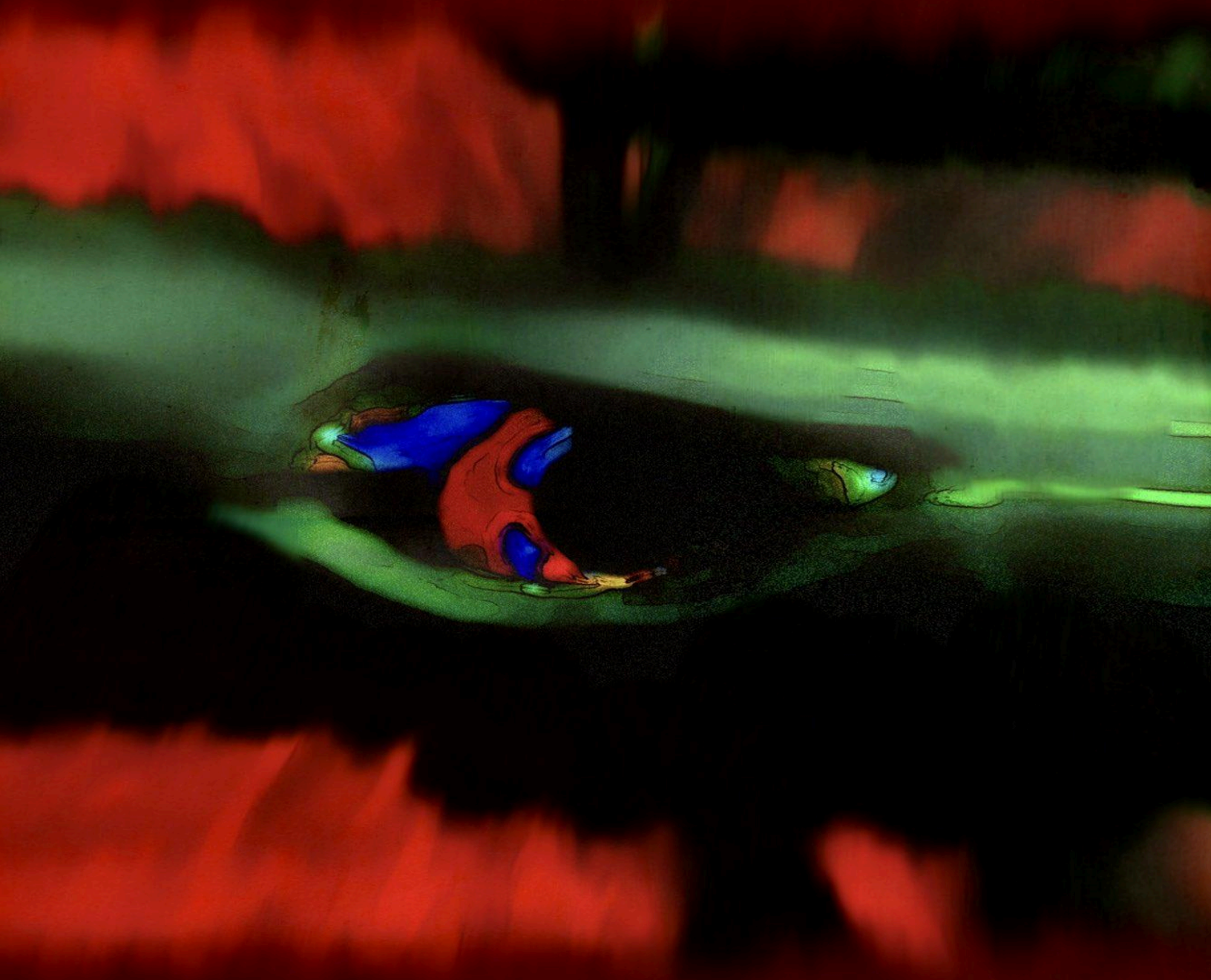




THE UNHYMANS



AMAZINGLY MUGGY



# EVIL DESERVES THE RIGHT TO EXIST.

"She needs to learn that this world hates non-lethal people." Thought Primal. "Besides, these soldiers are already dead because of what she did - even if she had no intention. No human survives having their bodies totally frozen." Like last time, Primal waited a couple of seconds for Icemantis to leave before killing the two frozen GHRC soldiers with an energy blast from his hand.

"When will she ever learn?"

CLICK BELOW FOR:  
THE OFFICIAL SOUNDTRACK

CLICK BELOW FOR:  
CHARACTER PORTRAITS

**THE FOLLOWING STORY IS RATED**  
**M-17+ FOR MATURE AUDIENCES.**  
**CONTENT INCLUDES:**

- **GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF VIOLENCE**
- **INTENSE SWEARING**
- **DRUG USAGE**
- **OFFENSIVE MATERIAL**
- **SEXUAL ALLUSIONS**

**VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED.**  
**THIS STORY IS NOT FOR THE FAINT**  
**OF HEART NOR THE SERIOUSNESS OF**  
**TEMPERAMENT.**

It is highly recommended to listen to the linked tracks provided as you read along. The atmosphere was constructed with those tracks in mind.

