and now. There is little hope for your victory, even with your numbers.>*

"Hey! Asshole!" Marcus screamed.

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“Don’t worry, I did not forget about you.” Pride replied.

“What?”

To his surprise the positron cannon on the Seraph fired with a flawless activation. The beam’s immense size was irregular for any normal type of cannon, and it’s speed had a much higher acceleration than Marcus had believed it would have.

“Shit that’s fast.....not much time to fuck around then!”

Marcus replied in the only fashion that he was ever properly trained in; Oz’s positron cannon fired as well. With the abundance of energy that he collected in the energy canisters in the cannon the recoil was tremendous forcing Oz to falter nearing tearing off the left arm. The crimson beam quickly collided with the one originally sent out by the Seraph. Knowing his attack had little hope of overcoming the oncoming attack Marcus quickly dropped the extra weight, there was no use of using the cannon anymore, he had already used up a tremendous amount of energy in the previous attack and the recharge rate for the cannon was too long. By dropping the cannon to the ground he gained an extra boost of speed.

The skyline erupted with a bright display of fireworks, all due to the explosion that occurred the instant the two beams collided.

“Shit Marcus...subtly was never your strong suit...Adam, how’s your radar?”

“Dead, the negative energy particles from the explosion are disrupting it. I can’t see for shit.”

“Damn mine too....Adam! Above you!” Stephen screamed.

“What the hell?!”

*<I should thank your friend. His abrupt decision gave me all the cover I needed to end this>*

The Seraph soared through the clouds of smoke and debris with two elongated Excaliburs preparing to strike. Blue Dragon strafed to the right, turning to the side. Knowing attacking the Seraph head on would be considered a reckless move Adam chose the alternative. Just as the beast approached, both thigh cannons flipped open firing upon full equipped position. The two beams of plasma energy flew towards the Seraph’s left arm in sync with each other. Just as the beams collided with the frame Blue Dragon dashed to the left avoiding the first attack of Pride. Much to Pride’s surprise the Seraph’s left arm took an incredible amount of damage, sparks burst outwards while warning signs flickered in the dark seclusion of his cockpit.

*<Impressive..>*

“I’m far from done. You’re Seraph, its power is indeed unrivaled, but your speed is still too slow. And being out numbered, your chances of survival are slim. Just give up here!” Adam screamed.

*<Giving up is not an option....>*

Cringing, he pushed his throttles forward, and Blue Dragon’s thrusters exploded with a culmination of energy sending the blue frame towards the Seraph. Adam’s eyes could only focus on the weak joints that were searing with smoke on the left side. Like a hawk he singled out the area of weakness. Pride knew what was coming, and as much as he hated to admit it, his Seraph was too slow to be able to turn around, or to at least avoid the attack that he knew was coming.

The g-forces continued to pull at the body of Adam as Blue Dragon descended quickly with its energy sabers fully extended and ignited. Just as the blue frame passed by the Seraph, both of its arms cross slashed piercing through the already weakened arm joint. A minute explosion riddled the core while Pride held tightly onto the support beams inside. The amount of debris that was flung into the sky collided with Blue Dragon who was already falling with tremendous speed. The minor collision instantly knocked the MF off it’s course, and into a spiral.

“You really need to pay attention before you jump into action. \*Sigh\*..” Stephen mumbled.

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“Shut it, it’s not like I can’t recover from this!” Adam screamed back just before Blue Dragon’s wings extended right above the ocean surface. Waves of pure salt filled water shot into the air just as Blue Dragon recovered its balance, hovering over the water.

*<You are only prolonging the inevitable....there’s no use in fighting against the destiny that has already been set in motion...>*

The Seraph damaged and with only one arm remaining slowly made its way towards the rough rocky ground below. Oz and Alpha regrouped with Blue Dragon that was hovering just before the monstrosity.

“Let’s just finish this...it’s been an exhausting day.” Marcus muttered.

“Not yet, I’ve been meaning to ask this. What role are the Night Stalkers supposed to play in this supposed destiny? You’ve been targeting Red Fury facilities, and yet you have no political ties to any nation.” Adam replied.

“Someone hasn’t been doing their homework. While it is indeed true that we appear to have no ties to any nation, that reality is warped.” Pride replied.

His adrenaline had appeared to ease down, his own arrogance wouldn’t allow him to admit verbally that he was defeated, but he unlike the other members of the Crimson Dawn had little respect for his creator.

“You’re a secretly financed group with a cover saying that the neutral nations of Earth created in opposition to the likes of Orbis and Red Fury. However that is far from true, when you look deeper into the sources of your finances it becomes clear that these Seraphs are created by Genesis with no fees attached. Naturally, a machine that takes around 20 million to make would raise suspicion. Especially if the bills charged to the neutral nation were far from valid. In reality you take your orders from the current head of the UGE, Luscious Malum. His stock in both Genesis and the TA was more than enough to cover the construction of 7 Seraphs along with the transport ships that take you between Earth and Mars through a series of sub-worm holes. That is the truth about the Night Stalkers, your role is to take care of problems in the shadows without bringing attention to Luscious Malum.” Stephen muttered.

Pride at first just stared back at the group of frames that stood before him, however it didn’t take long before his mouth opened wide releasing a sharp explosion of laughter, never had he expected a human to be that smart.

“Hahahaha...I am very impressed....hahahaha. You know much more than I gave you credit for. It seems I need not be concerned with the future. Hahaha...maybe things can be changed....and knowing this, I am content with the path my artificial life has taken. “

“What the fuck is this guy talking about?!” Marcus screamed.

“You’re not like the others are you...Our first encounter, you could have killed me...but you didn’t.” Adam mumbled.

“I had faith in your destiny. And it would seem that I was correct. Don’t falter, even if it is for a second, because the Tribulation that awaits will be nothing like the previous attempt. The heavens will rain fire, and the lives of Earth will dim until nothing flourishes ever again...heed my words..this may be the last break you ever receive..”

Pride glanced over his shoulder and slowly took hold of a trigger. With out second guessing his decision, he acted. The Seraph slowly began to flicker until flames began to rupture out from almost every crevice and hole.

“Is he doing what I think he’s doing?” Marcus screamed.

“Shit...back away!” Stephen screamed.

Just as the massive machine went up in a glorified roast of flames Adam could do nothing but reflect on the words mentioned only a short while ago. It wasn’t until now that he realized choice to go after Luscious Malum might not have been a particularly smart decision.

**Chapter Twenty-Eight: Blood Tattered Skies**

The skies above Berlin were searing with caliginous clouds of distilled smoke and ash. Red Fury had made their assault with passion and ambition, but unfortunately for David Lepitus, he had no idea that the bane of his existence, Luscious Malum was prepared and solely focused on him. The attack formation David took up was flawless in theory, but his lack of true leadership experience was his weakness. He took too much pride in the satellite cannon the EAP unofficially provided Red Fury with, and failed to recognize the sheer need for MFs in the situation. His intel was flawed and wrong in almost every field conceivable. He expected Berlin to be defenseless and an easy target and that was far from the case. Luscious Malum made sure Berlin was amply protected with more than enough firepower.

The battle was quick and ended only mere moments after the Red Fury drop pods were released. Every Shade and Night-Wing that Red Fury had in their arsenal was shot down, torn apart, or evaporated from the skies only seconds after being released from their metallic coffins. David had no choice but to watch in awe and disbelief as his battalion went up in a brash display of blood filled fireworks. The anti-air missile launchers that were set up around the Berlin monument were unrealistically accurate, and then there was the ace up Luscious Malum's metaphorical sleeve; the Evertos, a machine that would have become the new flagship frame for the EAP if things had gone slightly different at Dammerung two months earlier. Their speed was the essence of the fear that pierced through the souls of their enemies. David in all logical sense stood little chance of even making it to the ground, thus leaving all of his aspirations for the so-called invasion in the hands of the units descending to West Point.



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David's eyes quivered with a fear that he had never felt the likes of before. Blood splattered amongst his cockpit, staining the charcoal leather and plastic textures of his seat and panels. Just like his frame, Retribution, David was crawling with injuries. Severe gashes were the source of the rivers of blood that made their way down his pale and frigid looking face. His pilot suit was tattered with shards of crystalline glass and all other sorts of metallic debris. The faint scent of human rapture brimmed through the atmosphere. Heaving and gasping for breath David could only grimace as he stared out at the blurred image of a single silhouette paraded before him. Barely able to make its details out he could only shutter at the presence that was glaring back at him.

"I... \*cough\*..." Barely even able to speak one word before his throat heaved painfully allowing a flood of blood and vomit to spurt out, his body leaned forward, both hands sluggishly moving towards his shivering lips while the display screen was blurred by the thick fluids that floated down the static induced screen. Spitting out the few remnants that failed to make their way out during the first reflex he managed to regain some sort of composure allowing for him to speak. "I... failed..."

"Failed is such a harsh word David. You merely fulfilled your destiny. And that destiny was to fall at the hands of my sword. What you accomplished today was simply the will of God. Red Fury has fallen, your satellite cannon is useless and your support troops from Mars won't make it off the ground. This is my world David Lepidus, and there is no room for you or Red Fury. The immature naïve dream that was Carlos Rendetore dies here today." The ominous voice rang dully through David's ears. His hearing along with his vision was dampened, no longer at its peak making it that much harder to stay conscious and coherent.

"How... \*cough\*... how could I lose..."

"Heh... simple, because you're opponent was me. The current head of this world, I am its new God. I held onto the plans of your creation, I created the blueprints that is your destiny, and here and now I tore them to shreds. My use for you has ended; my use for Red Fury has ended. I am Luscious Malum, the savior of humanity. Your sins are no longer needed in this world; your transgressions will end with a single blow. Fall with pride, as you were the first to encounter the Omega in battle. And you shall be the first to fall at its hands." Luscious Malum grinned just before he turned off the communication server with Retribution. Before he even began to prepare to launch he found his hand caressing the bottle of Merlot that was stashed next to his exquisitely tailored leather seat.

David continued to struggle with his consciousness in his cockpit; his vision either blurred or tainted crimson from the loss of blood. No longer could his hands remain tightly secured onto Retribution's controls, and with each moment his feet would find their way sliding off the accelerators. There was no way for him to keep on going; in the pit of his stirring soul he knew this to be true. His fate was marked, there was nothing left for him to accomplish. He took Carlos' dream as far as it could go, and now he realized what the dream truly meant. Carlos never wanted Red Fury to stand up and take arms against others, or to merely protect a single colony on Mars. Carlos wanted Red Fury to stand up, and with a deep resounding voice scream "We will not be erased from this world without a fight." He wanted Red Fury to fight for the rights of humanity until the last drops. And now, in the face of death could he realize it.

"Heh... \*cough\*... sorry Carlos..."

His final words just before Luscious struck. David's eyes slowly closed, sealing his vision, along with his life.

In a contained explosion Luscious' frame surrounded by smoke and the shadows from the towering buildings touched down onto land. The remaining unit of Evertos standing proudly beside him, Luscious could only grimace at the site.

"It would seem that the threat to Berlin has been contained. Commander McGrath, please inform the political representatives of the UGE that Red Fury has been stopped in Berlin. And that I am preparing to deal with them in West Point. The threat of terrorism will be extinguished today." Luscious spoke with a tone befitting of only a king.

"Right away President Malum... and if I may speak freely..." The timid sound in the young commander's voice only fueled Luscious' ego.

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“Feel free.”

“Thank you sir, I just felt that I should say how amazing you were out there today sir. I had never expected you to handle a combat situation with such grace and tranquility. Even though the Omega had just arrived, you were still able to control it with little struggle. It’s safe to say that I have never seen a display of skill quite like yours. Not since the Azure Cup tournament.”

“Oh...and may I inquire as to who I remind you of?”

“Of course sir. I only saw a hand full of matches, but the one that stood out the most was the final match, between Rebel358 and Adam Novus. I had never seen such movement from a frame and its pilot since Rebel358.”

“Rebel358 eh? Heh...thank you Commander. I appreciate your compliment.”

“You’re welcome sir. And one other thing, West Point has already been secured. General Novus and his unit swayed off the Red Fury forces along with a Night Stalker unit. I tell you, no force on either planet compares to the power of the UGE.”

“General Novus defended West Point with success? I see...that is all Commander.”

“Yes sir!” With an energetic salute the Commander closed off communications and quickly made his way to the debriefing room to begin preparations for the upcoming mission to Mars.

“It would seem that I misread...when ever did my pawn transgress into a capable knight? It would appear that I may have to take a higher interest into you then General Novus.” Luscious sighed, leaning back into the cushions provided by his chair. With his glass of wine stirring he took a final sip before closing his eyes as the dawn of a new day approached the horizon. The beams of orange and yellow light glistened throughout the city of Berlin as the remnants of the MFs used by Red Fury were burnt piercing through the solidified ground of the city.

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“It’s raining again...” Adam mumbled as he leaned against the window of the MF hanger in West Point. They had been lucky since they were the only ones around, there was no commotion getting their frames in for repairs. The thin streams of water pellets filled the atmosphere and with the thickened fog made it nearly impossible to see more than 5 feet in front of your position. It bothered him, the fact that the remains of all the frames and pilots still were out there. Out in the tempest for the weather to take, most were faceless men, but the few that he knew made it even harder to accept. He had found what he thought he lost, even though the fact that Sharon Amare was indeed alive brought up even more questions, at the moment he didn’t seem to care. This wasn’t the first time that he had seen a person he cared about die and then show back up casually. Amy Caecus died once before his eyes at the age of 16 only to run into her 2 years later. It was the first time where he became aware of what Genesis was doing, their venture into the area where God reigns supreme, messing with human DNA, altering it, cloning, in the end, simply just toying with it. The first time he came across this, Amy, the second incarnation of her was a clone. The second time was when he saw Sharon Amare die, her skin burning from an irregular source of heat and eventually the darkened color of ash taking place of the slightly tanned skin. Never before had he seen such frailty in a human as her bones collapsed inwards only to wither into the winds.

He had always had some suspicions about her, the Sharon that accompanied him to Mars, her recollection of earlier events was sketchy at best, and her personality appeared to be much clingier than the Sharon Amare he met in front of the Genesis head office. And then finding her here, in West Point only confirmed the suspicions he felt from the beginning, the Sharon he was with wasn’t real.

“Ugh...this is too damn bothersome...” Adam growled as his fingers brushed through his mahogany hair.

“Heheh, penny for your thoughts?”

“Huh?” He quickly turned around correcting his imperfect and slumped posture. Like a child he smirked with embarrassment. Showing emotion, or confusion in front of no one is one thing, it is the

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preferred means of expression in most men, and to find that comfort zone invaded with out notice adds to the embarrassment.

Sharon Amare stood only a few feet way, her right hand leaning against the cracked, deformed wall. She had a certain smile to her, something the clone never had. Her radiance brightened his darkness with a simple sarcastic grin. She was real, her emotions weren't fake, weren't made according to data. There was an edge to her; it was the same edge he first fell for when they met. Once again he found himself in the same awkward situation with little to say.

"So? What's wrong, you've said very little to me ever since we got here."

"I...ummm, sorry." He could only manage to get those baffled and forced words out from his lips.

"Heheh, well, it's comforting to know that you're just as confused as I am." Sharon replied. She moved away from the wall, her feet taking the first step of many and began to approach. Her hair was tied in a pony tail, still managing to flow down to her mid-shoulders. Adam could only be caught up in the beauty that was before him, her clothes were average, a dull gray hooded sweater and jeans, but her personality glistened from her face and eyes.

"Yeah...I have no idea what I'm feeling right now...it's been a chaotic few months."

"Chaotic, heh, that's a good way to describe it."

"Sharon..." Adam mumbled.

"Yeah?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Of course."

"Do you...." Pausing he had to turn away, glaring back into the constant rain fall that over took the skies that were stained with blood. "Do you hate me for what happened?"

The word "hate" isn't a word most people like to throw around for no good reason. It is a word that has the power to leave a lasting impression on the heart of those it's used against. At first she didn't know how to react, her heart nearly stopped from the shock. Eventually in a few seconds her eyes widened, that was the last thing she expected him to ask her.

"I would understand completely if you did. I mean, if it wasn't for me then you'd never have dealt with the pain and suffering that Genesis put you through. For what it's worth....I'm sorry."

"Adam...I..."

"It's ok...I understand."

"\*sigh\* You're such an ass. Not everything's about you, you know. What happened to me happened because of my own decision. You are not at fault for this. You need to lighten up you know. If you don't you're performances in battle will suffer. You're brother taught me that."

"Stephen did...heh...I see. Still....I'm not sure where we go from here. I mean..."

"We start over. It's the best way." Sharon replied, her smile, it had never left her face since she appeared moments ago. Adam couldn't help but stare at it, it was that smile, so full of life, and energy that was missing for the past few years; the smile was one of the things that no man of science could ever dream to recreate.

"I'm Sharon Amare. Nice to meet you." Sharon abruptly blurted out along with her right hand which now lingered in front of Adam.

"You can't be serious."

"I said start over. Sorry to break it to you, but you're not getting in my pants that easily." Sharon replied.

"Damn, I forgot how sarcastic you could get. Start over eh? Heh, I guess I can deal with that. I'm Adam Novus."

"Nice to meet you Adam, so you're an MF pilot?"

The two began to laugh as their hands intertwined with one another; it was the first time in a long time that he felt at peace with himself. He truly was home.

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“Isn’t that cute, that’s what love is. They’ve been apart for so long and yet they can jump back into it.” Ashley stated while she glared at Stephen who was sitting across from her.

“What? Don’t look at me like that.” Stephen replied.

“You people are fucking annoying. I don’t even know why I’m still here.” Marcus bitterly grumbled.

“Because you’re MF is in no condition to go anywhere. That and you have no transport in site.” Mario replied.

“Funny man eh, why don’t we see who’s laughing after I beat that smirk off your face!” Marcus screamed.

“Marcus calm down. We have enough shit to deal with right now. Between Red Fury’s attack, the Night Stalkers and Luscious Malum, I’d say we’ve got quite the plate full.” Stephen replied.

“I don’t give a shit about any of those bastards. My only concern is to find the asshole who killed my comrades. Once I can get in touch with Von Schuler I’ll be able to...” Silence suddenly swept through the hanger, Ashley turned away as did Heather. Both Stephen and Mario merely sat in silence. “What?”

“Secretary of Defense Von Schuler is dead Marcus. He died weeks ago from an assassination attempt.” Mario replied.

“What the fuck?!!”

“That’s the official report. That an assassination attempt on President Malum was interrupted by the heroics of the renowned Von Schuler, however, I highly doubt that’s the end of it.” Stephen interrupted.

“Just what the hell are you saying then Novus?”

“I’m saying that I wouldn’t be surprised if Luscious Malum killed him. It seems that Luscious is trying to get rid of everyone that may pose him a threat later on in life. It would explain why he left West Point to be defended by just me and my team, and why the entire 181<sup>st</sup> Independent Forces was wiped out off the coast of Japan. And then it gets even worse with the Night Stalkers attacking Red Fury on Mars, he was trying to get rid of Red Fury before they even made it to Earth. I’m not sure how the other part of Red Fury’s forces made out, but I wouldn’t be surprised if their efforts were halted as well. This world is really in chaos, even though it may not appear to be that way on the surface.”

“You can’t expect me to just sit here while that prick is out there do you?!”

“And what do you expect to accomplish by blindly rushing out there with a barely functioning machine?”

“Err.....”

“You’re better off staying with us Marcus. It’s completely up to you, but if you want to deal with Luscious Malum you need to understand the position that he upholds now. He’s in complete command of the entire UGE; he basically controls all of Earth. Getting to him will not be an easy task.” Stephen replied.

“I need to get in touch with my only remaining comrade, Natasha Sullivan first. She’s waiting for me.”

“Go ahead; we’ll be here for a while. Repairs on Alpha won’t be finished until Thursday, which gives you 4 days to find her and get back here.”

“One other thing Novus. Just what is it that you intend to do next? What’s your move, you’re too smart to charge in at the UGE.”

“We head to Rome. I hear that’s where Gail Contadino is residing.”

“Gail? You’re going to Orbis?”

“Yeah, there’s no way we can return to the military now. We’ve done nothing particularly wrong, but if we go back it’d only be that much easier for Luscious Malum to take us out. We’re better off going to Orbis and joining forces with them. At least we’d have support.” Stephen replied.

“I see. Strength in numbers, well then, I hate to admit it but you know what you’re doing Novus. This shouldn’t take too long. Just take care of OZ while I’m away. I swear if there’s one scratch on there that wasn’t there before I’ll have your head!”

“Got it Marcus, and while I’m at it, I’ll have them add a new coat of paint to.” Stephen replied.

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“Humor, you’re funny. When I get back we’ll deal with Luscious Malum.”

“That we will...(I only hope this is the right path...)” Stephen took a final breath before rising up from the wooden crate from which he was sitting.

The rain continued to pound heavily on the metal awning that covered the hanger, with each drum beat time slowly treaded forward. Adam and Sharon sat together in front of their frames while the rest remained gathered together in the break room while Marcus Falden left to follow his own path before rejoining the rest. The twisted wheel design of destiny turned yet another chapter in the lives of humanity.

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The flames were burning brighter than ever while buildings crumbled and children screamed. Moscow had already been a shell of its former self, but with the current destruction many wondered if it would ever return to its former glory. Death crept up on the people of the city as the single MF from the news made its latest debut. This time the fury unleashed was much more than many could withstand. No area was left unturned, the frame made its rampage, destroying everything in sight. The few fighter planes and armored tanks that were sent to engage lasted only a few minutes before being ruptured to pieces.

This all occurred 4 hours before the rising of the sun, while the world had their eyes set on stages such as West Point or Berlin, Moscow was drowned under a tornado of flames and death.

*10:17 AM Rome, Italy*

“Gail...it would seem as if the H-3 made yet another appearance. This time in Moscow.”

“And why didn’t we become aware of this until now Lucian? I thought you said our radars would be able to detect the heat signature if it appeared again?”

“I did, but the interference from the Red Fury drop ships in space distorted our satellite systems, by the time we were aware of its appearance it was far too late.”

“Damn it...we’re running out of time. If we don’t find any new clues to this H-3 then I’m afraid Luscious Malum will become too powerful to be challenged. I feel that we’re the only ones left on Earth who fear the absolute authority that he has been given.”

“That’s not entirely true Gail. I’ve received word from a colleague that we have a few more people interested in joining our campaign.”

“Colleague?”

“Yes, Mario Liberalis. According to him, the Azure Knight has made his way back to Earth. He was with Red Fury for a while, but he’s back. Also the Crimson Knight is interested as well. It would seem that we’ve gained some leverage, between the Azure Knight, the Crimson Knight and their comrades and the other MF pilots we’ve established quite the force of opposition.”

“I see...Adam Novus has come back. Well then, this is all the more reason to find the H-3. With them and the H-3 our victory will be guaranteed. Good work as always Lucian...good work indeed.”

**Chapter Twenty-Nine: Mortui non Dolent**

The screams still continued to penetrate through the hearts and souls of those still in the vicinity of the eroding buildings and environment. The clouds above were soured with the taste of premature rotted souls, darkened and ominous, preventing the sun from making its way to the city. The flames had finally managed to die down, revealing even more scars etched into the world for eternity. The remains of the city were scattered amongst the burnt crimson sand, becoming nothing more than a proverbial tombstone for all the lives that were lost hours ago.

A quiet breeze fluttered through the wasteland as the electrical currents flickered through fallen lamp posts. Silence was the new ruler of the city, nothingness was all that remained. Moscow was the latest in a long line of destructive acts that left the world in disbelief and even more confusion. Having no relation to Red Fury, the EAP, TA or the UGE, these attacks of random murderous intent have left any family, nation and government shaking with fear of being next. The frame that was at fault could never be recognized or even be caught on camera long enough to be able to create a basic identifying data sketch. And to many of the civilians of Earth the UGE would be their saving grace, regardless of their focus on Red Fury. It had seemed for the moment, Orbis was the only solace that the world could take; Gail Contadino was the only leadership figure head that had given this mysterious frame the attention that it deserved.

Leaving Orbis' original desire to prevent any and all battles from occurring for the sake of humanity's prosperity, Orbis found it necessary to look at this frame as a much larger threat than any military faction could ever pose. Much to Luscious Malum's dismay, Gail was slowly beginning to gain the world's trust, and compassion. How it would affect the UGE was yet to be determined.

*Rome, Italy*  
1600

Gail sat contently quiet in his office as the clouds outside congregated towards one another at a slow turtle like pace. His stereo which he used to sooth his moods was screeching out constant static filled news reports from Moscow. It was hard for him to make out even the smallest bit of information, but it was all he could hope to do in his current position. The weather for the area was predicted to be the worst conditions for a trip to Moscow. The thunderstorms that were scattering all over the rest of Italy along with other smaller countries of Europe, this had unfortunately forced him to remain in Rome for the time being, until the skies cleared up once again. The tattered edges of his nails continued to tap repeatedly against the fine polished surface of his desk. His impatience was severe as it could be shown through his legs continuous fidgeting motion. His face slid abruptly off the rigid surface of his enclosed fist forcing him to wake from his mild day dream. With his eyes now partially open he yawned signifying the true depths of his boredom.

"Can I truly afford to keep waiting like this?" He muttered softly under his breath. It was times like this that he yearned for company, for someone to converse with. He was in fact a connoisseur of the art of conversing. Although he had slight tendencies to take the opinions of others a bit too personally,

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bringing them to the point of being offensive. Once again he scanned the rest of his office in order to confirm the fact that he was the only one around.

“\*sigh\*...It’s times like these that I wish I was back in space. At least there, there was plenty to do to keep busy...” Yawning for the second time in the same minute his body fell backwards into the restraints of his chair forcing the joints to move and forcing him to realize that he once again forgot to apply oil to them.

“Gail, you mind if I come in?”

The sound of Lucian’s voice was angelic music to Gail’s ears which were only moments away from withering.

“Yeah.”

As the door slid open Lucian entered with a distinguishing smirk lighting up his face.

“What’s with you? Not sure the last time I saw you like this.” Gail mentioned.

“Can’t seem to remember off the top of my head, but I’ve got some information that you might be interested in seeing.”

“Really? By all means enlighten me.”

With a quick flick of the wrist Lucian tossed a single manila folder onto Gail’s desk.

“This is it? What is it?”

“Less talking and more reading.”

Gail after glaring at his friend’s abrupt rudeness slowly opened the folder. At that very instant his eyes moved away from Lucian, staring only at the front page of the files he held in his hand.

“Lucian...this is...just where in the hell did you get this?!”

“I have very good sources and friends in high places.”

“Very high it would seem.”

“I’ll be honest with you; I have no idea what it is. My informant from Genesis simply emailed me the information saying that you would be interested in taking a peek at it.”

“So you really have no idea what it is?”

“Nope, not a clue. I merely had it printed and sealed in that folder for you to see. So, you going to keep me in suspense or are you going to tell me what it is?”

“Heh, this Lucian, is exactly what we need to find the H-3 before Luscious Malum does. This my friend, is the specifications for Mechanized Frames for the secret Chimera projects, along with the test trials, and data results from the project, Zenith of Artificially Created Humans. Code named, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hybrid.”

“You mean?”

“Yeah, this is all the information pertaining to the H-3. With this in our possession it shouldn’t be too difficult to identify the MF before it attacks. This is our saving grace Lucian, you have no idea how much I owe you.”

“Heh, I told you before Gail. We’re friends, and that I’d follow any path you take to your destiny.”

“Huh...well this certainly is intriguing.”

“What?”

“It appears there’s also complete information in regards to the Reconstructed Enhanced Inhuman Neo Embryo project as well. The hypothetical H-4, Luscious never mentioned if this project was indeed another hybrid following the birth of the third. But even still, it would be good to search for this one as well. If we can get both projects within our grasp then there would be no way Luscious Malum could succeed.”

“Seems I hit pay dirt then eh?”

“It would seem like. So, have you made contact with our unit in Russia? Have they made any progress with the H-3?”

“Yes actually I spoke with them earlier this morning. It would seem that one of them, Zach Orion suffered from severe head trauma and has been moved to a nearby hospital just outside of Moscow. Reine Proprius, Leo Umbra and Chris Prodito have accompanied him there. They said they haven’t been able to

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come up with anything of true value as of yet. But have gone on to report that Moscow is in complete chaos and that the UGE support troops arrived during our conference. Luscious Malum has apparently quickly resolved the Red Fury issue and is now making his rounds with the rest of the world for public support.”

“No, that’s not it. Luscious Malum has now set his sights onto the H-3 as well. Damn it, I thought he would have been more preoccupied with Red Fury and the early stages of the UGE’s development. Shit...looks like we have no choice. Get in touch with our transport facilities, I don’t care how bad the weather is, we’re going to Moscow.”

“Gail are you sure that’s a wise decision?”

“We no longer have the luxury of making wise decision. Right now, it’s the quickest that will survive. And I refuse to die anytime soon...”

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“YOU STUPID USELESS OLD MAN! HOW THE FUCK COULD YOU DIE!?!?!” Marcus’ anger had reached its highest limit. His loud, gut wrenching voice bounce off every cement and concrete slab in the closest vicinity. Never could he have imagined his mentor dying, dying like a dog in order for some “dick-less” politician to live. It tore up his soul in places he never even knew he had, the first severe blow he took was letting the former Admiral’s daughter die off the shores of Japan. He had carried that burden for the weeks that followed, hoping to discover the words necessary to apologize to Von Schuler. How he was entrusted with her care, and how he had failed. But now he knew he escaped from the terrible job of informing the Secretary of Defense forcing him to live with the shame for an even longer period of time. His fingers dug past the outer layer of skin that covered his palm while the rain beat down onto him physically just like the pain beat down on him mentally. His hair no longer glorious and full of vibrancy but now stringy, dangling lifelessly as each strand acted as a middle ground for the drops of water to make it from the air to the ground. His right leg quickly swung colliding towards a solitude rock that was before him. With his anger driving his emotions the rock was sent hurling into the sky crashing some where in the far distance.

“You son of a bitch...how the hell am I supposed to get shit done if I’m by myself...And now with Natasha not answering her phone...JUST WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON HERE?!?!” His voice continued to carry, his frustration continued to go beyond his breaking point. His fingernails becoming stained with the crimson blood that was being leaked out from his palm, his fingers still pressing forward into the depths of his palms with each step Marcus took towards the Atlantic. His blood leaving a single solitude trail as he continued moving forward, with Natasha unresponsive he knew he had little left to do but to return to the TA military hanger at West Point. Where the only physical incarnation of his memories remained, OZ was his sword that no matter how many times broke, always managed to recover even stronger than before. It was his means of escape from the harsh window of reality.

“Alright then...I’ll avenge your death old man, just like I will avenge the deaths of everyone else. I will spill the blood of your murders, and force them to become paralyzed at sheer sound of my name, Marcus Falden...”

“So how long has he been stuck in there anyway?” Ashley questioned.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders; he had made it a habit to ignore Ashley since they returned from battle. He knew how much it bothered her to be ignored; Ashley was the type of person who felt the untainted desire to be acknowledged, whether it was in a positive or negative way didn’t mean much to her.

“Still not speaking to me huh. You’re such an asshole.” She replied just as she turned away from him. Her bright blonde hair waving through the tense atmosphere while Stephen merely chuckled under his breathe.



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“He’s still ignoring you? Man he doesn’t know what to do with beautiful women I swear. Still such a child.” Mario mumbled as he approached. He had finished working on Anima’s OS for the day and was heading towards the barracks in the back of the hanger. All of them set up small rooms containing overused cots, along with a few blankets. It wasn’t much, but it got them through the day. Currently they were restricted to West Point in order to not draw any unneeded attention to themselves. Stephen had determined that Luscious would be watching the hanger closely, and that it would be best to wait a few days before they would make their leave to Rome. They had already confirmed from Gail’s right hand man, Lucian that a transport would be sent to pick them up. The transport itself would be equipped with radar jamming technology in order to deceive the UGE’s resources. The only problem would be the small window where the transport would load up on the MFs. It was determined that Heather would be the last one to load up in the transport since she had the longest offensive range with her sniper weapons. She would be able to pick off any enemy threats from a distance, allowing everyone else to load their equipment with ease.

“Shut up Mario, no one asked you for commentary.” Ashley grumpily replied.

“Damn....you don’t have to get all pissed off at me....” He pulled back from Ashley as her fumes were almost physically apparent. Her eyebrows were arching inwards, and her blue eyes were as cold as ice, piercing through anyone and anything that got in their line of vision.

Mario cringed, afraid of being dealt with physical harm. Ashley was known to get quite violent when angered; it was something that he wanted to avoid at all costs.

“Dude, what the hell is your problem? Do you like antagonizing her like this?” Mario whispered into Stephen’s right ear.

“She’s always like that. If she wants to get all upset over nothing then let her. I have other things I need to deal with right now; I don’t have time for her.” Stephen boldly stated. “Now I’ve fallen behind, we leave in 2 days and I have yet been able to analyze the data we stripped off of the Seraph.”

“The Seraph? What the hell do you need to analyze that thing for? You already know that Genesis developed them, and that the Night Stalkers secretly work for the UGE. So what else do you need to find?”

“Didn’t it bother you that the pilot just killed himself, it seemed rather odd. I mean, yeah he had lost all chances of winning but still. For him to go all out like that and then suddenly just commit suicide...it just doesn’t add up.”

“Maybe he was hoping the explosion would take us all out?”

“Not likely. If that was the case then he’d have certainly made an effort to get near us all before his frame exploded.”

“Argh, fuck it. I don’t care, he’s dead and is no longer a threat to us. Do want you want, I’m going to bed. I’m too exhausted to deal with this type of crap right now.” Mario yelled.

“Heh, go ahead. I never tried to stop you.”

“What do you think they’re talking about done there Adam?” Sharon asked as she continued to sit leaning against the elevated walkway which lead to the core of Blue Dragon. Adam had been sitting, confined in the cockpit for at the very least 3 hours while Sharon remained by his side sitting, conversing trying to make up for the lost time.

Adam rose his head up slightly at the sound of her voice; it was hard for him to not smile as she just had that affect on him. The slight subtle indents at the edge of her budding lips; her button like nose that curved slightly outwards towards the end, her hair was released from the pony tail she had it tied up in earlier allowing it to flow at its full vibrancy and radiance. She was adorable sitting with her knees angled to the ceiling, with her arms wrapped around the outer regions of her legs while being hidden under the sweater that was too big for her. She was indeed a distraction, but a welcomed one.

“Who Stephen?” Adam mumbled as he leaned over the control panel to get a glance of his brother and Mario walking their separate ways. “I don’t know, he’s probably boring everyone with his over exaggerated and detailed analysis of everything around him. I wouldn’t worry about it.” Adam replied.

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“Hahaha, at least he has a view on things. You just carelessly deal with things as they happen without taking much stock into why they happen. You’re so immature for your age; I don’t even remember why I was interested in you. Hahaha.”

“You’re so cruel...well...ummm...”

“Come on, you can do it. Where’s that wit and charm I remember? Or did it go sour in the years since we’ve seen each other?”

“You know what; I don’t have to take this abuse. I have work to get done.” Adam replied with a grin. Suddenly Blue Dragon’s cockpit began to close which fully encased Adam in his cockpit. Sharon sneered at Adam while he waved sarcastically just before the image of her was replaced with a cold metallic wall.

“No fair, that’s cheating.”

“Don’t care what it’s called. I have to get some work done otherwise I won’t be able to spend the remaining 2 days with you.” Adam replied.

“Aren’t you cute.”

“What can I say, I try.”

“Remember you promised you’d help reconfigure my MF’s OS so it’d be a lot easier for me to handle.”

“Yeah I know. Just get some sleep; I’ll come get you once I’m done.”

“Nah, I’m fine. There’s no place I’d rather be right now than right here by your side.”

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The hospitals just on the outskirts of the Moscow remains were bustling with chaos. Every doctor in the area was on-call due to the massive amounts of injured men and women that were being brought in. Some were less severe than others, while most would continue to suffer from hardships even after they’d be cleared from the hospital. Reine, Leo, and Chris all patiently waited in the waiting room while Zach rested. It was hard for them to remain calm with the current situation, they had been sent out by Orbis with the purpose of recovering data on the H-3 and yet they found nothing but destruction and a feeling of confusion. Reine sat in the plastic chair staring at all the gurneys that rolled by with IVs. With each passing person he cringed, feeling the pit in his stomach growing bigger along with his nausea.

“You ok?” Leo asked. It was hard to miss Reine’s disgust from the situation. His face was extremely pale, and he was losing his balance on the chair. His body weaving from side to side along with his eyes being half open was a dead give away.

“This is our fault...it’s our fault these people ended up like this...”

“Stop talking nonsense kid. There’s no way we could have predicted this was going to happen. Gail sent us to Moscow in order to investigate the Genesis facilities in the area. This H-3 showing up a few nights ago was beyond our control.” Leo replied.

“But still...we should have been aware, we should have been around when it happened. If we were then we would have been able...”

“Stop right there Reine. You’ll just be an ineffective soldier if you start talking about what could have happened. You can’t say for sure what would have happened if we were there. Things could have gotten even worse if 4 other frames got involved. The area of damage could have been made even bigger with more frames in the heat of the destruction. You need to start living without regrets and learn from mistakes that are made instead of dwelling on them.” Leo mumbled.

“Leo...”

“I would know all about learning from mistakes...I’ve made plenty of mistakes that I’m not proud of. I’ve take plenty of lives in the past, most of which I can’t even remember their faces, or even their names. All I know is that their souls haunt me to this very day, reminding me to never lose control. Reminding me to always be aware of my surroundings.”

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Heh, there you go again. Getting all depressive. While he’s definitely being dull, he’s got a point. Dwelling on the past isn’t healthy. You need to look forward, and work to a better tomorrow.” Chris interrupted.

“Reine, why don’t you go check up on Zach. Once he’s healed we’re heading back to Rome. With UGE soldiers arriving by the hour it’d be best if we got out of here sooner rather than later.” Leo mumbled.

“Yeah, that makes sense. You guys know what room he’s in right?”

“Yeah, 245. We’ll stop by once we’re done.” Chris replied.

“We have to tie up a few loose ends here first. Go on ahead.” Leo muttered.

“K.”

As Reine made his way around the clusters of gurneys that were out in the hallways due to lack of rooms Chris and Leo quietly glanced back at one another.

“So what do you make of it?”

“Zach?”

“Yeah. What are you thinking Chris?”

“Well, it’s pretty odd that he was missing when we woke up the next morning. And then finding him collapsed just outside our hotel, with a puddle of blood engulfing his skull, I’m really not too sure what to make of it.”

“I heard from Reine that Zach suffers from nightmares the following morning of a H-3 report. Not too sure if there’s a connection...but after seeing all the shit I’ve seen, I wouldn’t be surprised.” Leo replied.

“Yeah, I agree. Maybe Zach’s our best bet at finding this H-3. We’d better look into it more before jumping to conclusions though.”

“Yeah....I agree....”

**Chapter Thirty: Ascension of Disorder**

His eyes began to quiver slightly as his consciousness made its return. His dark obsidian bangs blurred his vision as they hung carelessly over both his eyelids. The ivory cloth pillow ruffled at the slightest movements made by his head as it began to lift upwards. The sound of the sheets rubbing together woke Reine up from his nap, slouched over the edge of a fold up chair his arms hung loosely with a numb sensation that caused each arm to become dead weight.

“Ugh...I feel like I was hit by a truck...” Zach mumbled softly. His eyes still adjusting to the brightness of the room so he covered them with his right hand.

“Guess it’s possible, we have no idea what had happened to you.” Reine replied.

“Reine? Where am I?” Finally moving his hand away from his face he was able to make out the silhouette of his friend.

“You’re in a hospital just outside of Moscow. We found you lying in the middle of the street bleeding non-stop so we brought you to the same hospital where the survivors were being taken.” Reine’s arms had begun to regain sensation; the prickly feeling spreading thinly throughout his muscles wasn’t painful, but nonetheless very uncomfortable. Dragging his sagging arms he managed rise from his chair.

“I see...”

“There was another attack; Moscow has been left in ruins Zach. Between Red Fury and this mysterious MF the world’s really in a state of confusion.”

“Yeah...” His voice, far from lively only made his depressive demeanor even more apparent. Scratching the back of his head where his bandages were the tightest he let out a sigh just before he turned to the fogged up window which was dripping with dew.

“You ok?”

“I had another nightmare...it’s nothing. Don’t be concerned.”

“Listen, the doctor said you were clear to head back to Rome once you woke up.”

“Oh, then we should probably head out.”

“Yeah...”

“Reine...”

“Yeah Zach?”

Zach paused momentarily just before he turned back towards his friend. With a half cocked smile he replied. “Forget it. It’s nothing.”

While both remained awkwardly quiet due to the situation a slight tapping beat on the wooden door to the room. Both Leo and Chris stood there, leaning against the door simply nodding to Reine and the bed ridden Zach.

“We’ve received a call from Lucian. We need to head back to Rome.” Chris mentioned sternly.

“But what about the H-3?” Reine had been set on finding out the truth behind the legend of the H-3, he wasn’t sure if it was because he wanted to impress Gail, or if he wanted to set himself apart from Zach; but it was what he wanted to do. Then to be told that they were ordered to leave; it would only crush his determination.

“We can’t stay here. The UGE forces are quickly filling the area. It’s been all over the news lately; they believe that Red Fury was behind this attack so naturally they’re going to be quarantining the area. And you should recall that Orbis was never on Luscious Malum’s good side. If we’re caught here there’s no question that we’ll be taken into custody.” Leo replied.

“It’s fine Reine. That machine is long gone by now, and we can’t properly search with the UGE sticking their noses here. It’s much better for us to go back to Rome and start researching there.” Zach replied.

“I see...” Reine mumbled softly.

“Actually, we’re being sent into space upon our return.” Chris interrupted.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Space?! But why? There’s still so much that needs to be done here. What the hell can we do in space?!” Reine burst out.

“We’re supposed to dock with the Orbis research facility on the near side of Phobos. So it’ll take a few weeks to get there. But we’re in charge of monitoring Mars. Gail feels that with Red Fury’s failed invasion it won’t be long before the UGE sets their sights on Mars. More specifically the undiscovered territory, the single massive area that had been blocked ever since the terraforming. Both the TA and the EAP lost site of that territory in the heat of battle. But now it seems that Luscious has his sites on that area. We don’t know what’s there, but we figure whatever it is, it holds the key to controlling all of humanity. We can’t let the UGE get their hands on it.” Leo replied.

“So we’re going to protect Mars from now on? It sounds as if Gail’s trying to take Red Fury’s empty seat.”

“It would seem so Reine, but I think it’s much more than that. But there’s no use in arguing. Hurry up and get dressed Zach. We leave once you’re done. Gail sent us a transport, it’ll take some time to reach Rome from here, but it’s our best and only option.” Chris knew well what was in their future. Going against the current super power of Earth was not going to be an easy task. Even he wasn’t sure if they were doing the right thing anymore. Ever since the Azure Cup all he had ever wanted for the world was a form of unified peace. And even if he disliked Luscious Malum, with the UGE he managed to unite all the nations of Earth under his guise, creating a form of peace. Orbis, in Chris’ eyes was only going against that peace, and once again pushing the cycle of war forward. In the public’s eyes, Orbis would most likely be seen as an enemy, but only time would tell.

“Its fine Reine, we can’t afford to waste time here with the UGE forces. Think about it this way, if we get caught here then we’ll never be able to help Gail. I’m fine now; it shouldn’t take too much time for me to get ready.” Zach humbly replied.

Reine nodded while he stared back at his friend who only moments ago was still trying to regain his composure. It was so much like Zach to suddenly switch modes, to become stern and collected in seemingly the blink of an eye. It was what Reine admired most about his friend; it was one of the qualities that made him so envious. He sighed just under his breath; it was hard for him to keep his envy in tact without making it apparent to his closest friend.

“Yeah, you’re right...let’s go.”

“Glad to see we’re all on the same page. Chris and I will be waiting just outside. Try and make it quick.”

“Should only take about 5 minutes.” Zach replied.

Chris waved bye to the two youths as he and Leo began to walk away from the door. Passing through the ivory hallways they past many patients, it was much like a corridor of mummified people with all the bandages wrapped around vital limbs. Chris cringed at the site of men and women lying on stretchers, some missing limbs, others covered in so many bandages it was a wonder if they could even feel the brisk air on their skin. This was one of the lowest points in humanity, so many people were hurt because of one machine.

“You ok?”

“Huh? Yeah, I’m fine...”

“The look on your face says otherwise man.” Leo slowly moved closer to Chris’ ears. “You’re thinking about Zach and his connection to that machine aren’t you?”

“...yeah...”

“Figured, I’ve been thinking about it to. I think Gail might suspect something as well. Why else would he suddenly send us to the resource facility in space? He probably wants to keep Zach off Earth and see what happens.”

“Probably...but still, it’s just a hunch, nothing concrete. We could be completely wrong about this. Maybe we’re just pushing our minds too hard to come with an answer.”

“I guess, but right now, it’s the best we got. No need for us to worry about it anyway, let Gail do what he wants to do anyway.”

“Leo...about Gail...”

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Yeah?”

“Do you think he’s doing the right thing?”

“What do you mean by the right thing? He wants peace for all humanity. Of course he’s doing the right thing.”

“Yeah, I know about that. But the only thing really preventing that was the conflict between the TA and the EAP. As much as I hate to say it, but with the UGE in complete control of all of Earth, Luscious Malum has managed to gain the corporation and support of every nation in the world. Gail will only end up provoking Luscious Malum, and thus starting another war.”

“While you have a point friend, but peace is not simply a one definition word. Peace is dependent on the person that is supplying it. Do you honestly believe that peace being offered by Luscious Malum would be the kind that the world needs.”

“I’m not sure; maybe you’re right about there being different types of peace. But what is the alternative now? Are we supposed to put the world through another war just because we’re too full of ourselves to accept this one?”

“Our pride eh? As humans, we are especially weak to the sins of our souls. As far as I go Chris, I’m going to follow Gail. I will never trust anything that comes with the signature of Luscious Malum attached.”

“Speak of the devil...” Chris mumbled.

Pointing forward to the 25 inch plasma monitor hanging in the waiting room both Chris and Leo stopped moving forward. Luscious Malum continued to be on every news network around the globe mainly due to the after effects of the Red Fury invasion.

*“And it is with my deepest sorrows and regrets that even after the tragic war between two power driven nations ended, that the people of Earth would still be subjected to violent acts at the hands of the terrorists of Red Fury. In order to prevent any further harm to come to our beloved world, I have prepared and signed the Interplanetary Defense Act. It is with this Act that we will be able to protect our Earth with a much higher means of technology. At this very moment Genesis Industries is preparing brand new Satellite monitoring devices that will be able to detect any sudden movement from space and filter every image instantly to our headquarters in Berlin. Another ability of these satellites would be the energy particles that they disperse. With satellites circling the planet they will be able to send particles of energy to each satellite creating an impenetrable energy field to prevent any ships from entering, along with being able to reflect any form of attack. Basically we will be able to wrap Earth in an unbreakable bubble.”*

“A bubble...does he really think that is going to protect us any better than we’re protected now?” Chris muttered.

“Who knows...but with these satellites his control of Earth is pretty much sealed. It doesn’t take a genius to know that satellites being able to control the flow of energy particles mean that they can be used for offensive capabilities along with defensive. He’ll be able to attack Mars from nearly every conceivable angle...”

“You really think that he’ll attack Mars?”

“It’s pretty much a guarantee man. I mean there are still some Red Fury remnants on Mars. I met David Lepidus once before, and I know he’s not the type of person to send out all of his forces at once. He most likely left some on Mars for if he failed. But the problem with that is they were left with no leader, they’re an army without a head. And Luscious most likely knows this, it’s only a matter of time before he attacks Mars.”

“Conflict will never end will it?”

“Not unless we put a stop to it. And that is why I still follow Gail.”

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*“Mr. President, if I may ask you one more question.” One of the eager reports blurted out.*

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

*“Ah, Ms. Star, a pleasure as always to see you, of course you may ask me a question.”*

*“Thank you Mr. President. About Red Fury, do you honestly believe the events of last week is going to be the last we ever hear from them?”*

*“I was waiting for the question about Red Fury to come up. No, I do not believe that we’ve heard the last of them. But I will put it bluntly, their leader is gone, their most skilled have lost the fight, what’s left is nothing more than lackluster soldiers. I see no threat from them. However that does not mean that I will take them lightly, far from the contrary. We already have one of our satellites keeping close tabs on their activity. And I am pleased to say that their activity is dull, not much movement on their part. In my humble opinion, Red Fury will never attack Earth soil ever again. Any other questions?....”*

The screen flickered as its power light changed to a darker shade of red. A load yawn echoed throughout the room as Mario reclined even farther into his chair. Anima had been completely repaired a day prior, he had hated the fact that the small corner he had been claiming as a room was without a television. He needed to be connected to the outside world at all times, he wasn’t the type of person to sit in solitude and ferment with deep collecting thoughts. With Anima’s OS being completely reconfigured he was finally able to check the local news along with the news around the world. It still baffled him why Stephen refused to let anyone leave the West Point facility, at times he had planned to sneak out to some of the night clubs in the surrounding area outside of the base. But never followed through with it because he knew well the reaction he would receive upon returning.

“Damn this is so boring!! \*Yawn\*...just when the hell is that transport supposed to arrive here anyway?” He in his boredom felt the need to make comments out loud.

“Tomorrow morning since you asked so politely.”

Mario, hearing the sound of another voice, a voice actually being directed towards him could barely contain his excitement. Leaning forward he placed his hands on top of the control panel, pushing the display screen out of his way so he could take a peek.

Adam waved as he leaned against the edge of the guard rails just in front of Anima’s exposed cockpit.

“Yo.”

“Yo yourself, so it’s tomorrow then huh?”

“Yeah it is...” Adam replied pushing his body away from the silver metal railing. Approaching the opened cockpit he quickly glanced over his shoulder. On the bottom floor Stephen and Ashley had finally reopened communications. He could barely contain his own laughter, but trying he minimized it to a slight chuckle.

“What’s so funny?”

“My brother...he’s still as dense as ever when it comes to Ashley.” Adam chuckled.

“Haha, yeah, tell me about it. He’s still too damn focused on his fight for justice kick.”

“So you’ve been in here for the past 6 hours....just what the hell have you been doing? I know you weren’t modding Anima, it’s been done since yesterday.”

“Been watching TV, not gonna lie. I hate going with out television for over a week. It’s terrifying.”

“Anything good?”

“Blah, nothing really... Luscious Malum is giving another speech. Same shit, different day.”

“Do me a favor.”

“Huh?”

“Put it on.”

“Why? It’s just him kissing ass.”

“Just put it on...” Adam replied, his eyes determined, staring at Mario quietly. No words needed to be said anymore, it was clear that he was set on Luscious Malum, and any chance he could get to hear his intentions, whether it be public ass kissing or hidden intent it mattered little to him.

“Sure...” Mario turned the display screen around for Adam to see as once again the face of the UGE leader became crystal clear on the plasma screen.

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Adam leaned against the railing once again, folding his arms across his chest he stood listening intently to the words coming out from Luscious' lips.

*"The space station Prometheus has once again become active. UGE forces have already begun to move. We shall use Prometheus as the main headquarters for the newly formed organization, the United Planets of Humanity. The UPH will be a sub-form of the UGE, where elected leaders from the nations of Earth and Mars will be able to join together in order to delegate political issues. I will not stop moving forward until all sets of humanity are joined together once again."*

*"Mr. President, the societies on Mars are small, minute in comparison to Earth. They're mainly colonies of about 10,000 people each. Wouldn't the UPH just be a cover for the UGE's complete control over the Mars nations? Will Mars actually have diplomatic status for any changes in humanity?" One newswoman brought up.*

*"I'm glad you mentioned this, I will take the time to clear all of this up now. Mars is a part of humanity just like the people on Earth. The only problem I ever had with Mars was in the form of the terrorist group, Red Fury. We will liberate the rest of Mars from Red Fury. We shall break the hold that group has on our sister planet. And with the rest of the Martian society we will venture forth into a new generation. If I may I would like to bring up the South Western Territory that has been forgotten by most. We believe we found the key to getting past the strange energy barrier that has blocked us off for the past decade. And soon we will be able to make it across the threshold, and move towards the future of all of humanity with our brothers and sisters on Mars."*

*"And what would this key be then Mr. President?"*

*"If I told you that now, then it wouldn't be a secret anymore now would it. It would give every group and organization in the world the knowledge of how to get past the barrier, and I can not allow that to happen."*

"Adam there you are, I've been looking for you for the past..." Sharon was interrupted before she could finish. Adam simply placed his index finger over his lips and then simply turned back to the screen that was flashing brightly before him.

Unable to hold back her curiosity Sharon moved next to him only to gasp from shock at seeing Luscious Malum on the screen. She then began to feel her adrenaline run through the course of her veins; this was the man that ruined her life. Took her away from her friends, her family and replaced her with a failed clone. Such hatred for the president of the UGE filled the already sullen atmosphere of the hanger while his face and voice permeated throughout the room.

*"Is there any other questions before I move onto another topic?"*

*"Just one more Mr. President, is there any new information on the mysterious machine that has attacked Paris, Rome, Japan, and now Moscow? Is the UGE planning on doing anything to find out what it is and stop it?"*

*"Yes, I was wondering when this would be asked. Unfortunately as of right now any information on the machine is limited and the little that we do know is classified. We have already dispatched troops to Moscow and are offering all the families support and plan on following up with a refund check to each family in order to help them reestablish the lives that they have lost. I will assure you, that we will find this machine and the person behind these barbaric attacks and bring them down."*

*"I see...thank you Mr. President."*

*"Now, to switch topics to something much brighter, with all the commotion going on in the world I am well aware that everyone is worrying, or stressing out in some shape or form. I feel that I must do something to ease the stress, something to take people's mind off of all the chaos and disorder."*

"What the hell is he talking about?!" Mario screamed.

"Not sure..." Adam mumbled.



## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

*“I will help ease everyone’s mind from the pain. Right here, right now I am proud to present the date and location of the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Azure Cup Tournament.”*

### **Chapter Thirty-One: The Azure Cup**

Staring at the screen blankly he didn’t know exactly how to react. Adam Novus, a man of many words could only gawk at the statement that was just uttered by the current President of the UGE. Sharon not sure how to react either simply placed her right hand onto his shoulder, her fingers caressed over the tightened muscles that were quivering in his shoulder, his fingers tense and clamped together in his fist.

“Wow...I can’t believe he just did that...” Mario muttered in order to break the silence.

“Who did what? Are you fuckers going to just stand there or you gonna actually tell me something?” Marcus’ voice easily disrupted the silence, his vulgarity was a regular and by now everyone had already become extremely accustomed to it. Adam barely turned his head to recognize the presence of the current Admiral.

“It’s a tournament Marcus.” Adam merely mumbled under his breath. It was still hard for him to understand why Luscious Malum would hold another Azure Cup. A few thoughts seared into his mind, maybe he was using the Azure Cup as a diversion from his main goals and aspirations. He was right in saying that the tournament would distract the public from the current disorder in the world.

## Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“A tournament? What the fuck are you talking about Novus?”

“He’s talking about the Azure Cup Marcus. Luscious Malum just announced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Azure Cup. It’s set to take place in 2 weeks; the battle grounds are to be set in different locations. Each to be announced before the match.” Mario replied.

“I see...and anyone can enter?”

“That’s what it sounds like. Any MF pilot can partake.” Sharon interrupted.

“Hehe, sounds like my kind of action. Where do we sign up?”

“You can’t be serious? Didn’t you hear what Stephen said? Luscious Malum is most likely using this tournament to bait us out!” Mario screamed.

“Shut it punk, my decision has been made. I’m going to this tournament. And no one is getting in my way. What about you Novus? You in?”

Adam sighed, he had been thinking about the previous Azure Cup ever since Luscious announced its sequel. Detailed images of the Azure Cup flooded his tortured mind, the intensity of the previous tournament along with the tragedies were hard to forget. Rebel358 spawned an evil and hatred for humanity during that tournament that could possibly never be match by any other living being in the remaining world. It was at this tournament where he finally managed to gain the upper hand on his brother Stephen, but regrettably in the final seconds of the final match failed to defeat Rebel358. Coming in second to what he had found out was a failed clone had haunted his nightmares for the years following. With his mind set on getting revenge on Luscious Malum and Genesis he could help but wonder what Luscious could truly be capable of. If Rebel358 was a failed clone, then it would be logical that the original would be a much harder enemy to over come.

The heat seemed to have risen in the hanger; sweat perspired down his cheeks while he continued to contemplate the words that Marcus had muttered. Finally his head turned away from the ground, he merely glanced back at the impatient Marcus Falden baring nothing more than a simplistic grin. Replying in kind Marcus chuckled, simply tossing a wave in the air.

“Good to know. I’ll be fine tuning OZ.”

“What just happened?” Sharon asked.

“Nothing, don’t worry about it Sharon. Listen I hate to cut this short, but I have to go work on something. That transport should be arriving in a few days.”

“You’re going to sign up for the tournament aren’t you?” Sharon abruptly asked. Adam could only glance away, too afraid to look directly into her eyes. She was always the type to catch on quick, it wasn’t much of a surprise to him, but he had hoped that she wouldn’t have figured it out that quickly.

“...” His lips began to part only to shut a few seconds after. He knew there weren’t any words that he could say to comfort her in this situation. No matter what he did she was going to be angry, it was best for him to not take the chance and make things worse. “Sorry...”

With each step his feet took he could feel the towering presence of Sharon’s anger. He could do little but continue to walk away. The Azure Cup was easily Luscious’ best chance to draw them out into the open, the easiest way to get rid of them since his plan with leaving West Point defenseless failed. Although it hadn’t occurred to him until now, that Luscious had no idea that he was with Stephen and the others. Realizing this he began to smirk once again, the shadows falling from the ceiling, surrounding the atmosphere around him as he began to walk down the flight of stairs.

“What the hell is he thinking?” Sharon screamed.

Mario shrugged his shoulders and began to continue working on Anima.

“You should know by now that once he’s set his mind on something there ain’t nothing that’s going to change it. If you’re truly worried about him you’re better off spending the majority of your time supporting him. You wouldn’t want to regret anything later on.” Mario mumbled under his breath.

“...” She desperately wanted to vent, to yell, to hit something but, she knew he was right. If she spent most of her time being mad, holding a grudge, and then if something tragic happened she would only regret her actions later in life. Turning away she merely stared, watching Adam as he approached his machine.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“If you go through with this then...then...you better win...” Her words soft, barely holding enough of an octave to be heard by those around her.

“So what’s your plan? Really? Do you honestly think joining Orbis is going to make things easier?” Ashley asked.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders, baiting Ashley into an inquisitive state of mind. He continued to lean against the wall with his knees bent and arms resting over them. Ashley merely stood up on his right side with her back arched onto the wall as well. Her arms folded across her white tee, her brilliant cerulean eyes glaring down at Stephen as he continued to brush her off mildly.

“Are you going to just stare at me like that for the rest of the day or are you actually going to do something?”

“Is there a reason you keep on being an asshole to me?”

“There’s just some things I don’t think you need to know. Trust me; it’s for the best if you’re unaware of what I’m planning on doing.” Stephen replied.

