THE DUTY OF A SON

Nathan

For the longest time, my father's strong, broad shoulders were the top of the world for me.

I remember the days of sitting there, his hands holding me in place so I wouldn't fall, and excitedly gazing up at the multicolored clouds splashed across the beautiful sky of our world—or rather, the world we had chosen…..Aetheria Island.

These days his shoulders bore a different weight. The weight of taking care of the people of Aetheria Island, who had appointed him leader.

We were infinites. Human explorers who had entered the Solverse, seeking adventure across the interconnected, strange worlds. However, unlike most infinities, my father had lost the zeal he once had for adventure. He had given up his hopes of meeting an anomaly, powerful individuals said to possess great power and unique abilities.

This was because he had encountered a Novai instead. These are warrior entities formed completely of a purple substance called Nova, an essence that could be found emitting from several of the worlds in the Solverse. These beings saw us humans as viruses that must be exterminated. My father Truong survived that encounter….my mother didn't.

Since that time my father had settled permanently on Aetheria Island with me. It had been years since then. I am now a man of twenty-four. We were joined over time by other infinites who had experienced similar losses.

Cowards, the other infinites called us. We didn't care.

On this island, we had built a life. It wasn't one filled with new discoveries or thrilling adventures but it was a quiet one.
A peaceful one.

No Novai would find us here, we thought.
How wrong we were.

I remember the day *It* came for us. I was sitting with Nathan, the son of the leader of the town, on the rocks at one of the many beaches of the island. I glanced at him and followed his gaze at the beautiful blue sea of the Aetheria waters surrounding the island. The mists popular to the island hovered over it, teasingly beckoning us to come swim in its depths.

'So you were talking about something called fireworks?' I said drawing his attention back to me.

Yes, they can light up with sparks and explosions containing many colors. Nathan said, gesturing wildly.

I scoffed at the very idea.

'Yet you still insist they're not powered by magic? 'Just because there are no multi-colored clouds today doesn't mean you should make up stories to entertain me'

Unlike Nathan, I was a native of the Solverse, born here on Aetheria Island. Such devices as he described operating *without* magic were difficult for me to imagine.

'I'll make one someday and light up the sky for you Amy' he replied with a smile and a familiar playful gleam in his brown eyes.

I flushed and hastily directed my gaze at the sky.

That's when I saw *it.* It hovered in the Sky bathed in purple.

Novai I thought in dread.

It blasted over us…. towards the town.

Let's go!! Nathan yelled, scrambling up and running also, having seen it.

Silas

Silas opened his eyes and coughed up blood, his nanite battle suit cracked and heavy upon him.

He could hear the tiny nanites that made up the suit whirring, trying to knit it back together. When they were first introduced by the old Infinite who handled the tech-related aspects of the town, he had felt invincible giving it a test run.

Reality could often be too harsh.

He looked around and saw the dead, torn bodies of his men, their lifeless eyes frozen in fear. He had failed them.

The railgun he had been operating lay smoking from a blast of Nova to its side. Its ammo, a strap of nuclear bombs, lay by its side. They were nicknamed Nuclear bombs because of the huge explosions they were capable of unleashing.

He never had a chance to fire a single one.

It was just too *fast.*

The screams pierced through the fog around his mind, shaking him out of his daze.

He got up and tried looking for Truong, dragging the nuke bombs with him.

Last he saw before blacking out, the leader was clashing furiously with the Novai, clad in his tank-like nanite suit.

Truong

Truong knew he would not win this one. He felt it in every punch he threw toward the Novai. He sensed it every fist the Novai swatted away. He continued throwing them regardless. These people looked up to *him* to protect them. He would not fail them.

They were fighting amidst the ruins of a house of people he knew. People that were now dead.

He ducked under the blast of Nova the Novai threw at him and rushed forward, his nanite suit enhancing his speed greatly despite its tank-like appearance.

Gritting his teeth, he threw an uppercut that sent tiny shockwaves around, buffeting the flames engulfing the house as it connected.

Finally a solid hit he thought, grinning.

His smile disappeared as the Novai warrior simply lowered his head back down, showing no signs of pain at all. It seemed to glow brighter as the purple nova swirled around it.

Even now its pulsing purple face had no expression at all. Truong tried to get some distance as he realized too late that he was too close to the Novai for comfort.

It followed, moving with blinding speed leaving a purple afterimage where it had stood, grabbing him by the neck of his suit and shooting up into the sky with him.

He struggled to get free, clenching his fists and crashing them against its torso. Its fingers were burning into his neck where it still held him. It paid no attention to his seemingly measly efforts as it pulled back its left hand slowly.

He knew what was going to happen before it did.

Its hand crashed into his chest, tearing past his suit like paper, straight into his body, bursting out of his back.

Truong felt the life ebbing out of his body. He felt unimaginable pain as nova energy rushed into his body, burning away at his organs.