*This story is in a constant state of flux, due to Its unfinished state. The format & writing may or may not be the same when you come back to it.*

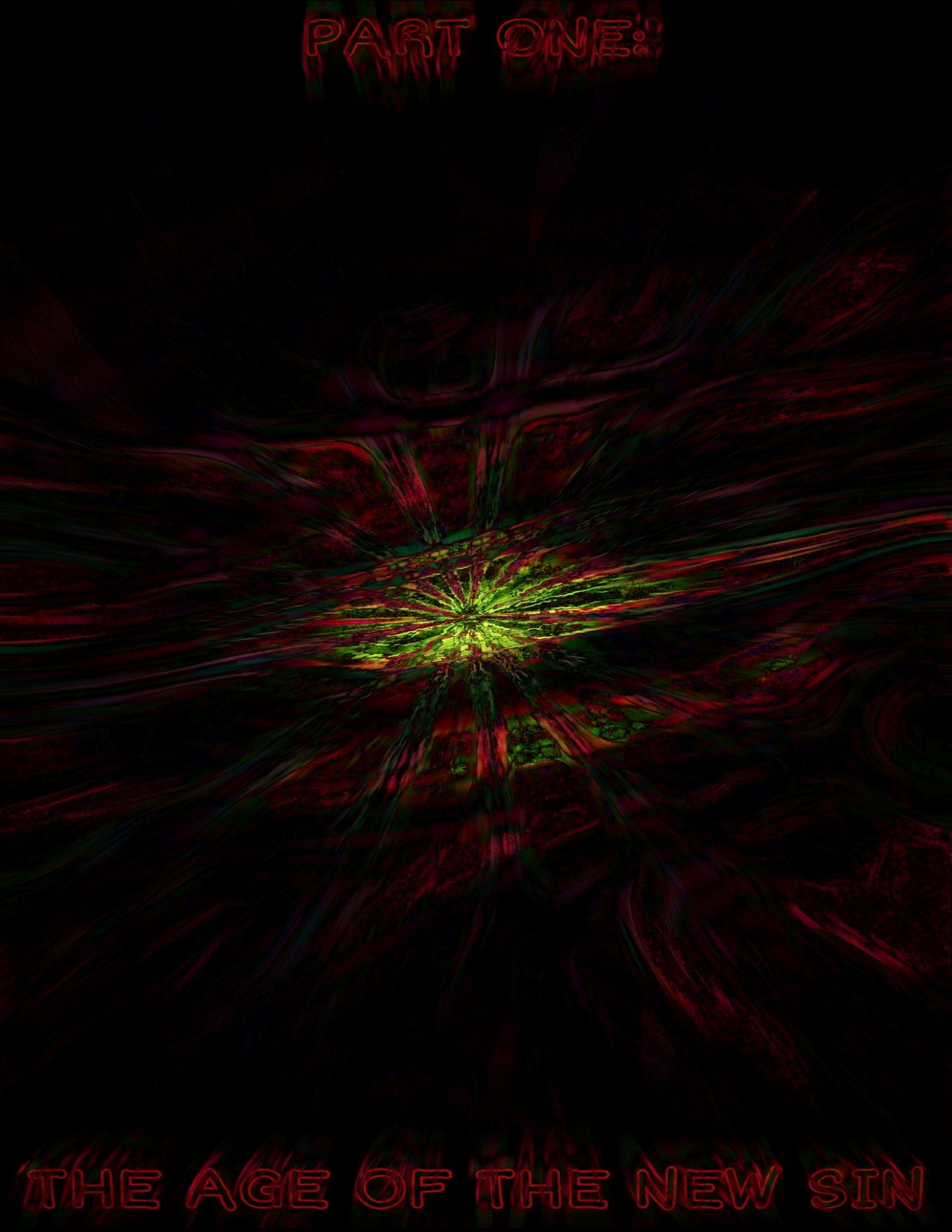
**KEY:**

**(EXAMPLE)** = This is a link to a track for you to listen to for maximum immersion.

**EXAMPLE** = Highlighted text means there's a comment by me.



PART ONE:



THE AGE OF THE NEW SIN

# THE UNHUMANS

## PART ONE:

### The Age of the New Sin

Theme: *Only Unhuman After All - Muggy*

## PROLOGUE:

At the exact start of the Medieval Era, a mass sacrifice of humans took place to counteract two global threats, Heaven and Hell. The sacrifice thus birthed the first generation of unhumans and they drove the threats back to their own worlds, locking them both under a powerful seal. Eventually, in the year 1812, Hell cracked their own seal. The unhumans of that time (typically referred to as Ancient Unhumans) went extinct and the gene that gave them their powers became null.

It is unknown how Hell's seal truly cracked. Some say a betrayer from the outside aided Hell in cracking it. While others say that Hell simply became powerful enough to do so on their own. It's uncertain on which is the real answer, because, over time, its history has been distorted by humanity itself (directly and indirectly).

The 1900s is when humanity began misunderstanding the history of unhumanity. They were just thought up as fantasy stories - good material to be used as adaptations in all sorts of fiction. Some of the most popular pieces of media were, in one way or another, inspired by unhumanity. Governments from across the globe denied their existence and kept the truth to themselves - despite *some* having a deep & personal history with them. Their intentions were to make unhumanity an antimeme, to make one forget about them as soon as they learned of them. However, since humanity is powerless, this idea was but a mere fantasy.

However, in 1943, one particular man delved deep into the lore of unhumanity - farther than any other person would have dared. His research would forever change not only his life but the rest of the world as well. This man, Drenzo, a middle-aged wealthy scientist, founded a private & primarily scientific group called the "Secret Soul Service."



Whatever happened then was enough for Drenzo and his colleagues to figure out the sudden disappearance of the unhumans. They typically used their insider knowledge of governments & agencies to gain an edge in their hunt for information. Since they only worked for themselves, no one really paid any attention to them (especially during a time of war). Eventually, in 1952, after managing to successfully steal hidden archives of the unhumans from various governments and organizations, Drenzo figured out what made the unhumans, well... not human.

Those lucky enough at birth would have a gene that held random power of absolute convenience suddenly appearing within their genetic code. It did not matter whether or not the gene itself was hereditary or dominant, for it was literally random in who it appeared in. Sometimes, the gene would even mutate and cause the person to become human hybrids of other creatures. This would *not* make them anthropomorphic however, as the animal looks are more so additions rather than features.