“You think you’re looking out for my best interest is that it?”

“Basically.”

Suddenly the palm of her hand struck down with a torrent of rage smacking against the side of Stephen’s head. The collision forced him to stumble forward; his left hand fell to the ground in order to give his body enough to support to remain steady.

“What the hell was that for?!” Stephen yelled as he stood up.

“You really need to stop trying to do what you think is best for me. I’m an adult; I can decide what I’m going to do and what I’m not going to do.”

“Ashley, you need to understand what’s going to happen. I...I don’t want you to be involved in this if there is no need for you to be. You’re only an operator for my unit, you have no reason for you...”

“You just don’t get it do you? I have all the reason to be involved, you are all my friends...why would I sit and run away? I’m going through with this until the end.”

Stephen had been ignoring her feelings, he was well aware of that. He had always tried to carry the burdens on his own, refusing to accept anyone else’s help. He stared back at her, the girl who had cared for him somewhat more deeply than the others, trying to hold back her tears she looked away. Sighing he stood up, the stress, the disbelief had been affecting everyone in different ways, some took it much harder while others hid their stress in other activities.

“I’m sorry...I didn’t realize how much it meant to you...”

“...I’d rather be there, supporting you guys, than watching from a distance, unable to do anything to help...”

“I know...but going to Orbis, siding with Gail. We’re once again going to war, and we will all be branded as traitors. There will be no going back.”

“Then we best not fail then.”

“Ashley...”

“I have faith in you, in all of you. But your strategies in mid battle need work, that’s what I’m here for. I’ll be able to see everything, and let you know what’s going on. You need me.”

“Heh...”

“Ashley! Stephen!” Heather’s voice burst from around the corner. The tension felt in the vibrations from her voice caused both Stephen and Ashley to turn around, riddled with concern. As they turned Heather stood, leaning over heaving, trying to catch her breath.

“What the hell happened to you?” Stephen yelled.

“I...\*gasp\*...I ran all the way \*gasp\* here...to tell you...” Still gasping for air she raised her finger in the air, nonverbally asking for another minute to explain herself.

“You ran from the commons? That’s at least 2 miles from here. What the hell could be so damn important that it couldn’t wait?” Ashley asked.

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

“Luscious Malum... \*gasp\*... he announced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Azure Cup Tournament to take place in 2 weeks.” Finally able to catch her breath she stood up tall, allowing her body to lean against the wall for support.

The mentioning of the Azure Cup sent chills down both Stephen and Ashley’s spine, it was the last thing in Stephen’s mind that he expected Luscious Malum to do.

“Are you sure that’s what he said?”

“Yes Stephen... I’m sure. I also ran into Sharon who was heading back to the Commons... that jackass is going to enter.”

“What?! What the hell is he thinking? It’s more than likely that Luscious is using this tournament to lure us out. Signing up will only make Luscious job that much easier!” Ashley screamed.

Stephen didn’t want to admit it, but hiding wasn’t going to make everything go away. Going to Orbis would only result in the same thing as signing up for the Azure Cup would. No matter what they did, their path ended with Luscious Malum.

“We’ve been running, been ignoring what he and Genesis have been doing for far too long. Adam knows this, that’s why he’s going. He wants to end everything once and for all.”

“But Stephen... shouldn’t we at least wait until we join up with Orbis before we doing anything as brash as this?”

“I’ll talk to him Heather, if the tournament isn’t starting for 2 weeks then we’ll already be with Orbis by then anyway.”

“I guess I see your point. Are you going to sign up?” Heather asked.

“Not sure right now. I’m going to have to play things by ear.”

Stephen smirked like he always would at the end of a conversation; in a way it was a defense mechanism for him to hide the stress to the world. Leaving both Ashley and Heather he began to head towards the frames that were lined up in the hanger. It was clear to him now that if he was going to fight, that Alpha would need to be readjusted, he could no longer hold anything back.

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“A tournament? With all due respect Luscious, what are you thinking?” Severen’s voice, filled with confusion echoed through Luscious’s personal cell phone.

Luscious smiled, placing his glass of wine on the wooden coaster before him.

“Not just any tournament Severen, it’s the Azure Cup.”

“I know what it is Luscious, that’s not the point. Do you really have enough time to hold a tournament of this magnitude? The first one took place over a few months, you had 120 competitors, just what do you think you’re going to have to deal with for the 2<sup>nd</sup>? Yes you got rid of Red Fury, but you still need to find the H-3, deal with Orbis, release the clone army from the South Western Territory and then secure Prometheus and set up your personal army there. You have too many things to deal with. You can’t possibly deal with all of that by yourself. Plus did you forget about the remaining Night Stalkers? There are still 4 of them left, and with the UGE in full control, do you still truly need them?”

“Calm down Severen. Don’t you have enough to deal with at Genesis? How are the new production models coming? Until they’re finished we have no use for the clones on Mars. And there still is a small force of Red Fury remaining on Mars. We’ll deal with them before we even consider dealing with Gail. And you’re right; I can’t handle all of this on my own. That’s why I’ve enlisted the aide of an old friend.” Luscious replied.

“Why must you insist on hiding things from me? After everything we’ve been through, you still don’t full trust me?” Severen asked.

“Come on now Severen, of course I trust you. So how about those new Frames?”

“The Exodus? Everything has been completed, just reconfiguring the OS.”

“Excellent. Severen, I must say up until now you’ve proven to be a trustworthy and reliable assistant and friend. I don’t want you to worry about anything anymore; from now on I’ll deal with

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everything.” Luscious replied. His fingers slowly wrapping around the slender glass of red wine he closed his eyes waiting.

“Up until now? What are you talking about? Just who is this old friend you’re referring to?...”

Just then Severen turned around as he heard a knocking on his office door just above the sound of the rain beating rhythmically on his clear view window. At first he wasn’t sure what to expect, Genesis had been closed for hours, it was Sunday and naturally they closed down much earlier than usual, at 6:30. His Irish green eyes staring while the door slid open, the silhouette standing before him emanated a familiar essence. One he couldn’t quite put his finger on.

“I know what you’re thinking Severen, it’s rather cliché of me to send a shadowy figure. But I still think the simplistic choices are the best and most effective.”

“What the hell is going on Luscious?”

“It’s amazing what you can accomplish when you have Genesis’ top Geneticists working for you. Almost anything is completely possible.”

“...Luscious you haven’t answered my question...oh my God...”

“Heh, you always were a smart person Severen. There was such an abundance of potential lying dormant in your soul. However, you are only human. As such you are just as guilty as the rest of them. Your soul is tainted with the sins and transgressions of humanity. If you were going to survive this encounter then you would be able to take a life lesson out of this, all partnerships are merely one person’s quickest path to the top. Sever your ties before they become troublesome. I will let you in on a secret Severen, didn’t you ever wonder how I became the President of Genesis in the first place? How your parents died?”

“What are you saying.....did you kill them? Did you kill my parents?”

“Huh? Don’t remember, my memory isn’t what it used to be. Sorry this had to be done over the phone, and I do wish I could see you off, but you know, the Azure Cup and all my hands are pretty much tied. Say hi to God for me....or would that be the Devil? “

“You son of a bitch...” Severen’s eyes widened as he heard nothing more than the desolate sound of a high pitched beeping. Luscious had hung up the phone leaving Severen in the dark to many things. And still, the single silhouette continued to stand in the middle of the doorway, patiently waiting for Severen’s full attention.

“Are you done?” The voice finally spoke.

At first Severen reacted to the voice in an awkward way, his eyes began to quiver, knees buckled and heart racing. As the figure began to move into the light a book fell out from his hand, the single piece of literature bounced off the carpet only to collapse in front of Severen.

“The Art of War?...” There wasn’t anything else he wanted to do more than to get out. Than to deny who stood before him and actually believe his own lie. But he had little choice anymore, the man who for so many years acted as a mentor, as a friend finally betrayed him.

“You do realize this is nothing personal, the true Tribulation is starting. And all those who have ties with Luscious Malum will fall. You’re mistake Severen Prodito was giving Luscious all of your Aces. Therefore making you worthless.”

“This...this isn’t possible...you....”

“I am what? Dead? Hahahahaha, I was if it wasn’t for your Genesis recovery crew. They found me....and according to them, Luscious had me resurrected. That’s the good thing about being a clone, extra parts are in stock.”

“I see...I didn’t realize human reconstruction was possible.”

“It’s not...I’m a clone remember, I’m nothing more than a human anatomy with embedded digital memories. I have no soul...I am nothing but a creature of sin.”

“You....and Luscious?”

“Yes, you see I realized that he was right, the Tribulation was indeed too early. That is why it failed. Severen, it was good to see you again.”

“...”

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There was an eerie silence that flushed through the room just as the silenced bullet pierced Severen's skull. A fountain of blood gushed out from the small hole embedded in between the eyebrows, the trickles of blood continued to fall, staining the Persian carpet while Severen's lifeless body plunged to the floor. His limbs twitching, deceiving the eyes around, Severen, the Prince of Genesis was dead, his limbs reacting to the shock that sent through they blood stream.

"I never do get tired of this feeling. Now then..."

The figure dialed a number on Severen's phone just as he bent over the corpse picking the object up.

"Hello? Is it done?" Luscious asked on the other end.

"Yeah, it's done. You did get everything out of him that you needed right?"

"Of course."

"Good, I'll take over the operations here. I'll make it look like I'm filling in for a deathly ill Severen Prodito."

"Good, which brings the question, what name are you going to go under?"

"Haven't figured it out yet. Bah, I have all night to come up with an answer. It's unfortunate that my own name wouldn't suffice."

"Your own Name? But that you signify that you have an identity, and a soul. And we both know you have neither."

"Rub it in why don't you. I need to ask though, what was the real reason for getting rid of Severen and Caleb. You had me kill both."

"I hated them."

"Hated them? But you worked with them, they both helped to establish all the resources you're using."

"They did nothing to me...but they represent all of those sinners who committed far worse crimes than any other human can dream of committing. Their ancestors ruined my life, forced me throw away my own life years ago. It was time to completely erase my past chains, and truly step forward. I trust only myself."

"I see...and yet you trust me."

"Yes, I don't feel that you'll make the same mistake again."

"I see, now, about this tournament Luscious."

"What about it? You want to enter?"

"Well...the previous champion should defend his title, no?"

### **Chapter Thirty-Two: The World**

Still dealing with the shock of Red Fury, the attacks on random, largely populated cities, the citizens of Earth had finally found their escape in the form of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Azure Cup tournament. At first many thought the President of the UGE was delusional for announcing such an event in the middle of the commotion, but now they were beginning to understand his plan. Once again Luscious managed to go through a rebirth in the public eye, a man who put his people first over his own goals. With the Azure Cup being set up for its debut in 4 days dozens of MF pilots made their way to Berlin in order to sign up for the tournament. What most were unaware of was the rules that were being implemented for this tournament, the way Luscious Malum set it up, the only way to win a match would be to kill your opponent. Naturally the severity of this rule would be kept in secret from the public, but each pilot that signed up was required to sign a waiver not holding the UGE, Luscious Malum, or even Genesis responsible for death. Pilots signed up knowing what their fates may hold in store. If any pilot felt that they could not hold to that standard then they would simply not sign up.

Berlin, Germany had become the focal point of the UGE, it was only logical that the Azure Cup would begin there. Once again Luscious had found himself being the center of a media conglomerate, nearly every news station on the globe had clustered around the main UGE building, all hoping for a word with the man behind the tournament. Most of the reporters he knew were not as ignorant and gullible as the rest of the world. Reporters are paid to go beyond the surface, and it wouldn't be too difficult for them to find out that the Azure Cup was merely a campaign to continue solidifying Luscious' pedestal in the public eye.

"Do you intend to speak with any of them Mr. President?" His advisor had finally found the necessary courage to speak up. There was something about Luscious Malum that stirred feelings of reluctance in those around him.

Luscious stood, staring out through the window down at the dozens of reporters trying to make their way past the security guards stationed by the stairs. Stirring the mahogany liquid in his glass he slowly began to smirk.

"At some point during the day I will address the reporters. Until then I'm going to enjoy the remainder of my tranquility."

"Yes...of course sir."

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“...” Luscius glared back over his shoulder at the trembling advisor. His hands were quivering in his pockets while Luscius continued to stir his wine. “You may leave now.” He sternly replied, his temperament contained to a mere simplistic glare. As the door closed on his miniature temple Luscius took the final sip of his wine with his laptop screen flashing brightly behind him.

“This place is too dreadful; I truly am looking forward to the move back to the former UN base of operations.” Smiling, he swiftly closed his laptop.

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With all the hype surrounding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Azure Cup the commotion around Orbis and Gail slowly began to die down along with the concerns about the MF that had been causing destruction all over Europe and Asia. Luscius Malum had once again managed to find away to shock the world, full grabbing hold of their attention. Even though the true purpose behind the seemingly out of the blue tournament was in question most failed to even raise an eyebrow to it, the tournament was merely a distraction from the true problems with the world.

Gail was one of the few that saw through the paper thin illusion of the tournament; it was his job as the head of Orbis to separate himself from the majority, to see through any troublesome events. The door behind his dancing shadow slid wide open to his surprise, the majority of the Orbis members were sleeping since night had fallen and were preparing to depart to their HQ on Phobos. He had tried to sleep numerous amounts of time but failed each time, questions about the H-3 continued to cluster through his mind along with doubts of his ability to do anything prevented his stricken eyes from falling heavily enough to remain closed. Barely glancing over his shoulder he spoke.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Stephen Novus, we talked over the phone about a week ago. We arrived a few days prior but hadn’t had the time to actually meet in person.”

“Ah, General Novus, certainly an odd time to come for a council is it not?”

“Yeah, I apologize about that. But with everything that’s been going on, it’s been pretty hard to find time where we both could meet. I just wanted to know what your intentions are now that you’re moving all of Orbis’ Earth bound members back to Phobos.”

“Intentions?...” Gail paused for a moment in order to gather his thoughts. Even though he was confident about the decision to head back to space, he hadn’t even begun to think about his next step. Between the H-3 and the UGE he was confused, after all, he was only human. “I’ll let you know once I figure them out. But if you may allow me to ask you a question.”

“Huh?”

“What made you search Orbis and myself out? Surely one of your stature doesn’t need comforting in this time of chaos.”

“I...no, that’s not it.” Clinching his fist he turned away from Gail and the flickering white light that emanated only a small corner of the room. “I can no longer delude myself from what’s going on in the world. That’s why I came. I honestly believe what you’re doing is right.”

“I see...well then I’m honored to have gained the trust of someone as noteworthy as you.”

“Noteworthy eh?” Stephen began to chuckle in the cool conditioned air, it was something he heard on many occasions from a variety of people, and most of the time he would greet their flattery with kindness and sincerity but today was different, he no longer could pride himself on his service record, or his aspirations. “Nah, I’m just an ordinary idiot who’s been blind for a long time.”

“Ah so we are truly alike then. We both live in the nightmares of our past.”

“I guess so...”

“It may be true that you prided yourself on your dedication to your dream, but just because you came to a new decision and took a path that would detach you from that dream does not mean you are an idiot. It simply means that you found something more important to protect. You are not blind; if you were blind you would have continued to fight for an unattainable goal. If you were blind you would not be here standing before me.”



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“Heh, you truly are a politician Gail.”

“Being a politician prepared me for my destiny Stephen. I will change this world; I will save it from itself no matter what path I take. That is why as a whole Orbis must head back to space in order to separate itself from the devouring plague that is flooding the Earth.”

“The UGE?”

“The UGE is only the beginning of Luscious Malum’s plan. I’m not completely sure of what it is he is planning but I’m confident that it isn’t in the interest of the rest of the citizens. Unfortunately there isn’t much else we can do here; for the most part everyone on the planet has already been taken in by the deceptive words of their leader.”

“The Azure Cup?”

“That was the final blow to ensure everyone’s trust. First he grabbed their attention with the actions of Red Fury, made them out to be the antagonist of his autobiography, then with everyone man, woman and child screaming for vengeance he introduced his plan to retake Mars, defeat the remaining Red Fury forces and obtain the South Western Territory. Now with everyone trusting him, but still in fear of the chaos he brought back the Azure Cup tournament in order to appeal to the screaming hearts. Now everyone has forgotten about the mysterious tragedies that have been happening all over Europe and parts of Asia.”

“I heard about the MF that has been randomly attacking certain cities. Unfortunately I know nothing more than that.”

“I’ll have to fill you in then. You are well aware with the experiments that Genesis has been performing for years correct?”

“Yes...a bit too familiar.” Stephen replied.

“Have you ever heard of Project Zenith of Artificially Composed Humans and its sister project Reconstructed Enhanced Inhuman Neo Embryo?”

“The H-3 and the H-4? Why? You think they’re connected to the MF?”

“Heh, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised that you’re well informed. You were high in ranking with the TA after all.”

“No...my rank had nothing to do with my knowledge. My brother had friends working for Genesis until they were killed for leaking information.” Stephen replied.

“I see...Sean Repens, Christina Effloresco, Jen Fama, and the second Chimera Micheal Aquillis.”

Stephen at first was shocked to how much information Gail had obtained, just by knowing each of their names showed the level of detail that was involved in his research. The interns were never truly important in the world of Genesis and would never have much information available, and then the Chimera Project and its participants was information that was locked heavily and for Gail to know everything could only suggest that he had paid some sort of price to obtain the level of knowledge that he held.

“You seem shocked Stephen.”

“Umm...yeah to say the least. While they did work for Genesis, they’re names should never have come up in your research. They were merely interns.”

“I aware of their position, I too have connections lying in that corporation. You are aware of their current state correct?”

“No, I haven’t exactly been paying much attention to the news lately.”

“I see, well it would seem that the young prince of Genesis is taking a sick leave. I’m sure you understand what that means.”

“A sick leave? So who’s in charge now?”

“Some guy, I didn’t catch his name but if I could guess I’d say it’s someone from Luscious’ camp.”

“But what’s the point? Severen Prodito was already allied with Luscious, it makes no sense to replace him unless...”

“Unless Luscious Malum wants to completely detach himself from everything that he once was...it’s a long shot, but I think that Severen Prodito is dead. And if that’s the case than it is true that no

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person is safe from Luscious Malum. He is gathering the most powerful army in existence together, between the advanced technology of the EAP, and the already devastating power in the TA's grasp there's no limit to what he'll be able to accomplish."

"So what do you expect he'll do?"

"That's the problem; I don't have the slightest inclination as to what he is thinking. Right now I'm going to concentrate on building an equal force that will be able to stand up to him when the time comes."

"I see...and this is why you're heading back to space then? To recollect your forces and strategize while waiting for Luscious Malum to make a move?"

"Pretty much, but there's still more to it than what you've mentioned...I have to find something first."

"You mean the H-3 and H-4?"

Gail's eyes widened, usually people failed to read him as well as Stephen had just done. It was a trait that he would value in a person, someone who could see beyond the surface, someone that could truly understand his dreams.

"You are perceptive."

"It's not too hard to figure out Gail. From what I heard about the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stage of the Chimera Project they would be invaluable assets to have. But a man of your intelligence should be aware that they are unstable and controlling them will be a much harder task than originally thought. I would hope that you reconsider this Gail, if you are correct and it is the H-3 or H-4 making those appearances then you should be aware of the destruction that they are capable of. They're nothing more than rampaging, soulless creations that will destroy everything in sight. Genesis failed with Nick, he managed to retain a piece of his own soul, and even managed to reject the programming, and they came even closer with the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage in Mike Aquillis. But even then he was still imperfect. From what I read they perfected the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Just be careful with this ambition of yours Gail."

"Thanks for your concern Stephen. But I already have my leads on both the H-3 and H-4; I have to follow through on them. Hopefully I'm right in my assumptions, if I am then the Earth should be fine for now..."

"Assumptions? You think you've located them?"

"I have a feeling...but, don't concern yourself with that as of yet Stephen. I need to know, will you be following us to space?"

"I...I'm not sure..." He sighed just as he gave an answer he knew Gail would be far from content with. Even though he didn't want to admit it, the Azure Cup had been on his mind for the past few days as well, whether or not he'd enter had not been determined.

"The Azure Cup huh? You do know it's just a ploy to draw you and every other skilled MF pilot out into the open right?"

"Yeah."

"And you're still contemplating it?"

"I'm not...I already know a few from my camp are signing up."

"Really? Who?"

"Marcus Falden for one, he's pretty much lost every support he's ever known, so as far as he's concerned he has nothing to lose by joining. Adam will easily jump in on it as well; his impatience to reach Luscious Malum has gotten the best of him. I'm not sure about the rest..."

"I see, well you do what you need to do Stephen. There's only 4 days remaining until the tournament begins, registering for the tournament is as easy as sending an email to the UGE Human Resources representative. Since there is no single arena each opponent will be sent to random areas located through out the globe for their matches. From what I've been hearing the main battlefields are going to be, Tokyo, Rome, Paris, London, Moscow, and Washington DC. Do you find anything interesting with those choices?"

"Yeah...those are the places where the H-3 or H-4 supposedly attacked, all except for Washington, but for the most part their cities that have been ruined due to the war." Stephen replied.

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“Yeah, I can’t figure out why Luscious chose those, but if I had to make a bet, I’d say it would be to search for clues on the H-3 and H-4 while the tournament ran. I’m in the middle of a race Stephen; I need to find them before Luscious does.”

“I see...if Luscious was to get a hold of them then...”

“Correct, it’d be the end of the world. I can’t let that happen.”

“Then neither can I. I’ll stay on Earth to monitor the tournament, and if anything happens I’ll make sure to put a stop to it. I won’t enter, but I’ll be able to watch and see everything as a whole. I can’t be distracted by the battles.”

“I see...thank you Stephen Novus...”

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Two thin beams of intensified energy pierced through the night’s sky at high speed. With a quick jerk of the controls Blue Dragon swayed to the right narrowly avoiding the attack. The dual set of boosters softly ignited cerulean tinted flames into the air just as the frame began to advance.

“Your accuracy is getting pretty good, but you still need to work on predicting your opponents moves. You can’t rely simply on the FCS!” Adam screamed just as his eyes focused on the silver and pink MF in front of him.

Sharon nodded taking any advice that was being offered, by now she had already become accustomed to the cockpit and the locations of all the controls. Her fingers would no longer quiver with hesitation around the throttles, now they would simply hold on tightly with determination.

“I think I understand.” She mumbled under her breath. Once again Impetus rose both metallic arms, the two energy rifles began to build clots of energy just inside the tip of the barrel while following any minute movement made by Blue Dragon. Two digital incarnations of green rectangles appeared on the display screen following the blue frame. Just before each lock could have the chance of becoming crimson the frame managed to turn away disabling the lock entirely. The first few times this occurred, Sharon merely cringed, shrugging off her disappointment. But it was beginning to truly get on her nerves; her frustration with her own reaction time was beginning to get the best of her.

Impetus began to fire each rifle causing small amounts of recoil to send throughout the gears and joints of the upper body. Adam sighed, shaking his head slightly in disappointment from Sharon’s random flailing attack. Just like before Blue Dragon easily dodged every attack that was fired.

“Sharon...are you even listening?... Sharon?...” Suddenly Adam leaned forward in shock from the sudden disappearance of Impetus. Checking his radar he only found even more confusion as the signal had completely vanished, leaving nothing more than crackling lines of distorted static. “I see...it seems I should have looked at the specs for that machine much more closely.”

The air became chilled with silence as the blue frame remained still while its pilot tried to locate his opponent. Suddenly much to Adam’s surprise the Angel System began to flicker inside his cockpit even though he had yet to even activate. For a brief second he simply stared at the light, normally he would feel an increase in pressure being applied to his body but this time there was nothing.

“What the hell is going on...it couldn’t be...” Suddenly he pulled the throttles to the right causing Blue Dragon to spin around. As the machine made its way Adam’s eyes widened from the shock of seeing Impetus speeding towards his position. “Shit...did she, could she even have activated it?”

Just before his eyes Adam watched as the frame quickly closed the gap between them, just before Blue Dragon began to move Impetus’ thigh cannons began to extend out from their protective covers, gathering the energy required to fire.

“Shit this isn’t good, she’s way too close. Sharon!” Adam screamed.

“....” She failed to respond, her chest was heaving heavily, her hair dripping with sweat, the amount of pressure that continued to beat upon her body was too much for her to handle. Her lips shook while she tried to move the muscles and nerves in her cheeks, she wanted to speak but couldn’t; her state of consciousness was barely being maintained. Her eyelids twitched making her vision distorted, blurry

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and dark. This was the Angel Drive on the Impetus; she was no where near being ready to use it. Her fingers struggled to stay wrapped around the throttles, but her determination outweighed her fear. Struggling, cringing, and panting she managed to move her fingers in order to fire.

“Sharon turn it off! You can’t handle it!” Adam screamed, pleading with her. Though he knew it was too late, the pressure was too much for her, causing her muscles to strain, and her mentality to crumble it would only be a matter of time before she would pass out. But to his surprise he watched as the machine fired both energy cannons. “Shit, I’m not paying attention!”

Barely did Blue Dragon manage to avoid the beams, the booster efficiency with this model was much more advanced than the previous model that he had piloted. The speed too was a dramatic boost, and in his current state of mind he couldn’t be any happier. He took a deep breath as he watched the two beams crash into the dirt and minerals below, causing an uproar of clouded smoke to burst into the sky. The light for the Angel System that was blinking prior had abruptly disappeared at that moment.

“It’s off...Sharon!” He screamed as he watched the boosters on the Impetus flicker with a dull glow just before completely disengaging. The Impetus quickly became nothing more than a heavy brick as it fell through the sky.

Not sure about how much he could do to help he blatantly took off, the boosters on Blue Dragon continued to feed the machine power as he managed to catch up to the descending frame. With the ground closing with each second Adam forced his frame to leap forward, crashing into Impetus just before they hit the ground. Both MFs tore through the burnt landscape with Blue Dragon taking most of the damage. Adam held on as the ride was rough, his body flapping around like a leaf in the wind. The dust and debris that shot into the air made it nearly impossible for anyone else to get a clear window into what was going on. Both frames finally managed to stop their momentum and as the dust began to settle Adam began to breath easy.

“\*Sigh\*...that was way too close...\*sigh\*...You ok Sharon?”

Adam opened up a visual link to the Impetus giving him a clear view into her cockpit. There she laid, her head leaning to the right, strands of dripping hair covering her eyes. She had passed out due to the strain and yet still managed to look peaceful in her slumber. Taking solace in the fact that she was alright he allowed his muscles to loosen and reclined back in his seat.

“I wasn’t expecting her training to be this troublesome...”

“Adam...you still in the middle of training?” Ashley’s voice echoed in Blue Dragon’s cockpit which caught him off guard. Pressing the screen view he changed the digital display to show Ashley’s face.

“No, we’re done for the day. What’s going on?”

“Put on the news channel. Luscious Malum is making a new statement.”

“Thanks, I’ll put it on.”

*“Yes, I have heard about Severen Prodito and I would like to take this opportunity to wish him all the best and recover as quickly as possible.” Luscious greeted the press.*

*“Mr. Malum, about the Azure Cup, some say it’s merely a means to distract the people from the problems that are building between Earth and Mars. Red Fury is still very much out there and it would be possible for them to make a counter attack. Your thoughts?”*

*“The Azure Cup is merely for the entertainment of the people. It is far from a distraction. I will say this though, neither you nor anyone else need worry about Red Fury. I have dealt with them; they will no longer be any concern. I would also like to draw everyone’s attention to some new information. I have already met with the leaders of the world nations, and we have all finally come to an agreement. We will be working to instate a unified form of currency; it will resemble the US dollar and coin system with a few changes. At this time nothing is concrete but in the coming months expect changes to occur with your currencies. This is the second step in becoming a complete unified people.”*

*“Mr. Malum...a single form of currency? Is this even possible?”*

*“Of course it’s possible. It is one of the many unification plans the UGE has in store....”*

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“Jackass. I have no patience for him.” Adam mumbled just as he shut off the display screen. Adam’s eyebrow rose for an instant as his communications display lit up with a single text box. “A message?”  
He suddenly began to smirk as he read through the message that he received.

*Congratulations, your entry into the Azure Cup has been authorized. You have been enrolled in the A division which consists of 8 other competitors. You’re first match is set to take place in Rome 5 days from today. Your opponent details have been attached.*

**Chapter Thirty-Three: Tournament Begins**

The crimson sun slowly made its way behind the caliginous clouds in the disillusioned sky. The time had vastly approached much quicker than anyone had previously expected, the Azure Cup had undergone the proper preparations to begin. The matches had been determined by a system which would pit opponents together randomly. Unlike its previous form this tournament was set up to take place with a seemingly minuscule number in comparison to the previous entry total of 120; only 16 opponents had registered. Most of the opponents were veteran pilots from the former EAP, along with some UGE pilots and Orbis pilots. Billions of people from around the world tuned in to the live recording of the first round along with people from Mars. Mars due to the distance wouldn't receive the transmissions for a few hours after their initial airing, but still were lucky enough to see some form of action. The state of the world kept everyone, regardless of home planet on edge. Each round consisted of 4 matches; each match took place in separate areas located around the globe. Luscious Malum had announced the primary locations of each arena a day before the tournament, in order to honor those who had lost their homes and possessions in the attacks of the unidentified MF each attacked city would be home to a match. Along with Tokyo, Rome, Paris and London he also named Washington DC and West Point as other fighting locations.

The first match of the first round was preparing to be underway; Rome was the named to be the arena to break in the tournament. Located miles away from the Coliseum barriers were set up to contain the level of destruction that was most likely going to occur. Thousands of people found themselves on ground zero for the match, the barrier would contain the splash damage and shockwaves ensuring the safety of those who managed to snag tickets to the match.

The oncoming night fall was brisk, filled with chilling winds and chirping crickets. The area was silent, quite possibly for the final time until the tournament would come to a close. Before the thousands in attendance and the cameras setup Luscious Malum stood with humility. The crowd which was whispering under the frigid wind came to a uniformed silence once the President of the UGE cleared his throat with a rough abruptness.

“Thank you all for joining us here. I promise you all a tournament filled with excitement and dramatic nuances that you'll find it difficult to move out from your seats. Now I know you are all anxious to see the tournament begin, however before we start this hologram data sheet will project the competitors and the order of their matches. In the future days to come it will also serve to keep records of the wins, it will become the official tournament bracket. Refer to this when you would like to inquire as to who is facing who in the up coming rounds.” Luscious smiled intently as the projector lit up displaying on a massive 100 foot panel the information for the upcoming matches and rounds.

***Round 1***

**Section A**

***Adam Novus (Rome)***

***VS***

***Mulam Suoicsul***

***Scion Bryce (London)***

***VS***

***Demetris Lancer***

***Freya Abby (Paris)***

***VS***

***Solice***

*Marcus Falden (Tokyo)*

VS

*Kyle Lengrin*

*Section B*

*Luscious Malum (Rome)*

VS

*Anwar Renatio*

*Crimson (West Point)*

VS

*Diabolos*

*Anima (Washington DC)*

VS

*Sapphire*

*Nex Resuelto (Tokyo)*

VS

*Dante Fuoco*

The entrants had been completely registered and sent to their respected fighting locations. The most upsetting attribute about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Azure Cup was its size, only two sections as opposed to sixteen. Luscious felt this was due to the lack of MF pilots remaining the world. Between the UGE, Orbis and Red Fury the amount of people piloting MFs were scarce. No longer was the world fueled with men and women piloting these gigantic machines, the ones that were fought to protect something and found the tournament to be a distraction from the true problems at hand. Their conviction and allegiance to their dreams was what drove them to fight, for the most part with the pilots taking part in the tournament their reasons were based on their desire to improve. Only a select few had reasons for fighting that could be deemed as worthy of respect.

While everyone gawked at the fighter list one could only notice the enrollment of the UGE President himself. Little was known about Luscious Malum other than he was once the head of Genesis, his past had always been blurred in the eyes of the public. It was easy to say that a politician piloting a Frame was the last thing anyone had ever expected. Instantly people began to break out talking, questioning the integrity of the President for signing up, while others merely looked intrigued and curious to just how good Luscious Malum was in an MF. Like a psychic Luscious Malum began to grin devilishly as he took the podium once again in front of the limelight.

“I’m sure most are wondering as to why you see my name up there. The truth is that I have always taken such enjoyment in piloting, and when I noticed that only 15 competitors had signed up I took it upon myself to balance out the bracket. I am truly looking forward to entertaining you all.” With a final grin his darkened eyes pierced through the crowd which was be stilled in shock from the decision. “And now, the first match of the tournament will take place. Please don’t look away; you might end up missing it. Enjoy...” As he made his way off the creaking wooden platform he placed his headset around his right ear, after confirming its position he began to speak.

“Am I connected?” He muttered.

“Yes sir, we are waiting on your order to send the signal.”

“Good, send it. It has been far too long...”

“Understood.”

His wireless headset began to flicker with a subtle blue glow as it began to connect to the preferred communication link.

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The match was only a few minutes away, for a pilot minutes became hours; depending on the pilot this could be a good or a bad thing. In his cockpit Adam Novus rested, calming his nerves in order to be fully prepared for the upcoming battle. Unexpectedly he had drawn first blood, he would be the first match to open up the tournament with an unknown opponent merely known as Mulam. Stephen and Ashley had spent the past few hours digging through both the TA and the EAP databases searching for the pilot only to continually come up with nothing.

“Still nothing?” Adam mumbled, his eyes still shut with one headphone plugged in his left ear while the other dangled freely in the air. Trying to drown his conscious in the form of music failed to keep his mind off the battle.

“Sorry Adam nothing. I even managed to dab into the UGE databanks for a short period of time, it’s as if this Mulam guy doesn’t even exist.” Ashley replied.

“Wonderful...I had hoped to get some sort of background information on the guy, like his fighting style, something.”

“Why? You afraid you’ll lose?” Ashley replied with the bitter form of sarcasm that she was known for.

“No, I would like to have finished this quickly. I’m supposed to continue helping Sharon with her training is all.....wait, one second. I have an incoming message.....Hello?”

*“It’s been a long time...Adam Novus...”*

At that very instant he felt chills like no other sprinting down his spine. He had not heard this voice so close to his soul, echoing off the very essence of his being in years; Luscious Malum.

*“Indeed it has...”*

*“Glad to see the warm welcome hasn’t changed. Not for nothing I miss the time when you actually seemed to be excited when talking with me.”*

*“I was naïve then, young. I’m different now.”*

*“No, I feel you’re still the same naïve boy, now you just have a tougher outer shell. Otherwise you wouldn’t have entered the tournament.”*

*“Get to the point, what do you want?”*

*“I wanted to wish you luck. After all this isn’t going to be an easy match. You’re opponent is pretty good.”*

*“Thanks for the concern, but I’ll be fine.”*

*“Make it to the finals; I would like to face you.”*

*“Don’t worry, it seems like you’ll be saving me the trouble of finding you after I win the tournament.”*

*“We shall see, I knew you were searching for me. Otherwise you would have never joined Red Fury, and would definitely never have entered this tournament. I felt I owed you that match to make your journey that much easier.”*

*“Thanks...I appreciate you cutting it in half. I just hope you’re prepared.”*

*“We’ll talk after you survive this match. I’ll give you a heads up, the reason you couldn’t find any information on your opponent is because that is not his real name.”*

*“What? Just what the hell are you playing this time?”*

*“Nothing, you’ll see once you get out there. I just hope you’ve learned from your experiences....”*

*“Luscious....”*

*“.....”*

To Adam’s dismay nothing more than static greeted his anger. Knowing that Luscious had hung up on him he tried to restrain his frustration. His teeth rubbed against each other, his fists shaking at his sides while he stared straight into his display screen almost as if his vision was looking beyond the screen.

“Adam, it’s time. Good luck.” Ashley mumbled.

Ignoring her blessings he grabbed onto the throttles unable to contain his combination of curiosity and anger. To receive a call from Luscious Malum and now of all times only added to his anguish to not



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knowing a single shred of information on his opponent. The transportable hanger slowly opened giving Blue Dragon the window to launch. Adam glanced up towards the sky taking notice to the curved structure of the barrier that separated him from everything else. Knowing it was his time he slowly applied pressure to the accelerators causing the blue frame to lift into the air. The sound of the boosters filled the hanger deafening small clustered area, Blue Dragon took to the sky slowly, just as Adam completely left the hanger he began to add pressure to the foot pedals which increased the booster output. Everyone watched as the frame took off into the distance heading towards the center stage once again.

Glancing over his shoulder looking back at the hanger he sighed, the words Luscious Malum etched into his mind wouldn't go away; they would linger just above his subconscious to distract him, to worry him. In the corner of his eye he briefly noticed the silhouette of his opponent's machine. Due to the peripheral vision he didn't take much concern in the brief sighting, it wasn't until he completely turned around did he take haste.

"What the hell?"

The frame stood tall, emanating with an ominous presence. It was obsidian with crimson details, holding onto a single plasma rifle and energy sword it stood. The structure of the frame brought back terrifying memories of the past. He knew the frame, he knew it well, but still even so he refused to acknowledge its continued existence.

"It's been a long time hasn't it? Boy?"

The voice pierced through Adam's cockpit and state of mind nearly pushing him to the brink of paralysis. An uncountable amount of thoughts flooded through the gate of his perception while he continued to try to make sense of everything that was happening in all of a split second. The machine and pilot that nearly defied humanity; Shadow and Rebel358.

"You can't be...." Adam finally managed to mumble some sort of sentence just as Blue Dragon touched down on the scorched earth below.

"Such welcoming pleasantries, you haven't changed I see. You continue to still judge everything from your own understanding when all that you understand is incomplete. Did you honestly believe that I would die in such an unsightly manor? You're much more naïve than I thought."

"But....there's no way you could have made it out of that alive. I watched you die; I watched your frame go up in flames!"

"Then maybe you should have paid more attention. Not many people get a second chance at life, but you should know that being connected to Genesis guarantees a second life line! I will get my revenge for what you did to me!"

Adam glanced away for a mere second, unable, not wanting to face his past once again. He considered it a miracle the first time he defeated Rebel, trying to do it again would be more than a miracle in his eyes. Still, even though Rebel was only a few feet away from him he couldn't help but wonder what this meant, he knew what Rebel truly was; a failed clone of Luscious Malum. But for him to be alive and in the second tournament only meant something else was really going on behind the scenes. The Rebel he remembered was insane; a wandering lost soul who wanted to purge humanity into a forced Tribulation. But this Rebel was calmer, more bent on revenge on him than revenge on humanity. He still couldn't phase out the words that Luscious said to him just moments before the match was to begin. He received a warning from him, which meant that he knew Rebel was still alive, which in turn would mean that the two of them were working together. But unfortunately for Adam he didn't have much time to think, the match had begun.

Shadow erupted from its stationary position much to Adam's surprise. There was no notification of the match starting, no familiar computerized voice to start it off; this was already a completely different Azure Cup than the one he remembered. Already at a disadvantage Blue Dragon was struck repeatedly by the cluster of energy beams that launched vigorously out from the barrel of Shadow's plasma rifle. The blue frame continued to be pushed back, its feet piercing through the hardened minerals of the ground sending out a trail of smoke into the air. Adam struggled with the controls, restricted to only defensive maneuvers. In an attempt to protect his machine from even more damage he raised both arms ignited the

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energy shields attached to the forearm. With a sudden ignition two thin rectangular shapes of energy emerged from the smoke in order to absorb the intensified impacts from the attacks.

Rebel smirked slightly just as Blue Dragon crashed into the brunt of the barrier. At the first moment of contact between the back of the blue frame's core and the barrier sparks of electricity shot out, spurting in every direction. The fireworks display caught every spectator off guard, nearing jumping out of their seats in shock. Adam leaned back into the comfort of his seat staring at all the warning texts that flashed on his digital screen. Rebel merely continued to grin, Shadow then stopped in its ferocity placing its arm at its side as the devilish machine merely glared at Blue Dragon. Electrical currents over ran the machine halting its movement, Adam confused began to move every throttle, push every button trying, struggling to get any sort of reaction out of his machine.

"Come on damn it! Move!" Adam screamed loudly.

"It's no use, the barrier is infused with an electrical current that will upon contact short out the fuses in your frame. This match is over, what a pity."

"What the hell is going on?!" Sharon screamed, nearly jumping over the guard rail of the bleaches at ground zero. Her hair flapping through the strong wind that swept over the area.

"I don't know...I have no idea why the hell Adam is just standing there?!" Mario yelled.

"Isn't it obvious? The barrier, Blue Dragon was thrown directly into it. An energy barrier will keep any stray attacks from leaving or entering. By doing so it releases an energy output much greater than those found on the highest standard energy weapons. It's only natural that there would be extra measures to keep MFs from getting through. Most barriers are infused with electrical currents that will short out sensors in the machine, thus preventing them from moving. But what concerns me the most is his opponent. I'm not completely sure of whom it is...but it almost looks like that's Shadow." Stephen replied.

"Shadow?! But that would mean that Rebel is..." Mario screamed back at Stephen as if he wanted nothing to do with the possibility of Rebel still existing in this world.

Stephen could see the fear riddling within Mario's eyes, he couldn't be held at a shame for his reaction, anyone else would have reacted the same way.

"I know...but we can't rule out the possibility."

"But what about Adam? Does this mean it's over?"

Sharon began to cringe at the thought of the match being over just after a few minutes. She was still getting used to everyone and wasn't the first to jump out in the middle of a conversation. For the time being she meagerly listened to both Stephen and Mario while watching Adam struggle out in the battlefield. With her hands intertwined across her beating chest she bowed her head, praying for his success, knowing that this was far from the end.

"He won't lose..." She quietly mumbled just under the subtle sound of the wind serenading through the sky.

"Heh...this is way too early to be doing this, but it seems I don't have much of a choice anymore." Adam said softly.

Reaching forward he flipped the switches required to engage the Angel System. He had hoped that with the system he would be able to use the wings as a means of movement. For at the moment the wing binders were what was connecting the core to the barrier, it was in theory that if he opened them and launched the orbital weapons that the sheer force would move him far enough away from the barrier that the electrical discharge would vanish and return the system to normal. It was a long shot, but at the moment he had very little choice.

"I know this is a long shot...all I need is a centimeter at the very least. I'm sure once I'm away from the barrier I'll be able to move."

By now activating the Angel System was nothing to him; his body had already become accustomed to the pressure. Still he felt uneasy about activating the system, mainly because Rebel was just standing there watching. As if he was waiting for him to move away. Just then the wings began to

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move, the reaction was sluggish due to the effect the barrier was having on the core. But just the same the wings were beginning to move, as each angular wing raised the force began to move the frame away from the barrier slightly, but enough that the warning signs in the cockpit began to vanish. He knew he had a chance, he wasn't out of the woods yet but now he had access to his booster systems which was all he needed.

Rebel's eye flinched; he placed his book down next to his seat as he began to notice the subtle movements that were being made by Blue Dragon.

"Took him long enough, I want to make him suffer before I end his life." Rebel snickered.

"Is he doing it?! Holy shit I think he's doing it!" Mario screamed.

Sharon smiled, nodding her head as she along with everyone else watched the cerulean flames burst out from Blue Dragon. She knew this was only the beginning of an exciting match as Adam took to the air finally managing to move completely away from the barrier.

"How the hell did he manage to pull that one off?" Ashley interrupted from behind.

Stephen smirked as he barely glanced over his shoulder looking back at Ashley.

"He most likely engaged the Angel System and used the wings to push him far enough away from the barrier so he could regain some control in his frame." Stephen muttered.

"Heh, that's kind of impressive when you think about it." Ashley replied.

"Not really, it's pretty basic. He should have realized that even the most basic frame has emergency boosters that are setup to work in situations like that. He still has a lot to learn. He's just used to taking the most draining path." Stephen replied.

"Haha, he is an idiot after all. But still, he's an idiot who'll never give up." Sharon interrupted.

"Haha, that is true. So very true." Ashley laughed.

Blue Dragon suddenly set its sights back towards Shadow; Adam wasted little effort and began to return the favor that Rebel so kindly gave to him. With the Angel System shut off to conserve energy he began to fire both energy rifles. With solidified lock-ons surrounding Shadow Adam's eyes squinted, focusing on the demon from his past.

Rebel chuckled just before the first barrage of beams approached his frame. Shadow just as many expected avoided the attack with ease. Strafing to the right Shadow quickly jumped back onto the offensive. Adam's eyes widened, he had almost forgotten about the inhuman speed Rebel would perform at. He knew he had to change his tactics and docked both rifles on the side. Once again he activated the Angel System knowing the Orbital Wings would be able to track Shadow's speed. The wing binders extended as each orbit launched off with ferocity not many people had ever had the pleasure of seeing. Each weapon quickly locked onto Shadow's heat signature and dove straight for the obsidian frame.

"These gnats, they didn't do much against me the first time I faced you. What thinks they'll do any good this time?!" Rebel screamed.

Shadow barrel rolled to the right side avoiding a few beams that were fired. It didn't take long for each weapon to increase the intensity of their attacks, but still it made no difference. Shadow managed to dodge the attacks.

Adam smirked as he watched Rebel pay all of his attention towards the orbits. Blue Dragon sped towards the cluster of weapons with both energy sabers drawn out. Rebel quickly looked to his left at the pestering of his radar system. To his surprise he saw Blue Dragon already closing in on his position.

"Heh, he's gotten more aggressive since the last time I saw him. Maybe..."

"Don't take me lightly!" Adam screamed.

The azure orbits suddenly launched an all out offensive simultaneously which forced Shadow to fly to the right avoiding the 8 beams of energy. Rebel's eyes widened just as he saw a cerulean blur of energy slice through the air. For a moment he was paralyzed with fear, even if it was for a split second he felt for the first time in his life honest fear. Just before the energy blade reached its target Rebel managed to move Shadow away with its left arm flailing in the air.

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“Shit...” Rebel muttered. He knew he wasted too much time in escaping, he could only watch as he sacrificed Shadow’s arm for his life. In an instant the left arm of the frame flung off from its hinges as Blue Dragon cut through the joints. Following was the first true explosion of the match, as the flames ruptured through the metallic skin Shadow was sent crashing into the ground due to the force of the collision. A bundle of darkened smog floated in the sky engulfing Blue Dragon while a similar form of smoke covered Shadow and its crater in the ground.

While looking down at his opponent Adam merely smirked, he had gained the upper hand.

### **Chapter Thirty-Four: Ashes in the Wind**

The dust scattered outwards filling the area surrounding Shadow. Rebel coughed roughly forcing his body to lean forward only to be held in place by the restraints on his seat. His body was beaten around in the cockpit due to the force of the crash. It had been a long time since he felt such a rush flood through his veins, and his feeling of ecstasy was at its peak. His lips parted sinisterly, saliva dripping over the rigid crevices of his lips he made his decision. Blood slowly flowed from his forehead making its way over his nose ridge and into his mouth. The bitter taste of his own blood only fueled his rage, his eyes widened, his soul awakened at that moment. Things began to appear clearer in his mind, he ignored the warning alarms in the back, he was aware of Shadow’s missing arm, but it concerned him not.

Adam sighed, letting out the majority of his adrenaline which was used up in the previous attack. He was clearly out of breath, taking deep breaths, along with continually wiping the sweat off his forehead. Blue Dragon maintained its altitude in the sky holding onto both ignited energy sabers while Shadow finally began to rise from the ground.

In the sky holders box every UGE representative sat comfortably with the air conditioning blaring at a constant temperature. Luscious Malum sat at the forefront of the group twirling his glass of wine in

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his hand trying to hold back his smile. Out of the 12 representatives he was the only one still in his seat, the remaining 11 were up out of their seats hugging the pane glass window in awe. They had never expected the first match of the tournament to come with such excitement. It had the essential qualities of a match that would be found in the finals.

“This is amazing...The intensity that is surrounding this battle...it’s on par of that of a finals match...” One representative muttered.

“Heh, so naïve. It’s because it’s a sequel to a final’s match. Read up on your history old man. Both of these pilots, Adam Novus and Rebel358 who has entered under the name Mulam were the in the final match of the first Azure Cup. This is that rematch. I sure am happy they got paired up in the first round. It’s almost as if it was their fate to meet again...” Luscious mentioned just as he took a sip of his wine.

“\*huff\*...Damn...I’m going to have to finish this off quick...\*huff\*” Adam mumbled, stumbling to catch his breath. This was the first time in a long time where he actually had a fight of this caliber.

Shadow began to make its movements as the remainder of the soot and debris dissipated into the air. In the blink of an eye his opponent was back in the air, it was quick, much faster than he had ever seen Shadow move before. Forcing himself to wake from his stupor Adam forced his feet to pound on the pedals. A flourishing stream of energy burst out from Blue Dragon’s boosters sending the MF down through the air heading straight towards the upcoming Shadow.

Shadow remained stern in its flight pattern, wielding only a single energy saber while it docked the plasma rifle. Adam knew Rebel and his tactics mainly from seeing him fight as many times as he did during the first Azure Cup. Shadow’s speed was on its own level, and Rebel’s handling of his frame was superb. But at the same time he was predictable, always struck at the same area, making the same motions. Even if he was unable to follow the movements with his eyes, he would be able to follow them with his mind.

Once again he found himself using the wings; each orbital weapon shot outwards firing with intent to kill. Unlike before Shadow ignored the beams failing to dodge, instead the frame moved forward, charging Blue Dragon. Each attack did minimal damage to Shadow’s outer layer, merely burning singe marks into the shimmering obsidian armor. Rebel’s crimson eyes blanked out, leaving no essence of a soul, only determination and pure enjoyment remained. Adam began to realize things were going to play out differently this time, Rebel was hell bent on striking him down even if it meant taking punishment in order to do it.

“Damn, if that’s the way it’s going...” Adam paused, and quickly ignited his energy shield as a last ditch effort. Shadow suddenly appeared before him slicing through the first three orbital wings that got in his way. The shards of burnt bluish debris flung outwards bouncing off the energy shield equipped on Blue Dragon. With his rage burning Rebel forced his energy saber forward easily piercing through Blue Dragon’s left energy shield. Adam cringed at the sight of the rampant sparks emanating the wound inflicted on his frame’s arm.

“You’re holding back...” Rebel finally began to speak once again.

“What?” Adam confused could only gawk at the crimson glowing eye of the frightening frame.

“DON’T HOLD BACK!” Rebel continued to scream.

*Neo Mode Engaged....*

Rebel’s muscles began to tighten under the strain of his performance enhancing system. With a sudden tug from his hand he pulled back the throttle resting on his right side. Shadow abruptly ripped its energy saber away from Blue Dragon tearing through the reinforced armor. The blue frame spun around rapidly from the force of the move, Adam glanced at his side taking notice of the severely damaged arm that he now had to carry. The lower part of the metal arm hung loosely off wires and gears it was only a matter of time before it completely detached.

“Damn...this will just end up getting in the way now...” Adam mumbled.

Blue Dragon’s right hand quickly grabbed onto the left with its metallic fingers firmly clasping into the damaged armor. With a quick tug Blue Dragon completely tore off its own left arm, before

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dropping it Adam took hold of the remaining energy saber combining it with the one in the right hand. Smoke seared from the wound of the frame and continued to float into the air distorting everyone's view as to what was going on.

"It can't be helped...I have to take him out here and now..." Adam yelled.

Blue Dragon burst out from the smoke that clotted the atmosphere, the particles of smoke dissipated outwards as the frame exploded outwards with a single dual energy saber ignited. Just as Adam approached Shadow the darkened frame dashed to the right avoiding the massive upper strike of the dual energy saber. The focused concentrated beam of energy tore through the remaining bundle of smoke while Shadow dodged. Adam quickly turned his head following his movements and once again let out the remaining orbital wings. As the last wing launched Blue Dragon too boosted towards Shadow flying through the rain of beams that were being sent hurdling towards Rebel's machine.

"Such ferocity...you really are beginning to make me wonder if you can stop them..." Rebel remarked.

"Them? What the hell is he going on about...argh..." Adam was suddenly thrown forward, the top of his head slamming against the display screen in front. His hair now stained with the color of his blood while droplets of crimson liquid dropped to the ground of the cockpit. Finding himself staring at the imperfections of his cockpit floor he began to wonder if he could do it, if he could defeat Rebel once again.

"No...I never beat him...I had Stephen, and the others for that. If it wasn't for them...I never would have beaten him..."

"You're stalling...why are you stalling?" Rebel screamed from behind. The five orbital wings followed every move that Shadow made, circling around the machine while firing consistently. "These won't do anything; they don't even make for a good distraction any more. They're movements are predictable and sluggish honestly. If you're going to defeat him you're going to need to do better than this." Rebel screamed.

Shadow seemingly disappeared as it flew tearing through each of the remaining orbital wings. With each graceful swing of its energy saber dozens more azure debris poured down from the sky littering the ground with burned metal.

After taking care of the nuisances as he referred to them as Rebel began his onslaught of Blue Dragon, swaying from side to side Shadow seemed almost unnoticeable. Adam listened to the constant echoing of his radar but failed to react. His eyes continued to stare blankly at the ground, at the ridges embedded into the steel floor.

"You don't deserve your life; you should have perished along with me years ago!"

*Angel System EX Mode Engaged...*

The feminine voice softly muttered. Once again he found himself tightly grasping the frigid plastic wrapped throttles. He knew he didn't have much time once the EX mode was engaged, the amount of pressure being applied to his body increased by a 100 fold, and with his body already weakened from minor injuries there was no guarantee he would be able to hold out for any longer than 5 minutes.

Shadow's right arm began the motion to attack from behind, its shoulder joint pivoting backwards while the energy saber sliced through the invisible air around it. Adam's head rose, his eyes glazed over with his own faith, he would not accept defeat. Blue Dragon began to turn just as Shadow began to attack. With Blue Dragon's right arm swinging from below and Shadow's swinging from above they prepared to clash. To Rebel's dismay Adam countered his attack forcing his dual energy saber to crash into Rebel's single beam. Streams of electrical lighting instantly burst into the air filling the upper half of the barrier with a brilliant display of fireworks. Both side pushed with all their strength to move the other, the crackling sound from the two beams of focused energy rubbing against each other filled both pilot's ears; their hopes, their dreams could not reach them anymore, all they could hear was the sweet sound of their weapons clashing.

"This is ridiculous..." Mario mumbled.

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“This is when the real fight begins...” Stephen replied.

“Huh?” Sharon eavesdropping slowly turned around out of curiosity. Her angelic face glistening in the lighting provided by the struggling frames.

“They were gauging each other until now Sharon. You’re about to see Adam get serious.” Stephen replied.

Sharon glanced over at Stephen who was standing, staring the explosive action above. Her lips quivered with worrisome feelings, she turned away her half opened eyes taking a deep breath. Holding her clasped hands before her chest she paused for a moment of deep reflection and silence. In a state of uselessness she knew she could only watch, hoping for a quick resolution to the battle.

“Adam...”

“You’ve gotten stronger...but you still won’t be able to get very far with this level!” Rebel screamed. Vibrant fuchsia lights flickered brightly in his cockpit lighting up his face. He stared back through the clashing beams of light and into the core of Blue Dragon.

“What is your deal!? Just what the hell do you want from me?!” Adam screamed back.

“I want nothing from you. You’ve got this twisted; it’s what you want from me!”

“From you? There’s nothing I want from you other than your death!” Adam screamed.

“Wrong. You want my knowledge...”

Adam’s eyes widened causing him to flinch for a brief moment; the sudden loss of pressure build up was quickly felt by Rebel. His hold on the throttles felt lighter than before, much easier to push forward, realizing this all in a matter of seconds he pushed forward. Shadow’s right arm began to lean forward pushing the energy saber downwards, the boosters behind the core lit up with a swift pivot of his feet. Blue Dragon slowly moved backwards, arching its back due to the greater amount of force being applied. Struggling inside he was beginning to wonder if it was over, he had made it to this point, if he was like his previous self he felt he could have never made it this far by himself. For a split second he was prepared for it all to end, smirking as he leaned forward, and his hair fell over his face, covering his shame.

“Not much else to do now...” His voice subtly spoke.

Rebel’s right eyebrow arched upwards, he was confused, it seemed like his opponent gave up. Shaking his head sideways in disappointment he pushed the throttles forward.

“Such a disappointment you are. Giving up, if you can live in the afterlife with the knowledge that friends are going to die because of your decision then so be it.”

“There’s...” Adam began to speak.

*What the hell are you doing? Get up!*

“Why?...there’s no point I can’t win...”

*What the hell is your problem, all of a sudden you’re going to lay down, and give up. After everything you did, after everything you’ve been through you’re going to give it completely up. What about Sharon? Are you going to let her down now?*

It hit him then; his brief moment of confusion, of self doubt was over. Listening to himself he woke up. Not completely sure as to why he suddenly began to doubt himself, to suddenly give up he suddenly found himself at the bad end of the energy saber approaching.

“I don’t know what the hell that was...that feeling, but it’s gone now. I won’t stop here!” He screamed with a new flame of determination burning in his pupils.

Just before Shadow started to move its right arm for the final strike Blue Dragon’s boosters went back online. Much to Rebel’s surprise the blue frame twirled around swinging its right arm through the air. Just like before both beams of energy collided with each other causing an outburst of sparkling energy and electrical surges of power.

“You’ve awoken haven’t you? Is everything back to normal now?”

“Heh, yeah...” Adam replied.

“Now prove to me that you’re able to do what is needed in order for this world to survive!”

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Shadow began to engage its thrusters as the frame tried to push forward, however unlike the previous attempt Adam refused to go down. Leaning forward Adam pushed the throttles with his arched over body. The pedals fell close to the silver panel floor, the boosters continued to send out vibrant flames into the air. Much to Rebel's surprise Blue Dragon began to overpower him, forcing Shadow's mechanical wrist inwards. Sparks of rampant energy burnt singe marks into the ash colored armor surrounding the wrist and lower arm, the intensity of the beams was rising as it crawled closer to Shadow's arm, the force being applied from Blue Dragon was beginning to become too much for Shadow's stabilizers to handle, Adam too could feel it, the sensation of victory shimmering through his veins. His anticipation had completely begun to overwhelm him; there was no way in his mind that he would let this fail.

"This...power...where did this come from?" Rebel screamed.

The head unit of Shadow suddenly flickered with a crimson glow, just then the boosters began to increase the output of energy that was being released and slowly Shadow began to push Blue Dragon back to a stalemate.

*Neo Mode...engaged....*

"To think you forced me to resort to this once again. You truly are worthy aren't you? But even still, you will die at his hands!" Rebel yelled.

"What?!"

Shadow suddenly released the pressure and strafed to the side, it was apparent that at the rate they were going neither would achieve any sort of advantage. Blue Dragon leaned forward due to the lack of an opposing force leaving itself completely open to attack. Shadow's heat signature abruptly appeared back on Adam's radar; quickly he turned his head around causing his hair to swing through the air.

"Heh..." Adam smirked. "You're predictable..." He replied.

"What?!" Rebel shocked failed to see the upcoming attack.

Blue Dragon's wing binders lifted upwards just as the two thigh cannons pivoted backwards and fired. Rebel's eyes widened as the two cannons let loose intense beam of energy.

"Shit..."

Rebel had no time to react and was left with no other choice but to take the hit. As the two beams burst onto Shadow causing the frame to tremble Blue Dragon cut to the left in a curved path. Quickly leaving no wasted motions the blue frame approached Shadow from behind.