He felt…*so cold.*

It withdrew its hand and dropped him.

As Troung fell and as his vision started to darken…..he thought of his son.

I should have carried him around more, he thought.

Nathan

Nathan saw his father through the smoke and death.

He saw his father with a purple hand through his chest out of his armored back.k

He saw his father fall.

The Novai simply shook its hand and blasted off to rain down more death.

I ran to his body, Amy following behind me.

I knelt and looked through teary eyes at the face of my father.

At his white hair and bloodied face.

Somehow in death, he looked…tired.

First my mother, now my father.

'_Could they not leave us be_?' I thought clenching my fist in rage and sorrow. They had ceased exploring the solverse and settled down. They just wanted to _live._

I realized another man was kneeling there already.

'Sir what do we do now?' the man said, his eyes dark and grim. He seemed to be holding a long strap of what appeared to be…._nuke bombs??_

'Why are you calling me that?'

'Your father is gone. As his son you're now in charge _sir'_

I felt a weight settle on my shoulder at those words.

I gazed again at this body, hot tears still running down my cheeks. So this was what Father had walked around with for all these years.

This uncomfortable feeling of _duty._ Many times he tried to get me to understand, to take my role as his son seriously. I hated that it had to take _this_ for me to finally understand.

What was once the Fathers' to carry had now become the Sons'.

My eyes fell again on the nuke bombs as an idea formed in my head.

It wasn't a plan where everything worked out well, but I could see no other way the town survived this onslaught.

Novai warriors were extremely powerful but they were not unkillable. You just needed something….*extra.* I looked down again at the broken body of my father. The sight seemed to strengthen my resolve.

'I'll need those bombs and a nanite suit.'

<u>Amy</u>

Amy watched as the nanites spread across Nathan's body, forming a sleek black armored suit.

'What are you going to do?' I managed to choke out as he picked up the strap of nuke bombs and counted them.

He looked at me and tried to smile, but failed.

A lot of unsaid words passed between us as our eyes met.

The playful gleam in his eyes I was so accustomed to seeing was gone.

'I'm going to light up the sky for you, Amy.' he said.

'For all of us.'

He activated the suit's foot thrusters and shot up into the sky before I could ask what he meant.

Nathan

Nathan blasted over the town, rage filling him as he saw all the death below him.

The beautiful, lush, green trees of the island that encompassed the town were now in flames around it.

It will pay he snarled internally.

He located the Novai raining orbs of explosive Nova down on the bunker where many of the residents had fled. He blasted towards it, approaching from its rear, locked his hands around its torso, directed all power to the thrusters, and blasted towards the sky with it.

Novai weren't classified into male/female categories. This was primarily because if you ever got close enough to deduce their gender you'd be dead.

However based on the physique of the being he felt pressed against him, he was willing to bet that this one was *male.*

The pain started almost immediately.

While Novai warriors were indeed tangible, despite the fact they were *literally* made of Nova and could certainly be touched, only a fool would try to.

Any other material that came into contact with them started to burn up immediately. Hence the need for nanites suits when dealing with them.

It didn't help that this particular Novai was struggling, trying to break free, growling words in a language I could not understand.

The flight upwards was far from smooth. Nathan remembered once, during their early days on the island when he and his father had come across two beautiful, red and white striped fishes, circling each other in a pond.

Koi, his father had called them.

Despite his father's stern warning, he, being a child, splashed in and grabbed hold of one.

The struggle of the fish to return to its twin companion was ferocious for something so small. It was almost like its life had depended on it.

Holding on to the Novai was something similar. It…*he* struggled so much that Nathan was forced to knit together the nanites on the arms of his suit, so he wouldn't break free.

Now he couldn't let it go even if he wanted to.

Counting on the suit to endure for just a while longer Nathan continued flying upwards.

Higher

He could smell his burning flesh now. The nanites in his suits were already detaching from his back to strengthen the armor around his arms, to help keep the corrosion at bay.

'Anytime now' he thought, gritting his teeth in pain.

He tightened his interlocked arms around the Novai, pressing its body against him even *more*.

Against the strap of nuke bombs, he had wrapped around himself.

You see he hadn't asked for a way to donate the bombs before he took them, even when he saw their hard outer shells.

The struggling Novai's burning form was the detonator.

As Nathan threw his head back and started to scream from the unbearable pain it *finally* happened.

'Father….I'm on top of the world' he thought through the pain as he saw the beautiful blue expanse of sky around him.

As the end came, he felt the weight ease off his shoulders.

It won't be able to hurt them anymore.

A rush of noise and then…. everything went black.

<u>Finale</u>

Amy looked up as the sky lit up with an explosion.

Her green eyes reflected the flames furiously burning the oxygen, spreading across the once clear, blue sky, bathing it crimson.

The image in her eyes swayed and distorted as tears filled it, as she realized…..Nathan wasn't coming back.

THE END.