This prompted Drenzo to expand the budget of the Research & Development section of the Secret Soul Service, ensnared by how the unhuman gene defied reality with such ease. With this, he began hiring more trustworthy people to try and replicate the unhuman gene with him. However, in 1961, Drenzo was quietly assassinated by the United States government, claiming that he “was a traitor to his country.”

However, Drenzo had a son a year earlier. He was named “Dreigenzo” and he inherited his father’s legacy in 1973, when he turned thirteen. Drenzo was so close to finishing replication of the unhuman gene that Dreigenzo finished it a year later, with many researchers claiming him as a prodigy. This action refueled the passionate flame that was thought to be snuffed within the Secret Soul Service after Drenzo’s death.

With the newly fabricated unhuman gene replica, which was turned into a serum, Dreigenzo injected himself with it. His power: the ability to summon any melee weapon in his hands. It was weak but Dreigenzo knew that the replicated gene could match the original in due time. Nevertheless, the Secret Soul Service relished in their victory and Dreigenzo set out to fully complete his research on a pure, 100% copy of the unhuman gene.

On October 23rd, 1979, after establishing a new headquarters in Ephemeral City, New York, Dreigenzo was confronted by a strange individual during the night. A tall, grey-skinned woman wearing green stockings and heels with black accents, as well as a matching leotard, also wearing a horned, fully-encased yellow helmet embellished with light-green straps. Dreigenzo was stricken in awe by her ethereal, pure-white pupils staring back at him.

She introduced herself as “Syraux” and Dreigenzo quickly introduced himself, his mind racing with thoughts of who this person was and what they wanted. She told him that she had the power to reactivate the unhuman gene. Dreigenzo didn’t believe her. So, she revealed herself as not only a demon from the time of the Ancient Unhumans, but the Queen of Hell, the devil herself. She then amplified Dreigenzo’s power to its full potential. That changed his mind immediately.

Dreigenzo was stoked and she offered a deal. She would use her powers to make all the inactive unhuman genes active again but the Secret Soul Service would forever be partnered with Hell. Dreigenzo quickly agreed but in return, she had to be his partner for life. He knew this was a risky move, however, she was so striking to him (in both forms) that he could not picture life without her. From the stories he’s heard about the demons, he figured they couldn’t be *that* bad (considering they are drastically different compared to their religious counterparts). It was strange but his mind told him not to question it. Syraux reluctantly agreed and she, along with her fellow demons, reactivated *every* unhuman gene on the planet using their combined powers.

When the gene was reactivated, people that had it blacked out for roughly five minutes. In that span of time, the world was plunged into chaos. Fifty percent of the world’s population was suddenly rendered unconscious. Doctors performing vital operations, pilots flying aircraft, soldiers, agents and cops performing key missions, drivers on busy interstates and many, *many* more people all affected. The unhumans that lived described being in a black void, with only bold, capitalized white text displayed out in front of them. It was a question on whether or not they accepted their power. In confusion, most people picked “yes” and gained the signature trait of unhumanity; absolute mastery and knowledge of their own,

respective power. Those that refused were killed instantly by an unknown force, spontaneously exploding into a shower of giblets.

Dreigenzo felt fear before but *none* compared to the apocalyptic state of the world he now found himself in. After people accepted their new power, the chaos that was a massive human blackout quickly delved into global anarchy. However, Syraux provided Dreigenzo comfort and protection during this chaos, something that he is forever grateful for. Thus, the 80s and 90s saw a *massive* influx of unhumans. Some believed in the good of the world and were hailed as heroes, while others chose a darker path.

Governments on a global scale, having survived the chaos that was the unhuman reactivation (also known as Chaos Day) and being the only people knowledgeable of unhumanity at that point, were quick to silence the new generation of unhumans, regardless of the noble acts performed by those few who chose the path of good. Some unhumans were locked up in facilities and some were just killed. Some were even chosen to be a part of a military, or a private organization - if lucky enough.

Eventually, the United Nations created the “Global Human Restoration Coalition” on September 6th, 1981, to counteract the unhuman chaos - to put an end to the Chaos Years. They claimed them as, “a threat to human life and a disruption to our society.” By this time, if humanity recovered, knowledge of the unhumans would have been commonplace all across the globe. Instead, the GHRC have been doing their absolute best job at not only slandering the unhumans but also deploying various psychic hazards as countermeasures against their influence.

This caused global society to believe that unhumanity are something to be feared and hated, giving the GHRC control over the entire populace. Considering that a majority of humanity already vilified the unhumans because of Chaos Day, this was easier than expected. In some countries, it’s illegal to talk about them or have knowledge pertaining to them (and that’s the *least* of the offenses). With this, the Coalition believed that humanity would return to normal (or at least close to it).

*The development of an antimeme to forget about unhumanity in their entirety was resumed.*

Dreigenzo was furious at the GHRC’s actions, immediately disapproving of them. He, along with the Secret Soul Service, would have been eradicated by the



Coalition had it not been for Syraux. Through demonic influence, the Secret Soul Service was hidden to the public and governments. Thus, Dreigenzo was free to experiment further with the active unhuman gene.

Eventually, on October 8th, 1992, both Dreigenzo and Syraux would get a surprise. Two surprises, to be exact. On that night, in the aftermath of a heavy storm, on the main HQ of the SSS, two infant twins were discovered in a basket, covered in blankets and small pillows. A Stalker Demon discovered them first, alerting Dreigenzo soon after. Two scraps of paper were found within the basket, with crude writing, in marker, saying, “THESE TWO ARE NYX AND NOAH - NYX IS THE BIG ONE. THEY’RE TWINS. WE CAN’T TAKE CARE OF THEM, SO HOPEFULLY YOU CAN. THEY’RE ALSO UNHUMAN. WE’LL MISS THEM BUT THEY DESERVE BETTER IN A WORLD A LIKE THIS. GOOD LUCK... AND DON’T SEARCH FOR US. WE’LL BE LONG GONE BY THE TIME YOU TRY.”