"This is it...this battle ends now." Adam mumbled just before Blue Dragon swung the dual sided energy saber through the air.

"Shit...even with the Neo Mode engaged I won't be able to completely avoid this attack..." Rebel knew it was over; still it didn't prevent him from trying to change the outcome of the match.

The crowd became silent in awe as a slight quick flash of lightning filled the sky behind the barrier. The middle section of the cerulean energy blade cleanly sliced through the lower half of Shadow's right arm causing an instant explosion. Amongst the clouds that burrowed around the two machines Blue Dragon flew away from Shadow creating a new sense of distance. Burnt plastic wires danced from the wound that was inflicted, electrical discharges flickered in the sky around the rigid burnt edges of metal armor.

Adam smirked as he watched the wrist of Shadow fell to the ground still holding onto the energy saber tightly. Knowing that Shadow's arsenal was reduced to nothing he felt relieved and shut off the Angel System since there was no need for the extra strain on his body.

"It's over you failed rejected piece of shit." Adam muttered.

"Heh...he's gotten much better. This will make for an interesting finale..." Luscious mumbled under his breath. He continued to watch from the sky box, his glass still filled with his merlot, and the UGE representatives still standing in awe over the battle.



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“He won...I knew he'd do it.” Sharon stated; her nerves had finally begun to ease up since she figured the match was over. Her eyes no longer straining to watch the fight in the air, she could relax once again.

“It's not over yet. Shadow is a dangerous MF, for all we know there could be more weapons on there hidden. For now all we can do is watch...but he does have the upper hand at the moment.” Stephen replied.

“You always have to rain on everyone's parade don't you?” Sharon exclaimed.

“Not really, I'm merely bringing everyone down to reality. It's best to not get your hopes up; it'll only hurt that much more when you are proven wrong.” He simply replied.

“(Won't it just end already...asshole; you're taking your sweet time. Just finish it...)” Sharon thought to herself just as she found herself still staring wide eyed into the air hoping for a quick resolution.

Shadow lingered in the air, both arms nearly eradicated and smoke clinging to the wounds. Rebel heaved in his cockpit, the sweat drooling from his body, the perspiration showing no signs of quitting. In all of the adversity of the battle he still found himself smiling, his face hidden behind the soaked strings of hair that fell over his forehead and yet he remained calm, leaning back into a comforting position in his chair.

Adam paused at the eerie silence that filled the air, he knew it was over; he studied Shadow day and night. He knew its arsenal and knew that was it, there was nothing left. And yet the match hadn't been declared over.

“You do know why it isn't over right?” Rebel asked finally breaking the silence.

“No...we both know you don't have the means to attack me anymore. There's no way you could win.”

“Heh, you didn't read the entire email about this tournament. The rules are different, the only way to win is if...is if your opponent is dead in the end. You have to kill me if you truly desire to move on in this world.”

“Kill...but, it's a tournament...you can't be serious...”

“Oh I am, this tournament, it was meant as a means of drawing out all of the strong MF pilots and get rid of those that would be a nuisance. Even you should have been able to have figured that much out. Luscious Malum...is beginning his plan; the true Tribulation will begin soon.”

“...”

“You've gotten stronger but still won't be much of a challenge for him. He won't fail like I did. And you are also aware of the H-3 and H-4 are you not?”

“The what? What the hell are you talking about now?”

“You truly are an idiot. The other dives Genesis made into the Chimera Project. The machines that have been terrorizing Europe, you need to start paying attention Adam. An ignorant fool will not be the hero to save the world. Hehe...hahahahaha...”

“You're out of your mind...”

“Hahaha...am I? I'm just a wandering soulless creation; I have no true purpose ever since you took it from me. So why don't you be that merciful bastard and kill me?”

“....”

“If you don't I'm just going to make sure everyone you care about, especially that girl...what was her name? Ah yes...Sharon Amare...”

“Don't even think about getting close to her.”

“Hehe...how about it champ? Kill me.”

“...This world will be better off without you.” Adam struggled to come to this decision. He knew Rebel was of no threat to him anymore, but he couldn't be sure. He also knew that this tournament could very well be the only chance he'll get at Luscious Malum and he couldn't pass it up. In a fit of frustration Adam slammed down on the accelerator the instant rush sent a fury of cerulean flames to burst out of the Blue Dragon's boosters. Time appeared to slow down as he sprinted towards Shadow closing the gap.

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The frame's right arm pointing outwards with its extended energy blade focusing on the core of Shadow. Rebel smiled sharply at the oncoming energy.

*Kill him....*

Adam merely nodded.

### **Chapter Thirty-Five: Of Sinful Nature**

From a distance a lone figure stood staring at the barrier in the distance. Her hair flapping through the breeze that continued to pass through the area. She sighed, not one to make much of an effort in any task assigned to her was beginning to wonder how she forced into this one.

*"\*sigh\* This is seriously too troublesome....\*arg\*...."* Her body collapsed to the ground, her palm resting on her forehead, her eyes squeezing from the pain that surged through her brain.

*"Argh....I've used the power too much....I'm going to have to rest, hopefully he'll be able to finish the job without anymore persuasion....even if it is troublesome, I can not fail this mission...Envy should have taken this job, his power in the Crimson Dawn is much more developed than mine..."* Sloth's eyes quivered until she fell completely unconscious.

Adam's eyes focused on the being before him, no longer were thoughts processing through his mind, he was fighting on rage alone. Blue Dragon's right arm stayed straight with the energy saber extending outwards. Rebel smirked as he slowly closed his eyes. Shadow, completely defenseless hovered waiting for the end.

*"Finally...my soul can rest..."* Rebel mumbled softly as the beam of energy collided with the outer core of Shadow.

Sparks burned outwards like an explosive fireworks display as the energy blade pierced through the layers of metallic armor. Adam simply stared forward, pushing himself to finish everything. Rebel smiled for the final time as the radiated energy crushed through the metal plating surrounding the cockpit. Warning lights flickered vibrantly; the temperature shot up instantly, Rebel's skin perspired hastily while his breathing patterns were irregular. The radical change in temperature alone was enough to cause him to feel the ending of his life. The inside of his cockpit's lighting suddenly changed to a crisp blue hue as the edge of Blue Dragon's energy beam tore through the display screen slowly moving forward. It wasn't long before Rebel's eyes shut and the energy over took his fragile body. There was no struggle, no sudden outburst of cries, nothing more than the subtle drone of the swirling energy. The internal generators of Shadow suddenly fulminated from the flames that burst out in the core, the miniature explosion ran

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rampantly throughout the machine until Shadow was nothing more than thousands of burned metallic debris surrounded by a conflagrant ball of fire.

Blue Dragon backpedaled away from the stirring sphere of flames as Adam sat comfortably, his eyes glaring at the pieces of debris that fluttered towards the ground. His breathing began to slow back down to a normal pace, the sweat still dripping off the tip of his dark brown hair. Suddenly he clutched onto his chest near his heart, struggling to breathe he grasped for air. His abrupt loss in stamina caused his feet to slide off the accelerators thus killing the energy being supplied to the boosters. To everyone's surprise Blue Dragon suddenly lost its stability and began to fall through the air.

"...I....Sharon...." His final words before the pain caused his eye sight to fade dark and his consciousness slept.

"Adam!" Sharon blurted out just as the blue frame crashed into the ground causing an uproar of darkened smoke mixed with minerals towering into the air. The entire crowd in the arena seating all stood up in awe, the force from the collision was too powerful to be completely contained by the barrier which was already beginning to fade. What the people on the outside felt was the weakest end of the shockwave which felt like nothing more than a strong breeze that surged through their hair and clothes.

Sharon's right knee rose as she prepared to climb over the silver fence before he only to be quickly grabbed by Stephen. His left palm simply resting on her shoulder, as she felt his presence she turned only for him to shake his head.

"There's nothing you can do, it's pointless. He's just drained, he's fine." Stephen replied.

"But..." She screamed back at him while trying to think of a justified logical argument only to come up empty.

*Winner...Adam Novus....*

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*Tokyo, Japan*

*Round 1 Match*

*Marcus Falden VS. Kyle Lengrin*

Rain littered the ruined streets and collapsed buildings of Tokyo as the two opponents for the next match in the Azure Cup tournament stood before one another. A large display hologram like the one in Rome had dissipated as the first match ended. Marcus shrugged his shoulders; to him it wasn't much of a surprise that Adam moved to the next round, in reality he cared little of the exploits of Adam Novus. His mind was set on proving his worth, he missed the first tournament because of missions revolving around the might of the 181<sup>st</sup>, but now he was free to enjoy his own strength and skill. The anticipation was beginning to agitate him, for about 20 minutes he sat in OZ's cockpit waiting for the match to begin. Grudgingly glaring away from the display of the MF before him he sighs, extending his legs outwards and his arms high towards the ceiling.

"This is a joke...they put me up against this nobody. And what's with that frame anyway...it looks like nothing more than an exaggerated Night-Wing." Marcus barked loudly in his sullen cockpit.

The frame before him was like he said, a customized Night-Wing. It had been a good amount of time since he had seen one in action, by this point and time they were easily an outdated model with inferior specifications and weaponry. Although the fact that it was customized left a lot to be desired, Marcus had no way of knowing the exact capabilities of the MF before him and in that way it made it more fun. But still he found himself doubting the possible longevity of the fight itself, his arrogance usually forebode the quick and untimely end for his opponent. The frame in question stood 18 meters in height, it's head unit resembled that of the Night-Wing production model with a single glowing eye unit,

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although the rest was unique, a single metal horn protruded from above the eye which was different from the Night-Wing along with two elongated radar tubes that rested on the right and left side of the head. The rest of the frame was a Night-Wing with added armor for better defense, the wings were different and a mix of a helicopter wing and jet wings. Three sets of propellers were embedded into the wings, one on the left, one in the middle, and one on the right. This would allow the frame to hover in the air without draining energy with any unnecessary effort. It appeared to Marcus that his opponent, Kyle was an impulsive pilot banking on his firepower; this was seen through his choice of weapons, a set of Bazookas equipped on both arms, and two grenade cannons resting between the connection points to the wings on the back of the core.

Marcus stared back at the frame, inspecting its joints and details. He chuckled slightly when he realized the pivot points of the grenade launchers, it was apparent to him that each cannon would flip underneath the arm joints and fire from that position.

“That’ll be his downfall. The recoil alone will do more than enough damage; I’m willing to bet that those joints won’t be able to take more than 6 recoil shots from a weapon that produces such a high force shockwave. Heh...this truly will be quick.” Marcus mumbled under his breath.

### *Round 1 Match 2 Begin....*

“Finally.” Marcus replied, his grin maliciously brightening up his face. With a flash OZ took off, tearing through the cracked and disfigured concrete street. The boosters on the frame glistened brightly, lighting up the darkened ruins. With the intent to kill brimming off his aura Marcus equipped the Excalibur, and increased his focus on the Night-Wing in front.

At first Kyle could do nothing more than stare into the burning soul of his enemy. Fear was his first reaction; his over beating heart accompanied by a waterfall of sweat was the clear cut sign. He couldn’t seem to force his fingers to stop fidgeting, he was a young pilot; barely 17 which made him wonder why he decided to take part in the Azure Cup. His vibrant blonde tossing in the air conditioning being provided in his cockpit, the subtle breeze on his skin began to calm his senses. With OZ’s speed it wasn’t long before Marcus began the motions to make his attack. OZ’s right and left hands held tightly around the edge of the Excalibur handle, the joints twisting and turning as the flickering blade of the weapon sliced through the air. Much to Marcus’ surprise the Night-Wings’ boosters ignited at the last second causing the frame to dash sideways forcing the brunt of the Excalibur to dig itself into the already torn apart cement. For a brief moment OZ appeared to be stuck in the street, struggling OZ managed to rip the blade out from the burned slaps of concrete along with miniscule debris flailing into the air.

“What the hell? Fucking showing signs of life just before I was about to deliver your death! How dare you make me look like a fucking bitch!” Marcus screamed, his temperament easily changed with the slightest influxes of a situation.

“...” Kyle remained silent, choosing to focus on the fight more so than the actual confrontation of words.

The Night-Wing quickly changed course, its wings cutting through the wind making the machine easily slide through the torrents of wind that passed through. Both obsidian bazookas lifted and fired, the two thickened shells flew through the sky heading towards OZ. For a brief instant Kyle felt a chip residing on his shoulder. Unfortunately for him the chip was crushed when OZ easily sliced through both shells with a single swipe from the Excalibur. Marcus smirking with each and every move he made. Kyle, shocked from the sheer brutish actions taken by his opponent was unsure on how to respond. With a single action he was able to determine the type of fight the rest of the battle was going to be. Marcus, in his eye didn’t seem like the type of person to waste his energy on dodging, rather, he would use his energy to overpower the attacks and fly forward with a powerful offense. Easily he knew that even with the extra armor his Night-Wing wouldn’t stand much of a chance.

“Oh...I see you’ve flinched. That means you know, you know this match has already been decided!” Marcus yelled.

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His soul was screaming, still hurt from the deaths of his friends he trudged forward. Sluggishly moving, forcing himself to go on for their sake. His rage contained mostly, until now. For this was when he could truly be himself, no longer would he hide for the sake of saving face. His raw, untainted strength and animalistic frustration be shown. His pupils were thinned, mouth widely open releasing the sounds of his bound tormented soul into the world. It was frightening for anyone to hear, Kyle was paralyzed in his reoccurring fear of the man preparing to strike him. The Night-Wing hovered, lingering in the air with each propeller spinning rapidly. His arms quivering with goose bumps unable to handle the throttles of his frame, he was simply a target for Marcus.

OZ's flames brightly moved the machine forward into the sky, Marcus nearly to the point of salivating with angst. Again the Excalibur chosen as his weapon he moved forward, preparing to strike down his enemy. Like before Kyle managed to snap out of his primary trance and react. Both grenade cannons turned under the arm joints of the Night-Wing and launched a volley. Thickened armored shells rapidly closed in on OZ, Marcus knew that if hit he'd be at a seriously disadvantage. OZ's core gears turned to the right as the boosters moved to a 45 degree angle allowing the machine to avoid the second attack fired against him. He knew that if the Excalibur came in contact with shells of that power and speed he'd lose. As OZ dodged Marcus' eyes focused on the recoil that hit the Night-Wing. He was wrong in his prior assessment; one shot was enough to disrupt the flow of the Night-Wing's internal motors. Smiling he knew he would end the match in the next move. Pushing his stringy black hair away from his crystalline eyes he pushed OZ to the limit. Each of the thrusters ignited violently with full force, both wrists of OZ turned inwards around the handle, tightening the grip.

The Night-Wing began to react; only much slower than Kyle had predicted. The left arm struggled to rise with the heavily armored bazooka. Between the recoil and the heaviness of his weapons there was no easy way out for him. Marcus was a veteran pilot, he was able to quickly analyze any situation and adapt accordingly; it was what made him an ace pilot. OZ's Excalibur slashed through the left arm, destroying its mid-joint causing an outlandish explosion. The fire and smoke that broke out distorted Kyle's view of his enemy. Only barely able to make out the incomplete silhouette of OZ he began to fire randomly into the air. Sparks began to ripple outwards from the right arm, the pressure was too much for it to handle, he had quickly reached his frame's limit.

"It's over boy...see you in the next life..." Marcus muttered.

OZ lunged forward, piercing through the disillusioning smoke forcing the end of Excalibur forward into the cockpit of the Night-Wing. Closing his eyes the Night-Wing exploded with tremendous force sending OZ 100 meters back into the sky. As each crisp piece of debris poured to the ground OZ touched down onto the rocky landscape.

*Winner....Marcus Falden.*

"\*sigh\*....the pain still remains....I shall avenge you all..." Taking in a deep breath he began to the process of calming down. His tormented body leaned forward staring at the ground beneath his feet he clenched his hands together as his eyes shut tightly.

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"It seems Marcus advanced as well." Stephen muttered as he stood, leaning in the doorway of the hospital room which Adam occupied.

Adam chuckled, his head glaring at the ceiling while his bandaged body rested on the ivory comforter. He had regained his consciousness a few minutes ago just after the 4th match of the tournament ended. He had been unconscious for 12 hours, during that time the remaining matches in the first section had ended. It wasn't a surprise to him that Marcus moved on, his frame and his passion was all that he had left. He knew it'd take a miracle to stop Marcus from moving forward.

"How's Sharon?"

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“Ooh? Not even going to ask about the fight itself?” Stephen replied.

“No, I don’t need to know the details.”

“I see. She’s fine; you scared her that much is for certain although she’ll never admit it. She’s a strong person, that pathetic clone could never do her justice.”

“Yeah...”

“What’s wrong? Having second thoughts?”

“Yeah...”

“About what? The tournament or her?”

“Both.”

“Want to talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“You’re afraid that you’ll lose her for real this time? Is that why you’re trying to distance yourself from her?”

“Pretty much.”

“Well...stop it. Life is too short to waste it on things like that. You got a second chance, not many people get one of those. If you waste it you’ll only regret it.”

Stephen paused momentarily when he saw Sharon slowly approaching from the distance. He laughed slightly, pushing his body away from the wall he waved to Adam as he walked out of the room. Adam shrugged and turned on his side. His eyes glazed over in grief, the window gave a nice view of the scenery that Rome had to offer. Day had broken and the sun gave a new outlook on everything in sight. Each blade of grass waved back at him with the passing of the early morning breeze. The dew on the glass caused small amounts of scattered fog to hinder his view of the clear morning day. It made little difference to him; he was in pain, mentally and physically. The Angel System alone did enough damage to his body to persuade him not to use it for such a long time in his next match, but that pain was tolerable when compared to his confusion with Sharon, and the nightmares that had been keeping him awake at night. Taking his pillow from under his head he quickly shoved it over his face.

“(I can’t go through that again...I can’t let her die...this would be the best decision...)”

“You ok? You know it’s not a good sign if you’re losing your sanity at such an early age.” Sharon quirked.

“Heh..” It was difficult for him to contain his laughter, regardless of how short coming it was.

“You going to say what’s wrong or am I going to have to guess?”

“Nothing’s wrong, I just have a headache.” Adam replied, placing the pillow to the side. He looked back into her brown eyes, wondering why he would ever contemplate excluding her from his life. Her beauty was beyond comparison, her smooth tanned skin, and glistening smile was enough to make any man melt. But all of that was merely an added bonus to her personality. Sharon made her way around the bed, she reclined onto the bed sitting next to him, and she began to lay down forcing him to move over. Her backside leaning into him, she laid being embraced by his arms. Lying there together felt right to him, the feeling of comfort and peace was something he could get used to. But he knew he had things he had to deal with first before he could ever dream of something like this.

“Adam?”

“Yeah?”

“You’re a terrible liar.”

“I know...” They both slowly closed their eyes, knowing that they were with one another; it was all they could ask for.

“So any idea of how Rebel was still alive?” Ashley asked.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders; it was still something he was trying to figure out. He was there, he saw Shadow explode; it made little to no sense to him.

“You think it was Genesis?”

“Most likely. Why the sudden interest?”

“It’s my job to know things remember.”

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“That was when we were with the TA. You don’t have to keep putting your life in danger, you do know that right.”

“Yeah I know. But you’re my friends.”

“Friends....heh, I have no clue what that means. If it means a fool then yeah...I have a lot of those.”

“We all do Stephen....we’re all fools.”

“Ashley?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you think I wasted my life trying to reach the top?”

“No...I think it was necessary for you to have made it to this point. Why are you so hard on yourself anyway? That is the one thing I never understood about you.”

“It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“I see...so what do we do now? The first section has finished their matches.”

“Ashley?”

“Yeah?”

“I need you to do me a favor.”

“Yeah?”

“I want you to start researching project Zenith of Artificially Composed Humans and get back to me as soon as possible. This tournament is merely a distraction from the bigger picture.”

“Ok Stephen...I’ll get right on it.”

“Thanks Ashley... in order to understand the strategy to the game I need to know all the players....” Stephen mumbled.

**Chapter Thirty-Six: The City Beyond the Gate**

Activity on the crimson planet had subsided since the failed invasion by Red Fury. A small cluster of the remaining Red Fury loyalists ended up in Mundus, the continent that was previously known as the South Western Territory. During the war between the TA and the EAP the South Western Territory had nearly been forgotten, Luscious Malum managed to divert the attention to the war for whatever reason. Only now, with the UGE in complete control of Earth and Red Fury on the brink of collapse he has once again made noteworthy attention for the South Western Territory otherwise known as Mundus. It wasn't much of a surprise that in fear of retaliation that the remaining members of Red Fury moved their activity to Mundus in order to investigate the claims of the UGE President. His constant use of the world "Utopia" made the undiscovered territory behind the energy barrier seem like a paradise on Mars. A paradise that was considered to be reachable for humanity; under the direction of Luscious Malum, God had finally forgiven the sins; the location of the new Eden.

In total only 25 members of the Mars faction remained, mostly comprised of low level soldiers hence the reason they were not sent hurdling towards Earth weeks ago. Leaderless they merely wandered the crimson dust, being rejected by nearly every colony on the means that they would only bring danger and destruction with them. It was unfortunate but true, between the Night Stalkers still being their primary hunters and the threats being made by Luscious Malum and the UGE their days were indeed numbered.

The flames blew in the wind along with the minerals and dust of the crimson ground. 5 soldiers stood guard slowly pacing through the night's sky. Their assault rifles leaning upwards against the ridge of their shoulders. It was quiet night with tons of nerves riddling with anxiety waving through the atmosphere as if waiting for something to happen. Apart from the small amount of light being shun from the flickering flames the desolate greenish barrier aided in lighting up the small area surrounding the edge of the landmark.

"I still don't see what's so special about this thing..." One of the soldiers, a tall man at 6'5 with a lanky body and curly hair spoke. At first the abrupt sound of a voice in the chilled air frightened everyone else, silence, for the most part had reigned supreme.

"It's mysterious; no one knows what's behind it. That's why it's so damn special Burke." Another soldier, this one female spoke in turn. She hid her face beneath her wave like crimson hair and bangs. Her body leaned forward with her arms crossing over her knees, the flames in front of her continued to apply much needed heat.

"Pfft...I still don't see the big deal or anything. So...Elise? How much longer are we going to keep hiding out? We'd be better off making a move instead of scurrying from colony to colony." Burke replied.

"You're such an idiot. There are 25 of us; at best we'd be able to start up a commotion. David sent our best out first and failed in one day. So just what the hell would we be able to accomplish, just face it; Carlos Rendetore's dream is dead." It hurt for her to say it, but it was the truth. With David's brash way of thinking it seemed that Red Fury was doomed.

"Well, if we're going to go out...might as well go out with a bang right?"

"Shut up Burke..."

"Elise...you're no fun. So what's the plan then?"

"The only thing we can do...we have to try and find a way through this barrier. We have to see what's on the other..." Elise's mouth slowly opened taking a brief pause from her reply. Along with her trance the remaining soldiers who were awake also stood staring at the fading barrier in front of them.



### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

Burke merely stared back at Elise failing to pay attention to the subtle hum that vibrated through the silence.

It was abrupt, completely unexpected but the barrier of energy that was protecting its insides was beginning to dissolve. Elise continued gazing, anticipating, day dreaming about what was about to be revealed to them, while the rest of humanity remained in the dark about the South Western Territory.

“It’s...a city?” She managed to find her strength to speak once again.

“What are you...” Burke began to speak only to stop due to hesitation found deep within his subconscious.

*She’s looking at a city. Our Zion...that is what she is looking at...pathetic human.*

“What the fuck?! Who said that?!” Burke suddenly began to look around aiming his rifle in the air, waving it frantically through the wind.

“Burke? No one said anything. You ok?” Elise questioned as she rose off the ground.

The new source of light which was emanating from the crystalline like city forced all of the shadows to run from the area. It was an eloquent sight indeed, Burke finally turned around to see for himself, still confused over the words that he had thought he heard. The city that stood hundreds of meters before them was silent to say the least, brimming with light that nearly blinded each Red Fury soldier. The buildings that were present easily put the current ones on Mars even Earth to shame. The structure angular designs were gorgeous and sturdy, glass windows glistening with the reflection from the light sources hovering in the sky. From the looks of it darkness had never managed to slip inside, a single massive atmospheric satellites used energy which was converted into a light source. As the group of Red Fury soldiers stared Burke began to approach the city limits. Still shaken by the voice that appeared for an instant he remained cautious holding onto his rifle tightly.

“Burke! Where the hell are you going? We don’t even know what it is!” Elise screamed.

“It’s a city Elise, it doesn’t take a brain surgeon to know that much! We can probably hide out here!”

*Filthy human, don’t even think about soiling our paradise. You’re sins taint your soul.*

The voice echoed once again within the walls of his brain. His feet stopped moving as he fell to his knees in fear. Shivering from the cold wisps of wind he wrapped his arms around his quivering body.

“Who are you?! What the hell do you want?!” Burke screamed in fear.

“Burke who are you talking to? Are you alright?” Elise yelled from his rear.

*You don’t even deserve to be this close to our paradise. You’re better off killing yourself; it’s the only way to be redeemed in his eye.*

“Redeemed? Yes...I want to be redeemed...” Releasing the safety of his holstered pistol he moved it forward, rubbing against his neck. His eyes shut while he smiled with deluded dreams of being redeemed. His finger pulled against the smooth trigger forcing a bullet to pierce through his skull at a tremendous velocity. Before Elise’s eyes blood exploded into the air, as Burke’s body collapsed to the ground. The echoing of the gun shot tore through her mind, numb she too fell to the dirt in confusion. Wanting to speak, to say something, she came up dry, unable to use her vocal chords in any way. The ground began to shake as if a tremor spread outwards underneath the ground. With each slow step a giant machine, specifically a Seraph made its debut. Peeking out from the city which was hidden behind the barrier the Seraph fired a single round from its positron cannon. The flowing beam of radiated energy crashed into the ground causing a shockwave to tear outwards in a circular pattern. In an instant the remaining Red Fury soldiers were evaporated, turned to ash.

With his job done Envy smirked maliciously.

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“My job’s done. Still...I don’t think releasing the barrier was necessary...are you sure its ok boss?”

“It’s fine. Our preparations are complete; the Archangel Class machines are ready. And their pilots...they too are ready. It was his will to release the barrier. So do not question it Envy.”

Envy, like a trained pup quickly nods in agreement with his superior whose face is hidden on the display screen by a black screen.

“So then? Sloth has completed her mission then?”

“Yes, the failure has been completed destroyed. That variable is no longer in the equation. You’re new mission is simple. There are only 4 of you left; each of you will stand guard at Zion’s gate while the soldiers are launched into space.”

“Space? Where the hell are they going?”

“He wishes for them to be sent to Prometheus. From there he will direct his will to the rest of humanity and then release the final act.”

“I see...war is merely part of the cycle that will never end...”

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His eyes slowly moved as his conscious returned. His vision was blurry at first but he was able to realize that it was still night. The void of light fluctuating from the window blinds was the first clear distinction. His mind had been wandering, drifting in the darkness of his nightmares for the past few days after the first round ended in the Azure Cup.

“You’re awake?” The voice surprisingly emanated from the side of his hospital bed. There was no mistaking it; the tone, the depth and pitch were familiar. Too familiar; Luscious Malum.

Turning around Adam looked into the shadows that covered the UGE President. Barely could he make out the physical traits of Luscious Malum, but it made no difference. His image was burned deeply into Adam’s soul; even in darkness he could see him clearly.

“Is there a reason you’re here?”

“Heh, sarcastic as ever I see.”

“You’re point?”

“I see bantering is out of the question. Guess we should just go straight into the questions as I’m sure you have tons of them.”

“I have plenty of questions, but I have to say this sudden appearance and willingness to answer them has taken the fun out of dreaming to beat them out of you.”

“Well, make it to the finals and you might get that chance regardless of what I answer tonight.”

“At first I was skeptical, but now seeing that you’re piloting an MF I guess there’s no questioning it. I always took notice of the physical similarities but I never paid enough attention to it to put two and two together.”

“I’m not surprised that this is the first topic, Rebel358.”

“He said he was you in my final confrontation with him 3 years ago. That he was a failed creation.”

“I see, well to be blunt, Rebel358 is the 358<sup>th</sup> failed clone of me. Before you ask, no I never had the desire to make a clone of myself. That was done by the parents of those spoiled kids Severen and Caleb.” Luscious replied.

“I see...what was the point of cloning you? No offense, but you hardly seem worth it.”

“There are some secrets that are better off unanswered. We’ll say they knew my past while others didn’t. The past makes us who we are, never forget that.”

“I appreciate the advice, but if you don’t mind I’ll pass on anything you try to pass down to me.” Adam replied.

“Fair enough. But it’s safe to say that you have some questions for me. So you will in a sense allow me to pass something on to you.”

“Whatever...why don’t you just tell me why you’re in my room in the middle of the night?”

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“For one it was a lot easier for me to go unnoticed at night. And I deal better in the shadows anyway.”

“You’re not really answering my question. Just dancing around the topic.”

“Heh, alright then. I guess it’ll be best if I’m forward anyway. I knew you were searching me out from the start. Otherwise you would have never shown up at this tournament. I felt I owed you this much.”

“So it’s true then. This tournament was created to draw us out into the open.”

“Heh, there you go again. Thinking that you and your peers are the center of the attention. No, this tournament was created for a much bigger purpose. It is simply a means to direct the attention of the public away from such threats like Red Fury, or even Orbis. The conflict that will inevitably drown the world in chaos once again, that, and it is also a way for me to test the limitations of Shadow Omega.”

“I see...this whole thing is merely a playground for your frame? Seems kind of arrogant if you ask me.”

“Arrogance huh? Maybe you’re right, but then again, maybe you’re not. Are you truly aware of what is going on? It approaches soon.”

“You’re Tribulation?”

He paused to take a quick sip of his glass of Merlot, Luscious then smiles. Holding back his amusement he leans forward revealing his face out from the darkness in which it was hidden.

“You’re more aware than I expected.”

“It wasn’t hard to guess after all, your failed clone wanted the same thing. It’s only natural for the original to wish for the same thing. Why is it that I think that you sent your clone to proceed with the Tribulation just to test us out? To test out the strength that was hidden deep within humanity. You wanted to observe what would happen so that when you decided to follow through you wouldn’t make the same mistakes. Am I close?”

“Heheh...haha. You truly are quite aware aren’t you Adam Novus?”

“I assure you, you will fail like that failure.”

“Will I now? While I am impressed with your current knowledge, you still have a long way to go before you are completely aware of everything. The sins of humanity have been their judge, and jury...I am simply their executioner.”

“So that’s what it is. You think of yourself as an executioner? You’re nothing more than idealistic jackass drowned in his own arrogance and self image.”

“Heh, I care not of what you think of me. You won’t be much of a threat; at the level you are at currently you are not even worth a raised eyebrow. While it is impressive that you killed Rebel, you are far from reaching me. Neither you, nor anyone else can stop what is coming. My suggestion to you would be to relax and enjoy the time you have left with Sharon. You’re lucky that you’ve lasted this long, you’re even lucky that you managed to find her again. However, your luck only goes so far. If you truly wish to test your luck then make it to the finals and face me. We’ll see just how talented you are. And don’t judge my skill based on my matches prior to the finals, I can assure you they will showcase nothing more than my speed.”

“Just who the hell are you?”

“I am nothing more than a relic from the past...”

“A relic?”

Luscious slowly stood up from the chair glaring back at the bed ridden Adam. Smirking he placed his now empty glass of wine on the table beside him.

“One more thing about this tournament, it was also established to bring out the only two possible threats to my campaign. The two machines that have been rampaging through out the world, Genesis’ latest chapter in the Chimera Project; the H-3 and H-4. But you knew that since you’re so aware.”

Adam’s eyes widened, he had heard of the machines and their destruction. But from his standpoint he only felt that it was one frame, and had no clue that they were related to the Chimera Project that Genesis had developed.

“Luscious...”

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“Yeah?”

“Why did you clone Sharon? Why did you send her and her father to a hellish facility away from the world?”

“Simple, to control you. You don’t think everything you’ve dealt with, every decision you made was truly yours do you? Heh, so naïve.”

“...” Adam shocked by the reply had no witty response; his eyes stared blankly at the wall in front of his face. Smirking, Luscious walked out of the room, leaving Adam nearly catatonic unable to comprehend the words that Luscious spoke to him.

“(Have I...have I really been following the path he laid out for me?...)” His thoughts wandered as the sun slowly began to peek from behind the narrow mountains in the distance.

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Orbis’ resource satellite which circulated around the Phobos gravitational field was currently bustling with activity since the recent transition from Earth. Gail knew there wasn’t much left for him to do on Earth, and with Mars being the primary target of the UGE he was well aware that the crimson planet wasn’t a smart choice either. Reunited with the birthplace of Orbis he finally found that sense of home in which he was missing while on Earth. The stars glistened brightly amongst the pitch black canvas of space. He couldn’t help but smile as he gazed out into the unknown. The nebulas of spectacular colors gave space the true essence of life that it was missing most of the time. Gail turned to face the scattered reports and files that were on his desk, each one was another window into the Chimera Project and the H-3. He still had his suspicions, he was even 99% sure that he was right. But there was still some hindrance of doubt clotting his mind.

“Do you think I’m wrong Lucian?” His lips mumbled softly. Almost too soft for his friend to even register, glancing up from his own work Lucian shrugged his shoulders.

“It’s your path, only you can truly know if you’re right or not.”

“You’re not helping.”

“Heh, sorry. Look, you have all the information you need to make a proper decision. And I know you don’t like it, but that information is pointing to those two kids. If you really need an answer...*\*sigh\**, this is really a bad idea, but it’s the only one I have. Why don’t you push them into a situation where they’ll need to rely on that power? From what I’ve read about the project once the human consciousness dissipates the computer takes over. Verify it with your own eyes.”

“You want me to jeopardize the entire organization just to verify if we’re right or not...I don’t think it’s worth the risk.”

“I understand, but you’re going to keep doubting yourself until you do. We’re running out of time too Gail. The tournament has begun its second round; it’ll end before you know it. The UGE forces are conglomerating around Prometheus already, once this tournament is over it’s going to begin. We can’t wait any longer. If we’re right we have the two knights needed for this to work. Plus it’s going to take time to be able to hack into the system and control them. We need to make sure we’re right. I’ve already taken the liberty to install the programs into their OS.”

“I know Lucian...alright then. We’ll do it; we’ll set up a scenario in which they’ll both have to rely on that power. I just hope that program you came up with will work.” Gail replied.

“Don’t worry Gail; it’ll do its job. I promise you that much.”

“Good enough for me. You’ve never let me down before; I have no reason to doubt you now.”

“After all, what are friends for? Listen, I have to do run over to the security bay to make sure the satellite’s defenses are up and running. With the UGE on Prometheus we don’t know what will happen. We can’t take any chances.”

“You’re right Lucian. Thanks.”

With a quick nod Lucian made his way out from Gail’s office. As the mechanical door slid shut Lucian began to walk through the empty hallway, his eyes peered off to the side, into the breathtaking

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sight of the stars. Suddenly his attention moved to the vibrating sensation of his satellite phone in his right pocket. With a chuckle he reached and answered.

*“So? Are we on schedule?”*

*“Of course, the program is installed in their machines.”*

*“Good.”*

*“And what about you? How did the meeting go?”*

*“Heh, he’s shaken up that much is for certain. He’ll probably try to do something but I don’t see him being much of a threat.”*

*“Perfect. It seems as if your plan is going to go off without a hitch.”*

*“It would seem like. As for the satellite defenses?”*

*“I’ve sent you the specifications.”*

*“Good, you’re doing well Lucian.”*

*“Thank you Luscious...”*

### **Chapter Thirty-Seven: Tumbling Down**

“Adam? Are you sure you should be getting up?” Sharon asked just as she entered his room in the hospital.

Glaring, he paused, trying to think of an answer. Unable to come up with something appropriate he merely settled for a quick chuckle. His right arm slid through his leather jacket just as he turned

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around, his face sullen trying to avoid the rays of light that shun through the window. Sharon stood before him blocking his exit, in a cautious and quiet tone he sighed.

“Before you ask, it’s nothing. I’m fine. The second round of the tournament is starting shortly, I have some things I need to do before it starts. Sorry Sharon, I’ll explain later. (I won’t give him the satisfaction of watching me follow the path he set up...)”

“I...Adam...” Feeling powerless she moaned watching as he passed by her with his bag flung over his right shoulder.

“Please, don’t worry, it’s nothing...”

Her fingers spread outwards as she reached, trying to grab onto him, to prevent him from moving further away. She wanted to say something, anything that would stop him. No matter how many times he tried to assure her that everything was fine she knew he was lying. His face, his expressions were different than usual. He struggled as well, doing his best to keep it bottled inside away from the outside world. Keeping a standard pace he walked past people who truly deserved to be in there, people with illnesses along with people with severe injuries, he didn’t belong there; he was merely exhausted and drained from his match with Rebel. He had every reason to leave; he continued to tell himself that. At this point his mind was set; his meeting with Luscious at night forced his eyes to open even wider. Not sure what to believe he didn’t want to take the chance.

*“Simple, to control you. You don’t think everything you’ve dealt with, every decision you made was truly yours do you? Heh, so naïve.”*

“I won’t be controlled any longer...” He mumbled.

With new resolve he found himself staring at the clear window door before him. The second round of the Azure Cup was scheduled to start in 4 hours; his match would be the first once again. He hadn’t paid much attention to the tournament since he was placed in the hospital, but in the end it mattered little to him.

“Adam? Adam Novus?” A feminine voice bellowed from behind. He recognized it but he was never good with remembering people off voice intonation alone. He slightly turned around to see a woman with short flowing green hair; Freya Abby, a former EAP soldier who migrated to Red Fury. But ended up leaving before Adam ended up stuck with them, the two of them had encountered one another before, mostly during the conflict with Nathan Leviticus. They never truly had a formal introduction but she knew who he was, and he knew of her. She apparently was apart of an EAP special forces squad that was sent out to deal with the H-2, otherwise known as Michael Aquilis. That was 5 to 6 years ago, in a sense that was their first encounter.

“Freya right?”

“Yeah, I know we’ve never been formally introduced or anything but I was there when Nathan Leviticus tried to destroy both the TA and EAP.”

‘I remember.’

“I heard you had entered, I must admit I was pretty shocked. I heard a rumor that you moved to Evo.”

“Yeah well...rumors aren’t the most reliable sources of information. What about you? You enter?”

“Yeah...I’m out of the tournament already.”

“Oh, sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. I should have won, I just...I just couldn’t kill my opponent for no reason. I forfeited the match.” Freya replied.

“Oh...still trying to hold onto your innocence then. Don’t let it get you down; I won’t kill without a reason either. I’m heading to the tournament representative; I’m resigning from the tournament.” Adam replied.

“You’re resigning...” It seemed unexpected from her perspective, he was after all in her mind one of the greatest pilots to ever handle an MF.

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“Yeah, I have my reasons...listen, it was nice to catch up, but I really have to hurry down there before my match arrives. Good luck, later!” Adam yelled as he waved goodbye, his hair flipping through the wind while he ran forward. Freya nodded, smiling.

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Sharon continued to gaze out, spacing away from reality. Her hotel room was bland and silent. Something she hadn't been used to in a long time. The one bed room only confined her tightly with her own fears and worries. A few hours passed since Adam left the hospital, she left a countless amount of voicemails on his cell only for him to not call back. The second round was about to be underway and he was no where to be found. Taking a deep breath she held in her frustration.

“Where the hell did you go?”

The hanger was damp and sullen while dozens of mechanics ran rampantly around trying to prepare for the upcoming round. The second round for Section A was designated to take place in Rome, due to the sudden decision made by Luscious Malum the hanger was even more crammed than usual. 4 MFs in total in a hanger which had a maximum capacity of 5 caused tons of chaos. Blue Dragon, OZ and two other frames decorated the darkened hanger. Staring carefully at the cracks and crevices in the tiled concrete floor he walked amongst the commotion. Although from the outside looking on he looked depressed he was smiling, almost upbeat. In his eye he removed himself from the warped path that Luscious had put him on years ago. Part of him felt some form of disappoint, it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Azure Cup tournament and he had defeated the defending champion in the first match; he felt that if he followed through he could have won. But this was no ordinary tournament, and it was this fact which eased his ego, he didn't want to be apart of a tournament which was nothing more than a training ground for Luscious. What course of action he would take now was completely up to him.

“Punk where the hell are you going? Don't you have a match coming up?” The voice of Marcus Falden screamed from behind.

Glancing over his shoulder Adam sighed. He knew he would never get the chance to live down his resignation, especially from the mouth of Marcus.

“I resigned.” Adam meagerly spoke.

“Resigned? What the fuck man. I was supposed to beat the shit out of you in the finals. Or did you realize it was useless.”

“I have my reasons Marcus. Don't let them concern you. You have enough you have to deal with. Any word on Natasha?”

“...” He violently turned his head swinging his charcoal colored hair through the air. Adam sighed; he knew it was a touchy topic with Marcus. Even though he meant no disrespect, he realized it might have stuck a chord. “No...I haven't.”

“Sorry...”

“I heard something that the person who brought us from Nagoya to West Point took off with her. I'm not too sure about what happened after the battle with those Red Fury bastards, but word on the street is that he took her into hiding so the UGE wouldn't be able to harm her.”

“Word on the street?”

“Yeah, just because my entire 181<sup>st</sup> is gone doesn't mean I lost all my connections to the military. The UGE is composed of soldiers from both the TA and the EAP. So that's what I mean, I'm not sure I believe it though, if that was the case she should have contacted me by now. I try not to think of it, I'll deal with that bastard Luscious first, and then I'll look for Natasha.”

“I see, well then Marcus, I'm here to help.”

“Pft, like I need help from the likes of you puta.”

“Heh, I guess not. By the way, since I resigned that means your match is up next. You might want to get ready. I'd hate for you to lose because you weren't ready.”

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“You may have to prepare for a match, but I assure you we are nothing alike. There’s no way I’d lose.”

“I would hope not. I have to go meet up with Sharon...I kind of left in her the dark about some things. I’ll make sure to watch you win.”

“Heh...I will find you when this is over, that much I promise you.” He muttered softly just as his body turned around to face his frame.

Adam exited the hanger entering the bright daylight. His hand holding onto his cell phone which displayed the message of 4 missed calls. He dialed Sharon’s number as he placed the object close to his left ear. The other end rang for a few seconds before she picked up.

“Where the hell have you been?!” Her voice boomed through the speakers causing Adam to move his head away from the speaker.

“Sorry, I’ve been at the hanger for the past few hours. I had some things I needed to take care of.”

“Like what? It couldn’t wait until after you were properly released?”

“No, because then I would have to have jumped right into my match. I quit Sharon, I resigned from the tournament.”

“What? But why? I mean...”

“Don’t worry about it. I have my reasons. Listen, does your father still have contacts in Genesis?”

“Genesis? Why?”

“We should have gone with Gail and went to Orbis.”

“Please tell me you’re kidding. You want to go to space?”

“Orbis is the last safe place; Earth is going to be too dangerous for just us. Do me this favor and find out for me.”

“Ok Adam, I’ll ask...”

“Thanks...”

Hours passed leaving the crowd waiting, patiently looking forward to the start of the second round of the Azure Cup. News had already spread about Adam Novus resigning, and as disappointing as it was everyone managed to find their anticipation bubbling inside. Marcus Falden, a man who most felt would make it all the way to the finals was the current center of attention. His frame, OZ stood amongst the fluttering specs of dust and debris while its opponent a four legged MF stood still only a few meters before him. The pilot’s name according to the flyers and tournament standing board was Solice, the pilot who managed to move to the second round due to Freya’s unwillingness to take another life. Marcus cared little for his opponent as in his mind he felt he was a C-rank pilot at best.

Luscious Malum this time took a different approach to when it came to viewing the match. A personal display screen in the cockpit of his own MF, Shadow Omega lit up the darkness giving him a close up view of the battle to come. His smile, eerie and sinister as he reclined into the cushions of his chair, slowly his fingers wrapped around the smooth outer ridges of the throttles as if he were about to take flight.

“This should be an intriguing match indeed. Good luck Admiral Marcus Falden...”

The match was underway with OZ’s thrusters opening widely releasing a cluster of crimson flames out into the world. His intensity never faltering his feet slammed onto the accelerators, his hands tightly encased on the throttles. OZ roared ominously as the silver frame zoomed over the dark tan gravel. The opposing MF, known merely as Unit stared back at the ever approaching OZ. While OZ kept a straight path towards Unit, Solice began to start his offensive. Unit’s two arms absorbed the tremendous amount of recoil from firing its dual grenade launchers simultaneously. Marcus smirked at the low level offensive, OZ jerked from its path to the right avoiding the two oncoming shells. As OZ dodged a major explosion lit up the area occurred from behind once the two shells crashed into the solidified ground.

“I hope you don’t think you have a chance to beat me with such pathetic tactics!” Marcus screamed.



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No response was made from the opposing frame, nothing more than small subtle movements. OZ continued on its path, just before it reached Unit the frame cut to the right making its way around the sluggish MF. At first he questioned the ill-fated tactics being used but shrugged it off with thoughts of a quick victory. The positron cannon on the back of OZ was released from its metallic clamps and flipped around underneath the arm joint of the left arm. The back of Unit completely exposed to Marcus seemed to be the perfect area for an attack. Knowing this Marcus prepared to make his presence felt. The cannon slowly gathered energy forming crimson spheres around the outer edges of the barrel. The main boosters of OZ cooled down while the extra boosters on the legs and side took over for the main method of movement. Thinner bursts of flames flickered while the bottoms of the metal feet skid across the ground with both metallic hands firmly holding onto the cannon. The deep low pitch sound of gathering energy echoed distantly while the world looked on.

“Why the hell am I forced to fight against poor pilots? Can’t I at least get one challenge?” Marcus yelled.

*Help me...*

Marcus paused at first; he suddenly broke his determined trance of victory as he scoffed at the frame before him. Believing that he was hearing things he shook off the confusion and focused back on the frame, much to his surprise the back of the Unit opened unleashing a fury of missile silos which launched into the air. At that moment his radar became clustered with ivory dots as each warhead locked onto OZ’s heat signature. As the silver rain poured downwards OZ was forced to change its target, lifting the cannon upwards was no small feat and required the MF to arch its back while aiming the heavy cannon into the sky. He hated having to waste his energy on something so minuscule, but he knew with the cannon equipped OZ’s mobility was cut severely.

Suddenly the cannon lit up as the beam launched with rage. OZ was nearly sent into the ground due to the sheer force of the resulting recoil, but it was worth it. The crackling beam of positron energy tore through the torrent of missiles causing instant destruction. Instantly a line of simultaneous orange explosions littered the sky.

“What the fuck!?” To Marcus’ surprise Unit burst out of its position shoulder slamming OZ off balance and into the ground. The two golden glowing eyes of OZ gazed up at the towering Unit. Finding himself in a precarious situation he cringed at the sight of the two smoking barrels of the grenade launchers. Even he with his speed couldn’t avoid a direct shot from such a close range. Silence filled his radio speakers as the heavily armored quad frame stared back at him.

“Well aren’t you going to do it?”

*Help me...*

Once again Marcus heard the familiar distant voice in his mind.

“What the fuck is that? Get the hell out of my head!” Marcus screamed violently. Now with the drive to take a chance OZ’s back boosters ignited and the silver frame tackled the over-seeing Unit. While the energy in OZ’s booster pack was continually fed the two intertwined MFs spiraled in the air until the back of Unit was sent into the brunt of a small mountain compacted with sand, rocks and other minerals. Electrical surges of energy bustled outwards at the point of contact but Marcus refused to give in. At close range OZ fired its beam rifle into the core of Unit. With fear of splash damage Marcus slowly moved away while he continued to fire energy round after energy round. The small explosion created a surge of smoke and debris to disperse outwards. Grinning with the thought of victory Marcus eased the throttles of OZ moving it away from the cluster of caliginous clouds that emanated before him.

*Marcus help me...*

“What the fuck?!” He screamed, even further confused by the subtle voice echoing in the inner walls of his mind. For the first time during the match he let his hands off the throttles in order to grab hold of his pounding head. The agonizing headache that shot through his brain was nearly unbearable; any average soldier would have passed out under the pressure. His eyes widened from the severe strain as he watched the drops of sweat plop to the floor panels.

On the outside it amazed the crowd to stare at the motionless OZ, by this point the clouds surrounding Unit had dissipated revealing an unscathed machine. To much of everyone’s surprise the

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frame slowly turned around revealing its armed dual grenade launchers. Marcus' right eye glanced upwards taking notice of his enemy preparing to attack. With the sharp pain subsiding in his lobe he managed to take hold of the throttles once again.

Gently tapping the accelerator pads caused OZ to fling to the right causing his enemy to falter upon losing sight of the silver frame.

Luscious Malum continued to grin, taking quick sips of his merlot as he watched the match continue to unfold.

"Now then Admiral Falden you shall taste the full fury of your own arrogance. Hehehaha..." Luscious started laughing in a maniacal tone while the match continued.

*Marcus....stop....*

Again the voice boomed loudly in his head, this time with more clarity than before. At this point he was able to recognize the intonation. The ability to recognize the voice bellowing in his mind only made things much more difficult.

"Natasha..."

OZ's head unit flickered brightly as his rage suddenly began to take hold of his composure. He wasn't too sure what was going on, but with his encounters with the Crimson Dawn he knew manipulation of the mind was not a thing of science fiction anymore. Still he didn't know what to think; all he knew was that he was hearing Natasha screaming out for him in a time of need. For a quick moment he took his eyes off of Unit.

*Marcus....I can't stop it...I'm sorry...*

"Natasha?! What the hell is going on? Oh I get it now; you fucking Crimson bastards are around trying to fuck with my head again! Trying to cause me to lose my concentration! It won't work!"

Unit's boosters flared brightly as the greenish machine sprinted across the ground firing both grenade launchers one at a time. With each vibrant firing an explosion riddled the soil beneath OZ's feet. Marcus fueled by his frustration went back on the offensive leaving his opponent no room for maneuverability. OZ dropped the energy rifle and began to unsheathe the Excalibur. Both arms bent behind the core firmly grasping the bottom of the handle. With Unit only a few meters in front of the rampaging MF OZ quickly swung both arms towards the ground with the brunt of Excalibur being flung. Unit arched backwards with the right arm raised in the air in an effort to avoid the attack. The large dull blue blade easily sliced through the metallic alloy that was compacted to create armor for the frame. Suddenly to Marcus' surprise Unit boosted into the core of OZ knocking the frame off balance. Marcus' body swung from side to side while his hands remained attached to the throttles in an attempt to keep him balanced. His hair swinging from side to side tossing sweat into the air of his cockpit he managed to stay focused on his opponent. For the moment the voices seemed to have stopped, allowing him free reign to fight without any form of hindrance.

OZ's legs bent backwards while the gears and shocks absorbed the recoil from the previous impact. Smirking Marcus could feel the adrenaline beginning to pump thoroughly through his veins, he wasn't about to let the match end like this.

"I must admit I'm pretty impressed but this is the end!" Marcus screamed.

With the Excalibur drawn OZ burst with speed. Unit's right arm continued to spark violently while wires and cables swung from side to side. Much to Marcus' surprise the MF moved very little as if it welcomed the oncoming attack.

*Marcus no...*

"Ugh...get out of my head you damned freaks!" Marcus continued to scream violently. Blocking out the voices echoing in his mind he moved forth. The end of the Excalibur pointing outwards preparing to strike the defenseless machine.

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“This is indeed the end Admiral Falden. I wonder, can you survive the grief? Heh, humans.” Luscious mumbled softly just before he finished off the wine remaining in his glass.

Blindly charging forward OZ’s weapon forced its way through the outer armor of Unit; flames burst outwards ripping through the metal armor. With a gaping hole now present in the front of the core it was obvious that the end of the match had arrived. Marcus snickered as OZ pulled backwards removing the Excalibur from the wound it had inflicted.

“And that’s all she wrote.”

“...bzzt....Marcus....bzzt....I’m sorry....bzzzt...”

“What the hell?” Turning to the communications display screen he was appalled at the sight he saw. A static educed image being broadcast from within Unit. Natasha, a bloody and battered Natasha being restraint in the cockpit of the MF he had been fighting. The image was far from clear, preventing him from seeing the extent of Natasha’s injuries. But it was more than enough to drive him off the borderline edge he had been walking on.

“NATASHA!!!”

“...bzzt....I....loved you....Marcus....I....” Suddenly Unit began to fall apart. The electrical sparks were more violent and quickly engulfed the remainder of the machine. Silence took over for a brief moment just before the MF’s generator fulminated violently. The blinding light from the explosion sealed his victory. OZ sat frozen in his own paranoia. Shaking slightly, his body slowly succumbed to the numbness that his soul had begun to cry out.

“NATASHA!!!”

*Winner... Marcus Falden*

“Hmm...I need a new bottle of Merlot.” Luscious sarcastically scoffed.

### Chapter Thirty-Eight: Solitude

#### *Round 2*

#### Section A Results

*Scion Bryce*

VS

*Marcus Falden*

#### Section B

*Luscious Malum*

VS

*Crimson*

*Anima*

VS  
*Nex Resuelto*

The matches had been set for the next round in Section B. The audience had already begun to move out from the stands for the intermission between section matches. As the crowd struggled to maneuver out many would wonder why the current victor in the arena continued to stand showing no signs of movement. Amongst the rubble and towering smoke OZ stood while its pilot Marcus continued to curse loudly from within the bowels of the cockpit. His veins pulsated lively while most of them were visible from the skin. His rage, mixed with sorrow completely deterred his logic and general understanding of the world surrounding him.

“FUCK!!! Natasha!!! Those sons of bitches....they fucking....they fucking did this to you! I’ll kill them; I’ll tear the flesh off their bodies then feed it to them through their asses!” The sound of his own voice blaring loudly prevented him from hearing the warnings of the officials. The next match was scheduled to start in less than 30 minutes and the current arena need to be cleared. Tears managed to slide out from his crunched eyelids; the pain that he was enduring was nearly unbearable. Clutching his uniform still cursing, his eyes opened taking notice of a silhouette in the distance. From his peripheral vision he was unable to make out the figure completely but he managed to regain some form of sanity. His sorrow and grief quickly replaced by anger and a desire for revenge.

“Are you that fucking Crimson Dawn bastard that was fucking with my head?! If so I’ll fucking kill you!” Marcus screamed. His hands once again found themselves wrapped around the throttles of OZ. The silver machine jerked around with the flames igniting out from the boosters. Expecting to see the staple machine of the Crimson Dawn, the Seraph Marcus gasped in awe over a different sight. Cutting off the engines of OZ the machine stopped suddenly causing minerals and burned metal to burst into the air.

A lone MF stood now on the arena grounds next to him. The frame resembled Shadow, only with more modifications. Two smooth cylindrical objects attached to the back of the core, the frame which he hadn’t recognized held onto a single plasma rifle staring ominously at him.

“Who the fuck are you?!”

“Admiral Falden, I must say this is a pleasure to finally meet you in person. Such a warrior you are.” Luscious smiled just as he opened a communications link with Marcus.

Needless to say Marcus was shocked at first that the President of the UGE was standing before him in an MF. He was aware of Luscious Malum and the connections he had to the recent tragedies in his life. Still he wasn’t too sure why he was standing before him now.

“Why the hell are you here?”

“You can read right? My match is next. You need to vacate the area Marcus.” He replied in a casual and yet arrogant tone.

“I have to vacate huh? Hehe, I like the view too much to leave now.”

“I see, so it’s going to be like that then is it?”

“You’re at fault. You’re the bastard who killed my comrades.”

“Comrades? Oh, you mean your decrypted old mentor. He died like a dog, not a death befitting of a soldier. You would have been disappointed. And as far as the rest of the 181<sup>st</sup> I had no hand in that. If I recall you’re the one who just put the final nail in its coffin.”

“You....” Struggling with his emotions his hands quivered around the sleek design of the throttles. By now the tears were overflowing from his eyes, even he was powerless to stop them from forming. “...SON OF A BITCH!!!” With amazing speed OZ burst forward.

Luscious calmly smirked as he too reached for his throttles. Shadow Omega’s head unit flickered as the frame came to life. While OZ continued to speed forward, tearing through the ground with the Excalibur leaning back in preparations for striking, Shadow Omega remained motionless. Luscious slowly began to apply pressure to the accelerators resulting in a quick ignition of the thrusters. The obsidian frame in a graceful display of agility dashed to the right seconds before OZ managed to swing down the Excalibur. Marcus, blinded by his rage stopped trying to think ahead and began to focus on his present attacks. OZ’s feet pivoted just as the core quickly swung around with the Excalibur in mid air.

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The front of the blade steaming with radiating energy approached the side of Shadow Omega only for Luscious to counter with

Ease. Shadow Omega's left arm abruptly struck backwards, its elbow joint colliding with OZ's hands and in turn forcing the machine to drop its famous sword. OZ faltered, stumbling a bit while Shadow Omega completely turned around revealing the plasma rifle to the core of OZ. ;Marcus' eyes widened as he watched the fuchsia beam of energy fire. With little time to force a maneuver Marcus relied on his energy shields to absorb the brunt of the attack. The beam dissipated once it crashed into the two beam shields saving Marcus' life.

"Asshole...I see this is going to take a lot more effort than I thought...(Natasha...how could I?...how could I have done this?...I'm sorry...)" Marcus cringed at the thought of using it. It was an addicting substance that would increase his performance in the cockpit. Drive, a drug that was given to him by the late Admiral Von Schuler in order to give him the edge in any situation. It wasn't until Natasha found out about the drug and its side affects that he started to cut down on its use. But it was simple for him to realize that he couldn't hold back this time. He was in a position to get his revenge, to satisfy the blood lust that his soul was searching for. This man before him, Luscious Malum was responsible for the deaths of his friends, even though he didn't have a physical hand in it; if it wasn't for the UGE President he might still have a shred of the 181<sup>st</sup> left.. Flipping the lid of the container open he quickly poured four gray colored pills into the palm of his hand. Without taking any pauses Marcus flung the pills into his saliva ridden mouth and swallowed.

The transition was almost instantaneous, he felt his muscles expanding, and his respiratory system strengthening; Drive was in full effect.

"I will kill you." Marcus subtly replied.

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"Do you know what the hell is going on out there!?" Mario's voice boomed forth in the hanger as he scurried around the mechanics and frame parts that were scattered amongst the floor. Stephen, Sharon, Ashley, and Heather were all gathered around Blue Dragon's cockpit while Adam sat working on his OS. By now they were all used to Mario being extravagant but the fear attached to the sound waves being emitted from his voice were disturbing. Stephen turned fully to see Mario clumsily hurdling over computer parts.

"What the hell are you bitching about now?" Stephen yelled.

"...There's a problem...\*huff\*...Marcus....Luscious....\*huff\*....it's bad..." Mario gasped.

"What? What the hell are you talking about?" Ashley interrupted.

"Oh, this isn't good..." Adam mumbled. He turned on his display computer which had already been connected to the television station broadcasting the tournament. Although the rest of the world would not be seeing what he was, all MFs registered in the tournament was given full access to the UGE satellite uplink for the tournament. His eyes nearly went pale from shock, to see Marcus squaring off against Luscious Malum on a whim was not something neither he, nor anyone else was prepared for. "He's fighting against Luscious Malum....why the hell is he doing this now?!"