The writing was correct. Of the two, was a 3’6” female infant already growing long, blonde hair. Her body looked swollen and Dreigenzo was, at first, concerned. Not only for these babies but why they were *here* in the first place. Why would someone entrust the Secret Soul Service with their *unhuman* children? How did they even know of the Secret Soul Service *at all*? The other infant, Noah, was relatively normal (he coughed a lot, though. Later to be discovered as asthma). Dreigenzo and Syraux could obviously see Nyx being unhuman but couldn’t at all see how Noah was... until Noah pointed a finger and shot a small laser through the building. After giving it some thought, Dreigenzo and Syraux came to the conclusion that these babies would be adopted and put under their care.

Parenting was not on either of their plans. Despite what the paper told them, they had demons and agents investigate as to who delivered these babies to their doorstep. The efforts were fruitless. The paper was right again.

On December 10th, 1993, another surprise would come. Another infant in a basket, lying comfortable in blankets and pillows, sleeping rather soundly. An agent would be the first to discover it and, much like the Stalker Demon a year before, would report it to both Dreigenzo and Syraux. Enclosed within the basket, on top of the baby, was an envelope. Within it was a printed piece of paper.

*“Apologies for the suddenness but I have to do this. This child’s name is Kanya and we cannot take care of her due to her being unhuman. We do not trust the Global Human Restoration Coalition with the adoption and safekeeping of our child, or anyone else for that matter. Hopefully, you are better than them and that I have chosen wisely. Kanya is but a few months old and... a little feisty. I entrust you with her - I specifically entrust you. Good luck and goodbye forever. Do not bother searching for me.”*

Syraux would be the first to read this letter, wondering just how information about the SSS is getting leaked. Another investigation was sent but no results were yielded - just like the last. She even made the psychic barrier protecting the SSS even stronger, ensuring no more information would get leaked. Much like Nyx and Noah, Syraux and Dreigenzo would adopt Kanya, putting her under their care. Dreigenzo then made a statement that they would no longer adopt more surprise children and would redirect said children, if any were to show up in the future, to the nearest adoption center. Luckily for the SSS, no more would appear.

No one had grown up in the Secret Soul Service before, other than Dreigenzo. Kanya, Nyx and Noah would be the first in a *long* time. Syraux was a natural parent and, initially, Dreigenzo struggled for a couple years but eventually got the hang of it. Being unprepared for this type of responsibility, on top of the *other* responsibilities he had to worry about, made him stressed in those couple years. The children grew up and as adults, they all chose, of their own volition, to stay and join the Secret Soul Service. This freed up time for Dreigenzo to continue work on the unhuman gene, still wanting to create a perfect replica of it. He wanted to finish his father’s work as he felt he owed him that much.

He even began a project in the late 2000s about the mutation powers of the unhuman gene. This project, however, was cut in 2018, with the blame falling on an unhuman with the alias of “Primal,” who had the goal of breaking out a specific unhuman from the Secret Soul Service.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Freedomers

Theme: *Sirens in a Colorblind Wasteland -*  
*RyuuAkito*

06/08/2018.

8:40 PM.

Ephemeral City, New York, United States of America.

Secret Soul Service Headquarters.

Dark Mark Operative, alias “Primal,” executing Rescue Operation  
“Fortuna.”

VIP: One (1) unhuman, alias “Icemantis” (real name unknown).

*Note: Primal to expect assistance from turned SSS Agents Noah & Kanya.*

Violence Level: Crew expendable.

Primal busted through a wall of the building, killing two Secret Soul Service agents in the blast. His powers protected him from the shrapnel and his helmet protected him from the noise. He was now in a narrow hallway and to his right, he heard commotion running up the stairs. He went the opposite way and opened a door that led to a room with a lit fireplace. While it looked pleasing with its 1920’s art deco, it was just a dead end for him.

“INTRUDER ALERT!!” Shouted an agent from the hallway as she drew her sidearm. Using his power of Soul and with a slight flick of his wrist, Primal blasted her away with tremendous force, which caused her body to become mangled and distorted mid-flight from the intense pressure, splattering gore everywhere.

“Oh, shit!!” Exclaimed an agent as he managed to reach the hallway from the stairs, seeing the brutality with his own eyes. He turned back to his squad and hurried them to retreat back down the stairs. “That’s an unhuman! We need demons!”

“Where’s Syraux & Dreigenzo?” Asked an agent behind the leader.

“Wrong fucking question! Radio for demons, we can’t handle that guy!”



Using this opportunity, Primal's helmet performed a scan of the area and informed him that the VIP was in the room below. So, Primal raised an open hand at the floor and it disintegrated (as if it never existed) and he dropped down in a dark, dimly lit, cold laboratory. He hastily set up a purple, transparent energy barrier to where the hole was to prevent any hostile surprises, then he walked over to a large, metal capsule that held the VIP. She was in cryo sleep, which Primal was surprised to see. He didn't think the Secret Soul Service had this kind of technology but this was his first time meeting them.

*Hell of an introduction.* He thought to himself as he noticed an on-board screen and keyboard on the pod. It was running a custom operating system.

*Uhh...* Primal thought to himself as he tried to find the start menu. His helmet then informed him that pressing random buttons was not helping.

"Just open the damn thing, then!" He replied in an irked tone. Almost immediately, the helmet connected to the computer on the cryo pod and forced it to open itself.

A cold burst of air rushed out as the door opened, even colder than the air in the room. As it cleared, a naked woman became visible. She had ice covering most of her hairless body and she had long antennas that came out of her bald head (that looked more like tendrils, if anything), and a mantis-like mouth that replaced her own. Primal caught her as she fell and made his way to the room's exit without missing a stride. After opening its door, he then met with one of the turned SSS agents, Kanya, a dark-skinned girl with yellow eyes and short, cropped, dark hair, wearing an agile fitness outfit colored black and yellow. More notable was that her eyes resembled a feline's and that she had large, black claws. She was anxious but more than willing to carry out the mission with Primal. Even if it meant permanently changing her life.

"Fuckin' hell, you're fast!" She said with an almost impressed look. Primal exited the cryo labs and entered a large, living room-like space. He looked at each end of the room, then noticed a large window to his left.

"We exit through here!" He commanded as he shot the window open with a soul bolt from his open hand. Primal was suddenly tackled to the wall by an agent (one from the squad from earlier), dropping the ice girl as he fell. Kanya, in quick thinking, stabbed the back of the agent's leg, her claws penetrating through his

muscle with ease and he fell down in agonizing pain. She made sure not to hit any vital spots.

“Sorry, man! Don’t have time to explain.” Kanya hurriedly said to the groaning agent as she pulled out her claws from his leg. Primal stood up, looking for the girl he dropped, then noticing her wide-eyed with fear, shocked at what was happening.

“What the-!?” She began, dazed and panicking. “What’s going on?!” She questioned, looking up at Primal with fear as she tried crawling backwards.

“We’re getting you out of here!” Primal grabbed her hand, helping her stand up with swiftness. He looked out of the broken window and gazed at the dark city streets, only to quickly back away from it as hellfire whizzed past him. The demons have arrived.

“Shit!” In retaliation, Primal chucked a soul grenade to the group of lesser demons below on the sidewalk. They quickly scattered, easily dodging the explosion and running up the side of the building. Car horns started blaring and more commotion could be heard from outside. Primal went through the window’s dormer and blasted a few of the lesser demons away, usually killing them in one or two hits. One demon tried to slice Primal with their arm as he landed on the sidewalk. He stopped their attack by force-lifting them up, crushing all of their limbs at once and tossing them aside. Once the coast was clear, he signaled Kanya, who then signaled to Icemantis, to drop down with him.

“Quickly, grab onto me!” Ordered Primal as they landed beside himself, throwing a soul tether up to the rooftop of the nearest, tallest building (a skyscraper). The ice girl and Kanya grabbed onto him tightly and the three zoomed to the top, Icemantis screaming in the process and Kanya closing her eyes. As they made it to the rooftop, the two girls let go of Primal, catching their breaths. Primal looked down below to where they once were and, using his helmet’s zooming and thermal capabilities, saw a swarm of Secret Soul Service agents and demons. They seemed confused as to where their intruder went. So, they spread out, the demons moving into the alleyways and on rooftops, while the agents patrolled the streets. On the opposite corners of the streets, Primal noticed two GHRC patrol trucks. Seems that they heard all the commotion and will keep the Secret Soul Service

busy for a while. Primal then turned back to the ice girl, seeing Kanya trying to calm her down. It seemed as if they knew each other well enough..

*(A Light World Darkens - Muggy)*

“They seemed to have lost us.” Primal reassured, walking up to the two. The ice girl shivered, sighing in relief that she made it out alive. The moon started to rise from the horizon but was then quickly blocked out by a few, heavy clouds.

“I’m Primal, by the way. I’m guessing you know Kanya already, right?” He asked.

“Yes. My name is... uhh,” the ice girl trailed off for a bit, still trying to shake off the adrenaline as she was catching her breath. “Icemantis!” It always made her a little anxious, even if she didn’t remember her real name.

“I already know that.” Responded Primal rather flatly.

“Oh! Okay...” *Get it together!* Icemantis thought as she shook her head. “It would be really nice if we can go somewhere safer - preferably where I can get some clothes, yes?” Icemantis pleaded as she covered herself with her hands, to which Primal understood. Thankfully, he knew just the place. It was part of the mission, after all.

“I know somewhere. Let me make this call first.” Primal said as he pulled out his phone from his pocket (amazingly, still intact). It was unmarked, had no brand stamped on the back and had a lightweight protective case colored black like the phone itself. He called the person that assigned him this mission (Discount), the founder of the faction that Primal works for (Dark Mark). Primal has known of Discount’s alias for a long time but even in that time, his real name was never even *hinted* at. Then again, a lot of unhumans are like that - including himself. During the call, Primal informed him that he had both Kanya and Icemantis, as well as telling him the current situation they were facing. Discount then informed him to meet up at the temporary location in the northern part of the city, to which he hung up the phone.

“Well?” Kanya asked with her hands on her hips, eyebrows raised in suspicion.

“We’re heading north near Ephemeral’s town square.” Primal informed. “Far from the HQ, so hopefully no agent nor demons. My boss, whose name is Discount, has our safety in mind.”



“Let’s hope he does.” Added Kanya, doubt within her glaring eyes. Icemantis still seemed groggy from the capsule that once contained her, a sign of her adrenaline wearing off.

“By then we can relax.” She said as she started to stretch, shaking off her tired feeling.

“You seem rather, uh... forthcoming in all of this, Icemantis. Are you sure you don’t want to take a little break right now?” Asked Primal with some concern.

“No, no, Primal.” She replied quickly, crossing her arms over her chest. “Kanya told me everything. I *want* to go along with this. How about we just move on, okay?”

Everyone agreed and with the help of Primal’s flying, the three unhumans set for Ephemeral’s town square. Kanya and Icemantis hung onto Primal as he flew past many buildings. He carefully hovered over some of the open areas he knew where the blind spots were (to avoid any detection from the GHRC or SSS). He lived in Ephemeral City all his life, so he knew his way around like the back of his hand. This was also because of the helmet he wore, which he discovered back in 2009. He remembered that day like it was yesterday but now there was no time to reminiscence.