"He's too damn impulsive; he's going to get himself killed." Heather mumbled.

"I don't know what the issue is, but this isn't going to end well." Stephen replied.

"I know Stephen...I'm going. Maybe I'll be able to put a stop to this before Marcus gets killed." Adam replied. Stephen, unable to reply quickly enough moved backwards a few feet as the cockpit to the blue frame tightly closed.

"Adam!" Sharon blurted out as she reached forward in hopes of grabbing onto him.

"Ashley, watch them, I'm going too." Stephen replied.

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“What? But why, just what the hell do you hope to accomplish?”

“Who knows...but someone needs to monitor the situation. Now come on, move away. If we stay here we'll only get in Adam's way.” Stephen muttered.

Reluctantly agreeing Ashley and the rest moved away from the cockpit. Slowly the frame started to move distancing itself from the metal platform. The dull rusted metal plating on the ceiling slid, parting in the middle. Cleared for launch Adam slowly applied pressure, the boosters flashed as the cerulean flames were sent outwards.

No longer wasting the energy to speak Marcus continued to fight. OZ had yet to be given the opportunity to pick up the Excalibur which Shadow Omega had knocked out of its metal hands. It didn't take the crowd long enough to make their way back to their seats once they heard the explosions pulsating through the ground. The UGE officials were stunned with the sudden outburst and for some odd reason failed to make any actions in preventing the makeshift battle from continuing. His eyes quivering from staring at the frame on his screen for too long showed signs of fatigue, the tears had dried up by this point only to form unsightly crust like debris underneath his eyelids. His mouth widened as he roared loudly with every attack he made.

Luscious continued to keep OZ at bay with eloquent attack patterns with the plasma rifle. OZ once again relied on its powerful back boosts to move it across a far distance in a short amount of time. The crimson flames burned brightly as OZ's left arm bent, leaning forward. Suddenly OZ shoulder tackled Shadow Omega sending Luscious for his first real ride ever since stepping into the core. Shocked he began to chuckle. Marcus was the first opponent to make such a powerful connection to Shadow Omega. The charcoal colored MF quickly regained its balance and retaliated.

The two cylindrical weapons on Shadow Omega's back began to move for the first time during the encounter. Following the sudden hatching of Luscious' new weapon came the foreboding sound of energy being collected. Marcus halted for a second just to analyze what the weapon on Shadow Omega was. His level of strategic collecting had gone down a few notches due to his own rage that continued to swell in the pit of his stomach.

Shadow Omega ripped away from its position crashing back into OZ. The collision sent Marcus flapping around in his cockpit, barely able to hold on to the throttles. Unlike the previous tackles both frames did not crash into the ground, Luscious kept his feet on the throttles applying power to the boosters. An even larger flame of energy exploded from the boosters as Shadow Omega continued to push OZ backwards.

“This is somewhat amusing. But I am running out of time, I should end this quickly.” Luscious mumbled.

Unsure of what was happening Marcus watched as a seemingly infinite amount of energy beams launched out from the back of Shadow Omega's core. But unlike normal beams of purified energy these moved in patterns much like that of heat seeking missiles. The greenish beams curved downwards once they reached their pinnacle height in the atmosphere. He knew what it meant, the beams then converged onto OZ just as Shadow Omega boosted away from the target. Unlike before the energy shield OZ was equipped with wasn't enough. The beams tore through the left arm joint, the right and left shoulder along with the main booster pack. Each impact caused the metal to burn leaving an unsanitary stench to float in the air. OZ crashed into a nearby mountain as each place of impact became engulfed in flames, dozens of tan colored boulders collapsed onto the silver frame pin pointing it to the ground.

Shadow Omega now hovered over the fallen OZ, Luscious smirking at the sight of his defenseless opponent. While dust and rocks collectively hindered Luscious Malum's vision Marcus found his latest opportunity. With the main boosters now offline he was forced to use the standard ones, lacking power they still worked effectively. OZ burst out from its vertical coffin, the sudden outburst caused Luscious to step back giving Marcus the room he needed. The positron cannon flipped downwards, being caught by both the right and left hand. There wasn't proper time to charge it fully, but there was more than enough energy to cause some damage. Smirking Luscious carefully awaited the oncoming blast.

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“Die you son of a bitch...” A teary eyed Marcus managed to scream. His voice dull and cracked due to the constant screaming he had been doing. The cannon fired sending OZ to the ground because of the recoil. Shadow Omega dashed to the left narrowly avoiding the thickened beam of compacted energy.

“You’re too slow.” Luscious humbly replied.

“Arrg!!” Whether he was unable or unwilling to make any intelligible words was on Marcus. He simply continued to scream as OZ lunged forward. The remaining boosters followed their pilots’ example and powered up. Flames with more power than usual exerted outwards, the flushing sea of flames burned brightly as OZ shot forward. To Luscious surprise OZ suddenly burst forward crashing into the obsidian frame. Shadow Omega tilted off balance due to the collision, Luscious smirked, once again taking notice of the burning fury that still resided within Marcus Falden. All that drove him was his pure animalistic instinct, suddenly with the positron cannon still within OZ’s grasp Luscious gasped preparing for the oncoming attack. The release of the energy was too fast for even Luscious to avoid. The thickened beam fired and spread between the short distance that separated OZ and Shadow Omega.

A blinding flash of flames burst out in the location of where Shadow Omega stood. An out pour of darkened clouds flushed outwards, spreading along the surface like a shockwave. Heaving, panting, sweating were all actions that Marcus was going through at the exact moment. Somewhat finding a collection of calming emotions his adrenaline began to slow down; wiping his eyes he finally realized that he was indeed crying. The tears mixed with his dripping sweat falling to the ground.

“Natasha...oh my God...Natasha...” With his anger dissipating everything suddenly hit him all at once. His stomach stirred violently, Marcus lunged forward as his mouth gagged on his internal pain. Nausea quickly took the place of the adrenaline provided by the Drive drug, the cockpit suddenly began to spin, his vision blurring with each passing moment.

“I’m disappointed Marcus. A soldier of your caliber should know to make sure that your enemy is completely disabled before calming down!” Luscious screamed.

“What?” Marcus couldn’t believe what he saw, Shadow Omega suddenly ripped through the towering cluster of smoke with an energy saber ignited. He tried to grab the throttles in time for a maneuver but it was far too late. Shadow Omega’s left arm hastily swung upwards causing the energy saber to slice through OZ’s positron cannon and both arms. The fiery explosion caused OZ to step back, its left leg bending from the pressure forcing the machine to lose its balance. Shadow Omega didn’t loosen up there, but continued its assault. Before Marcus even realized what was going on the black frame crashed into OZ to completely force the machine’s legs to buckle and to collapse to the ground.

“You should have cleared the field so I could have gone on with my match Marcus. Because the path you’ve chosen only leads to death. I will send you to see the people you are so painfully missing.” Luscious replied.

“You...I...I’m not worth living. I couldn’t protect anyone...” Marcus muttered in a surprising tone. Showing a side which no one had ever seen. A sense of humanity along with a sense of failure quickly swept through his mind. His head lowered, staring at the floor thinking of all the memories he had with Natasha and the rest of the 181<sup>st</sup>. “Maybe it’s better...I’ll see you soon, all of you...”

Just as Shadow Omega leaned over OZ preparing to deliver the final strike Luscious began to smile. His eyes glanced to the right as his radar began to beep constantly. Turning around Luscious watched two particle energy beams flung in between Shadow Omega and the fallen OZ.

“Heh...I was wondering when you would have made your entrance.” Luscious mumbled.

“MARCUS! MOVE!”

Marcus slowly glanced to the side, his emotionless expression staring forward as he recognized Adam’s voice. Blue Dragon surged through the air with Alpha not too far behind.

“Oh, you brought the brother too I see. You’re serious then.” Luscious replied. Shadow Omega turned around to face the two approaching MFs that made it to the scene.

Adam stared at the machine that he recognized as a modified Shadow. Cringing he knew this was his chance. His chance to get his own revenge for everything that had been going wrong in his life. The eight wings opened widely releasing the eight orbital wings into the air.

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“Hehe...you truly are impulsive.” Luscious mumbled. Shadow Omega suddenly burst into the air. The azure orbits began to circle around the obsidian frame. To much of Adam’s surprise each weapon merely circled Shadow Omega and nothing more. Luscious grinned as he swept passed the harmless gnats heading straight for Blue Dragon.

“What the hell is going on?!” Adam screamed. Realizing his orbits weren’t going to be much help, not even a good distraction he had them return to the wing binders. As Blue Dragon quickly docked both beam rifles Alpha flew past the blue frame throwing both energy boomerangs into the air. Shadow Omega with a single swing from its energy saber destroyed both flying weapons. Blue Dragon grabbed onto both energy sabers dashed towards Shadow Omega. Both frames clashed brightly when both energy blades collided.

“I refuse to follow the path you laid out for me!” Adam screamed.

“Hehe, is this what this is about? Is that why you resigned from the tournament?”

“I won’t!” Adam screamed.

*Attention pilots, move away from the UGE President. This is your only warning..*

“What the hell?!” Adam screamed.

“Shit the UGE forces are here. Adam we need to back away!” Stephen screamed.

“You can’t be serious?”

“Now isn’t the time to make a scene!”

“Damn it! Marcus get off your ass and come on!” Adam screamed as he let off the accelerators.

Luscious chuckled at the sight of the UGE MFs.

“You two are not my concern right now.” Luscious mumbled.

Suddenly Shadow Omega turned away flying back towards OZ which now got off the ground. Marcus slowly looked upwards at the burning sight of Shadow Omega closing in on him.

“I...what else is there for me to do? Natasha can you answer this question?” Marcus subtly mumbled. “I won’t go out like a dog...I won’t die without a fight...” Marcus screamed.

OZ erupted from the ground; he no longer cared that he couldn’t fight with any weapons. Once again his animal instincts took over, roaring loudly Marcus headed straight towards the oncoming Shadow Omega.

“Head on huh? I guess that’s what made you such a fearsome solider.” Luscious mumbled.

“Unfortunately it won’t be enough.”

Just as OZ approached Shadow Omega cut to the right, as time slowed down for Marcus Falden he watched Luscious Malum prepare the final blow. Knowing his time was up his eyes slowly closed, the last clear image that he saw was that of Natasha standing by his side in the Iron Fist. Her beauty was unparalleled to any other he met before. Arturo, Vladimir, Drake, the imperialistic Von Schuler and his daughter Krista, their faces flashed quickly like a human slide show in his mind. It made him smile a bit thinking that he would meet them again in the next life.

“No...I won’t meet them....I won’t be going where they are.... Heh...Novus, don’t lose.” Marcus managed to mutter just before Shadow Omega slashed through the core. The heated beam of energy crash through the armored plating engulfing Marcus’ body, the flames ripping through his flesh and bones; there were no screams. Silence only played through the air. Both Adam and Stephen gawked on, staring at the caliginous clouds that took the place of the at one time hovering OZ. Shadow Omega lingered next to the series of clouds, Luscious grinning at the events.

From the distance a lone spectator stared in fear at the event. Krista stood staring, clutching her hands before her chest. She was the sole remaining solider that would ever carry on the history of the 181<sup>st</sup>.

“Marcus...” She mumbled softly under her breath.



### **Chapter Thirty-Nine: Changes in the Wind**

The wind had a unique way of shifting its flow, much like that of fate. It twists and turns with the slightest anomaly that contacts it. The wind in the air was frigid with an emanating sense of death. Both Blue Dragon and Alpha helplessly hovered in the sky while four UGE standard production model frames stood before them extending their dual plasma rifles. Even though new MF models were in front of him Adam couldn't help but ignore their existence, staring beyond to the smoldering bundle of smoke that lingered besides Shadow Omega. His fist started to shake relentlessly at his side, his anger was swelling and his patience was exhausted. Stephen looked over towards his brother, he already knew what he was thinking, and it was obvious. Even he wanted to join in on the abrupt plan that Adam was about to act on, but he knew the truth. Neither of them would be able to do much of anything. The UGE units before them wouldn't cause much of a problem, but the enigma was Luscious. Neither of them had seen his true potential, never have they seen what Luscious could do when pushed into a corner and there was the fact that Adam's orbital wings did nothing but stare at Shadow Omega; there was too many variables for Stephen to become remotely comfortable with attacking.

"Adam...there's nothing we can do now. Let's head back to the hanger." He calmly replied hoping that Adam would do the same no matter how unlikely that would be.

"You can't be serious Stephen! Luscious...he just fucking killed Marcus. Are we supposed to keep running away? He's right there, right in front of us. We can finish this now instead of heading to Orbis! You can leave, but I'm finishing this!" Adam screamed.

"NO! You idiot, for once in your life will you just listen to me?! You don't know what Luscious is capable!" Stephen screamed.

He knew Stephen was right, he was always right, but even so he felt his adrenaline not backing down. The tips of his fingers caressed the edges of the throttles, his feet flexing around the accelerator pedals along with the sweat dripping down his face and hair. Blue Dragon slowly began to make movements, the wing binders moved upwards extending slowly. Each pilot in the UGE frames took deep breaths as they realized their job just got a bit tougher. Their hands quickly made it to their throttles. Each pilot began to lock onto Blue Dragon, ignoring Alpha as they figured the crimson MF didn't pose a threat at the current time. Just as each lock on box solidified Blue Dragon burst from its position much to Stephen's dismay. The eight orbital wings took to the sky, soaring around each of the frames firing within seconds of target lock ons.

"What the fuck!?" One pilot screamed as his frame's joints exploded simultaneously.

"Shit...Andrew is out! Converge on the blue one!" The second pilot yelled.

"Damn it Adam..." Stephen mumbled. Alpha too quickly burst into action speeding towards the two frames that were chasing Blue Dragon. In a burst of flair and speed Alpha dashed in between the two

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frames slashing violently through one arm unit on each frame. Both pilots gawked as Alpha zoomed past them leaving nothing more than their destroyed limbs burned and scared along with his particle trail of energy.

“I thought you were heading back?” Adam questioned as he turned to Alpha.

“Can’t let you go off and kill yourself. You still have no idea what Luscious can do. You don’t even know if he put out all the stops against Marcus. You need to work on surveying your opponents.”

“The time for that is over; I have to end this now.” Adam remarked.

With one remaining UGE frame on their trail both Blue Dragon and Alpha continued to press forward.

“Do me a favor, finish that guy off.” Adam said sternly towards his brother.

“\*sigh\* I don’t know why I’m going along with this...”

Alpha veered to the left and began moving on a curved path towards the remaining frame. It didn’t take him long to dispose of the frame, with a quick swing of the dual energy saber the left limbs, both arm and leg were detached.

Luscious turned around to face the oncoming Blue Dragon just as the smoke completely dissipated revealing the debris that was still falling from the sky. The final remains of the 181<sup>st</sup> and their leader, Marcus Falden. He didn’t know how he took out Marcus with little effort, but he was sure that he would pay. Fuming with rage he focused solely on the frame hovering only a few meters in front of him. The eight orbits suddenly docked back on the wing binders, he knew they would be no help against Luscious. He still had no idea as to why they didn’t fire the previous time, but what he did know was that he had no time to test out theories if he wanted to end everything.

“So, you just can’t wait can you? To be honest at your current level you’re not even worth my attention.” Luscious humbly replied. Shadow Omega much to Adam’s surprise turned its back and slowly began to boost towards the ground. “If you don’t mind Adam, I have a match that has already been postponed due to the unnecessary conflict brought about by your friend.”

So calm and collect, as if nothing in the world could bother him. Adam still had very little understanding as to how Luscious worked or thought. But to simply turn your back on an opponent would be considered a deadly mistake and yet Luscious did so without any distinction of worry. Adam couldn’t understand if it was a form of arrogance, or if it some sort of test, or trick. Nevertheless Blue Dragon’s boosters continued to push the frame forward. Once again Alpha dashed towards Blue Dragon; suddenly Stephen’s face appeared on Adam’s display screen.

“Let it go for now. We found a transport ship that will bring us to Orbis. Unfortunately it departs in less than 2 hours so we need to cut this off now and get out of here before things get any worse than they already are!”

“Stephen...he just killed....”

“I know what he just did. You don’t have to keep reminding me. But I won’t stand by and watch him kill you too. We need to reorganize with Gail, this tournament was obviously a setup and like moths to a flame we stayed behind to participate. Right now Luscious is untouchable, if you noticed the UGE forces only got in our way, they left Marcus alone. You do understand what that means right?”

“This was planned out...his target was always Marcus...son of a bitch...”

“Exactly, for what ever reason his first objective was to completely wipe out the 181<sup>st</sup>. And he knew Marcus’ ego wouldn’t allow for him to pass on the opportunity to prove his skill. I’m not sure what happened in Marcus’ last match but it doesn’t matter anymore. I understand your grief and your frustration but be smart about this. If we force their hand now it’ll only result in our quick deaths.”

“...fine...” It was obvious that he wasn’t too thrilled with the decision to run away. Orbis, once again Adam found himself heading there, heading to Gail.

Luscious smirked as he watched both Blue Dragon and Alpha turn and head back to the hanger.

“*Sir should we go after them? They did disable official UGE forces.*”

“No General, let them go. I have more pressing matters to attend to right now.”

“*Understood Mr. President.*”

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“Heh, I have no need for this tournament anymore. I’m content with how Shadow Omega handles. Sloth should be making her move soon...I’ve waited long enough, I guess I can wait a bit longer to head up to Prometheus...” Luscious mumbled.

The wind currents pounded against the metal armor of both Blue Dragon and Alpha as they flew through the sky. Every now and then Stephen would double check his radar to make sure they weren’t being followed. To his surprise they weren’t, in a way it confirmed his original theory, that Luscious’ main target was Marcus and that he was saving him and everyone else for a later date.

“Why aren’t we being followed? I mean we did tear through official frames.” Adam obviously pointed out.

“Right now we’re not the target. I’m not going to question it right now. This just gives us the time to get to the launch site.”

“What about everyone else?”

“They’re already heading there; they should have arrived by now.”

“I see...so just how the hell did we manage to snag a transport ship anyway?”

“Apparently Gail left one behind for us. Gail is pretty smart too; he plans ahead almost as if he can predict what will happen.”

“Yeah...Gail was always uncanny with that sort of thing.”

“Adam?”

“Yeah?”

“About Marcus...you think he’s finally found the peace he was looking for?”

“Yeah, his nightmare is finally over.”

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Just on the outskirts of Rome was a small batch of land that was hidden from the rest of society. It was there that Gail had established a small base of operations for Orbis if there was ever a need to escape to space with haste. The typical Orbis transport was based off the EAP ships which were built to mass transport entire MF battalions to Dammerung. Essentially the same unit with a few modifications, the nuclear rocket thrusters was more powerful and the hanger was expanded to fit at least 2 more MFs.

The wind swiftly passed through the air with leaves riding the waves along with Sharon’s mahogany hair. She stood outside staring into the sky waiting, patiently waiting for him to show up. By now everyone else’s’ frames had been stored into the back of the hanger, along with the extensive hanger there was a total amount of 12 rooms each with their own bed and amenities. The length of the trip to the Orbis resource satellite would take at most 12 hours with the worm gate, without the gate the trip would take at least 2 weeks. Mario, Heather, and Ashley had already claimed their rooms by now, but there was more than enough to go around. Night was slowly making its approach while the sun made its way to the ground in the distance. She sighed softly as she continued to stand waiting.

“Where the hell are you idiot?”

She proceeded to stand amongst the dancing blades of grass, the sparkling ivory dots that glistened in the dark canvas of the sky made for a peaceful atmosphere. Even in the time of frustration she felt at ease, knowing, trusting that he would make it back in time. Trying not to be cliché she halted from praying for his return, she knew the type of person Adam was and that she didn’t need to rely on God to bring him back. He would surely do it of his own power.

Blue Dragon and Alpha continued flying at a standard pace to avoid suspicion while being in the air. They already make a scene back at the arena by disabling UGE frames and attacking the current leader of the world. Adam yawned while he watched the sun completely hid itself from the world. Just like when he was a kid he stared at the stars, no matter how many times he found himself in space he always felt that there was nothing as good as looking up, gazing at them from Earth. There was something about trying to grasp something which is far away; it forces one to strive harder to reach their goal. To

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keep trying and strengthening oneself with each attempt, by now his nerves had calmed down realizing that Stephen was right; running away was in their best interest. Luscious Malum had yet to be pushed to his limits; there was no sure way of knowing just how strong he was.

Adam turned towards the display screen in front of him; the small 15 inch plasma screen was his key to the world outside. Thanks to the satellite uplink to Orbis' satellites he was able to view any channel from any where in the world. That was what many liked about Gail; he gave without asking for return. Every channel was the same thing, a news brief about Marcus Falden and his untimely end. Luscious Malum was an icon to the world, and there was no way anyone would put in him bad graces. Every reporter insisted that Marcus had finally snapped from all the years of being in charge of the secret 181<sup>st</sup> ISPF, that his grief from the barbaric missions he had to carry out forced his brain to malfunction. It was, in their words "the reason he so viciously slaughtered his opponent and then attack without any signs of instigation the President of the UGE," Adam cringed at the words being spoken about Marcus, while they were not the best of friends he still had respect for him. In his eyes Marcus was a man who constantly pushed himself to the limits, always finding a way to push through his physical constraints.

He shut his eyes slowly as he relied on the auto-pilot system to get him to the drop zone safely. As he slipped into his own day dream he recalled the last encounter they shared before Marcus' match.

*"You're a strong pilot Novus. I'll say that much, but you have a ton of work to do before you become a strong warrior."*

*"What the hell does that mean?"*

*"It means that you need to ditch your emotions in battle. They'll only cause your or someone else's' death."*

*"Easier said than done my friend, I happen to like having emotions in battle. It reminds me that I'm human."*

*"Human? Your humanity is based on your physical traits, not your emotions. Just because I drop my emotions once I jump into OZ doesn't mean I'm not human. You need to rethink your philosophy Novus."*

*"Maybe you're right, but I'll keep my emotions just the same."*

*"Suit yourself."*

*Adam smirked and began to turn away from Marcus who was sitting in his cockpit fine tuning the specs on the generator. In the corner of his eyes Adam took notice to a small dull gray canister standing on top of OZ's console with the word "Drive" printed in bold wrapped around the outer structure.*

*"Drive? What the hell is that?"*

*Marcus glanced up with his right eye as if Adam wasn't important enough to receive his full attention.*

*"It's a pill."*

*"A pill? Seems like more than medication if you ask me."*

*"Well I didn't puta."*

*"Sorry, damn. Didn't expect you to get so damn defensive about it."*

*"\*sigh\*" Placing down the notepad he brought with him Marcus turned his body giving Adam his full attention. "Fine, you want to know what it is. You rely on your mental strength to get you through situations, I, on the other hand rely on my beyond perfect physical specimen to get me through a life and death situation. That is the difference between you and I. You rely on your Angel System which if I understand correctly enhances the reaction time between your actions and the machines' responses. It places a severe amount of strain on your mind and body, but more so on your brain since it requires your nervous systems to respond to changing variables at an above human pace. I have my Drive, the pills enhance my strength and internal respiratory system thus increasing my stamina. The reaction time between myself and the frame remains the same but I can see clearer and I can keep going for an extended amount of time. I still am relying on my own strength since Drive enhances what I already have. Your Angel System merely enhances the limitations of your frame. Its true your body has to become used*

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

*to the pressure the Angel System exerts but you still are relying more on the frame than yourself.” Marcus replied.*

*“So they’re basically steroids then.”*

*“Gah, forget it man. There’s still more honor in using Drive than using your Angel System. Here, you might end up needing them one day but be careful; they have many addicting traits.” Marcus replied.*

*Marcus tossed another small bottle filled with the Drive pills in the air; smoothly Adam caught the hurling bottle and smirked.*

*“I doubt they’ll ever come a time when I’ll need these, but I’ll hold onto it just in case.” Adam replied.*

He then glanced over to the right compartment in his cockpit; opening the small plastic hatch he saw them, the pills which Marcus had given him earlier.

“That’s all that’s left of you now isn’t it?” Adam quietly mumbled as he shut his eyes once again.

“Don’t get too relaxed, we’ve arrived.” Stephen stated.

“I was looking forward to the sleep too..”

“Don’t worry; you’ll have plenty of time for that on the trip to Orbis. It’ll be a 12 hour trip through the worm gate.”

“12 hours? Guess that’ll be enough.”

With a sense of reluctance Adam took hold of the throttles once again, regaining control of Blue Dragon. Sharon smiled happily as the sudden gust of wind pushed her hair through the air currents. Her shirt and blouse flapped continuously, beating against her tan skin while both Blue Dragon and Alpha made the preparations to touch down.

“Took you long enough.” Sharon snuffed.

Adam, surprised at the sight of Sharon standing on top of the cliff closed his eyes with subtle amusement. Taking a knee the blue machine calmed its engines down; the cockpit lifted open revealing the outside sky to Adam once more. Leaning forward his head lifted upwards, being comforted by the gentle breeze that greeted it. His hair waving through the wind he smiled. His fingers tightly wrapped around the obsidian wire that began to descend to the ground. As he made his way to the ground Sharon too made her way to the bottle of the cliff to meet up with him. Just before his feet made contact with the rubble underneath he noticed Sharon staring straight at him.

“Hi.” Adam merely replied as if nothing had ever happened. As if he didn’t run out of the hanger earlier in order to get mixed up in the confusion that was already taking place.

“Hi? That’s it? After all that shit that went on you’re just going to greet me with a hi? Not even a sorry, nothing? What the hell is your problem?!”

It didn’t take a genius to realize just how pissed off Sharon was. He cringed from the sudden outburst, his body ached from the previous battle, and all he wanted to do was pass out for a bit. But no rest for the weary, he knew he had little choice but to deal with her.

“Sorry...” Adam replied.

“Seriously, what the hell were...”

Before she could finish her breath Adam glared back at her, his patience was tried twice already today and he wasn’t going to deal with a third time.

“Not now...we just lost another friend. I’m not in the mood to deal with this right now. Let’s just get out of here, because the longer I remain on Earth the more likely it’ll be for me to do something brash.” He sternly replied. Shocked, Sharon didn’t know how to reply, frozen in what could only be a small tremor of fear she said nothing as he walked away, heading towards the massive transport ship in the distance.

“Adam...” She mumbled softly under her breath.

\*\*\*\*\*

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The chaos finally managed to die down in the midst of the Rome arena. The debris that remained from both OZ and Unit had been cleaned up leaving the ground ripe for the next round. The crowd already duped into believing that Marcus Falden, the pilot of OZ had gone insane with grief and caused his outburst against the President of the UGE. Easily manipulated like pawns the crowd and other spectators remained clued to the current arena where the next match, after much delay was preparing to begin.

Luscious Malum sat in Shadow Omega while Crimson quivered with fear in his frame. He watched closely to his display screen when everything went down. He knew he stood little chance of winning, every ounce of sense and logic was telling him to quit, but like most pilots his pride stood in the way, preventing him from backing down.

Before the announcer grabbed onto his microphone the ground began to tremble, rocks bounced off the ground like rubber balls, and both frames lost their balance for a quick moment as the landscape began to deform from what most believed to be an earthquake. Grinning Luscious turned Shadow Omega's frame to the right. It was a hard sight to miss, the tremendous silhouette abrasively making its way towards the arena. There was no mistake to be made, it was a Seraph.

*Following your orders is too troublesome for me. This is the only way.*

It was hard for Luscious not to chuckle at the moment. It wasn't every day that his subordinates would revolt. But for him it proved intriguing. Crimson, his opponent he knew wouldn't be much of a challenge, but the Seraph, in his mind there was more hope for a Crimson Dawn to give him a run.

"I knew this would happen eventually. However, I wasn't expecting it to be in the form of you, Sloth..."

## **Chapter Forty: Essence of Humanity**

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

To the amazement of everyone who watched the Seraph pierced through the arena grounds staring solely at Shadow Omega. The frightful sight of the behemoth sent shivers down Crimson's spine, he had heard about the Seraph through the grapevines but this was his first time actually seeing one. It bewildered him to see a machine of this magnitude, it was breathtaking. The impact craters that were created with each step were immense; the sheer size was also amazing in Crimson's eyes. While Crimson froze with paralysis due to his fear Luscious continued to chuckle with each step the Seraph took. Sloth was never one to intentionally cause problems; she was the laziest of all the Crimson Dawn that he took under his wing. This, for Luscious was the biggest shocker, he had always expected Pride to give him the most trouble, or at the very least Envy.

"Still I must say I am somewhat impressed to see you actually giving a damn about something Sloth. You always gave off the impression of not giving a damn." Luscious said, his voice piercing through Sloth's radio and only hers.

Sloth sighed, moving back the locks of pink hair that covered her right eye. Her thin smooth index finger pulled the strands back behind the lobe of her right ear.

"Yeah, I know. But, I was getting tired of being your lap dog. The others don't see it, but I do. You've just been using us...we're nothing but disposable pawns to you."

"Heh, I'd say you're more like knights. Every trait about you is unique and irregular. It is true; you Night Stalkers have easily served your purpose. I grew tired of this tournament anyway; guess this will be the final nail in its coffin." Luscious replied.

"You can't possibly..."

Sloth's eyes widened, the thin reptilian slits grew pale from the sudden outbreak of fear that flowed throughout her veins. Shadow Omega now hovered quietly in front of the Seraph's core with its energy saber drawn pointing horizontally at it. It took a few seconds for the movement to register on everyone's radar; the speed of Shadow Omega was unbelievable. Sloth leaned back into the plush cushions of her seat as if trying to escape the point of the energy blade being directing in her place.

"What the hell? And I am supposed to fight him...maybe I should give up..." Crimson mumbled.

Leaning to his side Luscious opened up communications with the officials of the tournament.

"*Yes Mr. President?*"

"This tournament is attracting all sorts of energetic people. I feel that in the best interest of the spectators that we cancel the Azure Cup. With the appearance of a Seraph it's apparent that someone is trying to interfere with the UGE's plans. It's best if we hold off on the tournament until after the conquest of Mars is complete." Luscious replied.

"*Understood sir. Would you like for us to send out the Exodus unit to deal with the Seraph?*"

"No, I will deal with this personally."

"*Sir? Are you sure, it is a Seraph after all!*"

"I'll be fine, just deal with the evacuation of the area. And make an announcement about the discontinuation of the tournament."

"*Yes sir, be careful.*"

"I'll be fine." He replied, quickly cutting off the connection to the main lobby. Turning back to Sloth he spoke swiftly. "So, now where were we Sloth?"

Experiencing an emotion she had never felt before she didn't know how to react. Normally she would be the calm one out of the seven of them, but now she found herself backed into a corner, composure nowhere in sight, she ultimately knew she would never make it out alive.

"(Damn, Envy would have been much better at this...we're already down to four, if I die only three of us will remain...)"

"Are you having second thoughts? Now wouldn't be the best time to doubt your resolve." With a form of arrogance surrounding his aura he replied to the silence that leaked through his communication's link.

Her face was pale, much paler than it usually would appear. Somehow she managed to find the courage to take hold of her controls once more. For a second time the Seraph roared back to life, the resounding boom stirred panic in the crowd as well as Crimson who had a front row seat to the action.

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“I see you’re finally willing to fight now. Good, I was getting bored. Please prove to me that I didn’t waste my time and money when I funded your creation.”

“What?” Barely given a chance to react Shadow Omega lunged forward with the searing beam of energy piercing through the outer armor of the Seraph. Losing her doubt Sloth was reborn with a burning sensation of strength combined with determination. Her frame’s angular tails dispersed locking onto Shadow Omega.

“Hmpf...” Not even deeming the weapons worthwhile Luscious continued to stare forward at the dark obsidian core. Blazing sparks of electricity shot outwards as the energy blade burrowed its way through the outer restraints of the metal alloy making up the Seraph’s armor. Sloth smirked as she watched her four tail units begin to circle around Shadow Omega. Confirmed with a lock on she waited for them to begin to attack.

“What the hell?...WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?! FIRE YOU FUCKING PIECES OF SHIT!!!!” Her voice bellowed through the microphones while each weapon lingered in the sky doing nothing.

“Heheh, losing your composure already? I probably should have told you they won’t work on me.” Luscious calmly stated.

“What the hell am I supposed to do now....”

“I hope you have something else up your sleeve because if you don’t you’re dead. Come on, the Seraph is huge, there has to be something else worth while to see.”

“I was hoping I wouldn’t have to use it...(After all, it drains a great portion of my Seraph’s energy reserve.)”

Replacing her voice was the subtle humming of the core’s plasma weapon gathering energy. Luscious stayed with his present course of action, pushing Shadow Omega’s throttles forward, relying mainly on the energy saber to get the job done. He realized immediately what was coming next, his eyes focused on the small barely visible specs of energy that was clustering around the encased energy saber. He didn’t realize at first that he struck the plasma cannon on the core, knowing this caused him to laugh even more.

“Amusing. You simply are amusing Sloth.”

Just before the plasma cannon fired Shadow Omega vanished in thin air much to the shock of Sloth. The instant that Shadow Omega disappeared the plasma cannon fired, launching a wide beam of purified energy into the air. The thunderous sound screeched through the ears of every spectator around within a 20 mile radius.

Suddenly Shadow Omega reappeared behind the Seraph once again extending its single energy saber forward.

“Too slow. I expected the reaction time of a Crimson Dawn to be much faster than this.”

Orange flames abruptly tore through the 4 angular tails’ armor igniting a simultaneous explosion that lit up the sky much like a fireworks display. With the explosion as a distraction Shadow Omega lunged forward forcing the energy saber into the lower back of the Seraph. The armor fizzled, cracking apart as the beam forced its entry. Sloth forced the titan to turn, the sudden turn in motion from the core caused Shadow Omega to lose its grip on the energy saber. In the midst of the turn the Seraph pointed both plasma rifles towards the now exposed Shadow Omega.

“Interesting.” Luscious simply stated.

Just before both rifles managed to launch an attack Shadow Omega unleashed a barrage of ERMs into the sky. Thousands of thin green energy missiles crowded the sky line just before beginning to descend like heavy rain onto the open Seraph. Each missile hit its mark exploding into the armor of the Seraph. Alone the attacks did little damage, but with the small amount of time in between each collision the repetitive attacks forced the Seraph to lose its balance.

“It’s over. I had hoped for more...oh well, I guess beggars can’t be choosers.”

“What?” Sloth slowly turned her head only to make it in time to watch the quick flash of energy appear on her display screen before transitioning to static. Alarms began to loudly howl in her cockpit, the lighting changed to an eerie crimson hue, shutting her eyes she knew it was coming; her end.



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"I just want to regain what I lost...I've always wished to be human once again..."

"You can never capture what you've lost. You can only continue to move forward and hope for the best. Good bye Sloth." Luscious humbly mumbled.

Her body began to burn up with the severe temperature increase. Her sweat changed to mist as the edge of the energy saber melted the metal casing of her cockpit. With a swift jab the beam of energy enwrapped Sloth's manipulated body in flames, the screams of her death filled Shadow Omega's cockpit. Glancing at his side he took hold of his bottle of Merlot, only to find it empty.

"Geez... \*cough\*...with all the \*cough\* action, I forgot to get a new one...hehe... \*cough\*. I was careless... \*cough\*..." His voice dulled as his vision slowly faded. His body went numb, Luscious collapsed in the cockpit of Shadow Omega. Everyone gasped in horror as the Seraph violently exploded sending the obsidian frame to crash into the ground. Without hesitation the UGE frames burst onto the scene speeding to the aid of their leader. Every man, woman and child horrifically looked on as their profit fell while the singed metal debris of the Seraph littered the ground along with small clusters of dancing flames.

On every television station along with the live arena a single message was played.

*Due to constant interference with the Azure Cup the tournament has been cancelled.*

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The sheets were comforting; the silk like material eased his injuries, the mattress cushions supported his spine while the subtle roar of the engines caressed his dreams. The transport ship had broken free of Earth's atmosphere making its way towards the first worm gate checkpoint. While he slept Sharon sat beside him, her silver night gown complemented her skin and body. Her fingers holding the edge of her chin upright while she listened to the quiet sound of the transport soaring through space.

She looked up at the sudden sound of knocking emanating from the door to their quarters. Before rising to answer she glanced back at Adam who was sound asleep, entrenched in his dreams, or nightmares.

"One second." She replied quietly. Rising from the bed she made her way to the door, she then pressed the flat button attached to the wall revealing Ashley on the other side.

"Ashley?"

"You have a sec?"

"Yeah, come in."

"Thanks."

Ashley still wearing her clothes from before the transport launched entered the room. It was apparent to Sharon that she hadn't even tried to sleep.

"Is everything alright?"

"I'm not too sure what is going on anymore. I've been getting reports about the South Western Territory on Mars, along with news about Orbis and Prometheus. While the tournament was going on, on Earth the UGE forces have been increasing their offensive potential."

"Are you sure you should be telling me this and not Stephen?"

"He, much like Adam is passed out at the moment. I just received the news a few minutes ago."

"So you think we're going to run into trouble on the way then?"

"No, what concerns me is that the barrier concealing the South Western Territory has dissipated revealing a crystalline like city infrastructure."

"So you're saying there's been a city hidden on Mars for years?"

"It seems like it. Gail is already preparing forces to go investigate the scene. But there's also word that the UGE is preparing to launch an assault on Orbis' space resource satellite. It seems as if the world is once again going to be enflamed with conflict."

"Yeah..."

Both Sharon and Ashley sat down on the ivory encased couch while Adam's eyes began to twitch as his dreams slipped from his subconscious. His slumber faded but remained quiet in order to listen to

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the conversation that had been dragging on during the past few minutes. Slivers of hair collapsed over his only opened eye. The vision in his right eye was already hindered since it was half opened, adding the close up view of his dark brown hair didn't help any. Knowing that he wasn't relying on that particular sense he didn't mind, his ears were working fine.

"Do you think we're doing the right thing? I mean, who are we to try and fix everything? Why don't we just settle someplace and wait for this all to end?" Ashley asked, it was a thought that she had buried deep within her soul since the end of the first Azure Cup tournament.

"If we ignored everything that was happening then we would have no right in complaining about the way the future turns out. Those with power should use it to change destiny." Sharon replied with a simplistic smile.

"Heh...you really are strong. That's the thing, I'm not a pilot, there's nothing I can do."

"So that's what this is really about then. You feel useless."

"Huh...I...well, umm.."

"You keep everyone in check. And Stephen, he has a solid resolve because of you. He hides it well, but I can tell. And besides, I'm not a good pilot, if anything I'll only be holding people back. But you, you are the eyes and ears on the field, the person who sees things that those in the battle can't see. Cheer up; you're worth more than you think."

Smiling Ashley nodded.

"Thank you."

"Can you two shut up already. A guy can't even get a good amount of sleep?" Adam yelled.

Rising from the sheets he arched over his knees staring at the two women, his hair a mess, hanging over his eyes while other strands stuck up in clusters. Yawning loudly both Sharon and Ashley chuckled.

"Huh?" Confused at the devious smirks that lit up the faces of the young woman sitting only a few feet away he raised an eyebrow unsure of what to expect. Suddenly two plush pillows darkened his view as the taste of silk filled his mouth, his body collapsed back down onto the mattress.

"I hate you both..." He mumbled, with his voice muffled by the pillows covering his face.

"Hehehehe. Thanks again Sharon." Ashley replied giggling covering her lips with her hands.

"Hehehe, anytime Ashley."

Adam smiled as well; it had been a long time since he saw or heard Ashley giggle. He never wanted to bring anything up since he knew he had his own problems to work out. Both Stephen and Ashley had been unofficially together since the first Azure Cup. Stephen had problems with commitment since Veronica, his first liaisons manager for the TA. Like Adam he was stubborn and once he had an idea in his head he was determined to reach that goal, unfortunately his happiness had a tendency to take a back seat. And in this case that was Ashley. Most people had a limit in which after moving past it they would break, Ashley, in Adam's opinion should have reached it a long time ago. But she was always different than most, her loyalty to people was admirable; she would endure the most just for her friends and family to end up happy. At first he didn't realize how much of an impact Sharon would have until now. Her reentry into his life was unexpected at best, but seeing her connect so deeply with his friends meant that he could never let her down again.

Stretching out his legs underneath the covers he wrapped his arms under his neck looking into the darkness being provided by the pillows still above his face.

"(Still, it seems as if Luscious is preparing to make his final move. If what Ashley mentioned is true about the South Western Territory is true then he has to be ready.) No use worrying about it now I guess...still have a way to go before reaching Orbis...but still, I can't help wondering what the hell Luscious was talking about..."

*"One more thing about this tournament, it was also established to bring out the only two possible threats to my campaign. The two machines that have been rampaging through out the world, Genesis' latest chapter in the Chimera Project; the H-3 and H-4. But you knew that since you're so aware."*

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It was a confrontation that plagued his nightmares, if Genesis was continuing with its hybrid experiments there would be no telling how this variable would fit in the equation of the UGE and Orbis.

“...What does it mean? H-3, H-4? What else are you manipulating Luscious?”

\*\*\*\*\*

The news of the Azure Cup being cancelled came as no shock to the people of the world. With the constant interruptions, the later being in the form of a Seraph the tournament was thrown off balance. The UGE had been focusing its attention on the media sending out stories about the Seraph that made its appearance during the tournament. Along with the faux stories of origin the UGE reps had to constantly release statements about the state of the UGE President, Luscious Malum who collapsed shortly after he destroyed the Seraph.

Hand in hand every citizen of Earth prayed for Luscious' good health which was described as over exhaustion from the constant battles. His location was considered top secret while he recovered. In reality he was transported to back to his personal quarters in Berlin.

“Are you sure you're ok? I mean you were unconscious the entire trip. Your vitals were dangerously unstable, just what the hell happened?” The UGE Planetary Ambassador stated.

“It's nothing. Why are you here Jack?”

Taken back by the sternness of his reply Jack Mason faltered, unable to come up with a quick response. Luscious Malum had never before been seen in such a fragile state. Tubes feeding into his body, displays monitoring his vital signs, tracking every spike that ever took place, it was weird for him to see his idle in a weakened form.

“Jack?”

“Sorry sir...It's just that there have been reports from Mars that Mundus has attracted all sorts of attention. I think it should be worth investigating.”

“You're referring to the South Western Territory, yes I've heard, the barrier disappeared.”

“Yes...that's right. They've been reports of a Seraph guarding the outskirts of the city that took the barrier's place.”

“A Seraph...I see. How are the forces on Prometheus...\*cough\*...”

Luscious abruptly lunged forward spewing crimson blood from his mouth, Jack jumped from his seat running straight towards the President's bed.

“Mr. President!”

“I'm fine, no need for your concern...\*cough\*, did you bring the Merlot?”

“Umm, yeah. But I don't think wine is...”

“That's all I need from you Jack. Just give me the bottle. And as far as Prometheus, we're still on schedule. I will be heading there tomorrow. Make sure the transport is ready.”

“Sir...”

“Don't question me Jack. It won't be in your best interest.”

“Right...I apologize Mr. President.”

Grabbing the bottle of dark red Merlot from the hands of Jack he waved the UGE Ambassador away. As Jack approached the door he turned back towards Luscious.

“Prometheus is ready sir. The Exodus units are there and have already begun their training sequences in space. Also, at your request UGE forces have also moved to Dammerung and set up camp there. At the moment, 95 percent of the UGE military forces are now in space at per your request. Red Fury has also been confirmed to have been completely annihilated; they were the first to encounter the Seraph on Mundus and were killed instantly. Our satellites have also been keeping tabs on Gail, the Orbis resource satellite has been bustling with activity, and we think they are preparing an assault. That is all I have to report Mr. President.”

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“Thanks Jack. That is all...” Ripping the cork from the bottle he watched the Ambassador leave the room. His mouth wrapped around the edge of the bottle and furiously began to chug it. As the maroon liquid passed through his systems the displays began to beep as his vitals quickly returned to normal.

“\*huff\*... \*huff\*...It would seem that I’m running out of time....Heh, I’ll have to finish this quickly. My Tribulation will not fail, what will you do now, Adam Novus?”

### Chapter Forty-One: Activation

It was calming, almost too calming for the staff of the Orbis resource satellite. The barracks silenced by the sleeping soldiers within. With all of Orbis’ soldiers on standby residing on the resource satellite shifts were in the middle of transition. A select group of soldiers, 10 in total were given the task of monitoring the control room for any irregular movement near the space surrounding their base of operations. Chris Procella along with Leo Umbra sighed deeply as they stared off into the display entrenched within the limits of their own boredom.

“\*Yawn\*...I don’t see the point in this. It’s too damn boring.” Leo mumbled softly. Turning towards Chris who was reclining in his chair resting his legs on top of the control panel Leo waited for a response. A conversation was the only means of swaying the boredom away from their minds.

“With the UGE making its move to space we can’t be too care full. If they were to make any sudden movements while we have our pants down then it’ll be all over. All I can say for now Leo is to bare with it.”

“Ughh....I guess, hey, you see either one of those two kids?”

“Zach and Reine? I think they went to get a drink or something. They should be back shortly, I wouldn’t worry.”

“Ah...\*sigh\*....this is still so boring...I’m so tired man.”

“I’d rather have it be boring than have something serious happen.” Chris replied.

“Yeah...”

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“How’s it looking you two?” Lucian’s voice bellowed from behind as he entered the room.

“Eh? Nothing major is going on. All is well.” Chris reported.

“Good.” Lucian replied.

It was soothing to know that all was well and quiet, but Lucian knew there was more to the silence than what was being let on. He, like many people had his own secrets, secrets that he hid well deep within the darkness of his soul. His attention diverted to the silver door that slid open as both Zach and Reine made their appearance holding onto two bottles of water.

“Morning boys. Hard at work I take it.” Lucian suggested.

Zach simply nodded, not troubling himself with any extraneous body movements or words. Reine on the other hand was delighted to be acknowledged by any one from the upper ranks.

“Of course Lucian!” Reine replied with an energetic smile.

Chuckling, Lucian patted Reine on the edge of his shoulders and continued to walk out of the control room. As the doors slowly closed in behind him his head slightly turned to the right, his eyes piercing through Reine’s head and into direct contact with Zach’s own eyes.

“Heh, enjoy the remainder of your free will boys. Today your alter egos will be activated....” His body transferred into the shadows eventually becoming engulfed and unnoticeable.

“So, anything interesting happen while we were gone?” Zach said as he took his seat next to Leo. Taking little time in between sitting and booting up his console Zach listened closely for a reply without turning towards either Leo or Chris.

Bewildered, Leo had never seen Zach act so collected and focused on his job. It almost caused him to forget to answer the question that was brought up.

“Uh, no. Nothing, I sincerely doubt anything is going to....”

“Looks like you’re going to have to cut that sentence short Leo; check out quadrant F-8. I’m detecting several heat signatures, unidentified ones.” Chris shockingly screamed. His hair flapping through the air as his head whipped around.

“What? Are you fucking serious?! And this was supposed to be a calm shift!” Leo yelled in distress.

“F-8 Captain Procella? I’m on it.” Reine obediently replied scurrying to his panel besides Zach’s.

Once Reine took his seat Zach leaned over to help point out the section in question. At first it bothered him a bit; his envy for Zach had never seemed to reach its limit. But realizing that he didn’t have the time to deal with his shortcomings he nodded and began to analyze the data that was being scanned.

“I see it Captain. Am I losing it or do I see 50 identical heat signatures?” Reine questioned.

“No Reine, your eye sight is perfect....there’s 50 of them and they’re approaching fast. Shit, we don’t have much time to analyze this; we have to set up a defensive perimeter right away! Leo get in touch with Gail and inform him of the situation!” Chris yelled. Knowing the drastic severity of the situation he twirled his chair away from the control panel and jumped to the ground.

“Zach, Reine follow me to the hanger. We’re launching to intercept!” Chris yelled.

“Understood.” Zach humbly mumbled.

“Got it sir!” Reine followed quickly in compliance.

“Chris...” Leo mumbled.

“Yeah?”

“Be careful, I’ll join you guys as soon as possible.”

“Alright.”

Turning away from his friend Leo turned back to the computer and quickly began to type in the password to signal a code red to blare throughout the facility. Instantly every light in every hall, room and hanger changed to a bright crimson.

*This is not a drill. I repeat, this is not a drill. All pilots head to the hanger and prepare for anti frame combat. 50 unidentified units are approaching Orbis fast and should be within our perimeters within 15 minutes.*

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Leo's voice traveled through the dense materials which every wall was composed of. Those soldiers who were sleeping moments prior were now awake and scrambling to get dressed. Gails' cerulean eyes opened as his ears twitched in accordance with the repeating over speaker message.

"So it begins..." Gail muttered, still half asleep he was able to recognize the beginning of the end.

Running through the corridors seemed to take forever for the three pilots. Each crevice and turn appeared to be the same as the previous one. Their bodies dripping with sweat as they perspired from the unexpected early morning workout.

"So, what the hell do you think they are Captain?" Reine asked, glancing over to his left.

"Not sure, turn here it's a short cut to the hanger. If I had to guess I'd say they're forces from the UGE. It would appear that Luscious is finally taking us seriously." Chris replied.

"It would seem so. Still, one thing bothers me." Zach interjected.

"Huh?"

"Why would he wait until now to attack this facility? If he truly wanted to destroy Orbis he could have easily done it while Gail, along with more than half of his forces was on Earth. And to send new frames, it just doesn't add up for me."

"I see, well then maybe it isn't Luscious. Maybe it's Red Fury." Reine replied.

"No, Red Fury would never attack us head on. Their resources have been completely depleted since their failed invasion. That and I head they were completely wiped out with the unveiling of the city on Mundus. There are just too many variables in the equation right now." Zach replied.

"Yeah. Well whoever it is matters not. We have to protect Orbis and Gail's dream no matter at what cost!" Chris yelled.

Zach and Reine smirked agreeing in unison.

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Lucian stood swirling a glass of distilled red wine in his hand as he watched through the window in his private quarters. In the background of the neatly organized room played a majestic sound, one that could only be found in the form of classical music. For the past few years he stood by Gail's side, pretending to be his friend, gaining his trust, and thus finding himself in the perfect position to aide Luscious Malum.

In the distance his pupils locked onto the flickering energy flames that burned brightly behind each and every unidentified unit that was approaching. Like a straight line of fireworks they continued, marching forward refusing to show any signs of hesitation.

"Unidentified huh? Well then Luscious, it would seem that you've sent out the Exodus units to finish Gail off. Amusing, we'll see how the Hybrids match up." Taking a final sip of wine Lucian smirked falling into the clutches of his maroon hued chair.

"This is Zach Orion, Hades heading out."

Hades' rocket thrusters suddenly pulsated; the power being emitted sent vibrations through the hardened metal walls as the flames spewed out from the thrusters. Hades, like a rocket launched quickly from the hanger, the orange and black MF sped through the constellations and deep black abyss only to halt its movements suddenly. Turning back to the hanger he smirked, waiting for both Reine and Chris to launch.

"Reine Proprius launching." Much like Hades, Sigma lunged forward piercing through the barrier that separated space and the inner sanction of Orbis. Catching Zach in his sights Reine's adrenaline quickly began to flow throughout his systems, the two were friends, and the best of partners in the heat of battle. As much as Reine was envious of his friend, he also had tons of admiration for him.

Unexpectedly Chris Procella popped up on both screens within the cockpits of Hades and Sigma.

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“Listen, you two have the highest fighting potential out of every soldier in Orbis. I want you two to scout out the situation. Once you make contact I along with the rest of the MF forces will follow suite. And one more thing, don’t do anything stupid, you’ll be highly out numbered.” Chris stated.

“Understood Captain.” Zach and Reine saluted.

Just as Tempest soared through the space debris both Hades and Sigma roared loudly taking off into the distance. Still amused at their speed Chris smirked, feeling assured that he sent those two out first that everything would be alright.

“Captain!” A voice boomed from behind. Turning around Chris smiled, 45 frames of mixed origins surrounded the hanger. From Shade to Night-Wing to personalized Frame they all hovered in unison awaiting their orders.

“That was much quicker than in all the trial runs. I’m impressed. Here’s the situation, soldiers, we have 50 unidentified, possibly new UGE frames heading our way. Our only mission objective is to protect the resource satellite. Try and keep them as far away from our HQ as possible. If we lose here than everything we fought for, believed in will have been wasted in vein. Be proud, you are soldiers of Orbis!” Chris yelled.

Hades and Sigma slowed the acceleration on their boosters as their radars began to screech upon reaching the targets, before them they took notice of the oncoming frames. Zach cringed at the sight of the beasts, they were of a sleek design that he had never seen before. The torso was elongated and slender with rectangular ridges riding along the outer edges. The torso was more based off the human anatomy, there were no irregular curves or crevices, just a flat chest like rectangular structure, and the arm units were in the same style, smooth ridges replacing the Shade’s block like visage. The shoulders connecting to the arms rose upwards like a cone shaped spike but instead of coming to a single point at the end the spike curved backwards in the shape of an “n” as if being seen from above. The legs appeared to be different on each core, but from Zach’s point of view there seemed to be 4 types in total, a biped, quadruped, a hover tank and an irregular shaped leg which was a single descending cone with circular rings around the mid section. Suddenly the frame at the front of the pack turned its attention towards both Hades and Sigma. Reine’s eyes widened as if the devil himself had just pierced his insides replacing his organs with fear. Zach unaffected continued to scan the oncoming frames; the head of each frame closely resembled that of Blue Dragons, two side triangular vents and a single horn in the middle of its forehead. A bright flash of fuchsia light flickered amongst the head unit as it began to register the MFs before it.

“This isn’t good Reine, each one of those frames are carrying a positron particle beam cannon. A single shot from one of those can do severe damage if your energy defense is below average. Luckily for us, ours is way above the norm. It also seems like they’re each carrying two modified Excalibur-2 swords. You can’t tell just from looking at it, but the Excalibur-2 is a dual sided blade, the blade folds upwards to make it appear as a regular Excalibur, but once they’re in hand it becomes apparent what they really are.” Zach continued on as his computer screen dealt with the arduous task of analyzing and breaking down every component on the unknown machines.

“Wonderful, you think we should call Captain Procella with this information?”

“Not yet, I’m not done with the analysis. I need a few more minutes.” Zach replied.

Zach’s eyes widened as one of the unknown machines flew by both Hades and Sigma revealing its back. He didn’t see it before, there was no way that he could, but it appeared that the units final weapon were the orbital wings that were attached to bone like structures folded inwards in between both Excalibur swords. At that moment he tried to count them but was unsuccessful, the only true way of knowing just how many there are would be to see them in action. And at the moment both he and Reine were considerably out numbered.

“Captain Procella, we have identified the targets. After careful analysis I have come to the conclusion that we are no match for them.” Zach alertly reported.

“*What? Just what the hell are they then?*”

“Not sure, but they definitely belong to the UGE. The technology looks to be of EAP influence, and the weapons are definitely from the TA. At the moment their offensive power is unknown, but with the firepower I’m detecting it’s easily more than any MF we have in Orbis.” Zach replied.

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*"I see...unfortunately we don't have any say in the matter. If they truly are from the UGE then we already know conflict is going to happen. They certainly didn't come to chat."*

"I agree Captain. Its unfortunate, but simple logic decrees that Orbis will be lost."

*"Zach?! You can't be serious! You're not giving up on Gail are you?!"*

"Of course not, as long as you're aware of the risks then we're fine. My job was to give you a report on the unidentified frames. I did so. Now, if we're clear on that Reine and I will now head towards you. On the way we will flank them from behind, it's our best and only chance to have some sort of an advantage."

"What?! Zach?! But you just said that we wouldn't stand a chance!" Reine interrupted.

"Reine, don't worry. I can tell that these units are brand new, so the pilots probably aren't able to bring out the true potential of their units. We, on the other hand can. That's our best chance; we come from behind while Captain Procella and the rest hit them straight on. We should be able to get them stuck in a chaotic situation." Zach replied.

*"I see, so be it then. That's our best bet. Don't die you two."*

"Come on Reine, follow....ugh...\*cough\*" Abruptly Zach lunged forward coughing loudly. The palms of his hands quickly reacted jumping to cover his mouth. With each passing second his coughs became even louder and rough, his hair flinging through the cockpit while thin trickles of blood peered through the tiny crevices in between his fingers.

"ZACH....ugh...\*cough\*...\*cough\*..." Reine, in the midst of screaming with concern for his friend began to cough roughly. Like Zach blood spewed out from his lips, but unlike Zach it wasn't contained. The crimson liquid sprayed outwards, staining the obsidian control panel along with his pilot uniform.

Zach, struggling with the internal pain managed to slightly open his right eye, every alarm within Hades was blaring loudly, along with warnings flashing on every display. His vision became distorted and fuzzy, his muscles quivering underneath his skin so much that he couldn't control his motor functions.

"\*cough\*...not good...\*cough\*...not now..." His voice stuttering from the sudden shock that was being exerted on his nervous system slowly deepened. Turning his head to the left he watched Sigma linger amongst the dark abyss, within, its pilot too was undergoing the same pain that Zach felt.

Lucian sat still in his room smirking. On the side of his desk flickered a communications uplink screen which was connected to Earth through the various orbiting satellites.

*"So, has it been done?"*

"Yes Luscious, they have both been activated. We were right, there is now no doubt that Zach Orion and Reine Proprius are the H-3 and H-4. Once the awakening is complete the computer program I installed with sway their sub conscious making them yours for the taking. Although I wonder, is this alright that you sent out the new units only to be destroyed?"

*"Yes Lucian, this is the Exodus trial run. Let's see how they perform against the two knights of the Tribulation. Good work Lucian, I expect a full feed to be directed to my office."*

"Of course Luscious."

*"Any word on Gail? Does he suspect anything?"*

"No, he trusts me deeply. I am after all his best friend."

*"Heh, does this bother you? That you've spent years gaining someone's trust just to break it a lot faster than it took to gain it?"*

"No, it doesn't bother me in the least. I used him, which is all."

*"I see. Heh, you always were amusing."*

With a new animalistic instinct taking over their conscious both Zach and Reine stared at the passing battalion of MFs that floated through space. Their pupils faded leaving only the whites in their eyes. No hesitation left, they could barely even remember the plan that Zach had mentioned only a few moments ago. Zach glistened with a devilish grin as Hades burst from its position, surging towards the litter of frames. Sigma soon followed suit with a less powerful explosion.



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“What the hell?!” One pilot screamed, his radar barely giving him enough time to react the pilot found himself screaming in agony. The Exodus frame suddenly exploded violently sending the singed shards of metal into the surrounding area. The single destruction of one unit grabbed the attention of every other frame in the vicinity.

The frames in the back of the pack suddenly paused turning around to see what happened. Just then both Hades and Sigma zoomed by slashing with their energy sabers with speeds that not one pilot could fathom. The final image before each pilot’s death was that of the burning energy piercing through their frame like butter.

Surprisingly both Hades and Sigma came to a halt after the destruction of 10 Exodus units commenced. Leaving 40 left they stood brooding over the remaining units. No thoughts other than those containing high levels of destruction flowed through their minds, their mouths on the brink of salivating over the limitless possibilities of chaos that stood before them.