They finally made it to the location Discount told Primal about, entering a back alley and then heading down a cellar, walking down a short flight of stairs. The room was pitch black before Discount himself turned on the lights and Primal closed the metal door behind him. Discount wore a black, hooded cloak over a grey trenchcoat and the rest of his outfit was similarly monochromatic, except for the insides of the cloak being yellow, some buttons on his shirt being cyan-green and his dark shoes having yellow accents. He wore two belts that wrapped around his stomach akin to that of a chest rig, holding two pouches that contained various items useful for him. Discount then walked behind a steel table that seemed to have its legs somewhat rusted, calm in his stride, yet suspicious in his looks.

He stood taller than Primal and there was a distinct shade in his eyes, like a shroud of darkness that made it difficult to maintain eye contact with him for seemingly no apparent reason. His looks intimidated Icemantis and made Kanya uneasy, even though it was *not* intentional.

The room they were all in was small. Two concrete pillars held up the floor above, adjacent to each side of the steel table. The trio were just glad to be in a safe location - if only temporarily. Discount keenly eyed Icemantis for a few seconds and then on Kanya, which they both felt weird about. Their eyes itched the moment they matched their gaze with his.

“Yes, it is them indeed.” He finally said with satisfaction.

*Did he not know what we looked like?* Thought Kanya.

“You there,” Discount pointed to Kanya, snapping her out of her thoughts. “What do you know about Gehenna?”

“Gehenna?” Kanya was taken aback. She didn’t expect to be questioned about Gehenna.

“Well... not much!” She sighed, leaning against the concrete wall. “Never really knew her. She was just an agent that went on long missions and eventually went rogue.”

“This was known already.” Added Discount. “Do you happen to know her whereabouts?” He asked, already getting more serious.

“Last I heard, she was heading south.” Kanya replied, trying not to stare into Discount’s eyes as she had to rub her own due to irritation. “To where, I don’t know.” This was the best information Kanya had on Gehenna, though she was confused as to why Discount needed this information nor why it was relevant. That’s when it hit her.

“Hey, I didn’t betray the faction I *grew up* with to help a *Transformer* break out a naked ice lady just to give *you* a few words! Can we just... *RELAX* for a minute!?” Kanya’s rising tone of voice was justified with what she was feeling. Primal felt indifferent and Icemantis didn’t know what to think, still worrying about wanting clothes. Discount seemed unfazed. His emotion was never changing, keen on getting business done.

“Gehenna was once a part of my organization before turning over to the Secret Soul Service.” Discount explained. “She has crucial information on every important member within my group and the SSS, considering she once held a high-authority position in both my faction and your father’s. She is psychic and was able to resist my anti-memes about Dark Mark. Not only that but she also has a piece of a large ritual - which is more important. If she gets *any* more pieces, or if

anyone else does, then this planet is doomed.” His piercing stare and unwavering tone proved his seriousness of the situation to Kanya and Icemantis. This was a matter he seemed determined to shut down as quickly as possible.

“Ritual..?” Kanya repeated in a confused tone, before immediately realizing, her face shifting into one of disquiet. “Oh, *that*. I don’t know where the other artifacts are located, nor that Gehenna was involved.” This “breakout” was planned a week before, through Web-Beneath, a part of the internet where its users are primarily unhuman. A sub-internet with state-of-the-art encryption created by the Dark Mark faction. All for the purpose of granting unhumans with the luxury of using the internet. It was Kanya’s first time using it and *this is* Kanya’s first time seeing Primal in person. The vagueness and brevity in his messages annoyed her at first.

“Thanks to our implanted operative, Noah,” began Discount. “We informed you about the ritual your surrogate father and mother have been planning.” Kanya remembered this terrifying revelation all too well. “You then told Icemantis, converting her because your brother asked for it, though this wasn’t entirely necessary.”

“I won’t take offense.” Said a tired Icemantis as she crossed her arms.

“Both of you switching sides have given us an edge over the Service.” Discount continued. “If it was just Primal, Dark Mark and I, then the chances of success would be lower. We need *all* the help we can get to insure that this planet lives to see another day.”

Kanya was surprised by the answer and so was Icemantis but it just left them with more questions. “The Earth can live beyond humanity’s passing, even after all we’ve done to it.” Discount continued as he then walked over to a shadowy corner of the room and picked something up. “However, this is a rare exception and we need the proper equipment to handle it.” He slid the thing over to Icemantis. What seemed to be a medium-sized suitcase stopped by her feet.

“Take it. It’s a gift.” Said Discount as he walked in front of the table. “It has special augments for your powers, since you’re not fully unhuman.”

Icemantis crouched down and opened the suitcase, seeing clothes and a strange object underneath them.

“Woah... did you create this?” Icemantis asked as she picked up the black outfit and unfolded it, revealing the large, dark-blue mantis symbol on the chest (that was covered up by armor-plating, with the lower-half of the symbol being the only thing visible). Its textures were of a scale-like pattern and it also came with what looked like dark-blue stockings. Its angular eyes looked like goggles and the whole outfit itself felt metal - like it was sturdy armor but still light enough to be mobile in.

“Yes.” Answered Discount nonchalantly, seeing Icemantis smile at the outfit (and clothes) that she now held. Without any hesitation, Icemantis put on her new clothes and held the armored outfit in confusion, because there was no clear way to wear it. Discount noticed this and pointed at the outfit’s head.

“There’s a small button on the left eye, on the top. Press it.”

Icemantis followed his instructions and the back-side of the suit opened up. Icemantis put it on and pressed the button again to close the suit. The angular eyes lit up a faint blue, her long antennas popping out of the top of the suit as its operating system booted up.

“This feels... cool. I like it!” She complimented as she laid her antennas on her shoulders like it was hair. “Thanks!”

“Indeed. Now, we move on to the next phase.” Said Discount, getting back to business.

“Sorry, Kanya, we couldn’t make one for you.” Primal quipped to Kanya.