A pounding migraine pierced through both Zach and Reine’s head, causing their reality to spin in a distorted circle. Voices suddenly began to echo within the essence of their subconscious, their own voices; representations of whom they were before the sudden berserker instinct took over.

At that instant a distorted static induced image of Luscious Malum appeared on their display screens along with text written in binary. Screaming from the new sensation pouring into their already tainted minds both Zach and Reine collapsed, their heads folding downwards with no signs of life.

*You now belong to me. You are my knights of the Tribulation...*

<Hehe...> Zach’s pale face began to chuckle with a simplistic yet mystifying smirk.

<Destroy...> Reine made his way back to reality with a new expression. Both young pilots began to laugh maliciously as their frames cried out. In a split second both Hades and Sigma dashed forward with their energy sabers ignited.

Luscious Malum leaned comfortably in his chair as his transport ship finally left Earth’s atmosphere. On its way to Prometheus Luscious knew he could finally rest easy, he had managed to collect that which had eluded him for the previous years. The H-3 and H-4 as he and the rest of the world put it was now under his control.

“Things truly are going to get interesting from here on out...hehe...hahahaha..”

### **Chapter Forty-Two: Beyond Human Reach**

Focusing on the dew collecting around the edges of the window of the transport he couldn't help but feel anxious. According to Stephen only a few hours remained before they would reach Orbis' territory. Adam sighed softly, leaning against the bare front of his knuckles he continued to enjoy the soothing sensation of Sharon's fingers gently rubbing forward along his shoulders.

"You're quiet again." She mentioned.

"I'm fine."

"Heh, I didn't even ask anything." Her hands moved forward grabbing onto his cheeks. Smiling her face leaned over Adam's. The expression she posed before him with the dimples of her cheeks, her pearl colored teeth easily penetrated the sullen look and raised eyebrows that Adam gave off.

"Hey...." He stared forward into Sharon's gleeful eyes; with his eyebrows twitching he could only find one phrase that he felt suited the moment. "Why are you breathing on me?"

"Simple, to make you laugh."

"It's annoying."

"You're annoying."

"Ugh... \*sigh\*...." Adam slightly turned his head at an upward angle once again looking at Sharon. With a smirk lining his face he replied, "Why'd you stop? My shoulder is killing me."

"Heh." Sharon chuckled just before she lightly slapped his head with her opened palm. Scratching the side of impact he jerked around cringing at the sight of the girl who had been by his side for the past month.

"Was that really necessary?"

"Of course. Hehe."

"I'll never understand women...."

"And you won't ever have to; I'll tell you everything you need to know."

"Am I interrupting anything?" Stephen's voice was like an unexpected thunderstorm, it literally was a rain on his parade. Like two kids being caught by their overbearing parents both Adam and Sharon jumped away from each other, their facial expression glowing with red from the embarrassment they felt coming.

"You two truly are weird. I wish I could waste more breath talking about the habits you two share but I have some very unfortunate news." Stephen stated.

Shrugging his shoulders Adam wasn't too surprised. Whenever Stephen made an appearance from thin air it usually meant trouble. "What else is new?"

"I'll just get to the point. At O700 Orbis was attacked by the new UGE production models, code named Exodus."

"What?! But, that was so damn fast!" Adam screamed.

"I know, it concerns me too. Apparently the battle is still raging...however, it isn't looking good for them."

"The UGE is over powering them....Damn it! How much longer until we can get within a respectable range to launch?"

"The UGE is having trouble...at the moment it would seem that Orbis is in a comfortable position."

"What? How is that possible? It's obvious that the UGE would have the better technology, how can Orbis actually stand up to them?"

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“There was an anomaly Adam. Two frames suddenly went berserk and launched the primary attack against the UGE. Ever since then these two frames have been easily tearing through one frame after another...”

“Two...” Instantly he felt as if his soul was cut in two, visions of Luscious Malum laughing at the path he had taken entrenched his field of vision. Those words still haunting him from earlier in the week.

*“One more thing about this tournament, it was also established to bring out the only two possible threats to my campaign. The two machines that have been rampaging through out the world, Genesis’ latest chapter in the Chimera Project; the H-3 and H-4. But you knew that since you’re so aware.”*

“The H-3 and H-4...” Adam mumbled loudly, the sheer utterance of those words caught Stephen off guard as well as Sharon. Although the reason she felt uneasy was different than Stephens it didn’t change the fact that she did have that sensation coursing through her blood stream.

“So you know then?”

“Know what? It’s just that Luscious mentioned them to me earlier. I’m just assuming they’re the same machines that are at Orbis right now.” Adam replied.

“I see, referred to individually as Project Zenith of Artificially Composed Humans and Reconstructed Enhanced Inhuman Neo Embryo Project these are the final fruits from the Genesis Hybrid development team. A team in which your father was a part of Sharon, it is that connection that put your life in danger and which is why you were targeted by Luscious.” Stephen humbly said as he enlightened the two.

“Is there anything you don’t know?” Adam wondered.

“I have my limitations, but I do know a lot. It seems that they were Luscious’ main objective, the replacement knights for you and Nick. They’re in Orbis fighting, right now it’s against the UGE, but what we do know is that they’re unstable so in the end they might end up taking out Orbis in the long run...”

“Stephen... But what can we do? They can’t be always filled with rage; if they were then we would have been able to find them a lot sooner.” Adam replied.

“I know...they’re not like Nick or Mike...they are a new form where they are able to maintain their humanity an event triggers the change.”

“Ugh...we’ll never be able to find them then. By the time we reach Orbis the battle will probably have ended...”

“That may be true...but the identities of the H-3 and H-4 are Zach Orion and Reine Proprius.” The shocking revelation sent waves of rippling fear and shock through Adam’s system. Their connections with the two boys had been extremely limited at best since the end of the first Azure Cup. But to find out that those two teens were sitting on top of such ferocity was a serious blow that almost knocked the wind out of his lungs.

“You’re joking...those two?”

“Yes, those two. You can’t deny it Adam. They both had shown a tremendous amount of talent in the Azure Cup, even if you didn’t see it you must remember those moments where Zach burst out in an uproar of power.” Stephen replied.

Suddenly Adam became quiet, his eyes glazed over with a slight sense of fear, he did remember the times during the tournament where Zach nearly revealed his true self.

*The six beams of energy burst into Hades knocking the orange MF away from Reine. As a mound of caliginous smoke lingered in space Sigma boosted forward. Zach shook his head from side to side as he pushed his body up from the control panel. His pupils faded and his emotions took control, the glow around Hades began to flicker even brighter. The spectacle caused Sigma to halt in its movements, and then Hades erupted from the smoke and zoomed past Sigma slicing through Sigma’s left arm. Sparks of electricity gleamed around the metal wound. Hades then turned around and dashed past Sigma once again and sliced off the right arm. Sigma jerked from side to side as Hades continued to speed past the MF swinging its energy scythe. Inside the cockpit Reine was thrown from side to side, his head smacking*

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*into the display screen causing the plastic cover in his helmet to shatter into thousands of pieces. The pieces slit through his skin, while others lodged themselves securely in his face. Streams of blood combined with his sweat dribbled down his face as he came to his senses. His chest rising with his racing heart beat. He then screamed in agony over the burning sensation that now engulfed his face. The scream echoed throughout space and into Hades' cockpit. Zach then woke up from his own trance realizing that his friend was severely injured. As Hades slowed down Sigma was revealed in shambles, the cockpit was left as it was surrounded by its slain metallic limbs.*

The first match between Zach and Reine was one of many memories that had forever been etched into his mind. Just thinking about it reminded him of the sudden burst of fear that transcended into his being.

“Yeah I remember...I thought he was going to kill Reine during that match.” Adam replied.

“Unfortunately everything I say here is speculation. I won't know what is really going on until we get to Orbis. “

“Right...so...does this mean Luscious is going to be making his move then?”

“More than likely. Ashley told me a few hours ago that even Dammerung was taken over by the UGE. Including Washington, the UGE has 3 areas of operations in space. And then there's the city in Mundus...there's way too many variables still on the stage to be completely sure what route Luscious is going to be taken. But right now, it's safe to say the only path we need to be concerned with is Orbis and both Zach and Reine.”

“Yeah...” Silently he made a subtle reply. Adam took a deep breath trying to prepare for what was to come in the coming hours. Once again he found Sharon by his side embracing him. Her arms made for a comfortable substitute for any cloth blanket.

“Things will work out the way they're supposed to in the end.”

“Thanks Sharon...”

Stephen sighed; even though Ashley was always around he could never find in her what Adam had in Sharon. It just wasn't what he was searching for; he still had his own demons to deal with before he could share his dreams. Leaving the room he trudged through the encased corridor, pacing himself so that he didn't return to his room in a timely manor.

“Just...I'm not sure what's going on anymore with this world...”

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The Exodus units failed to make their rendezvous point near Orbis due to the current intervention. Much to the shock of the head pilot, he could do nothing but watch his men and women fall and all because of his own cowardice. Hades surged through the group line of Exodus' preparing to fire but ended up slashing through the lower half every Exodus core that was in its way. Pilots screamed, raising their hands in defeat and they knew what was coming; their death.

Like a raging demon Hades struck fear into the hearts of every pilot around. No longer burdened by humane emotions the tainted pilot stared forward, his eyes making only the slightest amount of movements always keeping locked onto the enemy. The Exodus units stopped their march towards the rest of Orbis due to the appearance of the two frightening machines. Suddenly in an instantaneous flash another Exodus fell to the overwhelming power of Sigma. Zach ignored the distraction that caused the remaining pilots to turn. Sigma boosted forward swinging only its energy saber, with each forceful stroke the beam of energy made its way through the metal armor of an ivory limb. The level of destruction in the area set the par for battles to come. Burnt wires lingering through the dismal abyss, scrapped limbs and weapons broken with jagged tears at the edges. With only a handful of Exodus units left in the battalion the commanding officer could only lean back trembling in fear. He couldn't help but gawk at the amazing skills that were on display for him, he was a UGE commander, one hand picked by Luscious Malum. With his pride on the line he didn't want to fail, he knew he had no choice but to push forward. Even so it was hard for him to prepare to attack; with only 15 Exodus units left he wasn't completely confident about his success rate.

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“Shit! Why the hell did we get sent here? Did he send us out here with the purpose of losing our lives!?” The lead officer shouted in despair. He was deathly afraid of the machines that were continually destroying his subordinates. Never before had he experienced such intimidation, such fear. The colorful nebula that glistened behind was only a minute distraction to the shadows that surrounded the UGE forces.

In the midst of the darkness the two rampaging MFs lingered, their single glowing crimson eyes flickered. Cold lifeless expressions chiseled into their faces as both Reine and Zach locked onto the few frames that were in their way. Hades abruptly lunged forward, its energy saber docked while the dual grenade took an offensive stance by unfolding. 2 Exodus units sped towards Hades, their positron Ion cannons charging in preparation for an attack, being held by both hands the maneuverability of the frames was reduced drastically. Cringing while in the midst of prayer each pilot locked onto the single target, in their eyes it appeared that the menacing frame had lost some agility, most likely due to the two grenade launchers exposed.

“The frame isn’t as fast anymore! Those weapons have cut down its speed! Now’s our chance....impossible...” The commanding officer froze as he bore witness to the blazing speed that Hades displayed. Nothing more than an orange blur the frame shot through the empty void like a shooting star, suddenly appearing before two Exodus units. Appearing before the lengthy positron cannons Zach smirked slightly, his pale frigid eyes staring at the cores in his line of view. His radio filled with the paranoid screams of the souls before him, he brushed them off his shoulder with a mere whim. In his current state human emotions, any shred of regret that a person would have vanished and were no longer applicable. Zach’s lips thinned, moist from the saliva dripping from his mouth, he smiled, dining off the fear that was emanating from the soldiers before him.

“You’re repentance...” His voice, deeper in tone muttered.

“No...wait...please for the love of God wait!!” The soldiers screamed, pleading for their lives.

In a flash the dual launcher fired releasing a fiery sphere of rampant energy that fulminated at point blank range. The force of the explosion sent Hades back a few meters while the burned remains of the two ivory units lingered in the abyss. Amongst the smog Hades still hovered with its devilish eyes flickering in the darkness of the shadows.

“This is insane...there’s no way we’re going to survive this! All remaining units retreat back to Prometheus!” The commander screamed.

“But sir...the mission...”

“Don’t talk back to me Ensign, I’m well aware of the mission, but the lives of my soldiers are more important. We’re escaping now so we can come....”

The commander’s words froze as did his movement. With little signs of movement Sigma appeared before the head Exodus. Reine smirked glancing back at Hades who was simply watching. Sigma reached for its rail cannon with its right hand, the left hand firmly grabbed onto the head unit of the Exodus.

“Heh...they’re not worthy enough to get the chance to repent...” Reine mumbled.

“What?!” The commander yelled, struggling with his throttles he couldn’t escape from Sigma’s grasp. His eyes widened, he knew what was coming, he could feel it stirring in the depths of his stomach. With a final chuckle Reine pulled the trigger which released a tremendous tempest of energy. The beam tore through the body of the Exodus leaving only the head which Sigma still held onto. Grinning he turned away, glaring at the remaining units that were in the area.

“Zach! Reine! We couldn’t wait any longer so we came....” Chris’ voice froze, he nor anyone else in the battalion that followed. Tempest suddenly came to a stop, the silver machine extended both of its arms to force his troops to stop movement as well. Forsaken sped to the side of Tempest with Leo’s face appearing on Chris’ display screen.

“What the hell is going on? You can’t seriously tell me that those two did all this....”

Disturbed by the interference both Zach and Reine turned their attention to their supposed comrades. Taking the opportunity the remaining dozen Exodus units hastily began to make their run.

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“Running...pathetic humans.” Zach mumbled softly under his breath.

Like a comet Hades burst through the stars speeding past the group of fleeing units. In a mere instant each unit burst in a succession of explosions shooting out their metallic debris. Both Chris and Leo watched with shocked expressions at the maliciousness that Zach was displaying with little hesitation.

“Zach! What the hell! They were running away!” Leo screamed.

“Pfft...humans...” Reine mumbled.

To the surprise of every Orbis soldier Sigma flew towards Forsaken with its energy sabers extended.

“What the hell?! Reine what are you doing?” Leo screamed. In a flash Sigma struck only to be countered by Forsaken’s energy scythe which Leo swung upwards at the last second. Everyone watched as the two Orbis soldiers conflicted with sparks of energy and electricity surging around the area of contact.

“Reine what are you doing?” Chris screamed. Tempest suddenly lunged forward, heading straight towards both Sigma and Forsaken. In the corner of his peripheral vision he saw it, two massive rounds of grenades piercing through the canvas. Chris cringed, pulling back on his throttles just as he cut off the power to the thrusters. Tempest shook at the sudden halt, Chris watched as the two shells flew by.

“Zach!?” Chris yelled.

“Humans are sinful creatures... don’t bother with them. Let’s head home.” Zach replied.

“Understood.” At that moment Sigma pulled away from Forsaken and joined Hades in his journey away from Orbis. Chris still shocked from the recent turn of events could only sit and watch. He knew at his current level he wouldn’t be able to do much against either of them, especially if they were both what Gail and Lucian thought.

Reluctantly Chris turned to his forces. “Don’t follow...you’ll just die.” Chris mumbled.

“You can’t be serious. You’re just going to let them go?” Leo screamed.

“Yeah...it appears both Gail and Lucian were right. They would only be a threat to us if they stayed.”

“So you’re just going to let them go.....we have to report this to Gail....” Leo replied.

“Yeah...make it quick. The transport with our remaining forces should be arriving within the hour....”

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“There it is...the Orbis Resource Satellite. It’s been a while since I’ve been here.” Adam softly mumbled.

“You were with Orbis before?” Sharon asked.

“Yeah a while ago. After the Azure Cup ended I was sought out by Gail. He wanted my help with designing an Orbis MF production model. At the time I believed in his ideals and agreed to help him. But after dealing with certain events I ended up leaving and moved to Mars permanently. I never thought I’d end up back here...”

“Well it’s different this time.”

“Yeah, it’s completely different this time.” Adam replied.

Sharon smiled and placed her head on his shoulder. Adam turned to the side glancing at the top of her vibrant hair. Wrapping his arm around her he smiled. He knew this time things were going to be completely different.

“I’ll make it so we can finally find a shred of peace.” Adam said.

*Welcome to Orbis...*

Luscious’s head lifted as he stared out the star filled window in his office. Smiling he took another sip of his merlot.

“Things will truly start now. My knights have finally arrived...”

**Chapter Forty-Three: Revelation**

The illumination of the hanger was sufficient as the group traveled through the weightless atmosphere. After the transport ship docked with the orbiting satellite, Adam and the rest made their way through the docking bay where the resident mechanics took hold of the onboard MFs. The hanger was nothing like he remembered, in the days when he stayed with Orbis he visualized the hanger as a broken down, third rate garage with rust and mold accumulating in the upper corners of the ceiling. Wires dangled recklessly among the unfinished frames, it was a mess completely void of any sort of organization. He was pleasantly surprised to see the hanger refurbished, silver ceramic tiles lining the ground, a new ceiling emanating with the essence of fresh paint. The frames inside were completely new designed frames based off the Shade, Night-Wing and OZ production models. While it was pleasing to

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see the changes that were made he still felt uneasy at how Gail managed to create such an atmosphere without attracting too much attention.

“You looked shocked? What’s wrong, I thought you used to hang out here before you moved to Mars.” Mario exclaimed.

Adam shrugged; he forgot that his short stay with Orbis was public knowledge. It was almost impossible for him to make any movements while being undetected.

“The last time I was here it wasn’t this clean, or organized. Just wasn’t expecting this that’s all.” Adam replied.

“Bet you didn’t think you’d end up back here huh?” Mario continued to jest.

“No, I didn’t.”

“Any word on what happened just before we got here?” Stephen interjected.

“None, I expected Gail to greet us with some form of an update to the situation.” Ashley mentioned.

“Yeah, he knew we were coming, so he should have sent at least a message carrier or something.” Heather mumbled.

“It doesn’t make a difference if we find out now or later. We’ll simply end up knowing it by the end of the day.” Adam stated.

Just as they approached the end of the hanger, the entryway opened blossoming with light. Amongst the light they saw Gail staring back. Normally this would not have been a means of commotion, but instead of his usual suit, he was decked out in full space gear, holding his helmet underneath his right arm he nodded.

“I apologize for the abruptness but we have a mission.” Gail shockingly announced.

“A mission? What the hell are you talking about? We just got here!” Mario yelled.

“I know, but this is a result of the commotion that occurred a few hours before you arrived.”

“I see, so I’m guessing you’re going to at least debrief us then.” Stephen said.

“Of course...” Gail turned his expression towards Adam who appeared to be uptight over his homecoming. “Good to see you again Adam.”

“Gail.” Adam humbly replied.

“Not to keen on coming back to this place are you? After all this is where...”

“I’m fine Gail. Just get on with the debriefing.” Adam interrupted.

“\*Ahem\*...of course, no need to stir up memories. I apologize for taking you all by surprise, but the girls can go to their assigned rooms. No need with troubling them with this information.”

“I’d like to stay.” Heather replied.

“Same.” Ashley smirked.

“I intend on going too, so yeah, I’m staying.” Sharon replied.

“Heheh, suits me. Here’s the situation. A few hours ago it came to our attention of an UGE battalion of MFs were heading our way. It was surprising to say the least; we never expected them to be so bold. We dispatched our forces in an effort to save the facility...”

“It obviously worked.” Mario chuckled.

“Yeah, it did. What happened after our forces left is what disturbed us. Two of our finest pilots, Zach Orion and Reine Proprius...”

“Let me guess, they went out of control and caused an unimaginable amount of damage to both sides?” Adam interrupted. He had no time to deal with the casual beating around the bush lecture, he already knew what happened, he was just waiting on a form of confirmation.

“So you know then? About the H-3 and H-4.” Gail replied.

“Not a lot, but enough to get by.” Adam mumbled.

“Good, then this will save us a lot of time. I already had a suspicion that they were indeed the two latest hybrids of Genesis which is why I had them transferred to space. What scares me is where they’re heading after they easily dismantled the UGE forces.” Gail mumbled.

“Where’d they go?” Heather asked.

“Prometheus.”



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“... So then he managed to get his hands on them then. If they’re heading there then there isn’t much time. If Luscious already has both the H-3 and H-4 under his possession then things are going to get extremely complicated.” Stephen mumbled.

“So what does this mission consist of exactly?” Adam asked once again going straight to the point.

“We’re going to be raiding a nearby TA orbiting facility. It’s a facility that has been long since abandoned.” Gail replied.

“So what’s the point if it’s abandoned?” Mario asked.

“Have you ever heard of the Iron Fist?”

Adam’s eyes widened briefly with an image of Marcus’ determined face flashing through his head.

“Yea...” Adam whispered.

“Well the Fist was left there; we have a limited supply of transport ships, and an even smaller supply of battle cruisers. With the addition of the Iron Fist to Orbis’ ranks we’ll gain a surge in power. Since the facility is abandoned there shouldn’t be much of a problem, but I wouldn’t be surprised if we encounter a few Shades along with the natural defenses of the facility. At most this would be classified as an A rank mission. The faster we acquire the Iron Fist the faster we’ll be able to take out the UGE.”

“I see... Sharon.” Adam turned his attention to the female who was floating next to him.

“Yeah?”

“This would be a good chance for you to use the training you’ve received. The mission itself shouldn’t pose too much of a threat so use this to gain experience.” Adam replied.

“Got it.”

“Alright then, if it’s settled I’d suggest suiting up. Your MFs have been confined to the transport ship that brought you here. Along with you guys Captain Chris Procella and Lieutenant Leo Umbra will be accompanying us.” Gail replied.

“Heh, haven’t seen them in a while. I did kind of wonder why they ended up.” Mario replied.

“They were there, with their own eyes they saw the monstrosities that both young boys became. They’ll tell you with their own words what happened.”

“Heh, it makes little difference.” Stephen replied.

“Yeah, tell me about, however hearing about how they got their asses kicked would be pretty damn enjoyable hahaha.” Mario laughed.

“Do you ever shut up?” Heather blurted just as her elbow pushed into his rib cage.

“Hehehe...sorry.”

Adam sighed, turning his attention away from Mario he preceded towards Gail. “Are the locker rooms still in the same place?”

“Straight to business as always huh?”

“There isn’t time for anything other than business right now.”

“Yeah, the locker rooms are still down the hall to the right. The women’s locker room is on the left.” Gail replied.

“Thanks.” Drifting through the air Adam’s hand grabbed onto the edge of the door just as he prepared to head to change. Just as he left the hanger area Gail glanced over his shoulder.

“Your resolve has changed. The confusion that once clouded your eyes seems to be gone.”

“Yeah.” A simple word to an obvious statement, Adam shrugged slightly just before he slowly made his way down the hall.

“Before I head to change, your outfit, does this mean you’re joining the fun?” Ashley questioned.

“Heh, not entirely, no. I’m going along for the ride. I know where the facility and the Iron Fist is located, I’ll be the tour guide.” Gail replied.

“I see. You said it was on the left correct?” Sharon asked.

“Yeah, right across from the men’s.”

“Thanks.”

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As Sharon proceeded away Gail awkwardly looked at Ashley who was the only person not budging to change. Her right eyebrow rose upward while she stared back.

“What?”

“You’re not changing?”

“I’m a liaison’s operator and Intel, there’s no need for me to change.”

“Intel huh? Well then I should probably fill you in on where we’re going and what we expect to encounter.”

“It’d make things a lot easier yeah.”

“Then right this way...oh and one other thing.” Gail noticed it earlier but never bothered to bring it up. “That girl, Sharon. Did something happen, not that I’m one to bother but she didn’t even say hi to me. We had met a few years back when both she and Adam stayed on Orbis. And right now she looks as if this is the first time she ever met me.”

“Oh, well to make a long story short, the Sharon you knew was a clone. A failed clone from Genesis.”

“I see, so then it’d be safe to say that there are other clones of people out there now.”

“Most likely.”

“Thank you, anyway back to the task at hand. Follow me to my office I’ll give you a further debriefing there.”

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The dark magenta liquid rippled to the edges of the clear glass. Below mechanics were doing the daily routines on the Exodus units while hauling all sorts of equipment around. The noise didn’t seem to deter him from his work, the constant rattling and small tremors slid off his shoulder like water on oil. Simply he sat, his fingers entwined with one another while his body leaned forward. Luscious’ eyes staring at the monitor before him, the 20 inch plasma screen displayed the two frames flying through the vacuum of space. Calmly he smiled, with his plans finally coming to fruition it was something he did often; smile. Out of charismatic gesture he pushed his obsidian leather chair away from the fine polished mahogany desk. It was time, with the arrival of the two things he had been searching for he could finally make his declaration to the rest of the world. It was a tingling sensation that trickled down his spine, a feeling of satisfaction, a feeling that any lesser of a man would become drunk on. Knowing of the current state of the world he had little, if any regrets about the statement he was preparing to make. Currently his approval rating was through the roof, no single politician had such a united following before. Even the citizens of Mars were starting to find the greater qualities that Luscious Malum possessed. Even though by nature the UGE was a sincere form of an empire the people cared not. No longer were they plagued with the death and destruction that the war between the TA and the EAP brought about. Under the guise of Luscious Malum all the nations of Earth managed to find a source of peace.

“I wonder how they will take the news...” Luscious’s voice traveled through the cynical intonation that he created.

It was a fact that the public looked up to Luscious Malum as a heroic figure. A man who truly looked out for the needs of the people, whether or not it was true didn’t matter; in the eye of the public he was their hero. Luscious smirked as the two flickering lights of energy in the distance of his opaque window grew in size, the distinct angular shapes of the two frames becoming apparent; the H-3 and H-4 had officially arrived at Prometheus.

“Heh, no longer will the sins of man go unpunished.” Luscious subtly stated as he made his way out of the sullen room.

Zach’s crimson eyes slowly opened from the surrealistic world that engulfed his conscious. At first he was welcomed with a flourishing sense of disorientation; his confusion continued on for a few

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seconds until he took notice of Reine's frame besides him. The machine humbly floated amongst the stars and metallic debris while it continued on the same path that Zach appeared to be on.

"Ugh..." Zach leaned forward, his index fingers massaging the temples on his forehead. He wasn't completely sure what had caused the massive migraine to reverberate with such ferocity, all he knew was that the pain was disrupting his motor skills; his vision blurred and warped which was accompanied by a feeling of dizziness. Somehow managing to block out the pain briefly his hands, quivering in the air moved forward towards the communication controls.

"Reine? \*arg\*...you awake?" He spoke softly, his voice filled with cracks and coughs from the pain. Zach patiently waited for a reply while his shaking eyes watched the dew from inside the cockpit collect along the edges of the windows.

"Zach...\*cough\* \*cough\*..." Reine too found his way to the current realm. He squinted in an attempt to focus. Due to the constant coughing sessions it was hard for him to carry on a conversation. His neck abruptly thrust forward, his eyes shot open from the surge of pain that traveled through his nerves. Covering his mouth with his fingers he broke out into hoarse sounding coughs. This time more harsh sounding than before, to his surprise he felt the mildly warm fluids drip from his lips, flowing through the small indents in his palms and passing through the crevices in between his fingers. The darkened blood slowly plopped to the ground, he, like Zach wasn't completely sure of what had happened for his body to end up in its current state.

"Do you remember what happened? \*cough\*" Zach questioned, his plea for an answer displayed his desperation.

After thoroughly wiping his lips and hands clean from the blood Reine glanced over.

"No...\*cough\*...the last thing I remember were those units that attacked us..."

"Wonderful...\*cough\*...just where the hell are we then?" Zach asked.

*"You have returned from your scouting mission to the Orbis Resource Satellite"*

Both Zach and Reine turned their eyes and ears to the now flashing display screen sitting before them. They weren't completely sure why they felt the way they did, but they liked the feeling of trust. The voice was familiar in their hearts; it was a voice that eased their rambunctious souls. Without taking the time to think or even ask, they both replied in unison.

"Luscious..."

*"You had us worried; you were gone for such a long time. We were preparing another team to go and find you two."*

"Sorry Luscious..." Even though they weren't completely sure of what happened, they were trusting when it came to Luscious Malum. The stirring feeling in their stomach was nothing more than an after affect of the battle that they had apparently participated in. They could only determine that they were exhausted due to an extraneous battle and after the conflict headed back to their base with an auto-pilot OS controlling their machines.

*"It's alright boys. We're just happy you made it back to Prometheus in one piece. You're frames are already on a direct path to our docking bay, continue forward and once you get on board I'll have someone escort you back to your rooms so you can get some rest. We can't have our two Ace pilots exhausted."*

"Exhausted for what? I apologize Luscious, but we're still a little out of it. Would it be too much trouble for you to fill us in a bit more?" Reine asked.

*"Once you get some sufficient rest I'll fill you two in."*

"Thanks Luscious..." Reine replied.

Luscious smiled while he shut off his link to the two pilots that were making their way in. If he wasn't a man who mastered the realm of shadows he might not have noticed his political advisor crawling up behind him.

"Is everything ready for the address?" He spoke, his voice direct and stern, his body solid and free from movement.

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“Yes Mr. President. Still, I don’t see why you’re making another address to the people of Earth. They already know what you’re doing here, the plan to once again take hold of Mars.”

“Heh, they know nothing.”

“Sir?”

“The sins have transpired long enough, the pieces are in place and the real battle begins now my friend. I’m sorry but you’re services are no longer required.”

“Mr. President? What are you saying?”

Slowly did Luscious’ body turn around, a sudden maelstrom of fear stirred inside the advisor’s frail body and rightfully so. Within an instant Luscious’ right hand firmly gripped around the slender neck of the elderly man. Unable to breath properly he squirmed like a dying insect.

“Lus... \*heave\*cious... why? \*heave\*”

“Why? We’re stuck in an endless purgatory that will contain to rotate unless someone gains enough power to break free. I am that person.” Luscious snickered.

“\*cough\*... the hell, you’re \*cough\* \*cough\*” The frail bones in his neck began to buckle as Luscious’ right arm began to rise into the air. Kicking his legs in all directions the advisor tried to break free but it was no use, Luscious was simply much to strong.

“Heh, you’ve heard of Déjà vu. Most brush it off as a mere coincidence, a trick of the subconscious. That’s why no one’s ever realized it. But haven’t you ever wonder why we feel like we’ve done a certain even before?”

“\*cough\* \*cough\*”

“It’s because we have done it before. No one completely knows what Purgatory is. Most believe that it is the time spent in between your death and your judgment. I know exactly what it is, Purgatory is the time where every man, woman and child is given the chance to atone for their sins before their judgment is handed out. Most believe that an angel replays a person’s life so they can see their sins but that isn’t entirely true. We relive our lives; we are reborn into a Purgatory where we go through the number of years we lived like a reoccurring play. That is this world; we are all stuck in a Purgatory. That is where Déjà vu comes in my friend; moments of Déjà vu are scenes from our previous life where our soul is screaming to change the outcome. Most people disregard the moment, and therein lies the problem. Our soul knows when are most tragic sins are going to happen, so uses this sixth sense to warn us, to prepare us for certain trials ahead so that maybe we can choose a different path and redeem ourselves in the eye of God. I’ve been appearing in this play for far too long, it’s time for me to break out of it. The sins of man will be judged by me. This will be the final Tribulation.” Luscious replied.

His advisor had passed on midway in Luscious’ speech from lack of oxygen. Tossing the lifeless body aside Luscious made his way to the podium and the ocean of cameras that awaited him. UGE soldiers held the camera high as their commander and chief took the stage looking as sophisticated as always. Luscious smiled just before taking a sip of the glass of wine sitting on the edge of the wooden podium. His smile turned to a smirk once he saw the lights on the camera’s turn to green; once again he was on every television screen in both worlds.

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“How much longer till we get there? I really need to get my beauty sleep.” Mario exclaimed.

“Almost, I’d say about another 40 minutes.” Gail replied.

Stephen shrugged his shoulders; something suddenly grabbed his attention along with Adam’s. Both looked up at the ceiling of main lobby in the transport to see the 35 inch plasma screen and Luscious’ face plastered on.

“Another address? But it’s far too soon...” Stephen mumbled.

“Has that ever stopped him before?” Adam replied.

“No, but still...”

“What’s going on?” Ashley interrupted.

“Luscious Malum is about to make another speech.” Stephen remarked.

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*“As most of you are aware the UGE has once again moved to the outer regions of space. But what you all are not sure of is what we’re going to be doing. Some believe that we’re on a campaign to completely rid humanity of the plague that is Red Fury, and that we’re going to be taking hold of our crimson sister. Some are probably wondering if there’s going to be another war. Today I will answer this question.”*

“What the hell is he getting at?” Mario questioned.

“Just listen for once.” Heather butted in.

*“There will be no war. Red Fury has been completely wiped out, and the at one time South Western Territory has been revealed. Most are unaware of this happening, but the barrier that once stood no longer stands. What was behind it was a crystalline city filled with even more compelling questions. I will say right here, right now that all humans have sinned in one form or another. I will also state that I will be personally carrying out God’s judgment. All humans are accountable; no one is free from this judgment.”*

Every UGE soldier held their bodies still, holding in the shock from their leader’s statement. Not completely sure how to react they continued to hold the cameras straight. Luscious paused, knowing full well that every one on both Earth and Mars was confused, even doubting him.

*“The world we live in today is nothing more than a laughable facade. A form of Purgatory where we continue to live in our sins hoping, reaching to gain entry to Heaven. God is laughing at us, watching as we suffer in the sins of our past in which he forces us to relive. It’s a never ending cycle of pain and suffering and no matter how much we try to escape it we are bound to this world. I will break free of this, I have been stuck for far too long, I have seen too many things that no person should ever have to bare witness to. Heh...but I’m getting too philosophical and am missing the point of this address. I am speaking with you all now so that you understand full well what is going to happen in the coming days. I feel 7 years of peace is far too long, I will blare the trumpets in 7 days. Genesis has been so kind to supply me with a massive army of soldiers who are ready to die. The city in Mundus that has been hidden was a Genesis facility for raising perfect soldiers in preparation for this day, this day of Tribulation. You should all be aware of the history that surrounds Prometheus, that man; Nathan Leviticus was ready to use its massive cannon to destroy every TA and EAP facility in space in one swoop. I will use this cannon, this Rapture will annihilate life on both Earth and Mars. I will strike every major city, major ocean causing severe tempests that will cause the Earth to grow unstable. And in a short amount of time life will fade, I will force us out of this cycle of Purgatorial hell.”*

“He’s fucking insane...he’s seriously fucking insane!” Mario screamed.

Adam took a deep breath while he wrapped his arms around Sharon who was already clutching onto him tightly.

“Stephen...” Adam mumbled.

“I know...we’ll stop him.”

“He made one fatal mistake.” Gail replied from behind.

“Huh? What’s that?” Ashley asked.

“He gave us 7 days. We should be able to finish this in 4.” Gail sarcastically replied.

“Heh, yeah...” Adam mumbled.

Chaos up roared all over Earth and Mars, no one knew exactly how to handle the current situation. In an instant the man most people admired had become the one they detested. Former soldiers from both the TA and the EAP felt the desire to jump into battle, now finding true honor in the words Gail had spoke months ago. A renewed faith swept all nations, religions mattered little, and every person on both worlds ended up praying to their respected deities. Not knowing anything more than that they had 7 days before Luscious began his campaign.

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Luscious smirked as the camera's faded, he watched silently as his UGE soldiers struggled with their emotions. Their hands quivering in the form of fists, their teeth grinding roughly, they wanted no part of what Luscious was planning.

"I assume you all are wondering how you're going to take me out in order to save the ones you love. I hope you understand that I knew I would be questioned by my own soldiers. So naturally I came prepared. Those of you, who make it out of this alive, by all means try to take my life." Luscious muttered with an essence of arrogance and bitterness.

Suddenly the doors behind the cluster of soldiers began to open revealing hundreds more soldiers, each wearing a stamped number on the side of their cheek. Each number directly related to the time in which they were birthed in the city of Genesis' Eden.

"These are the soldiers who have been bred for this battle. This is their time, and if you run into a mirror image of you don't be frightened. You don't have time to deal with emotions such as confusion and fear if you wish to survive and take my life." Luscious replied.

Every UGE soldier raised their rifles aiming straight ahead, taking their time to get a good shot. The marked soldiers, wearing ivory uniforms wasted no time and instantly jumped into the fray firing their weapons. Bullets streamed through the room, thunderous booms echoed off the hollow walls only to be quieted by the screams of men and women. Bullets pierced through the flesh of the UGE soldiers constantly as their bodies fell to the ground.

Luscious smiled as he exited the room, he felt no desire to watch everything unfold; he already knew his clones would be victorious. It was an eerie feeling, the feeling of your dreams finally unfolding after such a long time.

"We've arrived." Gail mentioned.

"Finally..." Mario muttered.

"Let's make this quick. If we're going to confront Luscious we're going to need all the firepower we can get." Adam replied.

"Yeah." Sharon nodded as she looked up to his warm comforting smirk. "You seem eager."

"Yeah."

"Why's that?"

"Heh, I've seen my future, my destiny. It's to stop him." Adam replied, smirking.

### **Chapter Forty-Four: Undying Sins**

It was her first actual mission; there were little words to express the emotions traveling through one's body during this time. She wasn't nervous, nor truly excited, merely content. Knowing the nature of the mission she was aware that the threat level was low, and being accompanied by some of the most skilled MF pilots helped a lot. It had been decided before each pilot left the bowels of the transport that Heather and herself would focus on a look out position. They would guard the outer regions of the abandoned TA facility while the others entered the facility and dealt with the dangers inside.

"You ready?" Heather asked.

Sharon turned to the side smiling, placing her hands around the throttles she began to think back to the few days of training she got in with Adam. They never went into much detail, just stayed dealing with the basics but she felt that was all she needed. Her breathing was controlled and as long as she kept her composure she wouldn't have to worry about fogging up her clear visor.

"Yeah, I'm ready." Sharon replied. Blue Angel was stationed in front of Impetus so she had to wait before launching. Her eyes watched inertly as the back thrusters of the frame lit up. Light expanded outwards as the flames strengthened, the hanger became filled with the subtle vibrations reverberating from the back thrusters.

"Heather." Adam spoke.

"Yeah?"

"Take care of Sharon ok?"

"I will."

"Thanks."

"Heh, Heather Pertencia, Blue Angel heading out!"

Blue Angel soared through the debris encasing the area around the broken down facility. By this time her and Sharon were the only two pilots who remained in the transport, everyone else had moved on

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ahead. Sharon's fingers twisted around the throttles, her feet pivoted along the edges of the accelerators; patiently she waited for the light to turn green. Her eyes widened as the crimson bulb changed colors.

"Sharon Amare, Impetus launching."

The pink and silver frame lunged forward, the g-forces pushing her body into the comforts of her chair. Cringing at the sudden increase in pressure she moved forward, Impetus shot out from the transport lighting up the charcoal abyss. It only took a few seconds for her body to become accustomed to the pressures being exerted, once she found her comfort zone she began to breathe regularly.

"You ok?" Heather asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Good, they already headed into the facility. Our job is just to watch the entrance to make sure no one else tries to get in. For the most part it'll be boring, but this will give you time to get used to operating your frame in space." Heather replied.

"Yeah..."

*"Hey you two, I'll be keeping you updated on the current situation. So make sure to have this line clear."* Ashley's static educed voice mentioned.

"Right. How are they doing so far?" Sharon asked.

*"Fine, they've already made it half way into the facility. So far everything looks to be clear. And I've already performed a thorough scan of the area and haven't detected any abnormal heat sources. So you two will be sight seeing for a while."*

"I'd rather be sight seeing than get overwhelmed. I'm still tired from the long trip here." Heather stated.

*"Well if everything goes according to plan than this shouldn't take too long."*

"Section B-2 on the map, clear." Mario exclaimed.

Anima floated quietly through the darkened corridors, dents and cracks lined the silver coated walls. The stench of death plagued the area he was ordered to inspect, lifeless bodies floated in awkward positions through the atmosphere. Staircases and columns were scattered amongst the metallic rubble, the sight itself was grotesque. He couldn't even fathom what took place here and why. He wasn't even aware of this facility's existence when he was stationed with the TA. Not knowing of it, and then suddenly finding the remains of what appeared to be an intense battle was nearly baffling. He was a man who found light in nearly every situation, but this time he could do nothing but cover his mouth from the horror.

"Just what the hell happened here?" Anima touched down in what appeared to be a hanger.

Burned clumps of rusted metal crushed smaller mechanical machines, as the frame moved forward it had to maneuver around remnants from what appeared to be the OZ production model. The familiar head design, the singular crimson horn attached to the front of the silver head was found only a few meters to his side. Wires outstretched from the connecting rods of the unit, blood stained tiles along with human limbs ripped straight from the torso lingered as well.

*"Section A-4, clear."* Stephen stated.

"I don't see us running into any trouble here man..." Mario mentioned.

*"I agree. I'm finding nothing more than remains from MFs. How bout you?"*

"Same...along with the dead bodies of numerous soldiers. What do you think happened here? An EAP raid maybe?"

*"It's possible, but I don't think it makes much of a difference now. We need to hurry this up."*

*Ashley, you said that every Section corridor leads straight to the loading dock correct? Or do we have to back track to another route?"*

"It should be fine. Let me double check. This shouldn't take long." Ashley replied. Turning away from her communication station she pushed herself towards the digital map towards her right side. Her cerulean eyes scanning through the green colored digital rendering of the facility infrastructure.

"Yeah, each of you follow each section corridor south. You'll each end up in the same room just before entering the loading dock." Ashley stated.



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*"Thanks. How's things outside? Any trouble?" Stephen inquired.*

"No things are quiet. I think with the commotion Luscious started everyone's attention is on the UGE. For now we should be fine."

*"Yeah..."* Turning his attention to his team Stephen relayed the message. *"We can't waste time searching the facility anymore. Hurry up and head south. We have to secure the package"*

Adam listened to his brother speaking but still couldn't help himself from looking around even more. Blue Dragon continued to move slowly through the slender corridor, nothing appeared to be out of order aside from the burn marks and bullet holes etched into the composition of the walls. All seemed quiet as the blue frame pushed forward. Suddenly his eyes moved to the side, a blinking dot abruptly appeared on his radar.

"Section C-5, not clear. There's some movement. Not too sure what it is, checking it out." Adam replied.

*"Understood. Keep us informed."* Stephen replied.

*"Don't get killed. It's too early for your death."* Mario casually jested.

*"Thanks...I guess."*

Blue Dragon stopped moving as the gears turned the upper torso to face the closed room. Docking both rifles on the sides the frame's right hand reached forward towards the control panel, Adam felt it was necessary to try to get in the civil way. The display simply rejected any combination of passwords that he remembered from his days as a TA soldier.

"Oh well, I tried." Adam muttered. Just as Blue Dragon reached for its energy rifle the inside radar began to roar loudly. "What the hell?" Quickly Adam looked back to see the silver tint of the wall begin to glow with a fiery crimson light. "Shit, it is a frame." With quick reflexes he pulled on the throttles while increasing the output of energy to the thrusters. Just as the intensified beam of energy pierced through the wall Blue Dragon dashed to the right narrowly avoiding the beam. Smoke ruptured through the area blinding Adam's vision forcing him to switch to night vision mode.

"Who the hell are you!?" A voice beckoned from the midst of the smog.

"I'm from Orbis, who the hell are you?" Adam screamed back.

"I...I don't know!!" The voice yelled back.

As the smoke began to dissipate Adam noticed the flickering beacon of cerulean light that emanated from the top of the unknown frame. A sudden feeling of chills rushed down the inner workings of his spine, it was a feeling of familiarity along, one he wasn't completely able to identify. Once again the unknown frame began to fire with out warning or hesitation. Beams of bright blue energy cut through the air of the narrow hallway. Adam knew he didn't have much choice but to engage, the hallway was much to closed off to start dodging. He'd end up crashing into walls only to create an even bigger opening for his enemy to take advantage of. Blue Dragon's left arm rose and ignited the energy shield just in time to block the oncoming attacks.

"Ashley, I need a quick report of my surroundings. Is anything behind these walls or is it simply space that waits on the other side?"

*"Space...sorry, but Section C is the bottom of the facility. Why?"*

"Because I'm currently engaging an unknown unit and I need room to maneuver. Does this facility have any safety measures?"

*"Safety measure? Like what?"*

*"\*err\*...Ashley I don't have time to get into detail. Just tell me anything you think would be useful."* Adam screamed while he kept Blue Dragon's left arm raised. Beams of energy continued to be deflected off the fused concentration of energy surrounding the frame's arm.

*"Umm...got it! In case of a rupture to the infrastructure each section is equipped with a fail safe. Above you there are slits where lead cased walls will collapse in order to seal off any section with a tear."*

"Heh, so I can open this can and the rest of the facility will be fine then?"

*"More or less."*

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“Good enough for me.” Adam replied.

*“What the hell?! Adam don’t do anything reckless!”*

“Too late.” Adam replied.

The small side thrusters ignited causing Blue Dragon’s torso to abruptly turn 180 degrees. As the blue frame now faced the wall both thigh cannons lifted and fired. Suddenly the explosion caused the wall to burst open causing a tremendous vacuum to start sucking up the air and everything around into space. Blue Dragon ignited its back thrusters and flew out of the hole once again entering the outer region of space. It didn’t take long for the facility to seal off the area, just before the final walls came down the unknown frame burst out into space as well.

“You won’t escape me!” The enemy yelled.

Adam froze from shock; the frame was no longer concealed by the trickery of the smoke. The frame was a dull silver middleweight, its weaponry matched that of Blue Dragon as if it were a mirror image. The only difference was the wing pattern, instead of eight orbital weapons there were 10. Blue Dragon lingered, its left arm fell to the side the moment Adam let go of the throttles.

“What the hell is this...”

“Are you the one I’ve been waiting for?!” The enemy screamed.

In a series of agile movements the silver frame dashed to Adam’s left and continued to speed forward. Holding two beam rifles upwards the frame began to fire.

“Huh...it’s coming from my left...” Adam mumbled. Finding the drive to wake from his momentary slumber he dodged the oncoming attacks. As the machine flew past Blue Dragon turned around and began to fire its own rifles. To Adam’s surprise the enemy frame docked its rifles in order to ignite its energy sabers and in a radical display of swordplay began to swat each beam away.

“I know these moves...” Adam softly mumbled, the moves his enemy was displaying were moves he used often, especially during the first Azure Cup. “Just who the hell are you?!” Adam screamed.

*“Stephen, Mario just to give you an update. Adam is currently engaging an unknown enemy. He has taken his battle to space, so it’s up to you two to get the package and get out of there.”*

“I see, thanks Ashley.” Stephen replied.

Alpha was the first frame to make it to the enlarged room that separated the loading dock from the rest of the facility. It too was an ocean of memories for those who worked there, Stephen expected the room to be in shambles, but not like what he saw. Dozens of destroyed OZ production models covered the ground, severed limbs along with massive gashes in the floor, walls and torsos of the machines. He didn’t notice it earlier, probably because the frame was using some form of stealth technology but he noticed it now. A medium height frame standing amongst the destroyed frames, the frame held onto what appeared to be two energy boomerangs in its hands. The dark silhouette remained motionless as if it was waiting, stalking its prey.

“I didn’t expect there to be only one form of opposition.” Stephen mentioned.

“Of course not. You’re the former great Crimson Knight; of course you’d have a better understanding of the situation than anyone else.”

“I see. That frame of yours, it’s modeled after my own.” Stephen replied.

“I can tell. You have no chance of passing me, I am aware of all of your maneuvers.” The voice replied.

“If you are what I think you are, then I’m not too concerned.”

“Heh, calm and collected. I wonder why I never found myself losing my composure in the heat of battle.”

“But the fact is, you’re incomplete. You can’t possibly beat me; I’ve grown since your completion.”

“Heheh, you know quite a lot there.”

“I tend to make it my business to know things.” Stephen mumbled.

“Well then, I’d say we’ve wasted enough time with useless banter.”

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The silver frame before him burst forward with an explosion of flames. At the moment of ignition two slender jet like wings extended outwards only to confirm Stephen's own suspicions. Alpha headed out as well, the crimson frame strafed to the right just as its left hand reached for the energy boomerang attached to the right shoulder.

"Too slow!" His opponent screamed. The silver frame in mid flight threw both boomerangs towards Alpha. Stephen cringed, shocked by the speed of the two weapons quickly turned the torso to the side. As the crimson frame dodged the two weapons it launched an attack of its own. During the spin in the air Alpha tossed its own energy boomerang while firing the two beam cannons attached to its jet pack. Not forgetting about the two weapons that were now behind Stephen grabbed his dual energy saber and quickly slashed through the air. The dual beams of energy tore through the metallic weapons that had approached causing two simultaneous explosions to riddle the air. Both frames touched back down to the ground just as the silver frame destroyed the boomerang that was sent his way.

"Not bad."

"Heh, Ashley, check on Mario. There's probably one more enemy down here. I'm currently engaged." Stephen mumbled.

*"Understood....be careful."*

"Ashley what's the current situation?" Gail asked.

Ashley turned around to face the silver haired man who sat at the forefront of the bridge.

"It seems there were enemies waiting for us to get here. Right now both Adam and Stephen are engaging them. It is more than likely that there is one more waiting to attack Mario. I'm going to send Heather and Sharon in there as backup." Ashley replied.

"Damn, it can't be helped. What about Chris and Leo?" Gail asked.

"You sent them to do recon outside the facility. They're on their way back, but I'm not sure if we have enough time to wait for them to get here." Ashley mentioned.

*"\*sigh\*....it was a trap then."* Gail muttered.

"More than likely yeah. But I have more than enough confidence in those two." Ashley replied.

Anima stopped just before the corridor ended, Mario's radar violently beeping. He chuckled under his breath, he was aware that both Adam and Stephen were engaging enemies and that I was only a matter of time before he met his own.

"It's about time. I was getting kind of bored." Mario mumbled.

He watched as the gate began to rise revealing something even he was completely prepared to deal with. Before the heavily armored slab of metal completely rose a metallic whip surged through the air heading straight towards Anima. Luckily to his quick reflexes Mario was able to dodge the attack. Anima's boosters lifted the lighter frame into the air at a big enough slant to avoid the attack. Mario watched closely as the electrically charged whip retracted back into the hand of the frame behind the other side.

"This is definitely a surprise. I didn't expect you to avoid that attack."

*"\*grr\* who are you?!"* Mario yelled.

"I'm not entirely sure. All I know is that I was sent here to stop you."

"I see, hehe, it's unfortunate that you don't know us very well." Mario snickered.

"Oooohhh, hehe. It will be you who see how little you know. I know more about you than you think."

"We'll see!" Mario screamed.

Anima violently burst forward, the frame twisted around the debris that was in its path. The gate finally lifted completely revealing his opponent in its full golden glory. Anima's right arm arched backwards only to snap forward sending out its whip. The golden frame before him gracefully swayed to the right, the whip burned through the floor panel as it missed.

"Swiftly son of a bitch!"

"Heh, you're too slow Mario."

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“What?!” To his surprise his opposing frame was now floating on his side. “Shit.” He knew what was coming; his frame was completely exposed; only an idiot wouldn’t take advantage of the opening he gave. The gold frame’s right leg swung forward colliding with the left arm of Animus. Mario managed to block the brunt of the attack but still was unable to stop it entirely. The force of the attack still was powerful enough to send Anima flying forward. The gold frame abrasively crashed into the pile of destroyed OZ production frames outside of the corridor.

Stephen, in mid flight turned as Anima entered the area.

“Mario!” Stephen screamed.

Alpha for an instant took its eye of its own silver opponent, a mistake he normally would never make. The silver frame dashed to the side of Alpha while wielding its dual energy saber. Stephen’s eyes widened as he watched the frame swing its weapon. Just as the beams neared the crimson frame a beam of positron energy surged in between the two frames forcing them both to draw distance from one another.

Blue Angel stood at the base of the floor, its positron cannon searing with darkened smoke from the tip.

“I swear, you guys can’t go anywhere with out me.” Heather smirked.

“Thanks, where’s Sharon?” Stephen remarked.

“I left her outside to help Adam. It seems there were only 3 heat signatures in this facility so while you two keep them busy I can get to the package.”

“I see, is there any reason Ashley was unable to detect them earlier?”

While Alpha and its silver counterpart continued to dance in the air Heather began to make way towards the loading dock.

“Well the problem was that each signature resembles Alpha’s, Blue Dragon’s, and Anima’s. So any time one showed up she figured it was one of you guys. There’s also an ECM machine somewhere within the facility that has been disrupting all of her detecting machines.” Heather replied.

“I see...hurry and get to the Iron Fist then. I’ll try and finish this quickly.” Stephen replied.

“Adam!” Sharon’s voice exclaimed loudly as Impetus flew towards the blue frame.

Adam turned for a brief second only to be bombarded with beams of energy. Clusters of smoke flourished around the frame completely engulfing it completely.

“Stay back! Only I can deal with this!” Adam screamed.

“Hehe...you have no chance against me.”

Blue Dragon’s wings extended abruptly causing the smoke to dissipate as each orbital wing launched. The silver frame backed away from Blue Dragon and began perform agile maneuvers in order to avoid the wasps that were following.

“What’s going on....” Sharon yelled.

“This guy....he’s....”

“Adam?”

“He’s my clone....”

**Chapter Forty-Five: Delve into Darkness**

Adam Novus was a man filled with conflicting desires and distorted presumptions about the world. What he saw in front of him was nothing short than an abomination. He had encountered the sins of Genesis before, but none of them stirred up the emotions he was feeling now. This sin in front of him represented everything he hated about Genesis; it was a physical representation of the shadows lurking deep within his soul. This man was a clone, created from his own DNA. But this person wasn't exactly like him, his method of fighting was different, it had yet to mature. After fighting with this frame which was more or less a mirror image of Blue Dragon Adam came to realize the brash fighting style his clone was using, was the same way he fought during the Azure Cup; the first one.

"I figured you out. You can't defeat me." Adam muttered. Blue Dragon suddenly took a more direct approach and began to zoom forward. Each orbital pod was already out in space taking every available shot they could find. The silver frame flew in eloquent patterns, performing barrel rolls along with back flips in order to avoid the cerulean beams being sent its way.

Inside the cockpit the pilot smirked at Adam's sudden explosive energy. He knew he was nothing more than a broken image of Adam Novus, to him Adam was nothing more than an obstacle to overcome in order to become worthy of life. Remembering nothing from his past other than the bright lights, and constant painful experiments he had nothing to lose but everything to gain.

"What do you know...." The clone spoke. For the first time during the encounter there was a stern, condescending tone attached to the words.

"..." Not sure how to respond Adam continued forward. Cringing at the amount of energy being drained from the length of the orbits being out on their own he called them back. As each wing snapped back into place the blue frame roared as both beam rifles fired. Each recoil educated shot forced each arm back a few feet.

"I have a name! I am the hope of my people! My name is Hope!" Hope screamed loudly, his adrenaline feeding into the operating system of his frame.

The silver frame lunged forward holding an energy saber in each hand, the bright crimson flames fueling its approach. Adam, noticing the sudden change in this clone's behavior knew he had to change his own approach once again. Just before the silver frame began its descent onto Blue Dragon Adam equipped his own sabers in order to counter attack.

Sharon watched in the distance, the disturbing feeling of helplessness emanating around her demeanor. Impetus, which was a frame designed to assist Adam's was doing nothing more than floating, lingering as a spectator. Her fingers tightly clenching she fought within herself to hold the tears from pouring.

"Why.....why can't I do anything?!" She screamed. Suddenly a blinding flash of cerulean energy fulminated amongst the darkness. Sparks of electricity fluttered around the area in between Blue Dragon and the silver frame, with all four beams of energy rubbing against one another it caused a severe amount of electrical friction to be created. Sharon leaned forward staring at the display of power before her. She reflected on the words Adam spoke a few minutes earlier;

*"This man....is my clone..."*

It only served to infuriate her more knowing that Genesis had continued to go to the depths that they went to, to create monstrosities, sins against God. She couldn't help but feel pity for any person who

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was created artificially for the means of pursuing someone else's dream; they were souls born without the divine right of free will.

"I could never walk such a path..." Sharon mumbled to herself.

"You think you know what pain is? You can't imagine what I am suffering through!" Hope's voice was all Adam heard through out his cockpit.

"You're..."

"I am a sin of nature! I am nothing more than a compilation of your DNA, your memories, and data extracted from the first Azure Cup! Nothing I am is unique! It's all a copy!!"

"I..." Adam didn't know what to say, how could he? To be confronted by a living being that was created just to serve, to be alive without a unique purpose, a unique destiny would be worse than death.

"If I defeat you...no, if I kill you here and now....THEN I'LL BE UNIQUE!!!!" Hope's anger rose with each passing moment. Adam noticed the sudden increase in his rage; Blue Dragon slowly began to be pushed back by the strength the silver frame exerted. Adam didn't realize the extent of the data extraction from the Azure Cup until now.

"He's..." Adam mumbled.

*Angel System Engaged.*

Hope began to smirk as the feminine computer voice echoed those three words. With the system engaged Hope wasted no time pursuing Blue Dragon.

"If you truly feel that I can not defeat you then this should be child's play." Hope blared.

"\*gah\* Shit, he's engaged the Angel System..." Adam's eyes widened as he watched all 10 orbital wings dismounted from their wing binders. Before he could even react the silver frame had already sped around ending up behind. "Quick little bastard aren't you." Adam replied.

Adam's body was thrown forward once he abruptly forced Blue Dragon to lunge in order to evade the attack that he knew was coming. Hope was Adam, he was a younger version of himself, and knowing this gave Adam some form of an advantage. Even if it was a slight one, it was nonetheless an advantage. Hope grinned even though his frame's cross slash was avoided. Suddenly Adam found himself surrounded by the 10 orbital weapons all circling his position.

"Can't be avoided I guess..."

*Angel System Engaged.*

The orbital wings weren't much of a threat, but they were never meant to be; they were more of a distraction. Adam focused on the silver machine in front of him, all he had to do was defeat his clone and move on. Time was not a luxury he had; Luscious gave the world 7 days before he would carry out his plan. He couldn't afford to waste time here.

Blue Dragon's azure wings erupted out from the wing binders with their sights set on the 10 that Hope released. He wasn't sure if his plan would work, but at the moment it was all he had. In the corner of his eye he saw Impetus just floating. Having Sharon help would have been a smart move on his part, it would ensure that the battle would end quickly, but he couldn't help but feel that she wasn't ready yet. Even though it was a clone, he lost her once; it was a memory that he would never be able to get rid of for as long as he lived.

Both frames were on the move once again, Blue Dragon moved towards the silver frame holding both energy sabers at its side. Each and every gear and joint preparing for the strike that Adam was set on using. Unlike his previous self, the younger version of him that participated in the Azure Cup he planned ahead. Saw the motions in his mind and set up various scenarios in order to land an attack. He was much smarter than he used to be; no longer would he fly in offensive maneuvers blaring. That is the advantage he found in fighting against himself, this Hope was based on an inexperienced pilot, no matter the skill level, Hope could not win.