“Cool, I don’t care.” Kanya quickly responded, not even looking at him.

Primal scoffed and was impressed by how easy and relaxed Icemantis was with the suit. Kanya crossed her arms, still contemplating her decision to betray Triple S. She was especially thinking about Nyx, Syraux and Dreigenzo. She had a feeling she should’ve told her sister about the ritual but Noah advised against it. Said, “I need to tell her at the right time and now isn’t it. You’ll know it when it happens.”

*Nyx definitely won’t. Kanya shuddered after having that thought. She’ll definitely join, though. She has to.*

“So, what’s next?” Icemantis asked Discount after finishing getting a feel for her new suit. “We track down this Gehenna gal and...?”

“She's a traitor. Kill her and retrieve any important items she has and bring them to me. I'll safeguard them.” Explained Discount in his own, simple way. Kanya and Primal didn't mind it but Icemantis didn't feel as if it had to end that way.

“Kill her? Seriously?” Icemantis asked, wanting no as an answer.  
“She is a threat to humanity *and* unhumanity. She *must* die.”

## CHAPTER TWO:

### On the Road

Theme: *Psychic Scars - Muggy*

*What did I get myself into?* Thought a concerned and second-guessing Icemantis as she, alongside Primal and Kanya, exited the cellar. She was definitely *not* expecting such an explosive rescue. She thought Primal would simply *talk* to the Secret Soul Service, convince them to release her.

*I get the hostility for the Secret Soul Service but...* Icemantis trailed her thoughts as she stared into the dark, somewhat messy alleyway, lit up by a combination of the full moon and streetlights. She didn't have much else to think about. So, she started to work with the user interface of her newly acquired suit, which was incredibly user-friendly. She even found the night-vision mode but quickly disabled it because there was too much ambient light. It wasn't *that* dark, yet!

All three of the unhumans had a mission to do. Primal and Kanya seemed indifferent about it but Icemantis wasn't so sure. She's never killed anyone but isn't afraid to take a life when needed, due to her training in the Secret Soul Service. Another thing Icemantis couldn't shake off was how uneasy Discount made her. Sure, he gave her clothes and a new, impressive suit of armor but he still felt a little strange to her. That and the way she couldn't focus on his eyes without being irritated with what felt like million, tiny scratches on her own eyes.

"That guy seemed intense, right?" Icemantis asked Primal, knowing that he has worked for Discount for a long time. "Hey, what is Dark Mark, really? I've never heard of them before."

"Well," Primal began with a deep breath. "It's a faction that helps unhumans have a safe life. It's mostly comprised *of* unhumans but we also have human allies as well. Discount's power is Deception and he uses it to keep his faction hidden from... *practically everyone*. It has an antimemetic field around its identity, so no one truly remembers it the second they look away. This field also protects members



of Dark Mark, Web-Beneath and other Dark Mark properties. It's why the GHRC hasn't destroyed us. They don't know that we exist."

"I've heard of antimemetic hazards but don't really know what that means." Said Kanya as they all stopped near the end of the alley. The trash bin nearby was overflowing and Kanya, the only one not wearing a fully-encased suit of armor or a masked helmet, flared her nose at the smell and veered away from it in disgust.

"Antimemes are a real thing." Primal continued. "Think of a dream you couldn't really remember. Passwords, taboos and other secrets. It's information *not meant* to be known. Antimemetic *hazards*, on the other hand, are a type of psychic hazard that causes the brain to immediately dump the information it *just* obtained. The reason that none of you are forgetting about me, Discount and Dark Mark right now, is because Discount considers you two as allies and has made you both an exception for the barrier."

*I guess the same applies to my brother.* Kanya thought as she crossed her arms. Ever since Primal first contacted her, revealing the truth behind Syraux's & Dreigenzo's intentions, he broke the news that Noah was also a part of Dark Mark. That same day, Kanya confronted Noah and the two had a *long* conversation about everything Primal told her. Kanya couldn't remember *all* the details, her feelings about her surrogate parents clouded what she remembered about that talk.

The end of the alleyway was fenced off. In between two small buildings with no reliable view, Primal told the two girls to meet him on the rooftop. He floated up to the roof without any trouble. Kanya had to *actually use* effort and climbed the building with her claws. Icemantis and Primal were both impressed at how Kanya was a good climber and how sharp her claws were - as they easily entered and exited the building's brick material like a hot knife through butter. Icemantis didn't see any escape ladders or stairs nearby so, with a deep breath, she jumped, summoning an ice pillar beneath her feet at the same time that launched her further than she anticipated. Primal eased her landing by making her float down.

"Thanks!" Her fear of messing up that jump and injuring herself was overshadowed by Primal's aid.

"Yeah." He simply said, then immediately thought, *she really* isn't *fully unhuman. How sad.* "The reason I want to be up here is to figure out a good route to our next destination."

“Wait, what *is* our next objective?” Questioned Kanya, now realizing that no one asked Discount on what to do next. “Your mission is over, right, Primal? What now?”

“Oh, *that* mission isn't over yet.” He answered, using his helmet's zoom functionality to scout the northern side of Ephemeral City. It had a rather impressive magnification. “Getting you two out of Triple-S was *part* of it. The next part begins now and thankfully, you two are helping me.” After seeing a good route to progress to the next objective, he turned to face the girls again. “In the event that neither of you two wanted to help Dark Mark, we would, instead, enlist the help of an individual named ‘Luhki.’ *That's* our next objective.”

“Who the hell is Luhki?” Kanya questioned, almost sounding impatient.

“An unhuman known for helping other unhumans. Not a unique role itself but Luhki seems to have the resources and influence necessary to have safehouses. Typically, unhuman safehouses are quickly discovered by the GHRC but not for this guy. He's not Dark Mark either, just a man doing what he can with whatever he's got. If I had to guess, given his name, he has the power of Luck. Discount wants his help, so let's get moving.”