"Head on? Heh, that won't work on me!" Hope yelled. "Wyvern is much more agile than your frame!" Pulling back on the throttles along with lifting off the throttles Hope put a stop to Wyvern's movements. Adam's eyes widened as the two thigh cannons on Wyvern lifted. Spheres of brightly burning energy collected around the outer regions of the barrel, it would be only a few seconds before

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Hope would fire. Confident over his decision Adam kept moving forward, Blue Dragon closing the gap between the two frames with both searing beams of energy flickering at its side.

Just as the two plasma cannons unleashed the terrifying energy Blue Dragon's true speed was displayed. In a flash of massive energetic flames the frame nearly vanished from sight. Hope was shocked to see such a maneuver, he then began to chuckle. He too knew Adam well, although there might have been some changes in his strategies in the end he was predictable in Hope's mind.

"I may not be Stephen, but I can tell you're going to come up on my left!" Hope yelled. With a jerk of the controls Hope pulled Wyvern to the side in order to catch Adam off guard. "What the hell?!" Confused at finding nothing more than the starry back drop he realized the difference between the two.

Blue Dragon appeared on Wyvern's right side, smirking Adam attacked. Swinging both the right and left arm upwards he connected with his attack. Both beams of energy pierced through the silver armor. The sound of crackling energy and melting metal screeched through Hope's mind while he was shaken from the tremors being sent through the frame. As the right energy saber slashed upwards it dismembered the right side of slate tinted set of wing binders while the left energy saber tore through the right thigh cannon and right arm joint. Wires vibrantly danced from the severe gashes on the points of impact, the singed arm was tossed aside to float forever through the weightless canvas. Adam's eyes widened as the main booster pack on Wyvern lit up causing a trail of flames to force the blue frame away. Heaving and panting Hope turned around, ignoring all of the warning signs and beeping he focused solely on his one true obstacle.

"I... \*huff\* can't lose... \*huff\*" Exasperated from the recent events he began to lose his cool. His vision quivered, sweat hastily ran down the tips of his hair and skin. "I WON'T LOSE!"

Adam sighed; he knew it was the end now. Remembering how he used to get frustrated at the drop of a hat, and how he would blindly attack his opponent; Hope was no longer much of a threat. 10 explosions lit up the abyss from behind Hope; Adam was the only one who took notice. When Hope first engaged the Angel System Adam had his doubts about how effective it would be. It seemed as if his first few thoughts were correct; the Angel System in Wyvern was a hacked version, it wasn't as efficient as the original. The 8 azure wings flew through the rings of smoke heading straight towards Wyvern.

"It's over... Hope. You can't beat me." Adam replied.

"NO! I can't lose! My existence is meaningless with you alive!"

"... You need to find your own path."

"I found the path to take. Unfortunately I can't go there as long as you're alive!" Hope screamed, still blinded by his anger he set off. With one arm remaining Wyvern dashed forward, no longer was there any form of form in his attacks, no grace, no meaning to his movements; all there was, was rage. Suddenly the orbital wings traced Hope's movements and quickly caught up. Even though he was aware of the azure weapons he ignored them, moving straight towards his main objective. Each orbit fired beams of energy creating a tempest of energy, all of which exploded upon contact with Wyvern's dull silver armor. Each explosion riddled the frame, causing it to lose balance, but his determination never faltered. Hope knew what he was after and refused to lose sight of it.

"I'm sorry...but, you are the one who's in the way." Adam replied.

Blue Dragon suddenly rushed forward, the speed of the frame still amazed Sharon as she only saw it from its first position and then again after it passed Wyvern. As the time slowed down for Hope flickers of fire and electricity began to emanate around the mid section of the silver frame's torso as well as inside the cockpit.

"Heh... can't be too surprised... I mean, after all... I'm just a copy..." His final words before the generator inside Wyvern melted down causing a chain reaction of explosions. Hope's eyes shut slowly as the control panels inside blew up sending shards of plastic and metal into his flesh. Blood spurt out into the small compartment; there were no screams, only the horrific sound of simmering flames and crunching metal were all that could be heard as the frame crumbled. Adam sat watching, each orbital weapon docked back into the wing binders while he watched, filled with discontent. Not sure if he was happy to have taken a life, regardless of its birth, Hope was still a person.

"How much longer can this go on..."

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“Adam!” Sharon blurted from behind. He turned slightly to watch as Impetus made its way towards Blue Dragon. It didn’t take long for Sharon’s face to brighten up Adam’s cockpit.

“Hey...” Adam replied, his voice soaked with remorse, he couldn’t look Sharon back in the eyes. Instead he glanced away, staring at the bottom right hand corner of his control panel.

“Are you ok?”

“I’m fine.”

“Listen...about...”

“Don’t worry about it. It’s nothing; he’s better off this way. He would have led a life of persecution, trying to find acceptance in this world filled with deception.”

“Adam...”

“Come on, we still have a mission to complete.”

Blue Dragon turned back towards the facility and took off. Sharon sat back in her cockpit sighing, she didn’t feel like pushing the issue and merely nodded and followed suit.

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Stephen sighed as he watched the silver incarnation of his own frame continue to be engulfed by the flames. The battle didn’t last long; he had grown a tremendous amount since his clone’s artificial birth. He knew every maneuver his clone would perform, he had it all down to a simple science, and in the end he came out on top. Mario managed to out perform his clone as well; it just took a lot longer than he was willing to admit. Still, weary and out of breath both Mario and Stephen stood before the wall separating them from their so-called package.

“How...*\*huff\** are we supposed *\*huff\** to get in there?” Mario questioned.

“Who knows...I’ve tried every TA activation code in my library and nothing is working.” Heather mentioned.

“Ashley, how bout hacking into the system?” Stephen asked.

*“I can try. It’ll take a few minutes though.”*

“That’s fine...how’s Adam doing?” Stephen continued on.

*“He’s fine; he defeated his enemy a few moments ago and is on his way here. Also, both Chris and Leo have returned from their recon. They found nothing.”*

“Come on Ash, hurry it up.” Mario exclaimed.

*“Shut it, my superior hacking skills take time alright.”*

“Superior...hahahahaha. You’re such a freakin nerd.” Mario always managed to find the right opportunity to come up with a few laughs even if they were out of place.

*“Heh, asshole....got it. This should take a few seconds for it to register but the gate should be opening soon. Go ahead say it, I’m a genius.”*

“Thanks Ashley. You’re not detecting any heat signatures right?” Stephen asked.

*“No, you should be fine from here on out.”*

“Good...”

It happened just as Ashley said it would, the gate slowly began to slid open. As the rumbling continued they all bore witness to the unveiling of what many soldier would call the “greatest battle cruiser ever created.” It was true that the Iron Fist had been through many difficult battles and often came out on top without a single scratch which was a true testament since its commanding officer was known to take many risks in the name of victory. The crew had long since abandoned the ship so getting the ship out of the bay and back to Orbis was going to be a task in it of itself, but luckily the ship’s A.I. piloting and stabilizing systems were top of the line. After the snail like movements of the gates the bulbs, one by one began to flicker until finally turning on completely.

“*\*Phew\** Impressive statistics.” Mario stated as he read through the Iron Fist’s technical data.

Iron Fist:



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*Equipped with 2 deep space class Apollo Nuclear Fusion reactors. Able to reach top speed in only 2 minutes. Constructed of lunar alloy, the hull is covered in 1 to 2 meter thick battle ship grade armor. It also boasts a magnetic field generator installed on top of the command bridge. The generator can create an intense field wherever the ship may get hit, to block out any energy based weapon.*

*Armed with 4 Super Mega Particle beam cannons, three facing forward and one aft, each with rated at 165mm Energy shell, it is capable of engaging and destroying even Heavy Battle Cruisers and Dreadnaughts. Across its hull it has a total of 16x heavy laser cannons at 95mm Energy shell, 6 high-speed 52 mm machine-guns. As for guided weapons it carries 10 missile silos, each capable of launching 12 missiles at once and 2 24 barrel high maneuverability missile launchers designed to intercept and destroy high speed targets be it other missiles or MF, or Fighters.*

“Let’s get to work then.” Stephen stated.

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“It seems that they’ve beaten them. How disappointing.” Luscious spoke softly while Lucian listened on the other end of the communications line.

*“Yeah, at this rate they’ll have recovered the Iron Fist. With that ship Orbis will become an even bigger threat.”*

“I’m not too concerned about it Lucian. I have the H-3 and H-4 in my possession. It is those two and those two alone who have the power to change fate. How are things going on Mars?”

*“Well, there are only 3 remaining Night Stalkers, with the appearance of Eden there is definitely a stir amongst the people on Mars. Plus there’s the declaration which you made earlier. People are struggling with the end.”*

“I see. We need to make the Night Stalkers our main priority. Even though there are only 3 of them left, they do pose a threat. Sloth turned on me on Earth; I wouldn’t be surprised if the remaining 3 are thinking about doing the same. It would be truly troublesome if they joined up with Orbis.”

*“I agree Luscious. What should I do about them? Do you want me to persuade Gail into taking them out?”*

“It would seem that would be our best bet. With any luck Orbis can take some heavy losses in the battle.”

*“Understood Luscious. I’ll make the Night Stalkers Orbis’ priority. I assume that everything is well with the UGE.”*

“Yeah, as much as they hate me right now, they are powerless to get in my way. The clones from Eden have already replace 3/4<sup>th</sup>s of the UGE’s MF pilots. The only remaining forces that are not completely under my influence would be Dammerung. But that should be taken care of by morning.”

*“I’m glad sir.”*

“I trust that you will take care of what I’ve asked. I have some other pressing matters to attend to.” Luscious replied just before closing the link.

Standing up from his couch he stretched his limbs while he smiled devilishly.

“6 days remaining.”

**Chapter Forty-Six: Lust**

The whole world was thrown into chaos, both Earth and Mars; Mars being in the worse shape of the two. Each small city plunged into fear, the past few months had been difficult for the red planet. With the quick defeat of Red Fury on Earth, and then the appearance of Eden on the continent of Mundus, Mars was in the process of weakening as a whole. Many ex pilots who left the battlefield in order to live a peaceful life have found the burning desire to suit up once again. Not knowing how they could be useful

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they still dug up their old machines in the sensation that they would fight off the forces that were sent to do Luscious Malum's bidding.

Evo, the main city through out all of Mars was the busiest, most, if not all of the ex soldiers from the TA and the EAP gathered there. And it was there where their frames were stored in warehouses once occupied by Red Fury. In the middle of the city was a stature of Carlos Rendetore, the man who dreamt of a better future on Mars, a man who fought to the end in hopes of his dream coming true. He was seen as a martyr, someone who died for the greater cause of humanity. Many walked through the great park, Evo was originally homage to New York City, and so it was only natural that its layout was similar. The Great Park was very similar to Central Park, it was a place where people went to get away from the stressful life that the city brought, or just to get away to see the beauty of the red planet.

The weather was clear and the sun shined brightly while the ivory clouds passed through the air. 3 people walked casually through the park, following the cemented path that was laid out along the park. A woman walked in front, her vibrant crimson hair flowing through the gentle breeze which passed through the park, her leather jacket flapping outwards as well, the two men behind her chuckled under their breath as they came up upon the stature of Carlos Rendetore.

"A man who died for his dream huh... What do you make of this one Greed?" Lust mumbled, her voice soft and pleasant, it was the type of voice men wanted to listen to over and over again.

Greed shrugged his shoulders, glancing to the side as if to act casual and uninterested; but that wasn't him by any means. He was indeed greedy and wanted everything he could possibly grab onto.

"I think it's pointless to celebrate the life of one man whose dream failed. Humans pin their hopes on the past, expecting to find answers in the past and end up becoming to preoccupied with the past instead of looking to the future." Greed replied.

"The past...do we have a past? I wonder." Lust mumbled.

"It doesn't matter anymore if we have one. We're the last of our kind, the last of the Crimson Dawn. It's obvious that we were played from the very beginning, so now the question is, what are we going to do about it?" Envy brought up a good point, one that they had all been thinking for the past few weeks. They were saved from Prometheus by Luscious Malum 2 years ago, and were instantly put to work as an elite fighting force known as the Night Stalkers. But as the months passed by recently, following the fall of Red Fury their usefulness has dwindled. Sloth saw that they were nothing more than mere pawns in Luscious' game and stood her ground, only to be quickly killed. Their past was a nothing more than a blur to them, and with their future in question there weren't many options left for them to take.

"So then, are we going after him?" Envy interjected.

"\*sigh\* is there anything else for us to do now? It'll only be a matter of time before he hunts us down anyway. Luscious Malum never was one for keeping his pawns." Greed replied.

"Then it's settled." Envy mumbled.

"Yeah, but how exactly are we going to accomplish this?" Lust asked.

"Simple, we make a scene. We have no way of getting to space, so we might as well have some fun here. If he sees us it won't take long for him to act." Greed mentioned.

"Don't make it sound so easy. Just because we make a scene doesn't mean he's going to come running. You're such a simple minded jackass. If we're going to do anything, then we're going to have to attack his Eden." Envy smirked as the words flowed; it was obvious that Eden was Luscious' precious rose. The clones that Genesis produced were held there, trained and perfected behind the secure barrier. With it gone and the clone army already taking their positions among the UGE Eden was open for attack.

"Eden huh...yeah, that would piss him off wouldn't it. It'll take at least 12 hours to get there though, so we better leave now."

"Lust has a point; we're going to have to rest up as well if we're going to do this. Even with half the population of Eden already gone we aren't completely aware of its defenses." Greed replied.

"There isn't much time left for us anyway...if we're going to die, then we might as well make it a fitting death." Envy smiled throughout the entire conversation, his hair wrapping around the smooth edges of his face, the wind caressing through the forest green blades of grass, rustling beds of leaves were

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tossed carelessly through the air with the sudden wisp of the wind. The day was gorgeous and yet, the atmosphere was creeping with ominous intentions, overcasting the serene beauty that was Mars.

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Adam sighed as he leaned back against the frigid wall. The Iron Fist was already on its way back towards Orbis, the package was easily obtained after the cloned pilots were defeated. Only a few took quarters in the former 181<sup>st</sup> cruiser, mainly the ones that would be using it during battle. The cruiser itself could only hold up to 5 MFs at a time which meant only Blue Dragon, Alpha, Anima, Blue Angel and Impetus would be able to call it home. His head hung over his knees while he chuckled every few seconds; it was amusing to him that he ended up on the ship that Marcus Falden once called home. Ending up in the former 181<sup>st</sup> Commander's quarters was also ironic in his mind; it was filled with memories of Falden's past. Between pictures, awards and personal fitness products it still lingered with Marcus' essence.

In his hand Adam rotated the small container that Marcus had given him a few days ago before his death; Drive it was called. The tranquil silence was disrupted by the clicking sound of the small pills colliding into the plastic walls of the container. His pupils focused solely on the pills in his hand, everything else in the background was nothing more than a distorted blur. His dark mahogany hair covering the sides of his face along with the small strands that fell over his nose, it was an depressed position to be in, with his torso leaning forward, his knees extended towards the ceiling with his arms hanging off.

"Heh...destiny sure if weird isn't it..." Mumbling to yourself, a sure fire way to know you're depressed. He intentionally blocked out the sound of water tapping along the skin and tiled floor emanating from the bathroom a few feet to his left. It was a long 2 days for everyone, especially Sharon. The steam from the heated water hitting the ground filled the air, soothing her nerves and muscles. She stood in the middle of the pallid blue shower room, with the shower nosel attached to the wall above her head the water flowed down from the points of impact, dripping down her hair which was darker from being soaked and then down her shoulders each drop of aqua was a form a relief which soothed her tanned skin. Moving around the crevices of her body the water flowed down her legs, running between her individual toes and through the small drain embedded on the ground.

Sharon leaned forward, revealing her back to the flushing trails of water that poured outwards. Both her hands pressing firmly against the tiled wall, her dripping hair brushing against her skin while hanging down, she too was feeling the stress build up from the past week.

"(I couldn't do anything...I just sat there, watching while everything happened. What good am I as a pilot? Maybe it was nothing more than a pitiful attempt to become accepted...gah, I'm probably getting too worked up over this. He doesn't care if I'm not an elite pilot...right?)"

She continued to force herself through her emotions, her concerns. She had seen many things in the past few years, gone through her own personal set of trials and tribulations in order to make it to this point in her life.

"(Adam...am I...am I just holding you back?....)" Her thoughts continually penetrating her heart, her knees buckling, tears beginning to build up in their ducts. Her pinkish lips quivering until she finally broke down, her body collapsed to the ground, knees and lower legs angled outwards from the chest on the ground. She now found herself sitting on the cold tiles, with one hand still leaning against the wall while the other covered her grief stricken face.

"(Why am I still so weak...I can't do anything for the friends that I hold dear. If it was a serious battle out there...would people have died due to my lack of power? If I can't fight then what was the point of me coming to Orbis...I don't want to sit on the sidelines, I want to help, I want to fight for the things that Adam wants to protect...I want to be there by his side while he's fighting...I want to be more like Ashley, even though she isn't fighting she's there, helping, guiding everyone. God...why am I so damn emotional...) heh...can't be helped I guess..." She began to chuckle under her breath.

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“You okay? You’ve been in there for nearly an hour now.” Adam finally forced himself to get off the his mattress.

At the sound of his voice she quickly turned around, nearly jumping to her feet with a different resolve as if becoming an actor playing the role of a person who wasn’t upset.

“I’m fine. No need to worry.” She blurted out, her voice distorted from the falling water echoed out from the bathroom.

“Good, had me worried...and hurry up. I need to get in there before we reach Orbis.” He replied.

“Heh, why don’t you just join me then if you’re in such a rush? Because this is too soothing, don’t see myself getting out any time soon.” Sharon replied with sarcasm riding the sound waves.

“Heh.” It might have been the enticing image of being in there with her naked that did it, or it may have simply been the idea of cleaning away his sins and concerns, but regardless his spirit felt uplifted. Lifting his ivory shirt over his head revealing his defined muscular structure he entered the bathroom. Aside from nearly tripping over the carpet at the foot of the door he dropped his shirt to the ground. Smirking at the sight of her nude silhouette he parted the plastic curtains.

Sharon smiled back at him, but to his dismay her curvaceous body was wrapped tightly within an ivory towel covering down to a few inches below her pelvis.

“Aw, you seem disappointed. I changed my mind, I’m done for now. It’s all yours.” Adam gawked, his cheeks blushing from the embarrassment while her legs lifted over the edge of the shower passing him by.

“I really...really don’t like you...”

“Heh, you’ll get over it. Don’t wake me if I’m sleeping, and you can have the couch.” She replied.

“Seriously...I don’t like you.”

Stephen continued to watch the stars and nebulae glisten through the small window in his room. It was quiet which was surprising to him since Ashley was also there. Unlike her usual self she was quiet and restrained to the couch on the other side of the room. She laid down along the cushions of the crimson sofa, her legs hanging over the arm rest on one side. He had been thinking about the incident at the facility, more specifically the clones that were there, waiting for them specifically to show up. The fact that clones of Adam, Stephen and Mario were there meant that Luscious knew what they were going to do before they did. The repercussions with thinking like this meant that trust was something seldom given out. It bothered him how much Luscious knew, how he would arrange his pawns in this game of chess.

“What do you think; do you think there’s a UGE spy in Orbis?” Stephen broke the silence as he glanced over his head.

“Huh?...Not sure, why? What brought this up all of a sudden? Ashley remarked.

“It’s just been bothering me that those clones were waiting. If it were any other enemy this wouldn’t have bothered me this much. But it was specially clones of Adam, Mario and myself. It’s as if Luscious knew we were the ones heading to that facility. And if that’s the case then it would be more than likely that there’s a traitor in Orbis.”

“I guess that could be possible, but it’d be a bit hard to find out who since Orbis isn’t that small of an organization.”

“You’re basically telling me to drop it and focus on the task at hand right?”

“Pretty much. You worry too much, that’s your problem.”

“It’s true that I tend to worry a lot. But not for nothing, I usually end up being right. We only have under 6 days left before Luscious begins corrupting the world. We can’t waste any time, especially if he’s going to be aware of our next move before we do it.”

“Ugh...you’re telling me this because you want to use me to find out who the traitor is. It’s because of my connections and intelligence as a Operator isn’t it?”

“I’m telling you because you like to get into other people’s business. So, with your knack for gossip it shouldn’t be too much of a challenge to you to find out who it is.” Stephen laughed.

“You’re such an ass, you know that right?”

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“Pretty much, you tell me time and time again after all.”

“Still, I had a question about the clones you went up against. It didn’t seem like either of you were having too much difficulty with them. Why? I thought they were exactly like you.”

“Heh, not exactly like us. It’s more than likely that Luscious used the first Azure Cup to gather information on the pilots. It was a good plan, but unfortunately he waited too long. All of us have grown with experience since then, our moves aren’t exactly the same anymore, and we’ve also become much more aware of our weaknesses from back then. So it was simple to counter them, that’s why they didn’t stand a chance.”

“I see...listen, I didn’t want to bring this up before, but do you think we can stop Luscious? I mean you know of the power he poses.”

“Heh, I wish I had an answer for you. But the truth is, I don’t know. But, after years of sitting doing nothing I can’t stand by and wait for an answer.”

“Well then...if that’s your decision, then I’ll stand behind you to the end.”

“Thanks...that means a lot to me. It really does...”

“Heh...Stephen.”

“Yeah?”

“I...”

Gail sat in his office staring back at the flickering screen which displayed a facial image of Lucian.

“So you’ve received information on where the remaining Night Stalkers are. You think we should finish them off before they become a problem then?”

“As your friend you know I have your best interest in mind Gail. The Night Stalkers are a radical group and are completely predictable. We can’t have them getting in the way with so much at stake.”

“I see your point...but making a trip to Mars, it seems out of the way. We don’t have much time left Lucian. Getting to Mars will take up at least another day, bringing us down to 4. Then there’s finding them and then jumping into battle, by the time we finish we might be too late.”

“I agree...then split our forces. Send a group to Mars to intercept them, while the remaining forces head to Prometheus.”

“Lucian...that’s too big of a risk. By dwindling our forces we’ll just be sending people to their deaths. If we’re going to go against Luscious Malum then we’re going to have to have full force.”

“I know...but you have to trust me on this Gail. You do trust me right?”

“\*sigh\*...of course. It just seems a bit far fetched...this will be a big leap.”

“I know. But trust me; it’ll work out much better if the Night Stalkers are completely out of the picture.”

“...fine... We’ll send Captain Procella along with Leo Umbra and a small battalion of our forces to Mars to deal with them. We’ll give them a day to finish the job after arriving on Mars. Once they’ve confirmed their success we’ll set sail for Prometheus.”

“That’s exactly what I would have done Gail. Get some rest, it’s going to be a long week, I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Yeah...take care old friend.”

“You too.”

Gail’s chair squeaked as it twirled around, it was painful for him to question his long time friend’s true ambitions. Never before had he heard such a plea of desperation from Lucian, the idea of taking out the Night Stalkers seemed rather abrupt in his mind. Even if they were unpredictable, it was highly unlikely for them to gain a means of transportation to space. But even with all the doubt surrounding his friend’s idea, Gail still intended on following through.

“I hope I’m not making the wrong decision...”

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The hollow halls of Prometheus were silent in the grasp of the shadows. Activity on the former EAP space station was low; the clones needed much more rest than that of a normal soldier since their body chemistry was altered for ultimate performance. Luscious didn't mind though, he allowed them the rest they needed as they were going to be the ones responsible for making his dream a reality. He too was only human and required rest as well, but on tranquil nights such as these he found it difficult to sleep. Rather he would spend his time watching the stars light up the dismal canvas that was space.

A sudden knock caused him to turn his attention elsewhere.

"Luscious is it alright if I come in?"

"(Zach huh, this is indeed a surprise.) Of course, the door is open." Luscious replied.

"Thanks."

The door slowly opened as Zach stepped through, entering Luscious' personal room. Zach's face was pale, his eyes placid which only exaggerated the circles underneath his eyes. It was apparent that he was dealing with sleepless nights. The nightmares continued to plague his mind like on Earth only much more graphic and unrelenting.

"Lack of sleep I see." Luscious smirked.

"Uh..yeah."

"You're a very skilled pilot Zach; you're a person who's dedicated to his training. But sleep is also a part of that process. Your body needs to rest."

"I know. It's just that these nightmares haunt me in my sleep...they seem so real. I hear the screams of people burning in flames, dying by my hand. I'm not sure what it means."

"So you came to me to find out if I did."

"Yeah."

"I think you're troubled by the current state of the world. You do believe in what I'm doing right?"

"Of course, you're the only person who sees the world in a clear lens. You're giving humanity a second chance to start over."

"I'm glad you see it that way Zach. It's true not many people understand the world quite like I do. But I'm only one man; I can't achieve my goal by myself. I need strong people like Reine and yourself to offer their power."

"I still don't understand why you think I'm so helpful..."

"Heh, it's because you have a vast amount of potential hidden deep within your soul. It's a potential that shows up in the heat of battle. You need to have more confidence in yourself Zach."

"...about my nightmares..."

"Ah yes. I have them too Zach...in my nightmares I see the same vision, I'm being engulfed by a torrent of flames while the ones close to me are being slaughtered, and I'm stuck...completely powerless to save them. My nightmares are a glimpse into a past I've longed to forget. Your nightmares are most likely the same. You can never get rid of them, only hope to accept them as a part of your soul and use them as fuel to your drive."

"I see..."

"You are one of the lucky individuals who have the power to change the world. Use that power to protect your vision of the future."

"I will...I will use it to protect the future you see."

"Thank you Zach...I know that I will not fail with your power at my disposal."

"Of course Luscious, my power is an extension of your own." Zach replied with a glimmer of crimson light flickering in the inner depths of his eyes. Luscious smirked as the shadows grew engulfing them both as the lights dimmed.

**Chapter Forty-Seven: Conflict on the Edge of Paradise**

It wasn't the most ideal mission assignment they had ever received, but the amount of pilots skilled enough in Orbis to take it was low. Both Chris Procella and Leo Umbra cringed as the dark auburn atmosphere surrounded them during their descent. The weather was subtle, perfect for the battle that was to come shortly. Two glimmering metallic drop pods cruised through the air, tearing the ivory clouds asunder as they passed by. It was only a matter of time before each pod's armor was discarded revealing the frames inside. The fact that Eden had been for the most part abandoned made the job much easier; with the exception of the few remaining Night Stalkers they could go undetected. After being dropped at O200 they finally reached the drop zone above Eden at around O1100 hours.

"You see anything on radar?" Leo mumbled.

"Nothing...it almost makes me wonder if this is going to be a complete waste of time."

"I know...I was looking forward to take part in the advanced on Prometheus...what the hell is Gail thinking? I mean sending us back to Mars to deal with the Night Stalkers. I mean there's only 3 of them left, what possible threat could they be?"

"Not sure...I heard it was Lucian who persuaded him into going this route."

"Ugh, I'll be honest man, I never trusted that guy." Leo replied.

Chris sighed, he too never found Lucian to be one worthy of trust. It was too late now to start bitching about their current mission; both pods were preparing to disengage the latches which would reveal the MFs into the Martian atmosphere.

"It doesn't make much of a difference now anyway. We're reaching the drop zone, you remember the plan right?"

"Hah, of course I remember the plan. Only thing is, we can't see any activity on our radar. Hell, we don't even know if they're down there."



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“I wouldn’t rely on your radar man. I’ve read the reports from those who’ve encountered them. Some of these so-called Seraphs are equipped with Electronic Counter Measures, so it’s more than likely that they’re hiding. That girl, Ashley said the last thermal reading she had recorded of the Seraphs was only a few hours ago, she said that they were on a direct path here, so just keep your eyes open.”

“Easy for you to say man...”

“You ready?”

“As ready as I’m going to be I guess.”

The titanium latches suddenly flipped off their locks, the sealed container abruptly burst open revealing a wave of light gray smoke to brush outwards, polluting the air surrounding them. The head unit on Tempest flickered with a bright golden glow as the machine came to life. The motors turned and twisted while the boosters moved to a comfortable angle. The generator hummed with a resonation matching that of a thunder storm. Like a broken eggshell the sides of the pods split in the center as both Tempest and Forsaken erupted forward. In the corner of his eyes, Leo watched the four pieces of titanium fall towards the ground below. Suddenly he saw it, a massive conglomeration of positron energy heading their way.

“Shit! You were right!” Leo screamed just as he begun evasive maneuvers. Forsaken’s thrusters moved out in a 45 degree angle in order to push the crimson MF to the side. Tempest performed a similar maneuver in order to get out of the beam’s path. In a supreme display of fireworks each panel that fell from the sky exploded while the energy current surged even higher into the atmosphere. Forsaken and Tempest hovered on the opposite side of the beam as it slowly dissipated into nothingness.

“Well at least we don’t have to wait too long.” Chris replied.

“You almost sound happy...”

“Listen, the faster we complete this mission the faster we’ll be able to join up with the forces in space.”

Leo paused; he hated it when Chris was right. Just once he would like to be able to have the upper hand in a conversation, but now wasn’t the time to get into a verbal debate. They were found out, rather quickly in fact.

Chris leaned over his side glancing back at Leo and his Forsaken.

“I’ll head down first to get an idea of what we’re dealing with. It’s obvious the original plan isn’t going to work so we’ll have to wing it.”

“Wing it? What the hell man!”

“Sorry, we have no other choice now.”

The heels of his feet acted as an axis for the front end of his feet which were pulled down to rest upon the metallic ridged design of the accelerator pedals. In sync with the pressure being applied the boosters quickly gained a boost in power as Tempest headed downwards towards the crimson dust below. Not know exactly what he would find he forced himself to keep moving, it was his mission and as a Captain he couldn’t be intimidated by the little things, even if the little things were easily 15 meters bigger than he was. Leo could only curse at his Captain who fool heartily headed into the belly of the beast by himself. The reports read that each Seraph was uniquely designed in accordance to its pilot’s mannerisms; they were monsters in a human world, their sheer destructive capabilities were beyond any conceivable belief. Not to mention their pilots were publicly announced to be those who underwent the EAP experiments on Prometheus, those known only as the Crimson Dawn. Recognized by their reptilian eyes and enhanced mental capacity and physical prowess they were indeed a distortion on the German ideology of the Aryan race. Having yet to encounter one Leo still began to sweat from the pressure of going up against such a formidable enemy, and not just one of them, but three.

“Damn it...how much of a chance do we truly stand?” His fingers curling inwards from his frustration, his teeth grinding against one another in a subtle movement, sweat dripped down along his cheeks, his visor fogging up slightly from his heavy breathing; he was beginning to become nervous.

As a Captain he was expected to be firm and brave in the face of impending danger. As a human, it was hard for him to keep up with that expectation. He had only heard about the Seraphs, he had met a Crimson Dawn before and was disturbed with the power they possess. He couldn’t even begin to fathom

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what would happen when a Crimson Dawn would pilot a superb MF. The gold frame managed to touch down onto the solid ground without being harmed. The minerals turned to dust under the heavy metal feet of the Mechanized Frame. Calm and patient, Chris took a deep breath. With a gentle breeze sweeping through the air dust particles tainted the air.

“(I knew this wasn’t going to be easy when I was told about the mission...so why am I so tense?) I can do this...” He mumbled softly.

*Can you really do what it is that you were sent to do?*

“What the hell?! (Shit Chris, calm down. You’re already aware of their mental abilities. It’s nothing more than a distraction, a means to cause you to falter...)”

*It’s more than a means of a distraction. Hehe, so that bastard was too chicken to come himself so he sent the bench warmers huh?*

“What the hell are you talking...” Chris’ voice suddenly changed pitch as the ground began to shake. Suddenly Tempest’s alarms began to cry loudly as three ivory dots blinked on his radar screen. It was true, these Seraphs were equipped with ECMs, hence why both Chris and Leo saw nothing. It was upsetting to see the scenario he was in, Tempest was in the middle of an imaginary triangle with each corner being represented by the Seraph standing amongst the rubble and dust.

“Shit.” A simple reply for a simplistic formation. Chris knew he was in no position to start a fight, but what made him curious was the statement the one pilot mentioned. He began to wonder if they knew about the mission, about how Gail had ordered them to find and eliminate the remaining Night Stalkers as a means of insurance.

“Envy...I want this one.” Lust abruptly stated. She brushed her brilliant auburn hair to the side revealing the determined slit pupils which stared maliciously in Tempest’s direction.

“That’s a first; usually you like to sit back.” Envy replied.

“I felt that it was time I got a kill in. I’ve desired it for a long time now.”

“Well, do whatever you want with him. Greed and I will deal with the other one.”

“(Shit, they know about Leo...but this is a surprising turn of events. I’m just going to have to deal with one of them, and from how it sounds the most inexperienced one. Maybe I do have a chance.)” His thoughts were like echoes to the pilots of the Seraphs. Each of them smirked at the forced idea of a chance forming in the bowels of Chris’ mind.

“She may be lacking experience...but that doesn’t mean you have a chance. In time we’ll send that bastard Luscious Malum to hell along with you. There you can tell him how you failed.” Greed snickered.

“Luscious? You think I’m working for Luscious?” Chris didn’t expect that in the least. It was also shocking for him to hear that they had it out for the President of the UGE as well. And if that was the case then the Night Stalkers would not have been a threat to Orbis.

“...So you’re here on behalf of that other deluded politician, Gail?” Envy asked.

“Yeah...but if you’re going against Luscious Malum as well then there’s no need to...” Given no time to finish his sentence he was suddenly forced to take control of Tempest. Lust’s Seraph howled loudly, unleashing its 4 angular tail units into the sky. Not too sure of their capabilities he knew he had to be on the look out for anything suspicious. The Seraph which was speeding towards Tempest raised both arms revealing grenade cannons attached to the bottom of both arms as well as the mechanical thighs. While slow, they could deal a tremendous amount of damage, a few hits from them and it would be over. The speed of the Seraph was astonishing for something so tremendous in size and bulky in stature. He expected not to get through to them, and that he would end up having to fight.

Tempest jerked to the right, sprinting towards the oncoming Seraph. Going head on wasn’t in his original plan but it was safe to say that things changed. Chris’ eyes glared forward, he thought about looking back in order to see what the other two were doing but decided against it. Before him he witnessed the sheer power of the Seraph, the two grenade cannons unleashed shells burning brightly. Tempest veered to the left avoiding the frontal assault; suddenly the 4 tails appeared in a circular formation. His brown eyes widened from the sudden appearance.

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*You lose focus easily...*

“What?!” Chris turned once again to see the Seraph’s overbearing torso only a few feet away. The two grenade cannons taunting him, he quickly realized just how difficult this mission was going to be. Hearing the echoing voice of the female pilot in his head was disturbing, but not enough to force him to lose his balance. Tempest’s torso lunged forward crashing into the center of the Seraph. Lust was taken back by the reckless maneuver and thus lost her own focus. The golden frame reached for its energy saber, the green blade of energy abruptly ignited just as Chris pushed the arm upwards. Tempest dashed away from the Seraph once two of the tails appeared at its side gathering energy.

Chris smirked as he left his mark on the titanic machine. With the energy saber stabbed into the lower right side of the torso Lust began to chuckle slightly.

“Hahaha...I never would have expected you to injure my Seraph...haha.”

“Why the hell are you laughing? I’ll end this!” Chris screamed, the single blow he handed out was more than enough to reinstall his confidence. Tempest had been heavily modified since being last used in Moscow and even more so in accordance with the difficulty of the mission. Two cylindrical launchers flipped upwards while resting along the joints attached to the back of the torso. At the same time two thin pulse launchers lowered from small slits located just underneath both arm units. Chris’ index finger gently pulled back on the crimson trigger causing the pulse launchers to fire; simultaneously both missile launchers fired causing a barrage of silver silos to paint the sky.

Lust sighed; she failed to be impressed by the sudden offensive valor in which her opponent was displaying. Each of the angular tailed weapons flew in front of the Seraph, beams of energy launched outwards from each one, stretching into the sky. The beams of pinkish energy pierced through some of the missiles pouring down, with each contact a fiery explosion burned the atmosphere causing a domino like effect where every remaining warhead melted down. Lust allowed the beams of pulse rounds to pound on her Seraph’s armor, Chris was astonished even more as he watched his pulse rounds bounce off the outer armor.

“You’re going to have to do more than that to defeat me.”

“Damn it...looks like we’re not going to make it back in time for the fun...” Chris mumbled.

“It looks like you have things under control here Lust. We’ll go take care of the other one now.” Greed interrupted.

“Kay, I shouldn’t be long with this one.”

“Leo...” Chris realized how bad things would turn out if he were to let both of the Seraphs head over to engage Leo. If he was having this much trouble against one of them, then Leo stood no chance against two. “Looks like I have no choice then...I’m sorry, I can’t play around any longer. I’ll have to finish this quickly.” Chris replied, a sudden calm had over taken the storm of fear. It was as if he saw things clear for the first time, the Seraph before him was equipped with heavy hitting weaponry and durable armor. But it was all in order to make up for its pilot’s shortcomings. As a Captain he had acquired the skills to analyze situations in a heartbeat.

“Quickly?...Hahaha, you humans truly are...what the hell?!” Lust was shaken; Tempest had abruptly pierced through her defenses and was now hovering in front of her cockpit. Her demonic eyes glanced towards her orbital weapons which erupted in flames. She couldn’t believe it, she couldn’t comprehend it, and in her eyes what was happening was impossible. Tempest’s left hand firmly wrapped around the handle of the energy saber that penetrated the Seraph’s armor while holding another saber in its right. “You son of a bitch!” Lust screamed. The Seraph howled as it boosted backwards while locking onto the golden frame at the same time. Just before the lock on solidified Tempest zoomed to the side breaking the lock on signal, the gears turned slowly and the torso could not manage to keep up with the new found speed of Tempest. Lust frantically searched the area, looking at the sky and the ground for her opponent.

*Above Lust.*

“Shut it Envy, I can handle this on my own!”

*Apparently that is not the case. You always were the weakest one.*

“Shut up Envy!”

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“You’re the one who needs to work on her focus!” Chris’ voice traveled downwards, reverberating through the wires and walls of the tremendous frame. Lust’s pale face froze as Tempest lunged forward, descending from the sky with both energy sabers pointing down. She wanted to move, thought about moving, but ended up watching her own end come on swift wings. The tips of both sabers punctured the obsidian armor and sliced through the wires and gears inside. Lust began to chuckle, smiling as the beams of energy extended into the cockpit. The beams engulfed her frail body while flames ripped through the consoles and electricity based explosions lit up the small compartment even more. Her flesh burned maliciously, peeling the skin off her muscle tissue and bones. A horrific death for any to suffer through, no screams, only the swishing sound of the rampant flames filled the air; it had ended.

Chris knowing his job was finished pulled Tempest away in order to not be caught up in the shockwave from the explosion to come.

“...” Taking a life was never an easy sitting event, even if that life has already been tainted by science.

“Bravo, Greed... how bout you take care of that other one. I’ll deal with this one.” Envy replied, he showed no remorse for his fallen ally. Lust’s Seraph made one final action as it exploding violently sending singed chards of metal into the sky.

“You sure Envy? He just killed Lust... rather easily. You sure you don’t want some help?”

“Greed I’m fine. Lust was the weakest out of all 7 of us. This punk won’t cause me any problems. You deal with the... heh...” Envy’s eyes moved to the side as he caught Tempest zooming towards his position. “In a hurry to die I see, this won’t go the same way it did with Lust.”

Envy’s Seraph released its 7 tails into the air which all locked onto Tempest instantly. It was a move which Chris regretted quickly. All 7 weapons began to fire repeatedly, each green beam of pure energy forced Tempest to halt its offensive movements. Each weapon danced through the air, changing its location causing Chris to remain sharp enough to avoid. It was only a matter of time before Tempest was hit, but it was something Chris wanted to prolong as long as he could.

*You’re pretty nimble, but still too slow in my eyes.*

“Get out of my head.”

*Why? Does it bother you? Does it hinder your performance? Haha, wouldn’t want to have that!*

“Damn it!” Chris screamed, his frustration was now finding its way to the surface. Then it happened, one of the weapons scored a hit. It was the first of many to follow. With the first it, Tempest’s balance was disrupted, the frame was sent falling sideways towards the ground. Envy took quick advantage as the Seraph’s exterior boosters ignited. The ignition flames were larger than any ever seen before on a frame. The Seraph ripped over the ground causing minor tremors to spread out along the route. Chris froze in terror and gasped in awe while he watched the machine approach.

*You’re too slow.*

The Seraph continued its attack. Envy ripped his gigantic scythe out from the back of its holster. The weapon was surprisingly tiny in comparison the Seraph’s size. It was the first thing Chris noticed once it was drawn. Tempest was then struck down suddenly, Chris couldn’t figure it out, a few seconds ago the Seraph was lingering in front, and then it managed to strike from behind. The sharp end of the scythe slashed through the dual missile launchers attached to the back of Tempest igniting a furious explosion which sent the gold frame hurling into the crimson ground.

“How did you...”

*I never bothered to show this to anyone before. My Seraph’s true form...*

Chris forced Tempest to rise up from the ground only to be shocked once again. The outer layers of the Seraph had collapsed to the ground revealing a much smaller and lighter frame. The frame was the size of an average frame of 18 meters, its sleek armor and physique was nothing like any of the other Seraphs that have been seen. The smaller frame held onto the scythe with both hands as its crimson eyes flickered in the darkness.

Leo continued to wait in his cockpit, as much as it frustrated him he decided to respect his friend’s wishes.

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“This is ridiculous...”

*Bored? Then maybe I'll step in.*

“What the fuck?! Who said that?” Leo’s eyes twitching in fear, the deep pitched voice snickered in the bowels of his mind.

Just then Forsaken’s radar became activity showing a massive blinking dot amongst the edges of the green grid. Leo was aware of the Night Stalker’s special abilities, but even still was frightened by experiencing it.

*Your friend won't last much longer against Envy. I'll make sure to send you to the same place when it's over.*

“Chris...shit, I knew I should have followed.” Leo screamed.

In the corner of his eye he caught sight of the 2 angular objects staring back at his frame. Leo laughed calmly under his breath, his fingers firmly took hold of the throttles, and his feet slowly began to apply pressure to the accelerators. Just before Forsaken managed to move forward it was bombarded by dozens of missiles. Each missile pounded heavily onto the frame causing an outburst of smoke to grow in size around Forsaken. Leo squirmed in his cockpit as his FCS went haywire from all of the hits it was enduring.

“Damn it!” Leo screamed. As the smoke began to clear the image of the Seraph that launched the attack became clear. Its tremendous size caused Leo to jump a bit in his restraints. The massive frame hovered there silently, both of its rail guns raised in the air preparing to fire at close range.

“Heh, this was too easy.” Greed snickered.

### **Chapter Forty-Eight: Blinding Light of Redemption**

The Iron Fist was the newest addition to Orbis, it was something that Gail had planned months in advance. Most of the remaining 181<sup>st</sup> members, mainly the technicians had sided with him and joined Orbis after the death of Secretary of Defense Von Schuler, most like those who joined, felt that Gail had the right idea, the right cause. Luckily for him the main O.S. engineer of the Iron Fist had given him the location of its burial. Her name was Krista Summers, the daughter of the late Von Schuler. Thanks to her efforts Orbis managed to obtain one of the most esteemed battle cruisers ever created. The ship itself remained docked in the outer sanctum of Orbis as preparations for its launch were being initiated. Only 3 days remained until Luscius would begin his Tribulation and it was apparent that time was significantly running out. Since the launch of Chris Procella and Leo Umbra to Mars things had been quiet, most simply waited for their return, while others sat in their rooms collecting their thoughts before the final battle would begin.

Krista had lost everything that she had ever considered being dear to her, first her father, then her squad, and ultimately her commanding officer, Marcus Falden. Orbis represented an ideal that she herself believed in, peace without relying on brute force to sustain it. She wanted to find a life where fighting wasn't a necessity, a life where she could enjoy life and the simplistic pleasures it offered. And yet she found herself here, in Orbis tuning up the ship she called home for so many months. She knew the truth, that something must be sacrificed in order to gain something else. Peace had to be obtained through perseverance and pain; if she could have a hand in bringing about a new era of tranquility then she would do everything in her power to push forward.

It had been decided how the Iron Fist would be used in the up coming battle, with its original crew of mechanics, medics, and technicians it would lead the battle. Since only 5 MFs could be stored it would serve home to Blue Dragon, Alpha, Anima, Blue Angel and Impetus. It would be unanimously stated that they were the strongest frames in all of Orbis. The final repairs and reconfigurations of the operating systems would take at the very least another 12 hours, giving that much time left for relaxing.

Adam waved goodbye to the young technician as he passed through the hanger with Sharon by his side. Krista waved back; she had heard many things about the Azure Knight, mostly from Marcus but never expected him to be so easy going in person. The way Marcus had described him was nothing short of extravagance, it was something Marcus had a tendency of doing once he met up with a strong opponent, and his stories would become grand stages of courage and ferocity. Without meeting him, he painted a picture of Adam being more brutish, more fearsome, the complete opposite of what he was. Although, they had never really spoken to one another, simply engaged in stereotypical conversations based on congeniality. She didn't mind though, she enjoyed the atmosphere of Orbis and would continue to perform to the expectations that were laid out by Gail. She smiled as her fingers continued to tap along the plastic keyboards. With an image of Marcus and all of the other fallen members of the 181<sup>st</sup> she moved forward, through all of the adversity she had become strong.

"I will continue to push our legacy into the new world that awaits us. For you father...and" She paused, slightly on the edge of blushing, "and for you Marcus..."

"Are you alright? You haven't really said anything since we left the ship." Sharon spoke softly; it had struck her as strange that Adam had been quiet since the morning.

"I'm fine, there isn't much time left before we advance."

"Second thoughts?"

"No. It's just that..."

"Yeah?"

"It's just that we haven't had a normal date since we met back up..." It was hard for him to get that sentence out from his lips. It was something he had been pondering for the past few days, ever since

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he arrived back on Earth and found her he had been very weary of starting an official relationship. They had been by each others sides most of the time, but picking up where you left off years ago after living two separate lies was more than awkward. It was a weird feeling, after being driven near the brink of insanity and simple rage Adam found himself staring back at the essence of that initial drive, it was a shock, a shock that would cause any other person to lose their concept of reality. Instead he forced himself to pick up things as if the whole middle ground had never happened. It was something he knew wasn't safe, to simply force out all of the memories he had with the fake, to simply forget about everything he fought to protect during the Azure Cup and the events that transpired afterwards. And she was no different, to be locked away from the world in a damp Genesis facility, to have her life robbed from her only to steal it back. Things were not easy; the base feelings were there, but still needed to be tugged a bit further to reestablish a true connection, a true, strong soulful relationship.

"A date?" She, like a young woman felt relieved at the statement. It meant he was truly still interested in her, that he wanted things to work out like they should have. She giggled; her index fingers from her right hand twirled the strands of dark brown hair around. Playing with her hair, it was a sign of acceptance and happiness from a woman's point of view.

"Yeah... a date. You know, the time where just you and I go to do something."

"I know what a date is jackass. You can cut the sarcasm."

"Heheh, sorry, force of habit I guess." He smiled, laughing while trying to hide his own embarrassment and twitching nerves. Even though he knew she'd agree, and even knowing that she cared for him he still found himself nerves in front of her eyes.

"So what're we going to do then? I'm assuming you planned this out?"

"Well, we don't have much time left anyway, so I just figured we head out for dinner. Then maybe watch a movie, just something quiet, with the two of us." Adam replied.

"Something quiet?"

"Yeah."

"Hehe, sounds good to me." She replied with glee.

Adam smiled and so did Sharon; it was one of those moments where no words needed to be spoken. The expressions etched in their faces were all that was needed. Their faces leaned towards each other, slowly moving closer, Adam's hand reached up towards her chin, his fingers slightly brushing along her skin. Moving her hair away from her pouty soft vibrant lips, everything surrounding their bodies blurred as nothing else mattered. Their eyes shut, sealing them both in their emotions.

"HEY!!!!" Mario screamed from the distance. And just like that, in a singly second the mood was changed. Adam cringed, his eyebrows lowering with frustration, his head sharply turned facing Mario who glared with a bewildered expression. Sharon began to chuckle innocently as she covered her mouth.

"Ugh... what do you want?" Adam forced himself to respond.

"Ashley just received a report from Mars. It's about Chris and Leo." He replied.

"What's the situation?"

\*\*\*\*\*

The chilled sensation of fear vibrated through the gentle currents in the air. Leo stared at the rail guns that fired. Forsaken managed to dodge the blast by swinging its dual energy scythe through the air. Both ends of the scythe managed to deflect the rounds that were fired. Whether it was luck or skill mattered not, he managed to avoid a painful death giving himself the opportunity to survive.

"Damn... that was too close."

*Not bad for a human. I wonder. I wonder if I'll have to use all of my strength to defeat you.*

"You can stop with that trick now, I get it, you're a one trick pony. There isn't much else you can do you so abuse the one ability you have. Why don't we ditch this mental battle bullshit and settle this in a physical match to the death?" Leo began to grin, he enjoyed toying, baiting the enemy into a false sense of security. He wasn't too sure how far it'd get him in his current situation but it made little difference. It was a part of his battle tactic and there was no point in changing it now. Forsaken hovered a few feet in

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front of the Seraph, the dark auburn machine held the scythe in both its hands, lifted in a position ready to strike. Leo's eyes pinpointing the locations of each revealed joint, it took him a few seconds to register the target in his head. Greed couldn't hold in his amusement any longer, spurts of exuberant laughter shouted from every corner of Leo's mind. It seemed that his opponent wasn't going to simply stop using the one technique he used the most just because he was told to.

"Laughing? Heh, you won't be laughing once I'm through with you." Leo screamed, his arms pushed forward, both plastic throttles moved to their farthest position within the confines of their design. The thruster output bar was in the red; Leo was never one for holding anything back. In his mind, it was the smartest decision he ever had, with the Seraph so close to him there was no way he could miss.

Greed watched intently as Forsaken lunged forward, Leo's screams growing in depth as the crimson frame pulled the scythe back in preparation to attack. In mid flight both of Greed's angular weapons shot in between the two frames. Leo's eyes widened, never did he expect the two weapons to be used for defense as well as offense. Already in mid swing he was forced to follow through. Forsaken's dual scythe slashed through the two weapons causing their instant destruction. He cringed sternly, it wasn't what he wanted to do, he was aware that for a brief instant he would be vulnerable. With both of Forsaken's arms positioned in the air from the blunt attack the Seraph moved in.

Greed continued to laugh with smoke bustling all around the area. Using the smoke screen as a distraction Greed's Seraph burst outwards, the silver metallic beast once again looked to its rail cannons as its primary means of attack. Leo quickly found himself scrambling, trying to find a clear lock on, or at least anything that resembled one. With the smoke completely deterring his vision he was now forced to rely on his radar. It was this type of scenario that he had hoped to avoid, the radar he had setup in Forsaken was lackluster to say the least. He was always the type of pilot who fought battles with his own sight, never relying on a computer to tell him what was out there.

"Shit, switching to night vision for the..." His mouth gaped as the darkened smoke dispersed in all directions. A single elongated cannon piercing through fired a high speeding bullet towards Forsaken. Leo reacted as quickly as his human body could, Forsaken tried to repeat its previous miracle, by swinging the dual energy scythe through the air Leo hoped to deflect the bullet. As the extended weapon slashed the bullet broke through the rod connecting both halves of the scythe. At first he was in disbelief, but his disbelief suddenly transitioned to fear. The bullet grazed through the outer layer of armor and ricocheted into the depths of space.

"Heh, your eyes are still too weak. You can't hope to survive this." Greed jested; his taunts were starting to have some form of an effect on Leo. Each sarcastic remark burning into the essence of his existence, forming clots of rage that boiled in his blood.

"Heh, I should thank you."

"Huh?"

"Now I don't have to swing that weapon with both arms. I can use them freely!" Leo screamed, his own determination, his rage having an effect on Greed. As if a mental pressure was being exerted from within Leo's soul pushing Greed's away. Greed choked from Forsaken's abrupt outburst. Forsaken suddenly cut to the side, a maneuver that caused Greed to stutter. The Crimson Dawn's head jerked to the side, his reptilian eyes trying to keep up with the fuchsia trail of energy. The particles slowly vanished from the area with the seconds that moved by.

"Behind huh...it won't work on me!"

The Seraph turned around furiously, Greed pulled back on the triggers causing both rail cannons to launch deadly shell bullets into the air. Both bullets surged through the clouds, heading towards the shining horizon in the distance.

"My right!" Greed screamed again, still trying to use his special abilities to gain the upper hand. His stress level was increasing, sweat rolling down his body, his lungs expanding heavily causing his breathing pattern to become rigid. Once again as the Seraph fired only the particle trails of Forsaken remained.



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Greed stopped briefly to catch his breath, his chest lifting outwards with each deep breath that was taken. In a reluctant state of calm he grinned, a single image of Forsaken and its pilot flashed in his mind.

“I forgot, I tend to become over anxious. Heh, things will be different now.” Greed smiled, the Seraph’s arms forcefully threw both rail cannons through the air. Leo caught off guard by the spinning weapons pulled back on Forsaken’s throttles but not quick enough to avoid contact.

Both cannons collided with the torso of the frame knocking it out of the air. While Forsaken became entrenched in a free fall towards the crimson scorched ground Greed once again began to laugh wildly.

“Hahahaha, did you honestly expect to get the upper hand over me? Hahahaha.”

The Seraph ripped two energy sabers from the side pockets and began what Greed hoped to be a final descent. The overbearing flames of crimson fury fueled the titanic frame in its comet like form.

With the g-forces increasing around the outside of his body Leo coughed, his body twisting and turning with each rotation of his frame. The only thing keeping his body in place were the tightly restricted belts crossing his body. His fingers managed to keep a firm hold around the throttles, and his eyes while squinting followed the Seraph’s movements.

Greed’s malicious looking smile widened with each meter he passed. Forsaken only grew in size as he neared his prey. Both arms of the Seraph pivoted backwards once each saber ignited with a glowing radiance of energy.

“Heh.” Leo smugly muttered.

“You think this is a joke? Haha, you humans truly are interesting.”

“You don’t pay much attention to your surroundings do you?”

“Huh?”

“The other reason I rely on my eyes and not my radar to see is known simply as Hinderance. Heheh...” Leo smirked, he then forced Forsaken to break out of its fall and regain its balance. Greed’s eyes widened and began to look around. He didn’t realize it before, most likely because he was too caught up in his own overbearing emotions. 15 small titanium orbits were circling the atmosphere around the Seraph, each one dispersing its own EMP, with visible electric currents jumping around the base of each orbit. In a single instance every control panel in the Seraph, small flames burned through the wires and circuitry emerging into the cockpit. Greed began to hyperventilate as the life support systems that were attached to his spinal cord were severed. His upper body fell forward, his hands tightening while he clutched the left side of his chest. Trickle of blood leaking out from the crevices of his pale frigid quivering lips.

“\*cough\*...lucky...\*cough\*...son of a bitch...\*cough\* \*cough\*”

“I had you outsmarted from the beginning; your greedy desires to be better than me caused your downfall. I’ll end this now.” Leo sternly replied.

“\*cough\*...to be defeated...\*cough\* by a mere...\*cough\* human...heh...”

Forsaken’s thrusters ignited releasing a massive outpouring event of energy to pollute the sky. Leo set his sights on the beast falling towards him, as he neared the torso Forsaken swung both arms in a circular motion. The tips from both energy scythes cut through the outer armor. After hitting consecutively Forsaken dropped both weapons in the air. While debris and currents of electricity erupted out from the wound Leo briefly shut his eyes. Flashing memories of the lives he had taken in his years of being a soldier flashed like a high speed slid slow in beneath his closed eyes.

*A young man’s eyes flooded with tears as he stared at a girl’s lifeless body. She twitched on the ground as a pool of blood slowly outstretched over the at one time cleanly tiled floor. Another girl was hysterical, she couldn’t control her emotions; no one could. She fell on the ground with her arms shaking over the fallen body of her friend. She burst out into tears mixed along with partially high pitched screams. The man then burst out from his chair and reached for the gun that Genesis provided him on the day of his employment. The three men just glanced at one another and without any hesitation pulled the trigger. Three chrome bullets pierced his body causing an uproar of blood to spew into the air. The*

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*remaining girl quickly turned around only to watch her boyfriend fall to the ground covered in blood as well.*

*“SEAN!!!!....Oh my God...oh my God...why.....why ARE YOU DOING THIS?!!!”*

“Will these memories ever disappear?...” He shouted just as Forsaken lifted its plasma rifle placing it in the opened wound of the Seraph. Greed continued to chuckle for whatever reason, his vision blurred, and his balance distorted, he was prepared for the end. In an instant the rifle fired causing a chain reaction of internal explosions. The green beam of energy ripped through the torso of the Seraph and exited out from the back. Singed metallic debris fluttered through the air like scattered flower pedals. Each piece shimmering with the reflected rays of sunlight.

“...Chris...I hope you’re still alive...”

\*\*\*\*\*

The main hall of Orbis’ facility was bustling with members, all scrambling for their last meals before they shipped out. The noise was mixed with reverberating echoes of strayed speech and clattering of silverware mixing together. The clamor of the room which would bother most failed to faze Stephen Novus. He sat staring at the fettuccini alfredo that was wrapped around the sharp edges of his fork. His eyes wandered, lost in the tranquility of his dinner while Ashley quietly sat across from him, staring back at him.

She rested her cheek on her bare knuckles, sighing loudly, blowing the few blonde strands of hair that fell before her eyes, all in the effort of trying to grab Stephen’s attention. Every subtle flirtatious outcry for attention that was in a woman’s repertoire Ashley used, but with each one Stephen merely kept to himself, playing with his food like a small child.

“What’s with you? You’re much more quiet than usual. And you look like a 10 year old playing with your food.” Tired of the subtlety she became blunt.

“Huh...it’s nothing....my food’s cold. I’m going to have them reheat it.” Stephen dully replied.

“Its cold cuz you’ve been playing with it for the past 15 minutes. Are you going to tell me what the hell is wrong or no?”

“I told you I’m fine...”

“No you’re not. If you were fine then you wouldn’t be acting like this.”

Stephen paused; he had been running away from any type of relationship for years now. It was something he never found himself to be good at, and he made every effort to avoid one. And yet this woman, Ashley Bellulus continued to persevere through all of his avoidance. But even she had a limit, and it was near its breaking point. Her crystalline shimmering blue eyes angrily stared back at Stephen, piercing his own. Her entire body language had changed, sitting up straight no longer leaning on her knuckles; she was determined to get the answers she had been looking for.

“...\*sigh\*....what do you want from me Ashley?”

“What do I want? I want you to react; I want you to actually enjoy life instead of acting like everything is life or death! After all these years....I’ve grown close to you, I’ve shared things with you that I would never share with anyone else. And yet, you still act distant to me....like I’m \*sniff\*...like I’m not important whatsoever!” Her voice cracked often, tears gathered together under his eyelids. Stephen sat back, crossing his arms folding them across his chest. It was clear to him that this was her time to talk, and that he had better listen.

Her eyes slowly bubbled with water, thin drops of tears rolled down the side of her cheek, parting around her nose and ultimately falling onto the mahogany table cloth.

“Do you even \*sniff\* feel anything? You criticize your brother for his mistakes, the wrong \*sniff\* decisions that he’s made. For ignoring the feelings of those around him and yet \*sniff\* you do the very same thing!”

“Ashley...you don’t understand.”

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“I understand. You don’t!” Her voice rising in level with each second. Stephen sighed, he cared for her, much more than she knew but bore a deep burden that he never wanted to share with anyone.

“Ashley...you don’t know what I deal with...”

“Then tell me!”

“I...I can’t...”

Ashley’s body her chair back creating enough room for her to step away from the table. As she stood up Stephen turned away, the pain that flowed through his body from just the thought of his burden was too much for him to bear. His breathing became erratic, heavy and loud, his eyes quivering, trying to hold in his own tears. Underneath the table his hands took the form of fists shaking vigorously over his trembling legs. Ashley approached Stephen from behind, her arms moving around his neck and shoulders. Her hands intertwining together across his chest, she placed her chin on his shoulder resting her cheek against his.

“It happened 6 years ago...” His voice was soft, but loud enough for Ashley to make out what he was saying. “It was after my second mission as an MF pilot for the TA. I had established a relationship with my liaisons/operating manager, her name was Marina...after I succeeded the mission, and she surprised me by visiting my hotel. We were staying in Beijing at the time...during the night, when we were in bed a Chinese assassin was outside across the street waiting for the perfect opportunity to snipe me. You see, I had taken out an entire battalion of Chinese EAP forces, and the EAP designated me as a severe threat...Marina, seeing how stressed I was, it was the first mission where I took someone’s life, moved on top of me, she told me that she was the best in her family at back massages. It seemed like a soothing idea to me at the time. Well...I’m sure you can guess what happened next.”

“Stephen...”

“The sniper took his shot, a good one. The bullet pierced the side of her skull, her death was instant. All I heard was the glass shatter, he was apparently a sloppy sniper and failed to equip a silencer, it was probably his first time taking a life as well...The sound of glass breaking isn’t so bad when compared to hear the sound of bones shattering in the frigid wind. And then the feeling of her blood mixed with the soft pieces of her brain tissue running down along side my unclothed spine. She died because of me Ashley, because I was like Adam at one time, because I became involved with someone and let my feelings influence my decisions she died. I swore after that to never...\*sniff\*...to never put someone I cared about in a similar situation...” His voice began to crack; simply retelling the story was more than enough to trigger his forced forgotten memories to resurface.

Ashley was shocked after hearing this; needless to say she had never expected this type of scenario to have happened. Suddenly her outlook on Stephen had changed; he never ignored her, never brushed off her feelings out of spite. Instead he forced himself to ignore his own feelings for her own sake. Her arms tightly squeezed around his muscular physique.

“I’m sorry Stephen...I’m sorry for what happened. But you can’t blame yourself for what happened, and you can’t deny your emotions because you’re afraid of what’s going to happen. You need to have faith, faith in me. That won’t ever happen again, I promise...”

“...I’m sorry Ashley...I never meant to hurt you. I fell for your beauty the moment I met you 3 and a half years ago. I...”

“Sssh...it’s ok. What happened in the past doesn’t matter anymore; we still have a few hours left before we set off. Let’s make them count.”

“Yeah, thank you...”

\*\*\*\*\*

Burning torrents of flames surrounded him, the glowing crimson specs of fire rained down from the sky surrounding Tempest along with charcoal ash. Chris continued to cough violently, patches of blood flying out from his lungs with every other tingling sensation. His helmet was filled with dents and cracks, his flight suit had tears along the outer ridges. It was a miracle that Tempest was still active,

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although far from battle ready. The torso was on the ground, with the right leg severed along with the left arm, half of the head unit was missing, a single bullet shaped hole remained on the upper right corner of the head unit revealing the inner structure and wires. Searing streams of smoke rose into the air off the scared pieces of metal which were distributed along the ground.

Envy and his Seraph stood in the midst of the destruction starting down at his opponent.

“Was that all you had to offer me? Hahahaha, you humans truly are fragile creatures.”

“\*cough\*...I don’t want to hear a lecture....\*cough\*...just get it over with it.”

“Heh, if you desire your death to come swiftly.” Envy replied.

“...I failed....” Chris sullenly mumbled.

“CHRIS!!!” Leo’s voice resonated from behind. Chris slowly moved the blood soaked hair from his forehead, his eyes half opened barely managed to recognize Forsaken. The crimson and grey frame zoomed towards the agile looking Seraph with both energy scythes drawn.

“Another one? I guess Greed failed as well. How amusing.”

“I beat your friend; I’ll do the same thing with you!” Leo screamed.

“No don’t! He’s too strong!” Chris yelled back.

Chris’ words failed to reach his friend in time as Forsaken swung both weapons. Envy devilishly grinned as his Seraph’s boosters ignited. Much to Leo’s surprise Forsaken ended up standing where the Seraph once stood, with both energy scythes touching the ground with their tips. Forsaken slashed through the air but apparently missed as the Seraph ended up in Forsaken’s original position. Envy shrugged his shoulders in disappointment as both of his energy sabers disengaged. At that moment the two energy scythes fell from the halfway point, both sides collapsing to the ground. Suddenly flames erupted through the torso of Forsaken along with currents of discharged electricity. Chris stared in awe as Forsaken was split in two, the top half of the frame collapsed into the auburn sand causing a tower of sand and minerals to launch into the air. The legs of Forsaken remained standing with the joints and connection wires to the torso exposed while the torso itself quivered in the sand.

Envy turned around facing both Chris and Leo, his laughter burning deep into their souls.

“Hahahaha, you’re both so damn weak.”

“Chris...I’m sorry...” Leo managed to mumble.

Looking over at his fallen friend Chris smirked.

“Not you’re fault...I didn’t do any better. My only regret is that we weren’t able to help everyone else out...”

“Yeah...goodbye Chris.”

“Goodbye Leo...”

“Heheh...it was fun.” Envy snickered, revealing two positron cannons attached to the back of his Seraph’s torso. Things went blank as Envy fired.

\*\*\*\*\*

The stars glistened brightly in the backdrop, Sharon lifted up from the cushions and blankets. Her hair a mess hanging off her shoulders, she smiled staring at Adam sleeping next to her. She sighed as she knew time was up, in a few minutes his alarm would blare and they would set out for Prometheus.

“Don’t die...please don’t die out there....”

**Chapter Forty-Nine: Path to the Gates**

The beauty of a nebula formation radiating among the charcoal canvas was breathtaking, Sharon stood, staring at the essence of the beauty, with her palms leaning against the pane glass window she could only hope to get another chance to see it the following day, if there was a following day. The corridor was barely lit; the contrast was low making it difficult to see clearly. The shadows closed in from every corner, she continued to lean against the screen as a subtle rumble swept through the entire ship. The rectangular clamps opened up releasing the Iron Fist from the port of Orbis. The ship itself was bustling with noise and activity, the mechanics monitoring the vitals of the generator and radiator systems, with each system behaving properly things were green for launch. Krista sat on the bridge, heading the navigational systems along with other former 181<sup>st</sup> soldiers taking control of the FCS panels, Radar systems, and communication consoles. At the head seat in the Iron Fist, Gail Contadino resided.

He knew what awaited him, the pitch black abyss, the UGE forces congregating in formation, and the blinding flashes of light resonating from the explosions. Overall, death waited for his arrival. Whether or not this would be the event that would force him to meet his end didn't matter to him, all that mattered was that he moved forward against the UGE. In a little under 3 days were left until Luscious would make his philosophical words into realistic judgment.

“Sir, everything is green for launch.” Krista stated.

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“Good to hear... alright then. Everyone listen up.”

His voice reverberated through the bridge as well as ever speaker mounted to the walls and corridors in the Iron Fist. Every one of the 100 soldiers on board halted their current jobs, turned their heads listening closely. Adam looked up from staring at his console; he slid his visor up revealing his face taking in the fresh air.

“I know for most of you this is a big step, a frightening step. For what we are about to do is not easy. We are going up against what can be considered an empire, we are standing tall for every human on both Earth and Mars and saying that we won't sit by and watch Luscious torment us. We won't fall to his false words of profit, we will stand and fight. We are the last hope for all of humanity; we are the only ones that can put an end to this. There will be no time for slacking on this one; there is less than 3 days before Luscious makes his move. We've wasted enough time, and I hope every single one of you had more than enough time to settle loose ends. Because I will not hold anything back, not everyone may make it back from this. I know it's harsh for me to say, but if I hold back I would only be doing a great injustice to you all. There are going to be casualties on the battlefield, some may end up being your friends, if they die, then avenge them, if they don't, then protect them, if they don't need protecting, then support them. This is not a battle we can win by relying on single pilots; we have to be a united front, an unbreakable wall. We will not fall, for if we fall then the rest of humanity will perish, if we succeed then all of humanity will prosper. Give it your all! This is what we've been fighting for; the past year has been training for this moment! Put your souls on the line, your blood, your sweat, and your tears will be vital for winning this battle!”

Adam smirked; slight subtle laughter fell out from his lips. Hearing Gail's attempted inspirational speech made him feel calm, Gail had always tried his best to drive his forces as well as lead them.

*Update complete*

The artificial voice alerted as the files Adam began to install had finally finished after 20 minutes of patience.

“Finally.” It was the one thing he hated the most, configuring his OS just before a battle. It was tedious work in his mind. Normally the stationed mechanics and technicians would handle the job but he was too attached with his frame. It would be a cold day in hell before he would let anyone else gets their hands on the inner configuration. He knew it would take 8 hours to reach the outer zone of Prometheus, so he still had some time of tranquility left. His arms pushed the latch before him up allowing him to exit the cockpit. He paused once he caught sight of Sharon's legs covered in her pink and grey flight suit.

“Sharon...”

“I told you, I'm going out there as well.”

“I...know. I remember.”

“Then why do you look so surprised? Are you regretting this?”

“No, it's just that seeing that outfit on you reminds me that we're really going. Sharon, I'm going to want you to stay back, as close to the Iron Fist as you can be.”

“Sorry, I can't do that. I'll be by your side, protecting you.”

“Sharon...I...”

“Don't bother trying to stop me...” Sharon leaned against the silver railing guards that lead towards the exposed cockpit. Her head tilted backwards, she stared at the ceiling of the Iron Fist hanger while Adam completely exited the cockpit. Smiling she turned her face, gazing into his eyes she chuckled. She was an essence of angelic beauty in his mind, her pearly teeth shimmering even in the darkest of places. “No matter what you say I'll end up by your side.”

“\*sigh\*...it'll take us 8 hours to reach Prometheus. I guess it's pointless to argue with you now.”

“Heheh, pretty much yeah.”

“Thought so.” He embraced Sharon, hugging her. It caught her by surprise, he said no words, gave no signal that he was going to hug her, he just did. She smiled, rubbing her hands up and down his back, she held him close.

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The metal gateway was decorated with scratches and peeling skin made with rust. It finally began to open. The latches for the final time released their grip on the Iron Fist, for a brief second the massive cruiser fell from the sudden release. The thrusters ignited with a thunderous boom that echoed throughout the encased hanger. The curved light cyan flames ignited thrusting the battle cruiser out into the space region. At the helm Gail sat, part of him tense over the journey they were about to embark on, while the other eager and nervously anticipating what was to come.

The Iron Fist once again took the stars moving out on its own. With the original crew members at all controlling stations it was like a family reunion. Each one thinking of the times they spent with Marcus Falden, chasing down EAP forces and anything else that the TA wanted eliminated. They felt alive again, their spirits lifted by the power of the Iron Fist.

“Once we’re clear our support ships will be following suit. Lucian will be commanding the Griffon, and one of our remaining 539 soldiers will be following in old TA and EAP cruisers. It will take us approximately 8 hours and 12 minutes to reach the region surrounding Prometheus. It will be more than likely that UGE forces from Dammerung and Washington will be on their way there as well. This is going to be the most chaotic and destructive battle in human history. Let’s make it count for something.” Gail sighed as he finished. His crystal like sapphire eyes looked forward as he lost himself in the rainbow like nebula in the distant background. Peace and tranquility were what embraced him now, he tried not to enjoy it too much, to not fall into a false sense of peace. But it was hard for him not to, not knowing if he would make it back, not sure if he would succeed, he wanted to enjoy as much of the peace as he could.

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Lucian sat in the bridge of the Griffon, an originally designed battle cruiser for Orbis. His crew all were quiet and stern, staring at their respected consoles, running diagnostic tests every few minutes just to make sure everything was as it should be. Lucian smiled as he glared at the Iron Fist before him.

“So you’re on your way here then?”

Turning to face the small 15 inch display panel Lucian nodded.

“Yeah Luscious, the Orbis advance has begun.”

“I see, they’re cutting this a bit close won’t you say. There’s 64 hours left until I make my move. I see you successfully stalled them for a little while, whatever happened with the Night Stalkers anyway?” Placing his glass of wine on the finely polished table he smiled. The idea of Orbis making their way towards him, of putting his cloned army to the test simply enticed him further. No longer did he have to play the role of the calm and silent politician, the strings that the corporate executives of Genesis thought they had on him were no longer in existence. He was power; he was the one holding all the cards now. After the years of waiting he could finally fulfill what he thought was his destiny.

“One managed to survive, but the two Orbis pilots managed to defeat the other two.”

“I see, so which one is still out there?”

“The only one who managed to activate the true form of the Seraph.”

“So Envy then. Heh, can’t say I’m surprised.”

“Oh? Any particular reason?”

“Heh, he was after all a failed clone of myself.”

Lucian paused briefly, his eyes widening at the sudden news that Luscious brought to the table. Leaning back he gasped for air.

“He was another clone? But how... he’s a Crimson Dawn.”

Chuckling Luscious took another sip of his merlot.

“We offered him to the EAP, Genesis that is. It was another experiment, in their desperation they wanted to create another pilot of my skill level. One that they could control, but as advanced as their

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geneticists were they continued to produce failure after failure. The execs decided to send one of them to the EAP as a test subject, that failure came out and was given the name Envy. I was always amused by the name, it fitted him well. He was envious of me and the power I held. That's why I was surprised he wasn't the one who challenged me on Earth. Still, it's no real surprise that he survived. Envy isn't of any importance any more to me. He'll end up doing his own thing, I say let him."

"Understood Luscious. What should I do about Gail?"

"Do whatever you want Lucian. If you want to stall them a bit longer than by all means. Either way this will not end well for Gail Contadino."

"Understood."

"If you'll excuse me, I have to check up on the forces at Dammerung."

"Of course Luscious." As Lucian shut off the link he began to grin. Turning to the crew surrounding him he smiled.

"You've all be patiently waiting for your chance to show your power. Here is your chance. The days where we hid our true potential, our true identities have come to an end. The ship in front of us is the Iron Fist. A legendary cruiser that has a spotless record of victories; now is your time to prove yourselves. Ensign, target the Iron Fist. Today, we'll take our place alongside Luscious Malum!" Lucian screamed.

Every soldier on the Griffon was marked with the label of a Genesis clone from Eden. Lucian managed to smuggle in soldiers from Eden without Gail noticing; throughout the years he spent by Gail's side he had always managed to manipulate any situation to his own benefit. In his eyes Gail was nothing more than a clueless politician.

"Understood, targeting the Iron Fist with the positron cannons."

"I'm sorry Gail but it was only a matter of time before our paths came to an end." Lucian mumbled.

"Gail! We're being targeted!" Ashley screamed. Her chair swiftly turned around, her dirty blonde hair whipping through the air in exuberance.

"What? By who?"

"...it's the Griffon." She reluctantly replied. She knew very well that a man Gail personally looked to as a close friend was directing the ship's operations.

"The Griffon? You're making a mistake Ashley...the computer has to be reading it wrong, Lucian would never..."

"I'm sorry Gail, but the Griffon is defiantly targeting us with both of its lower level positron cannons. What do you want to do?"

"I...Lucian...he never..." Struggling to find the exact words he wanted to say, the idea of his friend betraying him was simply nonexistent in his world. He found himself entwined in a world of confusion and denial, Gail began to fail as a commander, unresponsive, and unable to direct with confidence.

"Gail..." Lucian's distorted voice pierced through the speakers of the Iron Fist. Any ideas Gail had derived of the computers being wrong quickly vanished once he heard Lucian speak.

"Lucian."

"You knew this day was going to come."

"I never dreamt of it."

*"I have no sympathy for you. Never have, you're views are childish at best; there's no rhyme or reason. What you're trying to do will do nothing but cause more confusion. Luscious Malum is right for the world. He wishes to save it from itself."*

"Heh, you never were my friend were you?"

*"I have no friends Gail."*

"I see...so this is the path you've chosen then?"

*"It is the path that was laid out for me."*

"The Griffon is no match for the Iron Fist, and even if it were, you still have another half dozen ships following you. There's no positive outcome if you follow through. Think it over Lucian."



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*"I don't have to stop you Gail...I have to stall you."*

Gail's eyes widened.

"Fire." Lucian sighed, turning away from the wide screen panel that was in front of him. The two soldiers sitting alongside the Firing Control System nodded and began to type vigorously on the flat keyboards underneath their fingers. The two silver cannons slowly began the process of firing, first they extended outwards growing in length with each section that moved forward. Particles of energy began to formulate around the edges of the cannons flickering brightly. Gail knew now that nothing else could be done, he had no other choice but to engage with the Griffon.

*"Gail, Stephen and I will launch. We'll be able to handle..."*

"I appreciate the sentiment Adam, but let the Iron Fist warm up a bit. You save your strength for when we reach Prometheus."

Adam sighed; he wanted to stretch his wings sort to speak. But he nodded; respecting Gail's wishes he took his hands off Blue Dragon's throttles.

"Miss Summers, please aim the Positron Beam Cannons at the Griffon. Try and strike only the main engines...."

"But sir, if we strike the engines there's still the possibility that they can fire back. It would make much more sense to..."

"Just do it Krista. There will be no unnecessary deaths on my watch!"

"Right...targeting the Particle Beam Cannons...locking...locked on."

"That fast?" Gail was nearly in shock over the quick lock on speed.

"Hehe, that's because I designed the OS for the Iron Fist. This is why the 181<sup>st</sup> was the most fearsome platoon in all of the TA." Krista replied giggling.

"Fire." Gail muttered.

But before Gail managed to turn away the Griffon struck first, the two positron cannons unleashed a fiery beam surrounded by positron currents of electricity.

"Shit, we took too long. Can we avoid?"

"Of course, this is the Iron Fist after all." Krista replied.

Leaving the maneuvering to the two soldiers in charge of that area everyone watched closely. The two former 181<sup>st</sup> members steered the noble ship, causing it to perform a barrel roll through the region. Lucian paused, he had never seen the superior agility of the Iron Fist, he had only heard vast rumors about it during their small encounters with the EAP and Red Fury over a year ago.

"Damn it Gail...I'm starting to regret allowing you to obtain that piece of machinery." Lucian mumbled softly. "Well don't just stand there, fire the warheads!"

"Understood sir..."

The two Particle Beam Cannons, or PBCs as they're also known, turned slightly, keeping a solidified lock on the bulky looking Griffon cruiser they fired intensely. The beams of purified concentrated beam of positron energy surged through the floating debris left over from the Exodus units causing them to disintegrate by coming into contact with the edges of the beams. The Griffon ship pulled away at a 45 degree angle, while it maneuvered, attempting to dodge it managed to launch a total number of 35 silos into the area, each one locked on specifically to the Iron Fist's heat signature. Some the missiles exploded from the expanding aura of the oncoming beams energy while others were destroyed by the anti-missile machine gun turrets of the Iron Fist.

Clusters of small explosions lit up the pitch black canvas, every free soldier on the Iron Fist found themselves glued to the nearest window in order to watch the fantastic battle that was occurring.

"Sir, do you want us to engage with the Griffon as well?" One of the commanders from the rest of the Orbis fleet questioned.

Gail turned to his side, glancing briefly at the face of the commander.

"No, we'll take care of this. It should be ending soon."

"Roger that..."

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“Did any of our missiles hit?” Lucian asked.

“None sirs, all were destroyed...may I suggest using the ERMs?” One of the soldiers mentioned.

“Yeah...use them. They can't be intercepted like regular missiles. Also fire both positron cannons simultaneously with the ERMs. Maybe we can force them into a corner....”

“Understood sir.”

Each silo for the ERMs flipped opened and launched a tempest of greenish energy above. Gail cringed as he watched the ERMs fluttered into the stars above, he knew that he couldn't rely on the anti-missile weapons to prevent any damage. He had to rely on the piloting abilities of the two soldiers below.

The Iron Fist sped with its thrusters burning brightly, the ship managed to speed away from the majority of ERMs but ended up being tagged by a few. He then took notice of the two beams of energy that were fired from the Griffon.

“Shit! Evade!”

“Damn...we're too close. We can't completely avoid...we're going to get hit in the rear.”

“Then raise shield output to 100%, we need to avoid any damage as much as possible!” Gail screamed.

“But if we....”

“I know what will happen. But if we stop the Griffon now it won't matter!” Gail yelled back.

“Right...shields at maximum capacity. Generator is now in the orange.”

Gail had a slight idea of how the energy shield for the Iron Fist worked, but not a complete understanding. So when the two beams of energy were deflected merely by coming in contact with the shield he was shocked.

“What power...” Gail muttered. “No...fire the PBCs again!”

Once again the Iron Fist disengaged its shield in order to fire the powerful cannons. The immense beams of energy pursued the Griffon much faster than the smaller, heavier ship could maneuver. Out of fear, one of the pilots for the Griffon began to shake, his quivering arms causing him to steer in the wrong direction. Lucian noticed this once the beams he was so desperately trying to avoid were growing in size, directly heading for the Griffon.

“Luscious...I....” A single beam of energy that was launched from the Iron Fist blast through the bridge area of the Griffon, glass shattered through the vacuum of space, flames briefly pierced out from the control panels while the screams of women and men went unheard through the silent canvas of space. Upon sudden exposure to space their bodies quivered, their blood beginning to rush straight for their brains. The saliva on their tongues slowly starting to boil only for their bodies to be quickly engulfed in the radiated energy wave that swept through. Lucian's body was ripped from the seat flapping through the exposed area of space while his limbs were severed violently from his torso. His mouth split open as blood poured outwards only for the energy beam to completely vaporize his blood and his body in an instant.

Before Gail's eyes he had to watch the Griffon become engulfed in a series of radiant explosions. He had to turn away from the screen once again, frustrated with himself and the fact that he failed to keep a person he believed to be his friend alive. His fists shaking on top of his thighs he began to sob quietly in his mind.

“Shall we keep going Gail?” Ashley hated to ask under the circumstances, but the fact remained that they were on a tight schedule.

“Yes Ashley, keep moving forward....(Lucian...you shall be missed....old friend....)”

### **Chapter Fifty: The Two Knights**

The forces began to gather around the outer perimeter of Prometheus. A congregation of Shades, Night-Wings, Evertos, OZ production frames, Exodus', even modified Diabolos frames all made an appearance surrounding the docking bay. Luscious managed to gather together all sorts of frames from nearly every faction in all of creation. The Exodus frame was the one in the most circulation; they were the newest addition to the UGE. When he had the clones infiltrate the TA facility he was able to scrounge up a few of the remaining OZ production frames that Von Schuler had so desperately wanted created. They were useful frames at the time of their launch, but were considered to be out of date now. Their agility was still good for its weight, but the firepower was a bit too weak to be considered a severe threat. The Shades and Night-Wings, the remnants from the first generation of production models made possible by two smaller corporations, Revelations and Prodigy. Revelations along with Prodigy were smaller organizations which had mysteriously surfaced a few years after the Chimera incident. They were both under surveillance by both the TA and the EAP, mainly because they had appeared seemingly out of nowhere. With no prior history the two corporations fueled both the TA and the EAP, providing them with machines and weapons while hiding in the shadows. It was the privy knowledge of Luscious Malum that both organizations were in fact smaller divisions of Genesis.

It was a secret that he held close to his heart. Genesis was the sole benefactor in the war that controlled the world for so many years. He managed to manipulate every move that was ever made by either side. Luscious Malum controlled the path that humanity walked for more than 10 years. All of it was to get to this point in time; he now no longer controlled the world from the shadows, but from the pedestal of humanity.

His eyes watched closely as both Hades and Sigma flew past. He was impressed with their growth rate alongside the chips imbedded within their brains. They began to mature, no longer would they blackout, losing control, they now subconsciously merged with the chips, their personalities remained on the outside, but once in the cockpit they were all business Killing, no longer became an issue with them, it was something they would do at the drop of a hat. Their power residing within their machines became unrivaled, during test runs they performed against all sorts of frames they always tore through their opponents. The clones that Luscious managed to control were of no threat to the young boys.

“Things have indeed become intriguing. Heh, I wonder, how much they can endure.”

He smirked as he placed his merlot on the edge of the table. The lights in his office slowly dimmed as they went into a form of hibernation.

Hades swept passed the few Exodus units that lingered in front of the rest of the UGE forces. Zach's crimson eyes scanning the area in anticipation for what awaited him on the other side of the region. Ever since Luscious made his declaration every soldier on the facility was notified of what would most likely end up happening. Zach and Reine had little recollection of their time spent with Orbis, or

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even with Gail. Since the incident where Luscious managed to obtain their souls their only priority was Luscious and his dream. Any fragments from their past surfaced in random surrealistic dreams. For now they lived to serve Luscious and his ideals, and they were prepared to fight for him as long as their bodies held out.

Sigma swiftly approached Hades on its side. Sensing his friend near, Zach turned his head away from the front screen.

“Do you really expect those bastards to show up?” Reine asked.

“Not entirely sure. Anyone who decides to go against Luscious head on is obviously missing some brain cells.”

“Yeah, no one could ever hope to stand up to Luscious. Even if they did they’re not justified. Everything Luscious says is true, humans have sinned too much. It can’t be ignored any longer!” Reine replied.

“And that’s why we’ll bring anyone who opposes him to justice. Their deaths will not be swift or sudden, but slow and agonizing.” Zach concurred with force.

“Hey Zach...”

“Yeah?”

“I’ll be watching your back.”

“Heh, and I’ll be watching yours my friend.”

“They’re approaching...” Reine muttered. Their radars still failed to pick up any forms of heat, but they knew. Both of them could sense the extravagant feeling of hatred moving towards their location. It was chilling to them, never before had they felt such a sensation. It fazed them little, if anything it excited them. Zach grinned, he had been wanting to test the full capacity of Hades for a while now, but had never gotten the chance. All of the opponents he faced were nothing short of pathetic in his opinion. They were worthless, soulless creations that contained no passion for what they were trying to protect.

“Yeah. Reine, get in touch with Luscious. Let him know that I’m going forward to greet them personally.” Zach replied.

“What?! You can’t be serious, you have no idea how many are on their way. And we don’t even know how far out they are. It could be another hour or so before they even reach Prometheus. Do you even have enough fuel?”

“You worry too much Reine. I’m going to be the first to intercept them; I’ll try and cut down their forces as much as I can.”

“Zach...”

“I’ll be fine.”

“...” One thing that had always remained in Reine’s mind was his undeniable feeling of envy towards Zach. He was always the one to make the first great impression, and Reine was always the one to be left behind. His feelings were sincere, this could quite possibly be the last time that he ever had to fight alongside his friend and prove his worth.

“I’m going too Zach.”

“I see...”

“You can’t stop me.”

“Heh, I wasn’t going to try to. Come on, we may miss our chance.” Zach replied.

“Right!”

The thrusters fired brilliantly on both Hades and Sigma as they launched forward. The sudden burst of speed caused the Exodus units lingering behind to shake slightly, quivering in the ominous presence of the power those two machines held.

Luscious stood watching his monitor with a glass of merlot in his hand smiling. He could only ponder how things would turn out. It was hard for him to not smile at the sight before him; everything hovering in space belonged to him. They were the benefits brought about from his constant trials. His two knights were preparing to go to war for his own dream. Finally things were working out for him; it was

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this thought, the thought of being the one in complete control that soothed his mind. The auburn liquid circled along the edges of the glass due to the gentle motions that were being exerted from his wrist.

“With their speed it shouldn’t take them long to come in contact with Gail and his pathetic excuse for an army. It would seem that I gave Lucian too much credit, there’s still 2 days left. I was hoping he could have stalled them for a bit longer. Oh well, beggars can’t be choosers I guess, this will imply have to do. I hope they’re prepared for what is coming. Even if it’s just those two, it won’t be an easy task to get through.” Luscious laughed, his mouth widening from the devilish sarcastic sounds of laughter that emanated from his vocal chords.

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Ashley moaned grudgingly, her body continued to lean uncomfortably against the frigid restraints of the seat in the bridge. For the past 7 ½ hours she sat in the same position, making sure that they weren’t being followed. Her beauty was surpassed by her lack of ongoing patience, her shift was supposed to end 4 hours ago, but the person to take her place apparently took a seat on the wrong ship and was somewhere behind the Iron Fist. For the most part the trip towards Prometheus was generally quiet, the ship maneuvered around a few stray asteroids and debris from the battles of past. But nothing severe had shown up. Gail remained quiet for the entire ride, whether he was still wallowing about the death of his friend was up for debate, and yet, it didn’t really make much of a difference.

Silent was the best adjective to describe the Iron Fist, the minute subtleties of tranquility was appreciated by the staff and soldiers on board. Not knowing when they would be able to see the shed of light, or the warm sensation of their significant other touching their skin. Most were afraid of what was to come, but as proud soldiers they were in constant denial.

The hanger, it was a dismal place, crowded with unwieldy shadows and cobwebs hanging from nearly every crevice and corner. Each of the 5 frames loaded in the Iron Fist hung from the metallic clamps; their slumber was a means of preparation for the battle at hand. Out of all the frames only one was active. Blue Dragon’s cockpit was opened as Adam continued to work on the OS for the system. Already decked out in his azure flight suit he was preparing for the encounter which was vastly approaching. His eyes strained from the constant computer glare. In his fingers he rolled a small mundane canister. The reverberation from the pills rolling along the side of the plastic restraints echoed outwards through the hanger.

Adam sighed; his hands flew in the air as his body fell backwards into the chair. For all he knew he was finished updating his operating system. It was a tedious task, but it had to be done. With a relief he was able to shut his eyes, even if it was for a few minutes, just being able to do so was heavenly. His head turned to the side and his eyes opened slightly, their focus was of the small container in his hands; Drive. It was the remaining shard of Marcus’ persona, his final gift to Adam. It was weird for him, to have mocked Marcus for relying on these pills to help him to escape a pinch, only to be holding them in his palm, considering the same thing. The images of Luscious piloting the modified Shadow still burned in his mind, everyday he saw the same thing, Shadow Omega easily disposing of a pilot who gave Adam such a hard time. It was obvious that he was still being overcastted by Luscious’ ominous shadow and disturbing presence.

“I was wondering where you went off to.” Heather stated.

Adam glanced away from his fist which now closed to hide the pills. He was exhausted and the rings underneath his eyes were proof of that. He managed to create a sarcastic grimace.

“Heh, after all these years you should know where to find me before a battle. It’s been a while since we’ve talked hasn’t it?”

“Yeah, it has.” She replied in a soft tone, almost as if she was embarrassed to be speaking with him. Heather Pertencia was one of the first relationships he ever had. It was true they hadn’t been close in years, but he still considered her a good friend. This marked the first time in nearly 2 years where they were alone.

“What’s on your mind? You wouldn’t have come all this way to find me for nothing.”

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“Heh, you still know how to read me huh?”

“Of course.”

“Heh, that makes me feel a bit more at ease.” She replied.

“So what’s the problem? Don’t tell me you’re getting nervous.”

“It’s not nerves really...I’ve never been nervous before heading into battle. And why should I be? Especially with all of you supporting me.”

“So, if that’s not it...”

“I’m not sure I know how to explain it to be honest.”

“Try me.”

She chuckled; it was always his smooth demeanor that made her comfortable.

“I...do you think we’ll survive this?”

Adam was shocked; he was pretty much prepared for anything except for that. He never expected Heather to show doubt, or fear. It wasn’t nervousness towards the battle itself. But more towards what would come after the battle ended. It was true that many had questioned the path Orbis had taken, especially going up against the most powerful man on both worlds. There was also the issue with the mission that two highly skilled pilots were sent on, and failed to hear back from; Chris Procella and Leo Umbra, two of Orbis’ aces had never replied to any of the distress signals that Ashley sent out. It was later written down that they were both MIA, but Adam and the others knew they most likely perished on the crimson planet. Their mission was a difficult one, to exterminate the remaining 3 Night Stalkers, whether they managed to take any of them out was unknown to those residing in Orbis. But either way, it was deemed a tragedy, and with that judgment under scrutiny it was only natural that this one was as well. Many people wondered if they would be able to make it in time and stop Luscious. While others wondered if they even made it would they be able to stop him.

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? That’s all you have to say? No words of insight? Words of wisdom? Some help you are!”

“It’d be pointless to lie to you now. The truth is, I have no clue what is going to happen and I’m not going to delude myself into thinking otherwise. I already know what I’m in this fight for, do you?” Adam moved his legs over from the console and placed himself in a more serious sitting position. His back leaning straight up against the cushions of his seat, and with his stature stared back at Heather.

“I...I don’t know...”

“You can’t force yourself to fight if you have no real resolution to do so.”

“All I know is that I want to help everyone. I don’t want to be the only sitting back while everyone is fighting.”

“Then you have a reason. All you can do right now is fight; we’ll sort out the endings when they come. Until then, there’s no use in fussing and worrying over the end now.”

“Hehe, you’ve really matured over the years haven’t you?”

“I guess so. Hahahaha.”

The sound of laughter was rare in the Iron Fist, specifically when it was filled with sullen soldiers and paranoid technicians. He found himself drowning in the pleasantries of laughter, it was something he felt he needed to rise his spirits. He was always a multitasker, able to display one form of emotion while feeling another. Regardless of the outside, he was on the inside focused, filled with ambitions of revenge which were all going to be directed towards one man; Luscious Malum.

“Thanks Adam.”

“Huh?”

Heather lifted up from her squatting position and started to walk away.

“That was pretty quick don’t you think?”

“I’m fine now, that was all I needed to hear.”

“Heh, honestly I didn’t think I was that big of help but hey, to each their own I guess. So what’re you going to do now?”

“I’m going to make some adjustments to Blue Angel before we reach Prometheus.”

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“Heh..”

“Later.”

“Later.”

Smirking, he reclined once again; lifting his legs onto the edge of the silver console he shut his eyes. His solitude didn't last much longer once the alarms began to blare, the crimson lights circling the darkened room at a swift pace. His eyes shot opened, nearly jumping out of his restraints Adam leaned forward in order to completely close Blue Dragon's cockpit. Once closed, the display screens lit up and the lights dimmed. The computer had a direct link to the Iron Fist's external monitors; it wasn't long before he was greeted with a serene view of space and its obsidian glory. For the moment only the stars flickered on his screen, as hard as he looked he found nothing suspicious.

“Adam...”

At the sound of Ashley's voice he turned to the right display panel where her face as vibrant as ever was shown.

“Where's this coming from?”

“Front, 50 meters out. Two heat signatures...”

“Recognizable?”

“...”

“Heh, I'll take that as yes.”

“Hades and Sigma...”

“Zach and Reine then... this is a lot sooner than expected.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Not much choice is there?”

“It's only the two of them.”

“Then this shouldn't get too ugly. We'll try and force our way through them. I'm going to head out.”

“You want me to alert Stephen and the others?”

“It's up to you.”

“You don't want back up? You're kidding...”

“It makes no difference to me honestly.”

“Ugh...you're so damn difficult.”

“I'm cutting communications now Ashley. Do whatever you want, just make sure the hanger is opened so I can launch.” Adam replied.

Before Ashley was given an opportunity to reply the link was cancelled, it didn't surprise her really, it was simply his personality. She grinned just as she began to page Stephen.

Adam smirked once the hanger gates began to slide open. His body shook slightly from the sudden movement of Blue Dragon. The metal clamps strengthened its grip as they lifted the blue frame towards the launch pad. Adam flicked the switch turning on the generator, the head unit flickered brightly. The subtle hum of the generator eased his soul; it wouldn't be a stretch to say that he felt comfortable, almost home in his cockpit. Still, as comfortable as he felt he still had stray feelings about confronting both Zach and Reine. Two young pilots who he fought side by side 3 years ago during Rebel's Tribulation; it wasn't something he wanted to do.

“(H-3 and H-4 huh....) I wonder what that exactly means...” He mumbled.

*Adam Novus, Blue Dragon is green for launch*

“Adam Novus, Blue Dragon launching.”

The thrusters exploded with power, the blue frame suddenly dashed down the narrow barely lit corridor. As the cerulean flames brightly fluttering while the frame moved closer to the space before it.

His hands continued to grip the throttles while he eased the accelerators. Upon exiting the Iron Fist his radar began to scream. To his surprise both Hades and Sigma surged in front of him.

“Shit...”

“You were right Zach, they launch from the front.” Reine yelled.

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“It’s just one, let’s take this one out first and then finish off the ship.” Zach replied.

“Right.”

“Reine, I’ll handle this one. You focus on the ship itself!”

“Got it!”

“Zach! Reine!” Adam screamed, remembering the frequencies on both Hades and Sigma Adam locked onto both frames. Both Zach and Reine stared at the end of Blue Dragon’s beam rifles. At first they were confused at the sight of Adam’s face filling their displays, a part of them stirred inside almost as if they knew him. For a moment they cringed, trying to figure out what the feeling was, trying to remember the person standing in their way. As they continued to dig even deeper into their subconscious their heads began to ring with pain, their eyes flinched in reaction to the increase in migraines.

“You’re...\*arg\* in our way...You will die...” Zach struggled to say.

“I see...neither of you know who I am.” Adam replied.

“It doesn’t matter...Zach, hurry up, we need to get this over with before the rest of their forces get within firing range.” Reine replied.

“Got it...”

“If that’s how this is going to be then so be it. But be aware, you won’t get past me.” Adam sternly replied.

“Heh. Sure.” Zach mumbled, almost as if he was amusingly entertained.

Hades dashed to the right while Sigma went to the left. Adam cringed; he knew he shouldn’t have wasted time, which he should have fired when he had the chance. He knew what they planned on wasn’t what they were going to do; most likely both of them were going to attack him head on in an attempt to get him out of the way early.

“I see...” Adam mumbled. His eyes first glanced to his right where Sigma was speeding on a curved trajectory towards him, and then to his left where Hades was doing the same. Both raised their rifles in his direction. Blue Dragon suddenly strafed to the right, he recalled that between the two of them Reine was the weakest; he still posed a threat but not as much as Zach did. Reine was shocked by the speed in which Adam was heading towards him; Reine began to fire with no restraints. Each bullet sped past Blue Dragon as Adam dashed from side to side avoiding every shell. At the last second Blue Dragon unsheathed its energy saber and in a quick move swung towards Sigma. Just before the beam of energy approached Sigma another solidified beam interrupted the attack.

“You’re my opponent.” Zach humbly replied. To Adam’s surprise Hades was now standing on his side with his energy saber drawn, conflicting with his own. The currents of electricity and positron energy were fierce as their outer glow of light gleamed off the metallic armor of all three frames.

“Hmpf, you’re improved.” Adam sarcastically stated.



**Chapter Fifty-One: Angel in the Azure Dusk**

Adam was still in some form of shock in response to Zach's miraculous save. Neither he nor his radar managed to pick up Hades' movements in the process. It was almost as if he disappeared and then reappeared. It was surprising, but nothing that caused him to falter in his own confidence. He had dealt with speed similar to this once before, namely in the form of Shadow. Until both of them were to force him into relying on the Angel System he would remain calm. Both thigh cannons lifted firing almost instantly. Zach grinned as he pulled the throttles inwards causing Hades to relieve the pressure from Adam's energy saber. The sudden loss of an opposing force caused Blue Dragon to lunge forward disrupting the firing of both plasma cannons. As Blue Dragon appeared to be vulnerable Hades entered a swinging motion. Just as the orange frame's arm began to slash Blue Dragon suddenly lifted its left arm firing the beam rifle at close range. The beam exploded on the core of Hades interrupting its own attack, simultaneously the torso spun around focusing back towards Reine who was about to attack.

"Too slow Reine." Adam snickered.

Blue Dragon's thigh cannons fired violently. The force of the collision knocked Sigma out from the caliginous clouds of darkened smoke that emanated around the point of contact. In the corner of his eyes he watched as Hades recovered and began its onslaught. Suddenly beams of thickened energy all converged onto the blue frame. Adam's right foot applied full pressure onto the accelerator pad causing the right boosters to gain an increase in power. The unbalanced output of power sent Blue Dragon spiraling through the region avoiding the first batch of plasma beams. Zach dismissed the maneuvers and lunged forward still firing with everything he had. Hades soared amongst the torrents of energy it was firing, using it as a cover for its next attack. Adam remained calm as he watched the beams continuing their pursuit, Blue Dragon dashed to the right, barrel rolling over and under thin focused beams of energy. During all of the dodging and missed attacks Zach remained calm, piloting his frame like a professional. His inner conscious however, was much different. He heard its screams, the darkest regions of his own demons, gnawing, begging to be unleashed. His eyes twitched at their bellows of terror, the only thing standing in its way was his will, his own will to remain in control.

Sigma managed to recover and quickly sped back towards both Adam and Zach. Unlike Zach he had already succumbed to his inner demons, with his eyes engulfed in a fiery glaze Reine pushed his throttles forward. 14 lock on boxes scattered around the edges of his display screen all frantically trying to obtain a solid capture on Blue Dragon. It only took a few seconds but once the first lock on caught the blue frame the remaining 13 followed like a domino effect.

"To forget about me... why... I'll show them all not to take me lightly!" Reine's deepened voice screamed. Suddenly 26 missiles launched from Sigma's back. Adam quickly glanced over his shoulder, now not only were beams of energy heading in his direction but dozens of silver warheads. He shrugged his shoulders with a meager smirk.

"Reine... heh, almost forgot about you." He replied.

Blue Dragon abruptly stopped in mid space while the oncoming attacks continued forward. Zach forced Hades to stop as well just as Sigma showed up beside him. Just before each attack converged Blue Dragon's eight wings sharply extended. There was a thunderous boom along with a blinding flash of radial light. Each of the missiles bombarded the frame creating an out pour of smoke to rushing flow from the point of contact. Each beam of energy pierced the bulbous cluster of smog adding to the explosion.

Looking over at his comrade Reine began to smile, even with his hybrid side blossoming he still held onto some form of human arrogance.

"It's not over yet Reine." Zach replied softly. He had fought off his visceral subconscious for the time being.

"You're kidding..."

At that moment Reine realized just how impressive his opponent truly was. Amongst the dull smog shun brightly a cerulean orb of flowing energy. In it was Blue Dragon with its wings spread

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outwards while sustaining the energy shield that now encased it. Adam smirked as the shield disengaged and Blue Dragon soared forward. He knew how shocked both Zach and Reine were and intended on using that to his advantage. It bothered him slightly that he wouldn't be able to use the Angel System in sync with the OWS for 30 minutes now because of the drastic energy drain the shield used. In his mind he figured he wouldn't need it, not with the Iron Fist behind him and the rest of Orbis' fleet on the way.

Zach remained calm, collected as if the new display of defense talent failed to faze him. Reine on the other hand was completely different. Feelings of doubt flowed through his mind, causing him to become open. Blue Dragon slammed into the core of Sigma knocking it away once again, Adam turned away just as Hades flung its left leg. The orange metallic leg missed its target just as Blue Dragon spun on its side in order to dodge.

"This is a pretty good work out. You both impress me. But that's about the extent of it. If you two can't take me down now when you have the numerical advantage then how do you expect to do so when company arrives?"

"So then, shall we stop toying then?" Zach replied.

"Hehe, you two are toying? Well then if that's the case, then by all means stop and show me what you really..." Adam's eyes widened in disbelief, Hades suddenly swung both of its energy sabers upwards. The orange frame managed to get within striking distance with little effort; Adam tugged back on the throttles causing Blue Dragon to bend its torso barely avoiding the strike. Hades then slammed its right leg into the side of the blue frame causing it to spiral on its side uncontrollably. While Adam's body was flung around Reine managed to gain control of Sigma, the frame suddenly burst towards the spiraling Blue Dragon.

It was the first time in a while where Adam found himself cringing at a situation, his hair flopping around behind his opaque visor. His hands firmly holding onto the throttles while he debated if he should engage the Angel System, it was a decision that would have had to been made in the following seconds. Just as Sigma sped forward two beams of lime energy surged in between the two frames. Smirking Adam left the Angel System alone and Blue Dragon came to a stop regaining its stature.

"What the hell?!" Reine screamed. He turned his head to see Alpha flying towards the group of frames.

"You should have waited." Stephen casually stated.

"Heh, what can I say? I'm impatient." Adam replied.

"Yeah you are. And from the looks of it in some trouble."

"I'm still gauging their abilities...I might actually have to use the Angel System on them."

"I see, so they improved that much. It makes sense since they're both products from Genesis' DNA division." Stephen replied.

"Reine still has some room for improvement, my main concern is Zach. I'll deal with him, you take care of Reine."

"Listen, everyone else is ready to launch..."

"We should be enough; we can't afford to stall any longer. Have Ashley tell Gail to take the remaining forces and go straight to Prometheus. We'll finish things here."

"I see...alright. I'll send a text message. You deal with Zach, and don't stall; you have a tendency of playing around too long."

"Hehe...yeah, I do don't I?" Adam chuckled.

Blue Dragon and Alpha went their separate ways, Adam heading towards Zach and Stephen heading towards Reine. Alpha lunged towards Sigma, both of the crimson arms arching back as they held onto the energy boomerangs. With a sudden release Alpha threw the two weapons hurling towards Sigma. Reine nodded, Sigma ducked underneath the approaching trajectory avoiding the weapons. Just as Sigma dodged Reine's eyes widened as Alpha was now on his side with the two energy cannons from his glider staring in the face of Sigma.

"You're fast..." Reine mumbled.

"I know." Stephen replied.

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The two cannons fired in front of Sigma with an immediate impact. The force of the impact caused Sigma to fall backwards and into the second trajectory of the boomerangs. Reine couldn't believe that a human set up that strategy and was forced to watch as each boomerang vastly approached his frame.

"I won't...I can't..." His resolve strengthened, fueling his desire to prove his skill and power. His eyes vastly widened; the human glaze no longer appealing as it transitioned a frigid glossy demonic figure. Sigma turned upwards still spinning towards the oncoming boomerangs, suddenly the missile packs on the back of the frame opened allowing dozens of missiles to launch. Stephen knew what was going to happen and wasted no time, Alpha dashed towards Sigma with both energy rifles locked onto the frame. The two boomerangs deflected off the barrage of missiles causing a minute explosion to riddle the foundation of Reine's frame. Along with the explosion Reine ignited Sigma's thrusters, with the uncontrollable rotation of his frame over he regained full control. Just as Sigma launched towards Alpha it was hit by the rounds of energy that Stephen unloaded. With each hit Sigma jerked at an awkward angle causing the thrust of the frame to become unstable.

"It would seem as if he's just fighting...not even thinking about what's going on. Still, it's amazing that he's still going this far." Stephen mumbled to himself.

*"What's going on Stephen? Mario and Heather are ready to launch."*

"Ashley, I'm a little busy right now."

*"I know, that's why I'm going to have them launch."*

"Don't bother. Adam and I will take care of these two. The rest of you continue towards Prometheus. We can't waste too much time here."

*"But..."*

"Don't argue, just do it. We'll catch up shortly."

*"...."*

"We'll be fine Ashley." Stephen grinned just before he cut Ashley's link to Alpha. "Now, where was I?"

Sigma blindly continued its rush; with both of its energy sabers extending outwards from the side Reine could only see his enemy. No longer was he paying attention to the actions of Zach or even of the remaining Orbis fleet; it was just Alpha that he saw. Alpha's silver fingers slowly let go of both rifles while Sigma continued to draw near. What happened next was something Stephen could never have foreseen, Sigma dashed to the right suddenly leaving no trace of energy or frame. It was as if Sigma completely vanished from sight. Alpha then revealed both energy sabers and quickly swung towards its left side, Stephen was shocked to find nothing there.

"Over here..." Reine's voice softly baited Stephen's attention.

Before Alpha could turn Sigma slashed the back side of Alpha. Both beams of solidified energy tore through the jetpack, the searing metallic wounds howled as fizzling electrical currents rampantly sparked about. The right wing suffered the most damage as it hung loosely from the base of the glider pack. Obsidian wires flinging in circles while darkened smoke emanated from the points of impact. Sigma's left leg then swung upwards kicking into the torso of Alpha. The impact sent a shockwave through the frame and cockpit causing Stephen to grab onto something in order to remain balanced. His head was thrown forward and then backwards causing a minor case of whiplash. Once he managed to regain some form of control in Alpha he smirked. It was a while since he was forced into a corner. Stephen cracked his neck after recovering from the minor injury. Once again Sigma vanished from Alpha's radar, this time Stephen made nothing of it. Alpha's arms rose extending outwards with both sabers pointing forward. Stephen quickly made some adjustments to the thrusters; he sent all of the energy output from the generator to the two main booster packs located just underneath the jetpack. Both of them pivoted at 45 degree angle pointing to the right. His feet slammed down on the accelerator pads causing an immediate flow of energy to rush through both boosters. The crimson flames erupted outwards with a powerful boost of thrust, since Stephen turned off the stabilizing boosters Alpha began to spin rapidly. The energy flow remained consistent as the crimson frame continued to rotate ferociously with both energy sabers fully extended.

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“What the hell?!” Reine shouted. Sigma was already in a full lung preparing to attack just as it did before. Realizing that he couldn’t attack during what he figured to be a defensive maneuver Reine tried to halt Sigma’s movement, but it was far too late for that now. Even if he did manage to cut off the booster’s power his frame would still continue to move forward at an alarming rate. In a flash Sigma’s right arm was sliced off, the metal arm flung outwards burnt from the searing energy that penetrated the joint. Reine cringed at the tornado like image before him. The rotations began to slow down as Stephen cut off the power, Sigma boosted back a few meters while gaining the proper lock-on necessary to launch its missiles. Just as Reine’s eyes squinted at the crimson box that surrounded Alpha on his display screen Stephen smirked once again as he released one of the energy sabers in mid rotation. Reine was forced to stop what he was doing and focus on dodging. The beam of energy sped through space with no signs of slowing down at all; it was still fused with the velocity it acquired during the numerous rotations that Alpha went through.

“Impressive...” Reine mumbled.

Sigma boosters ignited and the frame zoomed to the side avoiding the oncoming saber. Suddenly Alpha was following the same path as Sigma. Alpha’s two energy cannons continued to gather energy while the crimson frame glared back at Sigma.

“This isn’t possible...you’re only human...” Reine replied.

“Heh...don’t speak as if you’re not.” Stephen remarked.

Once the two beams fired Sigma raised its remaining arm in order to activate its energy shield. The rectangular shaped flow of energy deflected the two beams back towards Stephen. Stephen pulled both throttles towards his sides causing the frame to lean to the right avoiding the attack. His screen then became filled with dozens of warheads that were all converging onto his position. Alpha began a series of maneuvers in order to avoid getting hit, back peddling away with each passing moments Stephen was able to watch as the cluster of missiles veered away from his frame.

“Still fast I see...it would seem that Genesis did a much better job with this batch of hybrids. They’re pretty quick to adapt.” Stephen mumbled.

Sigma lunged forward swinging its energy saber, just as the saber closed in Alpha’s back boosters erupted with a burst of energy causing a flowing amount of energy to be back lashed onto Sigma. Once again Reine found himself flopping around in space.

“Reine! Enough is enough already! We’re running out of time, you must have a shred of your own memories and personality left in there!” Stephen screamed.

Alpha began its descent towards the back flipping MF.

“Don’t speak to me as if you know me. You’re nothing more than a hindrance to Luscious. And as such I have to defeat you!” Reine screamed back. More and more the sharp humming sound pounding in the back of his mind increased in volume. Every few seconds Reine found himself taking deep breaths, or squishing his eyes in reaction to the pain. He didn’t understand what it was; all he knew was that things were becoming clearer; his reaction time began to become in sync with that of his MF.

“You have no clue what you’re saying Reine! You’re being deceived!”

“Shut up! Your sins...your sins have to be destroyed!” Reine yelled back.

“\*sigh\*...I don’t have much of a choice do I then?” It wasn’t something he wanted to do, he had hoped to be able to salvage some form of Reine’s true persona, but it seemed as if the damage Genesis had done only continued to strengthen its hold on him. Just as Sigma managed to stop flipping through space Alpha surged past the frame. There was a brief silence; Stephen hung his head panting from the heat that was scorching his body. The salt tasting drops of sweat continuing to fall onto his tongue as he tried to gasp for air. Alpha’s right arm was extended outwards with the saber sizzling. Reine chuckled as he turned Sigma around to face Alpha, as the gears began to turn and the torso slowly moved there was a vibrant explosion. Flames burst outwards briefly before diminishing, debris launched outwards from under the torso of Sigma, chunks of singed metal armor spiraling through the abyss while the obsidian smoke flourished out from underneath Sigma’s torso.

Minor explosions lit up the cockpit, Reine’s arms swung in the air covering his face. Pieces of jagged plastic flung through the small room, most of which cut deeply through Reine’s pilot suit and skin.

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Drenched with blood and sweat his suit was torn and disheveled. spurts of hoarse coughs were all that filled the gap of silence, his visor no longer clear, but fogged and stained with dripping pools of blood. His mouth leaked with blood dripping to the bottom of his helmet.

Alpha hovered in the black canvas of space while Stephen began to show remorse over the remains of Sigma. The frame was split in two just underneath the torso. Stephen sighed loudly as he turned to his side; his display screen was filled with small blinding explosions that occurred in the distance.

“Heh..\*huff\*...you’ve definitely gotten better \*huff\*...” Adam continued to pant; he was exhausted from keeping up with Zach. Hades was a formidable opponent and was able to throw a countless number of offensive moves out before having to resort to anything remotely considered a defensive tactic. Both frames had sustained little damage, mainly burn marks and a few scratches from barely avoided beams of energy. Blue Dragon and Hades continued to circle each other, Adam stared forward as he watched the orange frame eloquently boosting around. Each volley that they both sent forward ended up at a stalemate, he had been pushed as far as he could go without engaging the Angel System.

“Why don’t you understand that Luscious? He’s right! This world is too stained to go on!”

“It’s true then...you have no recollection of who you are anymore. It’s clear to me that you’re nothing more than a lifeless doll with strings for Luscious to pull.”

“Say what you want, but Luscious Malum is right. One way or another his desires will be realized soon! I won’t let you get in his way!” Zach screamed.

Zach leaped from his seat forcing the accelerators down. The thrusters burst out with power sending Hades towards Blue Dragon at blinding speed. Adam realized there was no turning back anymore; Zach was gone, completely engulfed in the shadows that were Luscious Malum. Zach coughed up some blood which splattered along the curved edges of his visor, his eyes pale and lifeless, he had finally given in to the power that was artificially given to him by Genesis. At that instant Hades began to circle around Blue Dragon, its speed unrivaled to anything Adam had ever witness in his life. During its circling trajectory Hades began to pummel Blue Dragon with its plasma rifle. Each beam of thickened round of positron energy slammed into the energy shield that was emanating off Blue Dragon’s arm. Since using the Animus Lumen earlier it would have been increasingly difficult to use the Angel System. The 30 minute time limit was a mere 2 minutes away from finishing, when those 2 minutes complete the Angel System would be available once again, until then he would have to manage on his own.

With each hit the gears absorbed even more strain, the right continued to shake with each hit but still stood its ground. Adam’s eyes looked around, trying to receive a good read on Hades’ movements. If he could manage to see a pattern he might have been able to come up with some sort of theory as to how long it takes Hades to appear in front of him and for how long it would be open for attack.

“You can’t fathom Hades’ speed human so don’t bother trying.”

“Heh, you know that I’ve gone up against two of your predecessors. And both times I came out on top.” Adam snickered.

“Irrelevant, I am aware of the existence of the H-1 and 2, they were defective.”

“Defective huh? Heh, are you confident enough in your stability?”

“You stand no chance; you will not interfere with Luscious’ dreams!”

“You talk too much...it’s a pity you don’t have any form of recollection, otherwise you’d remember that we were friends. It pains me to end your life, but if that’s what it takes to save billions then I’ll do it in a heartbeat!” Adam screamed.

To Zach’s shock Blue Dragon disengaged its energy shield lunging forward. Hades’ right arm quivered, struggling to get a lock on. Blue Dragon’s trail of cerulean energy was intense as the frame leaned forward slashing with the energy saber. Zach pulled back on the throttles causing Hades to move away from its circular path. Adam snickered while Zach silently sat bewildered at the idea of Blue Dragon being able to catch Hades while it was in the middle of its maneuvers.

“A fluke. It won’t happen again.” Zach replied.

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“Fluke huh? We’ll see about that...hehe...”

“What are you laughing at? You’re at a disadvantage here.”

“45 seconds left. Can you finish this off in that little amount of time?”

“I only need 10.”

Hades disappeared suddenly, Adam couldn’t believe it, and he realized that he needed to separate himself from Zach as much as he could. No matter how many times he boasted he couldn’t bring himself to end Zach’s life. He was still desperately trying to come up with a plan to save him.

“Too slow.” Zach mumbled.

Hades reappeared before Blue Dragon as the orange frame revealed its hidden weapon; it was a nostalgic sight for Adam, he hadn’t seen Hades holding its energy scythe in years. But as nostalgic as it was, he knew it was a deadly weapon for Zach to be wielding.

“Time’s up, it seems I have no choice but to end this quickly if I want to deal with Luscious personally.” Adam replied.

“I won’t let it happen.”

“Heh, too late don’t you think. There goes the remaining Orbis fleet passing you by. With you two here, who’s going to protect Luscious’ dream thoroughly? You two are his prize pilots are you not?”

“...I’ll end this now.”

“No...you won’t.”

*Angel System Engaged.*

## **Chapter Fifty-Two: Radiance of Hope**

Sharon’s fingers firmly pressed up against the opaque window, her eyes staring off into the distance. Her vision attached to the fading spheres of conflagrant energy that continued to burst amongst the back drop of space, various emotions swept through her mind. At first when she heard that Adam stayed behind to deal with the frames she was frustrated, more along the lines of furious. But lately she began to worry; the messages blaring off the loud speakers indicated that Prometheus was a mere 20 minutes away. She wasn’t sure what was ahead, but she wanted Adam to be back.

“You ok?” Heather asked as she approached from behind.

Sharon slowly turned around, her eyes glazed over with her emotions.

“Yeah...I’m fine.”

“No you’re not. You don’t have to pretend to be alright you know. I hate to sound cliché but they’ll be alright.”

“I know...but it just pisses me off that he went out there on his own. He didn’t even tell me!”

“He’s an ass I know.”

“Heh...he has his moments.” Sharon replied.

*This is to inform everyone that we are 15 minutes outside of Prometheus’ perimeters. All MF pilots please report to your frames. Expect to launch in 10 minutes.*

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Gail's voice only added to the stress and tension that was flowing through the Iron Fist, it was also distributed through the following ships. Sharon sighed looking back at Heather. She was already dressed up in her pilot suit; her helmet was placed on the tiled floor near her feet.

"Looks like we're heading out. Are you sure about this?"

"Yeah...I have to do what I can."

"Alright, then here's the deal. Adam told me to watch out for you, so stay by me and you'll be fine."

"Thanks Heather..."

"Come on, let's get going." Heather replied.

Ashley turned around as Gail finished his announcements.

"How many are waiting for us when we get there?" Gail asked.

"50..."

"What type?"

"Umm...that's the thing. There's at least 6 different heat signatures showing up...Gail, nearly every type of frame is waiting at Prometheus for us. Not to mention, there are still soldiers from Dammerung and Washington. This will be our best shot at Prometheus."

"Damn...any word on Adam and Stephen yet?"

"Not things Gail...both of their heat signatures are still 200 meters out. It'll be safe to say that we're going to have to start things without them." Ashley replied.

"We have no choice. We're going to have to send out our best from the start if we're going to stand a chance." Gail replied.

"You think we have a chance?"

"Not a clue...but we're going to try."

Krista eyes' widened, her face suddenly became pale. Her chair swung around, her hair whipping across her face.

"Ashley! Gail! We're being hailed..."

"What? By who?" Gail shocked by the idea of being hailed asked. He took another deep breath; Krista's silence said it all.

"It's Luscious Malum..."

"I see...let it through." Gail mumbled.

At that moment the front display screen was colored by Luscious' face. It had been a long time since Gail sat in front of the UGE President, at first it was intimidating, Gail struggled with his composure, if it wasn't for Ashley glaring back at him he probably would have fainted from the severe amount of pressure mixed with tightened nerves that were building up in his body.

"Long time Gail." Luscious mumbled, smirking back at Gail who was trying to hold back his nerves from showing.

"Luscious..."

"Let's get straight to the point shall we? You came all the way here to stop me; do you honestly believe you can get in my way Gail?"

"We will stop you Luscious."

"Hahah, you truly are amusing Gail. While you're fleet is mildly impressive, you're fire power is nothing compared to mine. This is the true Tribulation of the world, and it will be brought about by my hand."

"You're Tribulation...Luscious you are nothing more than a lunatic who is obsessed the idea of sin. What makes you think you have the right to decide what is and isn't right for humanity?"

"What makes me have the right? Hahahahaha...you don't have a clue who I am Gail, what I've gone through, the countless tragedies I've seen. You don't have the power required to get in my way Gail. This is your last chance Gail; you can avoid unnecessary tragedies by leaving now."

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“What makes you think that I actually believe that? You intend to wipe all sins right? And in doing so you intend to annihilate all of humanity, so no matter what I decide everyone’s lives will be endangered.”

“That maybe true, but if you go against my will then you and your soldiers will not make it in to Heaven.” Luscious replied.

“That’s a chance we’re all willing to take.”

“I see, then there’s no need to continue this conversation. Your end will come upon swift wings.” Luscious took a sip of merlot and then shut off the link leaving Gail and everyone else in the Bridge of the Iron Fist to stare at a black screen.

Luscious stood staring out his window at the forces gathering together in front of Prometheus. The anticipation made him smile, in mere moments the remaining obstacle standing in his way was about to make their move. He still had a little more than a day left before he would fire the Rapture, after all the years of biding his time, plotting and planning he was finally able to live his dream. The only thing that bothered him was that both of his knights had yet to report back.

“Those two...where the hell did they run off to?” He mumbled under his breath as he placed his glass of wine on the table.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hades soared towards Blue Dragon swinging its energy scythe with every chance he had. Adam sighed as he watched the sluggish movements that Zach was making. Each attack he made was avoided with ease while Blue Dragon continued its display of speed and agility. Zach still under the influence of his programming remained collected and determined for victory, his eyes refused to move away from the blue frame buzzing around the region.

“Give up Zach, you can’t win this.” Adam mumbled.

“You’re a threat to Luscious. I’m not going anywhere! Not until I send you to hell!” Hades burst out in speed rushing towards Blue Dragon, both of its arms arched back as the energy in the scythe grew in width. Adam’s fingers firmly wrapped around the blunt end of the throttle.

“Adam, hurry this up. We’re running out of time!” Stephen yelled.

Adam glanced over his shoulder, he wasn’t surprised that Stephen came out on top against Reine, he was just surprised that he finished his battle first.

“You go on ahead, I’ll finish up here.” Adam replied.

Hades swung swiftly catching Adam off guard, Blue Dragon reacted at the last second counted with its energy saber. The two beams of energy crashed into one another creating a blinding light of energy to sweep outwards like a shockwave. Zach continued to cough, only more frequently, migraines echoed loudly in his head. His eyes flinched while Hades continued to struggle against Blue Dragon.

“I can’t let you leave here!” Zach screamed.

“Zach...you have no say in this.” Adam replied.

Blue Dragon’s thigh cannons pivoted upwards firing up complete extension. Hades was thrown off Blue Dragon, its hand letting go of the energy scythe due to the blunt trauma of the explosion. Blue Dragon burst through the small cluster of smoke created from the explosion following the falling Hades. Adam glanced at his watch, he didn’t realize how much time had past since he began engaging Zach and Reine, he truly was out of time and he knew it. By now the Iron Fist and the rest of Orbis’ forces made it to Prometheus. His main concern now was Sharon, his eyes lit up with a fiery ambition. No longer was his resolve blurred by the fact of who Zach used to be, it was clear, and nothing was going to get in his way anymore.

Blue Dragon’s wings extended outwards releasing the orbital wings into the region. Instantly all eight of the orbits began to circle around Hades, Zach cringed at the sight of the eight objects hurling beams of energy towards his frame. While falling backwards Hades began evasive maneuvers, Zach had complete control of his frame, whatever he thought about doing his frame would do. He, unlike Nick and



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Mike was a completed Hybrid; Zach was the ultimate combination of computer and human. Suddenly Blue Dragon swept through the torrents of beams slamming both energy sabers together, as his dual energy saber glistened in the vast darkness of space Blue Dragon's speed increased once again.

"I...I won't let you get in Luscious' way!" Zach yelled.

Hades abruptly stopped in the mid fall, upon recovering the orange and black frame ignited both of its energy sabers and began to deflect the beams that closed in on him. With quick sword play the beams being released by the orbits were deflected back towards Blue Dragon. Adam chuckled; he was amused by Zach's skills, and the fact that he pushed him so far.

"I can't play around anymore Zach...I have to get to Prometheus." Adam replied.

*Angel System EX Mode Engaged...*

The flames flourishing out from the back thrusters increased in length and width, it was over the minute Adam engaged the second stage of the system. Zach was thrown back in his seat from shock at by how quickly Blue Dragon sped past his frame. It was like a surrealistic nightmare to him, completely illogical in his mind. Finding a moment in tranquility Zach sighed, Hades' right arm and leg were severed from their joints; it was like a flash of destructive light for Zach, in a single instant his frame was disabled without warning. Blue Dragon hovered behind the smoking Hades, Adam sighed as he glanced over his shoulder.

"Zach...you're wrong in trusting Luscious."

"\*cough\*...I failed him...\*cough\*...\*cough\*" Blood spurt out from his cold pale lips spreading out across his visor. Zach clutched onto his chest feeling his heart beating much faster than it should. He then removed the helmet covering his head tossing it to the ground. His throat gagging on the blood that was flowing up from his lungs, his body collapsed forward and his head slammed into the control panel for Hades. While his eyes slowly closed, wrapped in the darkness he let out a subtle chuckle.

"Luscious...I failed..."

Adam shut his eyes in disappointment, looking away from the floating wreck of metal that was Hades. Taking a deep breath he disengaged the Angel System just as the orbital weapons reattached to the wing binders.

"Stephen, I'm on my way."

"Understood."

"Any news on what's happening?"

"It's begun Adam."

"Shit..."

"Don't worry Adam, nothing tragic as of yet. But the UGE forces have begun their advancement on the Iron Fist and the rest of Orbis' fleet. Don't worry, we'll make it in time...I promise." Stephen replied.

"I hope so...(Sharon, hold on, just a little longer.)"

\*\*\*\*\*

Anima sped through a battalion of Night-Wings with both of its whips dragging behind. Mario snickered as each whip stretched outwards in a tight form, with a flick of the frame's wrist the whip pierced through the torsos of each Night-Wing. An abundance of explosions vibrantly lit up the region behind Anima as each pilot of the Night-Wing screamed in the fulmination of energy.

"\*huff\*...that's 10 for me...\*huff\*...Heather, how are you doing?" Mario asked.

Heather ignored Mario for a moment while Blue Angel gracefully floated in space. The elongated positron cannon leaned over the shoulder of Blue Angel. Her hazel eyes thinned focusing on the Everto that was heading towards one of the Orbis cruisers.

"Above you Heather!" Sharon screamed.

A single Shade unit was hastily approaching Blue Angel, the pilot smiled as his energy rifle locked onto the blue frame. To his surprise his radar began to alarm, the moment he turned around Impetus headed towards the Shade with both beam rifles firing. To his dismay he had to let go of the lock

### Shattered Heaven Episode III: Serenade for the Wind

and switch his focus to the frame that was currently attacking. Sharon, intent on proving her worth didn't look back, didn't even worry about what could happen if she failed, she simply focused on the task at hand. Her hands no longer quivering around the throttles, but holding on with confidence, she smiled for the first time in her cockpit. The Shade danced between the green beams of energy, with each attack the rounds would get closer and closer to hitting the frame. Sharon swayed Impetus to the side and began to circle around the Shade in hopes of approaching from behind. While flying in the trajectory she continued to fire repetitively.

"This bitch is pretty good..." The pilot mumbled. "What the hell?!" He lost sight of Impetus for a moment and was caught off guard. The Shade was blown back a few 100 meters by the constant impacts of the energy rounds. A single round exploded on the head of the Shade causing its FCS to flash "error" messages, the display screens surrounding him were now stained with static. Impetus swung around and tore through the Shade's right arm with its energy saber. Sharon smiled once she disabled her opponent and continued to head back towards Heather.

"Not bad Sharon, not bad at all." Mario exclaimed from behind.

"Thanks."

"Turn to port! Fire anti-missile defenses; aim Positron Cannons in the direction of Prometheus. We'll cut through the oncoming Exodus units in a single attack!" Gail shouted.

"Understood." Krista replied.

The Iron Fist continued to cut through the defenses of Prometheus, with shells flinging into the region destroying as many missiles as they could. The Iron Fist took little damage since entering the battle, but it wasn't the time to be thrilled. While Orbis was managing to cut through the UGE defenses more and more MFs were showing up. It was beginning to seem as if Luscious had an infinite supply of soldiers at his disposal.

The two Positron Cannons lengthened staring forward at the dozens of Exodus units approaching.

"Targets acquired." Krista mentioned.

"Fire." Gail replied.

The two cannons jerked back as they unleashed a thickened beam of energy. The lead Exodus unit veered right avoiding the attack while the remaining units following were engulfed in the blast. The lead pilot glanced back as he watched the vibrant explosions riddle the foundation of his frame.

"You shouldn't look away!" Mario screamed as Anima descended onto the lone unit. Before the Exodus was able to defend Anima wrapped both of its whips around both the right and left arm of the ivory frame. "Hehe, this is almost too easy." Anima jerked the whips away from the Exodus causing its arms to be torn from the connecting joints and wires.

*Beep! Beep!*

"More I see, this is almost way too much fun!" Mario laughed.

Two OZ production frames tried to sneak up on Anima, both of which armed their own positron cannon. The elongated dark green and silver cannons rotated underneath the arm joints of the frames, each pilot focused on the quivering digital box that surrounded Anima.

Just before they were able to fire a focused beam tore through the cores of both frames. Mario sat bewildered as both OZ frames were torn to pieces. Amongst the smoke he was able to make out Blue Angel floating with smoke searing from the end of its own cannon.

"I could have taken care of that myself you know." Mario blurted.

"I know. You're welcome anyway." Heather replied in a cynical tone.

"Ugh...thanks..."

"Luscious, this isn't good. The Orbis MFs and cruisers are cutting through. At this rate it won't be long until..."

Luscious glared back at the younger soldier who was sitting at one of the control stations. The devilish stare that Luscious gave caused the soldier to become silent.

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“Don’t worry; all is going according to plan. I’ll continue to allow them to think they’re winning. Once Rapture is ready it won’t make a difference how many frames they destroy, it will all end in one attack.” Luscious remarked.

He softly patted the young soldier on the back and began to walk out of the room. The battle continued on, frames constantly falling and Orbis cruisers taking hits. It was a chaotic nightmare brimming with death and disorder. Luscious listened to the thunderous explosions and booming sounds of cannons firing as though it were a symphonic pleasure. He paced his way to the hanger where he too would join the fray.

Anima, Blue Angel and Impetus gathered together, each pilot heaving from exhaustion, their weapons running low on ammo; it was only a matter of time before they were run completely dry.

“At this rate it’s never going to end...” Heather muttered.

“Adam and Stephen will be here shortly, we have to hold out until then.” Sharon replied.

“I hope so, because we’re going to need the help. Our forces have been depleted to about 60%. And the UGE frames are still coming. I’m almost out of ammo, how about you two?”

“I need to head back to the Iron Fist to restock on munitions. At the moment I only have a few cluster missiles left.” Heather replied.

“I’ll go with you; I have 5 rounds left in both rifles.” Sharon exerted.

“Good idea, I’ll cover the both of you.”

Mario pointed towards the Iron Fist which was slowly approaching the outer defense post of Prometheus. Both Blue Angel and Impetus immediately took off while Anima followed closely. Mario scanned the area, at the sight of every exploding Orbis cruiser he quivered, at first he was enthusiastic about the battle, and about how they were proceeding. But now, he was beginning to question his own confidence, the UGE forces constantly continued to appear too overwhelming no matter how many frames he, Heather or even Sharon took out. They came to Prometheus with 10 cruisers but were now down to 6 at best. Each of the frames that came with the ships was scurrying to protect their vessels instead of trying to break through the defenses. There was no organization; Gail was a politician, not a soldier. He knew little of organizing a unified front.

Mario caught his breath as 2 Everto units and 2 Diabolos units sped in between them and the Iron Fist. The demonic slender frame of the Everto was an image that had yet to escape his nightmares. Since his first encounter with them during the final confrontation at Dammerung he had feared them more so than any of weapon he came in contact with.

“Sharon! Heather! Back off, I’ll give you two cover!” Mario screamed.

“Mario! Behind!” Sharon managed to scream, Mario turned around to see an Exodus flying straight towards him at blinding speeds. Anima began the motions to fling the whip but it was too late, the Exodus dashed to the side and zigzagged around confusing Mario’s eyes.

“Shit...I can’t avoid!” Mario screamed. The Exodus swiftly swept by Anima swinging its arm just before passing. The energy saber swung up through the lower right side of Anima’s torso and cut all the way through the right shoulder. The eruption of metallic armor and flames caused Anima to spiral uncontrollably. Mario’s body was flung around, his body slamming against the walls of the cockpit and his head to crash forward into the front display screen. He held his tongue, dealing with the pain. Upon impact with the screen his visor cracked sending small pieces of plastic shards into his skin and left eye. Blood trailed down the slight curves of his face, his left eye quivered from being struck by a piece of jagged plastic. No longer could he hold in his screams, his mouth shot open echoing the agonizing screams through his cockpit and communication links. He threw the helmet to the floor while he quickly covered his left eye.

“MARIO!!!!” Heather screamed.

The Exodus began to descend towards Anima like a lion to a wounded animal. Both Sharon and Heather wanted to move but were already surrounded by 4 frames. Just as the Exodus neared Anima Mario began to chuckle, ready to embrace his end. Just before the Exodus swung two boomerangs tore

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through the arms of the ivory unit causing an explosion which sent it flying. Both Heather and Sharon glanced to their side as Alpha soared past heading towards the Exodus.

Just then the 2 Evertos and Diabolos units were bombarded with energy blasts. Each frame turned around as 8 orbits moved in random formations firing relentlessly. Before they could even move Blue Dragon dashed through the line of frames slashing down each one. As Blue Dragon hovered in front of Blue Angel and Impetus the 4 frames exploded in a firework like display of energy.

“Yo.” Adam remarked.

### **Final Chapter: Shadows Grasping Heaven**

“Yo.” Adam casually replied as he stared back at Sharon and Heather.

“Yo? Is that all you have to say? I was worried about you!” Sharon yelled.

“I know...I’m sorry.”

“I’d hate to interrupt but this doesn’t seem like the best of times for this.” Heather interrupted.

“She’s right. You two head back to the ship. Stephen and I...”

“Will what? Finish it? I don’t think so, we’re going to restock on ammo and then we’re coming right back out.” Sharon exclaimed.

Sharon’s determination was etched into the facial expressions she displayed for Adam. He sighed; he wasn’t sure how to please her and his own feelings at the same time, if it were even possible. He wanted her to feel like she was playing a pivotal role and at the same time he wanted her to remain safe and out of the action, he realized that he couldn’t have both. It was the ultimate form of trust; he would have to trust in her decision to pilot the frame known as Impetus. What bothered him the most was that he wouldn’t be able to constantly watch her back; he had to focus on his own goals. He had no time to argue with her, against his will he nodded.

“Alright. Just be careful.” Adam replied.

“Same goes for you. Don’t do anything reckless, you have a tendency to over do it.”

“I’ll try, can’t promise anything.” Adam snickered and applied pressure to the pedals on the floor. Just as quickly as he appeared he disappeared. The cerulean flames building up only to be released creating a flash of light which engulfed the entire area in a 200 kilometer radius. Adam stared forward only glancing once and it was when he approached both Alpha and Anima. He wanted to ignore them and keep up the pace, but seeing the condition of Anima he knew he had to stop. The thrusters cut off and both legs lifted upwards slightly igniting a subtle boost of energy in order to balance the frame’s momentum.

“Is he alright?” Adam asked.

Stephen shook his head, he wasn’t sure of Mario’s condition completely; all he knew was that he sustained injuries.

“Not sure, he’s been screaming about his eye...it’s safe to say he’s out of the fight. I have to get him back to the Iron Fist for me...”

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“NO! I’m fine... \*agh\*...I don’t need any favors from either of you two jackasses!” Mario blurted.

“Please, you’ve done your part Mario. You’ll just get in the way if you stay out here.” Stephen replied.

“...you think you know everything don’t you?”

“Not everything, just more than you. Now get back to the Iron Fist, we’ll take care of things out here.” Stephen replied.

“Mario...thank you for watching out for Sharon.” Adam mumbled.

“...not a problem. Just make sure you come back...it’s pretty chaotic out there.”

“Not a problem, I’ll make it back.”

“Finish this...once and for all. Put all of your nightmares to sleep, leave everything to vanish along with the ashes of Luscious Malum and his distorted vision.” Mario replied.

“I will...now go.”

Mario continued to cover his left eye throughout the conversation. With his free hand he managed to steer Anima towards the Iron Fist. He subtly added power to the thrusters and Anima cautiously made its way towards the cruiser.

Adam glanced back at his brother and then back at the backdrop of destruction. It was a sight he hoped to never have to see ever again. It was a battle, the very essence of humanity’s darkest desires. Frames exploded into pieces before his very eyes; once again space was becoming littered with the remnants of Mechanized Frames. Even if the majority of the pilots were clones of real soldiers, even if they were a sin against God they still deserved a better fate than what they were given. Most take the time to admire the scenery; Adam took the time to familiarize himself with the situation. On the way he recognized most of the frames that consisted of the UGE army, he heard about the Evertos from Mario but never had the pleasure of seeing them in action.

“Stephen...”

“Yeah?”

“You think we can actually win this thing?” Adam’s blank emotionless expression shook Stephen’s very foundation. It was rare to see his brother in a neutral state, unsure of how to act, of how to feel. But he couldn’t blame him; the view was rough to take in. Orange and crimson spheres of contained explosions flickering in the distance more so than the stars of the obsidian canvas, the amount of deaths that were surrounding the area was inconceivable. Orbis continued to fly their frames forward and for the most part managed to get past some of the front line defenses. But the smallest form of victory was dwindled when even more UGE frames took the places of the fallen ones. It was only a matter of time before Orbis had completely exhausted their resources, and when that happened Luscious will have completely claimed victory. Adam’s hands quivered in the formation of a fist at the thought of that scenario coming to fruition.

“Doubt it.” Stephen replied.

“Heh, so we’re fighting against a futile destiny huh?”

“Suits us doesn’t it?”

“Yeah.”

“You love her right?”

“Sharon? Yeah, I do. What about you?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Ashley. Do you love her? You like to hide your emotions a lot, but I don’t see a point in doing that now.”

“Heh...yeah, I do.”

“Thought so. Does she know how you feel?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. So we have no regrets then?”

“Don’t think so, we should have tied up all of our loose ends.” Stephen muttered.

“Yeah.”

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“Alright then...let’s go.”

“Yeah.”

Blue Dragon and Alpha’s thrusters ignited sending the two frames in a parallel trajectory. Evertos units were stationed in front of both of them. Adam had always wanted to try his skill against the famed units from the EAP, and now was his chance. There were 8 of them in total; they were the first check point guarding the first defensive perimeter of Prometheus. The lead Evertos turned facing the oncoming frames; its triangular head unit glowed with a demonic crimson aura as the boosters abruptly ignited. Suddenly the frame launched violently with its right arm extended outwards across the chest and in front of the left. Adam’s eyes focused on the slender metallic blade that slid out from a small compartment underneath the arm.

“Cute. So 4 each then?” Adam chuckled.

“4 sounds fair.”

“Good, I’ll take the head unit.” Adam replied.

“Show off...heheh.”

Blue Dragon headed towards the Evertos with its dual energy saber ignited. The cerulean flames sent the frame hurling forward, the pilot of the Evertos began to laugh only for the sound of his laughter to become quenched by the amazing speed of Blue Dragon. Before he knew it he was staring at his machine’s arm floating in space in front of his torso. Blue Dragon didn’t even turn around to finish off the frame, its thigh cannons extended outwards from behind and fired. The two beams of plasma shot through the Evertos causing instant destruction. The silver and crimson beast broke apart into thousands of singed pieces while Adam moved forward.

The remaining 7 Evertos jumped into action, all of which instantly targeted Blue Dragon. Adam pulled back on the throttles causing Blue Dragon to stop allowing for the wings to launch. The orbits began to move in their patterns each of which began to open fire. Alpha dashed in between four of the units with the two cannons attached to the jetpack gathering energy.

“Heh.” Stephen chuckled as he fired the cannons. The two beams of energy pierced through two Evertos’ cores engulfing the pilots of each in a sea of burning flames. The remaining 2 burst away in separate directions just before the other 2 exploded violently. While the orbits continued to pound on the 3 Evertos in front of Adam, Blue Dragon soared through each of the 3 avoiding their plasma rounds and slashes. The blue frame barreled rolled to the right slashing during the maneuver. While 2 of the Evertos moved out of the way one was caught in the attack losing both arms and the lower half of its right leg. The azure orbits circled the already wounded frame like crows to a corpse and continually pummeled the frame until its internal power supply overheated causing a reaction of explosions to tear the frame apart.

“I’m not too impressed with these things Stephen.” Adam implied.

“Yeah, I remembered them being much better at Dammerung. Oh well, they’re only pawns anyway, they won’t be as much fun as the King.”

“Yeah...”

Blue Angel and Impetus once again launched from the Iron Fist, this time both Sharon and Heather decided to stay near the ship as they were preparing to pass through the first defensive line.

“Sharon, Heather can you take out the MFs that are in our way?” Ashley questioned.

“How many?” Heather replied.

“5 in total, 2 Night-Wings and 3 Exodus units. The Night-Wings shouldn’t pose a threat; it’s the Exodus that you should concern yourself with first.” Ashley replied.

“Got it. Come on Sharon, let’s make quick work of them kay?”

Impetus and Blue Angel made their way around the Iron Fist. While Impetus flowed over the vertical tower bridge of the cruiser another battalion of OZ units began to converge onto the Iron Fist.

Krista stared at the recognizable heat signatures as they drew near. She had already warned Gail about the incoming but it still stirred up a nervous reaction within her body. They were units mass produced based off of her commanding officer’s frame. Even if they weren’t Marcus’ personal OZ, they still brought back the memories of her days in the 181<sup>st</sup>.

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“Gail...” Ashley mumbled.

“Fire all anti-frame defenses. We’ll shot them out of the region!” Gail screamed.

“Understood, firing anti-frame missiles.”

The missile launchers on the Iron Fist began to turn locking onto the oncoming frames. Sharon’s eyes swayed to the side, it was then that she took notice of the OZ frames heading her way.

“Heather! 5 frames coming from out 12!” She shouted.

“Damnit! This wasn’t expected!”

“I’ll engage them.” Sharon replied.

“Sharon wait!” Blue Angel increased its speed and began to follow Impetus. Impetus made a dash towards the frames that were speeding towards the Iron Fist. Upon reaching the starboard end of the cruiser the missile pods began to launch. At first the defense mechanism was abrupt, catching the OZ pilots off guard. Two of the frames were destroyed by the warheads. Sharon smiled and moved in to seize the opportunity. Impetus sped through the clouds of smoke; she then managed to succeed in obtaining a lock on and fired. Two beams of energy tore through the head unit of one of the OZ units, the shock from the collision knocked it backwards into the remaining 2 that were following behind. The collision sent all 3 of the OZ frames off the back of the Iron Fist.

While falling backwards one of the Iron Fist’s positron cannons twirled around and fired. The massive onslaught of energy disintegrated the remaining frames in an instant. The howls of the pilots agonizing screams penetrated through the comm-links of every UGE frame.

“Sharon are you alright!?” Heather screamed from behind.

“Yeah...I’m fine....but...” Sharon paused as she watched 10 MFs swirling around another Orbis cruiser following the Iron Fist. Her initial reaction was to head there to help but the minute she found the courage to move the cruiser began to crumble, smoke burst out from the front end while electrical currents sparked around the points of impact. Each of the frames sped outwards away from the cruiser just before it was engulfed in a fiery destruction. The thunderous explosion shook her soulful foundation as another one of Orbis’ cruisers went down.

“Hold on!” Heather yelled. Blue Angel turned around whipping the positron cannon towards the 3 Exodus units that were approaching. Heather’s lips grinned the moment all 3 Exodus units lined up one after another. Her index finger quickly pulled inwards on the trigger releasing the radiant energy. The velocity of the thicken beam was tremendous as it gave the Exodus pilots no time to react. The single beam pierced through all three, the force of the attack caused the Exodus units to be pushed away from the Iron Fist. Once the Exodus units were in view Krista fired the second positron cannon. Like the OZ units the ivory machines were turned to nothing more than darkened ash.

“There’s still 2 Night-Wings remaining, quickly dispose of them!” Gail mentioned.

“Understood.” Heather replied.

Blue Angel dashed forward with the positron cannon charging energy. Impetus veered to the right appearing next to Heather’s frame.

“You still need time to charge energy right? I’ll take care of those two in the meantime!” Sharon blurted.

Impetus began to fire its rifles which both Night-Wings avoided with each. Once the two frames separated Sharon began to focus on one of them. The single Night-Wing lunged at a surprising quick pace which caused Sharon to falter for a second. Just before the Night-Wing slashed through Impetus Heather fired her positron cannon through the frame. Sharon’s eyes widened as the Night-Wing was thrown from her position while in the middle of exploding.

“Thanks...” Sharon mumbled.

“Any time.”

Sharon turned to see the remaining Night-Wing; she then pushed the throttles forward and quickly went after it. Impetus spiraled around firing its rifle, the beams of energy sped past the Night-Wing but with each and every volley the attacks became closer. Sharon then switched weapons, changing to her supply of ERMs. A small scope descended from the top of her cockpit, her right eye squinted at the fleeing Night-Wing. Once she obtained a lock-on she began to grin.

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With a fury the ERMs launched and instantly began to converge on the lone frame. Beams of energy soared downwards while the Night-Wing engaged in evasive maneuver, flipping around beams, swaying from side to side, anything it could do in order to avoid getting hit. Upon its final dodge maneuver Impetus appeared in front with its energy saber sizzling with energy. The pilot of the Night-Wing knew what was coming next, Impetus slashed through the arm units rendering the frame useless.

“Nice job, you really are getting the hang of this aren’t you?” Heather asked.

“Yeah...”

Luscious watched the chaos unfold inside the comforts of Shadow Omega’s cockpit. It never ceased to amaze him, the artistic display of battle, people fighting, placing their lives at stake for their dreams. He wanted to be a part of the devastation but he was willing to wait, he was waiting for his true opponent to show up. In the depths of his soul he knew it wouldn’t be long before he showed up. Shadow Omega carelessly lingered in the shadows of space, waiting for its power to be called upon.

Blue Dragon and Alpha continued to speed through the defensive zones of Prometheus; it wouldn’t be long before they would be able to enter the facility as well. Alpha sliced through the remaining guards of the station, but before entering the facility Stephen paused glancing back at his brother who appeared to be frozen in time.

“Adam...you ok?”

“He’s here Stephen...I can feel him, like he’s watching me. Go on ahead, I have to find him.”

Adam replied.

“You sure about this?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. We’ve come a long way, there’s no way we’re going to fail now.”

“Yeah, stay alive.” Stephen replied.

“Understood.”

The two brothers parted ways at that instant, Stephen speeding into Prometheus and Adam back out into the abyss in order to find his enemy. Luscious had shut his eyes, meditating in the tranquility that the battle was providing. He ignored the alarm on his console at first, he was already aware that Adam was searching for him, and that it was only moments before he was found out; he didn’t need an alarm feeding him that information ; he felt his presence, the immediate familiar sound of Blue Dragon’s boosters flickering against the charcoal back drop. Luscious slowly opened his eyes and placed his bottle to the side, he had no time to drink, he had drunk enough to sustain his body for at least a day without feeling any of the side effects.

“So you’re fangs have reached me.” Luscious muttered.

“I’m going to kill you, it’s the only way to set things right.” Adam replied.

“Hmm, rather blunt today aren’t you?”

“One way or another I will end this today!”

*Angel System Engaged...*

“Oh...you’re serious aren’t you? Well then, I’ll be more than happy to oblige.” Luscious replied.

Blue Dragon burst with fury towards Shadow Omega, its wings rapidly launching away from the binders. Adam stared straight at Shadow Omega nothing else in his mind mattered, this was the moment he had been waiting 5 years for.

“You’re wasting your time.” Luscious jested.

The orbits began to surge around the obsidian frame but did nothing more than that. It was just like that time on Earth, each orbital wing failed to fire, they were useless.

“Shit...just what the hell is the problem?!” Adam harped as he called each one back.

While the wings were returning Shadow Omega charged towards Blue Dragon, spiraling around the orbital wings closing in with speed he could barely read. Adam pushed the controls at an angle causing the frame to lean towards one side allowing Shadow Omega to pass by without causing any damage. It would have been dangerous to leave Shadow Omega behind his frame so he sprinted forward a few meters and then jerked the throttles causing Blue Dragon to veer around in order to meet back up with Shadow Omega. As the final orbital wing docked with the binders Adam began his attack. Both of



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Blue Dragon's energy rifles locked onto the nimble frame that was Shadow Omega, Adam was surprised at first at how easy it was to lock onto him, but he didn't want to over think the situation. Beams of energy were flung towards Shadow Omega; it was a furious attack that Luscious knew was coming.

"Amusing..." Luscious then dashed from side to side, speeding through and around each beam of energy that zoomed through the region. A subtle after image of Shadow Omega was left dissolving with each abrupt motion it made. Its speed was downright incredible; none of the beams came remotely close to touching the frame. Adam cringed, he never expected it to be easy, but he was hoping it wouldn't have appeared to be an unreachable dream.

His eyes shot open at the sound of his alarm sounding off, in disbelief Adam slowly turned to the side where Shadow Omega was heading from.

"There's no way...how the hell did he get here so fast?!"

Blue Dragon's side boosters activated creating a quick boost of energy which forced the frame to turn rapidly. During the turn the two thigh cannons lifted and fired once the blue frame finished its turn. Luscious grinned at the sight of the two fuchsia beams of focused positron energy pierced through the vacuum of space. Shadow Omega veered away performing a barrel roll avoiding the beams. In mid maneuver Blue Dragon surged towards Shadow Omega with its right arm arching backwards holding onto an energy saber. Luscious once again chuckled with intrigue as Blue Dragon slashed through the slowly dissolving beam of energy. The slash of the saber cut through the beam of plasma but still missed Shadow Omega as the obsidian frame dashed away once again.

"You're speed improved." Luscious continued to bait him into frustration.

"Yours is still the same."

"Heh, I see you still have your sense of humor in this situation that is indeed admirable. But your time is running out, do you really think you can beat me? You who are still a baby in skill when it comes to me!"

"I have my resolve, that's enough to defeat you!" Adam screamed.

He didn't know where the thought came from, but for some reason he came up with a theory as to why the orbits wouldn't fire at Shadow Omega.

"(Heh, I think I figured it out. If I recall, the only way the OWS won't fire at an opponent is if that opponent is using the same wavelength of energy that the Angel System uses. At first that's what I thought, but then there was the times I've fought with Stephen and they worked fine. But with Alpha, its Angel System is tuned differently than mine, so it's not identical...that bastard...he copied the Angel System's specs and incorporated them into his own design. That's why they're not working. If that's the case then I'm going to have to control them manually. If I do that then they should fire...no...that would take too much of my attention, I can't afford that. I'll have to make the Angel System rely on Blue Dragon's main generator instead of the portable one in the wing binders. That will change the wavelength of energy the Angel System emits and then the wings should fire on Shadow Omega...only thing is that it'll drain the energy being sent to the rest of the frame. Damn, it's a chance I'm going to have to take...)" His thoughts managed to flow without interruption.

"Are you getting scared?" Luscious chuckled.

"Not in the least. Let's go!"

Blue Dragon lunged forward, its eight wings extending outwards. Luscious began to laugh as he watched the orbital wings speed into the region.

"I told you..." He paused as all eight of the wings circled around Shadow Omega with a unique crimson tint glowing around the edge of their barrels. "Son of a bitch..." Shadow Omega erupted out of its position just as the wings began to fire. The color of the beams changed with the sudden generator switch, the crimson beams continued to fire at Shadow Omega forcing Luscious to focus on evading. Blue Dragon pounced forward appearing in front of Shadow Omega just as the frame dashed to the right. Adam smirked as Blue Dragon slashed the front of Shadow Omega's core with the energy saber. Burnt pieces of debris fluttered outwards as the beam left a single mark on the core, Shadow Omega backed peddled away from Blue Dragon creating some distance. Just as Luscious turned around his frame was hit

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by beams emanating from all 8 orbits, the explosion knocked Shadow Omega forward causing the frame to spiral uncontrollably towards Blue Dragon.

“You won’t win this.” Adam remarked.

Blue Dragon then burst forward, lunging with its energy saber extended towards the open Shadow Omega.

“Heh, hope you didn’t think it’d be this easy.” Luscious chuckled.

“What the hell!?”

Without warning Shadow Omega halted its movement completely regaining balance. Once again the eight wings moved in approaching Shadow Omega from all sides. Adam forced Blue Dragon to stop as he watched to the two cylindrical objects on the back of Shadow Omega begin to open. As they opened taking a new form, that of a crescent shape an eerie green glow quickly began to emanate. Instantly hundreds of thin beams launched, Adam’s eyes widened as each orbital wing was destroyed in a single attack. The beams tore through their metallic armor causing them to explode instantly. Their remains floating through space with no indication of their former form, Adam could hear the cackling of Luscious Malum through his cockpit. At the last second he noticed the remaining barrage of beams making their way towards Blue Dragon.

“Shit, they’re fast.”

Adam pulled back on the throttles and Blue Dragon back flipped away from the first volley, and then swiftly spun around veering to the right in order to continue dodging.

“I’m somewhat impressed that you managed to get your orbits to attack me. That was some quick thinking. It’s a pity you couldn’t have fulfilled your duty of being one of my knights.” Luscious mumbled.

“Don’t care, never wanted the job.”

“Heh, you truly are amusing.”

Blue Dragon was taken off guard once Shadow Omega sped forward. The obsidian frame crashed into Adam’s frame making him lose his balance. While Blue Dragon now sloppily fell through the emptiness of space Shadow Omega gently aimed its plasma rifle. With quick subtle recoil the rifle fired a beam through Blue Dragon’s lower left leg. The minute explosion which took the metallic limb added to the back spin of Blue Dragon’s fall.

Adam held onto the throttles keeping his position and balance. Everything was spinning, his vision was blurred from the rapid spin, he had to fight to keep his consciousness. Luscious smiled as he appeared in front of Blue Dragon once again, this time pointing the barrel of the plasma rifle at the core.

“You did surprisingly well Adam. That is why I’ll grant you a quick death.”

“Heh...I won’t die so easily.”

“Oh no? It’s over, you can’t beat me. I have yet to even break a sweat, earlier was mere child’s play. You’re still not worth my attention, I had hoped that you would have been the one to challenge me, it seems I was wrong.”

“I’m not through!” The thigh cannons pivoted upwards firing abruptly. The impact of the beams forced Shadow Omega farther away. Luscious was shocked by the attack, let alone the fact that it hit his frame. Shadow Omega quickly recovered only to find out that Blue Dragon did the same. Both pilots staring at the other, pondering what they would do next.

“You’re insane Luscious; your life will end with you knowing that your delusions of sins and Purgatory are wrong.”

“I wonder...can you release me from this Purgatorial Hell? I had hoped you would, but it would seem you don’t possess the power to do such a task.”

“Release you? What the hell are you saying?!”

“I’ll entertain the thought of your existence a bit longer if you truly desire to know the truth.”

“Luscious! Don’t fuck with me!” Adam screamed.

“Did it ever cross your mind? The question of why Genesis would go through so much trouble to clone me?”

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Adam froze at that moment; it was true there were times where he did wonder why Genesis would clone a CEO. To him it made no sense.

“I’ll take that as a yes then.”

“What’s your point? Does it make a difference anymore?”

“It makes all the difference you ignorant kid.”

“....”

“Heh, now that I’ve got your attention. Allow me to tell you a story.”

“...”

“Good, no objections. Mankind’s existence has thrived on the very thought of being the ultimate source of dominance. As time moved forward this very theme that was etched into the darkness of humanity’s heart remained while technology along with society had changed. In 2055 the Humanitarian Treaty was signed by every governing nation on Earth stating new rules of warfare, rules that protected the lives of the innocent civilians. It seemed that humanity was finally taking steps to improve their lives. Wars were now effectively organized and safe. It wasn’t until 2084 that humanity made its first tremendous advancement in the field of technological weaponry. Genesis had its hand in it, the creation of the first working bipedal tank. It was bulky in stature and very sluggish in movement, standing at about 10 meters in height this machine was the pinnacle of AI warfare. A machine that was able to walk and even fly in the air for small durations of time took the concept of war to a new level. It wasn’t long until every super power on Earth had their own prototype bipedal weapon making wars far more intense. However people remained calm and collected due to the fact that their sons and daughters were not directly in danger. As long as the AI on the machines functioned properly there was no real threat to existence. That didn’t last long, in 2099 fifteen years after the introduction of the first bipedal weapon a revolution broke out against the world. A top secret machine being produced by Genesis went on a rampage, the AI evolved and revolted. Soon every machine operated by AI revolted as well and humanity was in danger. As chaos spread and death stained the air a single man arose to take the challenge. It was in 2101 that a new machine arrived, the Mechanized Frame; a machine that was bipedal in structure and much more advanced than the original bipedal weapon that debuted in 2084. This machine was sleek in design standing at 18 meters in size, armed with more devastated weaponry and a highly advanced generator and propulsion system it was more than enough to fight against the AI. Genesis once again stood at the forefront of technology, this time with a living being piloting their machine they took the fight to the AI.

In 2102 all had ended, the single pilot defeated the top secret machine that had took control of every AI controlled machine on Earth. Wars once again called out to the sons and daughters of their nations for help.”

“Wonderful story, what the hell does this have to do with anything?”

“That pilot was believed to be the strongest person ever to step into an MF. Genesis being the power hungry conglomerates that they were wanted to control him. You should be aware of how they try to manipulate people, how they try to control them.”

“Yeah, but the last time I checked, it was you doing the manipulating.”

“Allow me to finish. That pilot was in Genesis’ mind the key to controlling the world. The pilot reminds me of you; he was idealistic, strong, motivated and had people he cared about. Unfortunately for him, Genesis managed to grab hold of him. They knew they couldn’t control him the way they wanted to, so you know what they did?”

“Not a clue.”

“They ripped his life from his hands, killed his family, his friends, and made it so that pilot had nothing to lose. Then they had soldiers arrest him, and then forced him into a cryogenics tube. They wanted to control him so much that they froze him until they had the technology to clone his DNA.”

It didn’t hit him until that moment; Adam felt the chills running down his spine. He wasn’t sure how it affects the current situation of the world, but he couldn’t help but feel as if he knew the scenario. It was reminiscent of his own situation; Genesis had taken his friends in the past, his family. It then made sense; he was being modeled after that very pilot. For whatever reason he didn’t know.

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“I was that pilot.”

Adam had already come to that conclusion, as difficult as it was to comprehend he listened.

“So you’re telling me that you’ve been alive for over 100 years...”

“I was stuck in a tube for over 100 years, they released me in order to continue their experiments, and they managed to clone over 360 copies. Each one was deemed a failure; they could never come close to completely recreating my DNA. I managed to escape their facility pretending to be one of the failed clones, over time I grew bitter, with a better understanding of the world. It amazed me how nothing changed after such a long time, wars still were out of control, people, innocent people still died. It was then that I realized progress was never going to happen, that we were all stuck in a never ending cycle. I desired to break free of that cycle, and I’m going to continue my commitment to all of humanity and break everyone out as well! I looked at you as a mirror image of my life, I felt that you could release me from this world since you went through the same trials that I did.”

“So you intentionally manipulated me into situations that would mirror events that you experienced. While I could never understand the level of pain you went through, I still don’t see your actions as being justified. If you want me to release you from the world then I’ll be more than happy to end your life.” Adam replied.

“Heheh...impressive, most who find out the truth grovel at my feet thanking me for giving them a future. If it wasn’t for me than this world would most like be in flames.”

“Not for nothing, this world is in chaos because of you!” Adam screamed.

Blue Dragon grabbed hold onto both energy sabers combining them; the blue frame leaped forward ending the conversation. Luscious grinned while Blue Dragon approached.

“Now that you know, there’s no use playing around anymore.” Luscious replied.

*Neo Mode Engaged*

Shadow Omega dodged the abrupt overzealous slash that Blue Dragon swung. Adam widened his eyes as he watched Shadow Omega force its plasma rifle in front of Blue Dragon’s core.

“Too easy.”

Adam pulled the throttles as Blue Dragon swayed to the right. The plasma rifle fired, the beam of energy pierced through the shoulder of the left arm. Adam’s body was thrown forward while the blue frame flung around. Smoke flowed heavily outwards from the gaping wound, warning messages emanated around the cockpit.

“Damn it...” Adam mumbled.

*Angel System Ex Mode*

Blue Dragon sped around the burned floating limb Adam made his way back towards Luscious.

“Oh, still coming eh?”

To Luscious’ amazement Blue Dragon dashed to the right disappearing from his line of vision. For a moment Luscious felt an emotion that he had never experienced before, for a brief moment he was scared.

Shadow Omega jerked around trying to catch Adam only to see a cerulean blur surge past him. Shadow Omega leaned backwards in order to avoid the attack. Luscious gazed as the blue beam of energy swung over his frame’s camera.

“You’re getting close. Still, you’re too slow.”

“I’m not through!” Adam screamed.

Blue Dragon turned around where Shadow Omega met the frame head on. Adam quickly reacted by swinging its right arm. The blue beam collided with the crimson beam that Shadow swung. Luscious smiled while he continued to force his power onto Adam and his frame. Blue Dragon’s thigh cannons lifted and prepared to fire.

“Nice try, but you’re too predictable.” Luscious replied.

Shadow Omega’s right leg slammed into Blue Dragon’s torso knocking the frame to the side. Blue Dragon turned as Shadow Omega began to fire its plasma rifle. Upon falling backwards Adam lifted its energy shield, the beams bounced off the rectangular form of energy that covered the frame’s forearm.

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With each hit Adam cringed, his eyes had a tendency to glance to the side. There it rolled along the crevices of the control panel. The canister containing the Drive pills that Marcus handed to him; it would be a lie if he told himself that he hadn't considered using it. While Shadow Omega continued to pound relentlessly onto Blue Dragon Adam reached out for the container. It was a shock that even during the Ex mode Luscious was able to beat him. His fingers wrapped around the container, it still bothered him to even contemplate using it.

"I don't have a choice..."

Adam took out 3 of the pills and throwing them in his mouth. It took a few seconds for the pills to flow through his bloodstream. He suddenly began to cough loudly, sweat rolling out from his pores vastly, his breath becoming heavier while the pills took their effect. Suddenly Adam's eyes widened, his fingers firmly wrapping around the throttles.

Shadow Omega hurled towards Blue Dragon dropping the plasma rifle to float in space. Luscious grinned as he neared Blue Dragon holding tightly onto the energy sabers.

"You couldn't do what was needed...ughg..." Luscious choked spitting out blood. His eyes began to twitch as the rest of his body quivered frigidly. "I...\*cough\*...heh, seems I miscalculated." He muttered, taking his eyes off Blue Dragon for an instant to reach for his bottle of Merlot was a mistake. One that he would normally not have made.

In a blur of speed Blue Dragon tore through the left arm of Shadow Omega. The blue frame's right arm twirling through space once he neared Shadow Omega. The furious explosion separated both Adam and Luscious while Luscious' body was thrown forward. His hand missed the edges of the bottle as it rolled down the floor panels of the cockpit. His head crashed into the display screen in front of his seat. His helmet protecting his cranium, but still blood began to flow outwards from his mouth spilling all over the helmet's visor.

Adam remained quiet, struggling with the effects of Drive, his adrenaline mixed with the pressure build up of the Angel System's Ex mode. The g-forces constantly beating down on his strained body began to crush bend his ribs; his breathing became irregular and difficult.

"I...\*cough\*...I can't stop now...\*cough\*" Adam coughed.

"Hehe...\*cough\*...don't know what he did...\*cough\* but maybe he can do it...heh" Luscious muttered.

Crawling back to his seat Luscious tried to focus on Blue Dragon. He left the bottle of merlot on the ground for whatever the reason. Maybe it was because some part of him wanted to accept his fate, maybe it was because he was tired of escaping death, either way he was prepared for it. Shadow Omega with its wound began to move forward, smoke rose outwards from the jagged pieces of metal that were all that was left of its left arm. Luscious struggled with his conscious and vision, but still pressed forward. The two weapons on the back opened once again unleashing hundreds of beams of energy into the region. Adam's body, weakened and frail glanced up noticing the beams falling at a rapid pace. His hair dripping with perspiration and blood, he removed his helmet from his head tossing it to the side.

"I can't keep this up much longer....and from the looks of it neither can he." Adam struggled to say, his voice cracking and coughing. His eyes half opened and squinted he tried to focus on both the beams coming his way along with the movements of Shadow Omega.

Blue Dragon spun on its side and ignited its boosters. The massive flames of energy fueled the frame's drive, Shadow Omega leaped into the fray as well. With hundreds of green beams of energy crashing down both frames lunged forward, their energy sabers searing, fizzling with positron energy. Adam screamed with all the rage and pain built up from the years, finally he was releasing everything that he kept sealed within his soul.

"I won't lose to you! You won't succeed!" Adam screamed.

"Heh...\*cough\*... Release me..." Luscious mumbled.

In a blinding flash of explosive energy both frames collided with one another creating a massive shockwave of energy to sweep outwards from the point of impact. The remaining beams of energy that Shadow Omega released all crashed into the fulmination of power increasing the size of the explosion.

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The battlefield continued to bustle with action, but with the single massive explosion thundering in the background every man, woman and child shifted their attention. Alpha turned around, its right arm hanging loosely off the metal joint. Charred and bruised the crimson frame lingered next to Impetus and Blue Angel.

“Adam...” Sharon softly muttered. She knew it was him, that he was involved in the spectacular display.

“Are you sure?” Heather asked.

“Yeah...”

“Luscious is there as well...” Stephen interrupted.

“Guys..What’s going on?!” Ashley spoke.

“The end...it’s over Ashley.” Stephen replied.

“You can’t be serious?! What makes you so sure?”

“I just know...trust me. Have everyone head back to Orbis. The rest of the forces will fall...”

Stephen mumbled.

“...*alright...if you say so...*” She reluctantly agreed to Stephen’s command as she told Gail. Gail simply nodded as he stared into the center of the brilliant explosion that was still radiating energy.

The region was cluttered with the remains of all sorts of frames lingering, destroyed and burnt from the battle. Orbis had been whittled down to nothing more than a single cruiser along with the Iron Fist. Both ships had been hit with damage, the Iron Fist had lost one of its positron cannons along with a few of its thrusters, but it still had enough power to move. Only a few Exodus units remained in the vicinity, at most there were 15, not enough to continue helping Luscious.

“Zach....\*cough\*...what’s happening...” Reine muttered as both Hades and Sigma reached the outer limits of Prometheus. Their frames in shambles as were their bodies.

“\*cough\*...we’ve failed...\*cough\*...Luscious has failed...” Zach mumbled.

“But...that isn’t possible...”

“Let it go Reine. There’s nothing \*cough\*, nothing more that we can do....it’s over...”

Reine sighed, he had put all of his soul into fighting for Luscious’ dream and it was like a fatal blow to see him fail. Both frames floated delicately amongst the rubble as both pilots quietly looked on.

Impetus suddenly ignited its thrusters heading towards the explosion that was finally beginning to diminish. Sharon’s eyes focusing on the goal ahead, her frame’s engines roaring loudly as the frame sped.

“Should we let her go?” Heather asked.

“Yeah, there’s no point in trying to stop her now. Let’s clean up the remaining frames and head back to the Iron Fist.” Stephen replied.

“Got it.”

“You better still be alive...you better still be alive.” Sharon continued to repeat those words over and over again as she approached the location of the explosion.

Impetus past by all sorts of debris and MF limbs all covered in charcoal rust, her heart pounded heavily while she continued to pray that none of the destroyed frames belonged to Adam. It was an eerie silence that overtook the region surrounding Prometheus, but she ignored everything around her, her only focus of Adam and to find him alive.

“Sharon...listen, there’s two heat signatures being picked up. Unfortunately with the disturbance of the explosion we can’t properly make them out.” Ashley stated.

“Adam...” Sharon mumbled.

As Impetus maneuvered around the lifeless frames she finally came to a halt. Not too far from her position she saw them, both Blue Dragon and Shadow Omega lingering, their limbs severed and frames covered in bullet holes and rigid tears. No sign of movement from either MF was noticeable, at first she didn’t want to consider the worse case scenario, but she wasn’t dumb either. She knew it was possible for him to be dead; it was just that her soul was rejecting that idea.

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“ADAM!!!” Her voice blurted, echoing through the communication lines of every frame in the area.

Upon hearing her voice his eyes began to quiver. His body still feeling weak as if a single touch would crush his bones to pieces. Slowly his right hand made it to his head in order to move the blood drenched strands of hair that covered his face. At first his vision was distorted, blurry and colorless, but after adjusting to the surroundings went back to normal. His lungs began to heave as he coughed up some remaining blood from his throat. The crimson liquid flew in the air only to fall staining his flight suit.

“Heh...I’m alive...who would have thought...” Adam chuckled.

His head cautiously turned around as Impetus approached from his side.

“Sharon...”

It was shocking to see her frame maneuvering around the burnt debris that littered the area, but it was a sight for sore eyes. He tried to move upright to get a better handle on what remained of his frame, his right arm outstretched to grab hold of the throttle for support only to stop as he cringed in pain. He quickly clutched his ribs in the agony that was suddenly overtaking him. He was well beyond his limit, something he thought he was used to, but during the fight with Luscious he pushed the extents of the Angel System farther than he ever thought possible. The g-forces butchered his body with little remorse, but in the end he didn’t care. If it ended the battle, the struggle and the chaos, then it was all worth it.

Sighing, he accepted the pain and rested back in the comforts of his chair. With a grin on his face, not to be diminished by the blood trickling out, it was then that he realized, it was finally over, the pain, everything. His rage and desire for vengeance had diminished before he knew it, all at the truth that Luscious presented him. And now Sharon was on her way to pick him up. Finally, it was his chance to establish a normal life, with her standing by his side.

“Yeah, I’m fine with this.” Adam mumbled softly to himself.

Sharon’s eyes widened as the remaining scraps of Blue Dragon’s cockpit came into view. Feeling overtaken by an insurmountable amount of joy she could barely contain it any longer. Wiping the tears from her face and sniffing she pressed forward with every bit of energy she could gather. Glancing from side to side she saw all the devastation, all of the sacrifices that were offered in order to put an end to the war. One could always hear about war, but still could never be anywhere close to fathoming its essence. Sharon could hardly keep her eyes open as she was continually disgusted by what was laying before her. Burned frames along with lifeless bodies floating in the region, no longer bound to a soul. But before her was him, Adam Novus, a man who she had met years ago and just as suddenly as he entered into her life, she was taken away.

They both struggled, both learned and experienced different things, but ultimately, they were lead here, to this point.

“You are alive...” Sharon replied, trying to keep her emotions in check. Her eye lids squishing together holding in the tears that were budding, she didn’t want to cry, she hated crying.

“Is it over?”

“Yeah...there aren’t any more soldiers trying to protect Prometheus. We made it in time...”

“Good...\*cough\*...how’s everyone else?”

“They’re alive...”

“Good... how bout him?” Adam asked pointing towards Shadow Omega. He knew there was no way for Luscious to survive, but then again there was doubt, after all, he was alive.

“No signs of life.” Sharon replied.

“I see...he managed to escape his nightmare....good for him...” Adam mumbled.

“Huh?”

“It’s nothing....let’s go home....” Adam replied.

“Can you move?”

“No, the frame’s busted. You’re going to have to take me haha.”

“Going to treat me like a taxi huh?”

“You’re not going to charge me are you?”

“Well, maybe I’ll give you a break, just this once. Though later tonight, I may charge you.”

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Adam's eyes widened with a smirk.

"Oh? Well, we better not waste any time." Adam chuckled.

"Thank you..." Sharon embarrassingly muttered.

"Hmm? Sharon?"

"For everything. For giving me hope. For...for...not giving in."

"Oh..." Adam paused, only to give a glance to the Drive capsules that now lay on the floor. His last remembrance of Marcus Falden, it was something he struggled with. In the end, he couldn't look at himself and say that he never gave in.

"Don't think of me so highly. I don't deserve it."

"Whatever happened, whatever you went through...it doesn't matter. Not anymore. We'll just look towards the future, and only the future. We won't be held down by the chains of our past. Not anymore."

"...Yeah. You're right. Let's embrace the future."

Impetus held on tightly to Blue Dragon's core with both arms and began to head back towards the Iron Fist. The region around Prometheus was littered with remnants from the battle, it would serve as a graveyard for those who felt the desires to try and manipulate all of humanity. All of Earth and Mars were able to rest easy the following morning, the forced Tribulation had ended.

### Epilogue

The sun's ray gently touched down onto the city of New York. The sky was a crisp azure with the ivory clouds passing through. It was a new year and all hope had been restored. Clusters of snow fell through the air collecting on the ground creating a near perfect winter wonderland. 3 months had passed since the battle at Prometheus occurred and life had slowly settled down. The UGE was taken under new leadership; Gail Contadino was elected to lead the nations of Earth into the new brighter future while Mars continued to prosper under the guidance of the UGE. Tensions no longer existed between the two worlds; instead Earth was acting like a parent planet, supplying resources and people to flourish a new order on the red planet. All seemed too perfect for most, this was the peace many had searched for, veterans from the TA and the EAP joined together living in cities, content with returning to a normal life.

Prometheus was reconstructed and served as a home base of a Special Forces department from the UGE known as the Angels. They were an elite company of soldiers whose only job was to monitor any form of terrorist outbreak that may occur on both planets. They would be the first to respond to any form of violence that would threaten the security of the world and its people. For the first time in nearly a century all seemed right with the world.

The snow continued to fall with grace and eloquence while couples walked through the pathways of Central Park. The winter breeze felt good on Sharon's skin, bundled up in sweaters and a winter jacket along with a pink cloth scarf she walked holding tightly onto Adam's arm. He glanced back at her and she smiled. The outer glow of the snow collecting on their cloths glistened in the sun. Adam had nothing to say, nothing needed to be said, they simply enjoyed the tranquility, the idea of not fighting. He pulled her close, his arm wrapping around her body, keeping her warm soothed his soul. After everything that he had gone through he finally found something real, something that was able to calm him completely. She glanced up at him still smiling, her cheeks were a dull red from the chilling wind, Adam looked back at her and leaned forward kissing her cheek; they were happy.



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“You don’t know how good this feels. Just being here with you...I could never wish for anything else.” Sharon softly spoke.

“I know...this is exactly what I wanted. I feel that everything’s going to be alright this time. As a matter of fact...” Adam paused separating himself from her. He smirked as went to answer his cell phone that was buzzing in his jacket pocket. His hand clumsily dropped the phone to the ground.

“Damn..” Adam muttered.

“Hahaha, you know for a pilot you’re pretty clumsy.” Sharon laughed.

“Funny.”

As Adam bent down to grab his phone he paused on one knee. Looking back at Sharon he put his phone back in his pocket, he smiled at her and her back at him.

“Sharon.”

“Yeah?”

He removed a small box from his pocket and stared back into her brown eyes. At that moment Sharon gasped, her heart beating much faster than it ever did before. Adam reached for her left hand and held it tightly while he extended his left hand with the opened box. Her eyes widened at the sight of the heart shaped diamond ring brightly glistened in the radiance of the day.

“Sharon Amare....will you...” Before he could finish Sharon lunged into his arms causing them both to fall into the snow. Their faces close together smiling back at each other, her arms wrapped around his body and his around hers.

“Yes...” She replied right before she kissed him. Her lips tugging on his while in the background everyone cheered to her surprise.

“Yeah boy!” Mario yelled.

At the sound of his voice Sharon whipped her head around the sound of his voice. Once she turned she saw everyone standing there cheering. Stephen nodded while Ashley winked over his shoulder. Mario continued to laugh loudly; his left eye was covered with an eye patch since he lost his eye from the battle. Heather merely smiled back at Sharon while nodding in approval.

“Thanks everyone!” Sharon replied. “So Ashley...what about you? Hahaha.” Sharon exclaimed.

“What? Me? You’re kidding right...hahahaha.” Ashley began to laugh while Stephen cringed.

Adam stood up helping Sharon rise to her feet. He turned to all of his friends, his family and smiled.

“This couldn’t have happened without all of you...thank you.” Adam humbly stated.

“Oh stop acting like a little bitch, why you wasting your time with us? Go on, you have shit to do!” Mario yelled.

“Heh. Don’t get to busy, give me a call now and then.” Stephen replied.

“Of course...Ashley, Heather...” Adam started.

“We’ll see you, don’t worry. We’ll keep in touch.” They both replied.

With a nod Adam continued to walk with Sharon wrapped around his arm.

“I have to be honest, I never expected this.” Sharon mumbled.

“Heh, neither did I. But you know...I think every thing’s going to be alright from now on.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah, I do. We’ve fulfilled our future, our destiny....”

*The snow hides the scars of the past under a blanket of ivory hope.....*