“And what if we *don't* get his help?” Icemantis wondered.

“Then we do with what we got.” Primal simply answered. “His last known location was in the Dust, by the way. We're heading there.”

Both of the girls seemed surprised.

“Woah, woah, woah... *the Dust*? The most accurate representation of Manhattan?!” Kanya joked but was still curious. It got a chuckle out of Primal.

“Yeah. Shouldn't be *that* bad, though. GHRC doesn't patrol that area too often, so we should be good.”

“Haven't been inside the Dust since last year.” Kanya reminisced, remembering the scouting mission she was sent on. “The homeless were building...” She still wasn't sure what exactly they were building, “...something but it just looked like they were making a junkyard.

“I haven't actually been to the Dust.” Added Icemantis, pointing a finger to herself. “I've driven past it but that's as close as I ever got.”

“You're gonna get a closer look, then.” Said Primal as he stood on the edge of the building, ready to head out. “C'mon, you two, let's move!”

*Meanwhile, back at the Secret Soul Service's main HQ...*

*(Sad Robot - Juice-Tin)*

Dreigenzo sat on a chair in his office, his hand placed on his temple with his eyes closed, disbelief and disappointment on his face. His wife, Syraux, was next to him, a hand on his shoulder for comfort. They were both waiting for Nyx and Noah to discuss what to do about the current situation.

"I can't believe she did this..." Muttered Dreigenzo as the two siblings entered the room and closed the door behind them. The office was rather small and contained many cabinets and only one desk, filled to the brim with all kinds of paperwork.

"Did you two know of Kanya's involvement in this?" Asked Dreigenzo as he opened his eyes, staring directly at the siblings with a look that just *wanted* a satisfying answer. The two wore primarily blue clothing but the more noticeable difference between the two was that Nyx was 8'6" and Noah was only 5'11". Thankfully, the SSS have compensated their buildings for Nyx, making the ceilings and doorways taller.

"Woah, wait a minute," Noah responded. "She was a part of the raid?" He looked shocked and so did Nyx.

"Kanya was fiercely loyal to this place! Why the hell would she do this?!" Noah continued, to which Dreigenzo aggressively shrugged his shoulders with an exasperated face, having the same exact question in his mind.

*"I don't know!"*

Syraux continued the conversation. "She was working with an unhuman that we haven't identified yet. He killed one agent and several demons while taking Icemantis with him."

"The hell does he want with the ice girl?" Nyx questioned, her curiosity of the situation bugging her mind.

"Unknown." Syraux simply answered. It was the best she had at the moment. "He was too organized to do this by himself. Looking at the security footage, this unhuman's main goal was Icemantis. He breached, took her and left, with Kanya assisting him."

“Shit..!” Nyx sighed heavily as she leaned against the wall. Dreigenzo then stood and picked up a piece of printed paper that stood out amongst the rest of the paperwork. “When your mother and I came back,” he said. “I found this in our room. It’s a letter from Kanya basically saying she’s betraying us.”

Noah grabbed the letter and read it aloud.

“Dear mother, father and my two siblings, I am leaving. Something terrible was shown to me and I no longer find myself safe in this building, nor do I find myself safe with you (mother and father). I found assistance, people that actually care. Much like my biological parents, you won’t find them, so don’t bother looking. Goodbye.”

“What is she *talking* about?!” Nyx said, trying to comprehend the words. “She must have been influenced by a *psychic* - there’s no other way!”

“Regardless,” Syraux continued. “We must find her. There’s a search party already investigating and I’m going to send out another with you two. Hopefully, you’ll find her before the Sweeping commences.”

“That was...” Noah paused, trying to remember that date.

“Three days from now.” His mother answered.

“Right. Got it.” He sighed and handed back the paper to his father. “Well, I’m going to get ready then.” Noah then walked out of the room, closing the door behind him and went outside the backdoor. He walked a couple meters away from the building, standing in a small parking lot. He could hear sirens in the distance and saw several GHRC trucks drive by. They must have been suspicious as to all the noise earlier, or they’re preparing to commence the Sweeping. Either way, Syraux’s protections were still working, so Noah didn’t have to worry about them. Noah double-checked his surroundings and pulled out a phone from his pocket, then dialed a number.

“*Hello. Please enter your given passcode on the dial.*” Said a robotic, male voice. Noah then entered 0-1-0-6.

...

“*Passcode accepted.*” Said the automated voice. “*Welcome, member Noah Enzo. If you need to speak to Discount, press ‘one.’ If you need to contact Ruvaly-*” Noah pressed “one,” interrupting the automated message’s speech before it could finish. After several seconds of ringing, Discount picked up the phone.

“Check in.” He said, already expecting him.

“Discount,” Noah spoke. “Some bad news. The Secret Soul Service is on a manhunt for Primal. Only a matter of time before they find out where he is. They’ve already sent out one team but they’re going to send out another. They want me and my sister on it.”

“Go along with it, then.” Discount responded. “This is the point of no return, Noah. I highly recommend converting Nyx to our side and for you to sever your connection to the Secret Soul Service.”

Noah exhaled a heavy breath, wondering when this day would come. “Okay... I’ll do it when I meet up with Primal. Where’s his location?”

“They’re busy on a mission right now. When it’s done, I’ll text you the safehouse they’ll stay at.” Discount then hung up the call and Noah turned off his phone, putting it back inside his pocket as he took another deep breath. As he turned to go back inside, he noticed that it was starting to drizzle.

*Odd, he thought. It’s not supposed to rain until next week.*

Shrugging it off, Noah went back inside and turned a corner, going up a flight of stairs and headed towards his room. The entire building was busy with agents and demons caring for the injured. Some were even analyzing the destruction Primal caused, trying to find the best way to repair the damages. Thankfully, Primal didn’t hit any of the gas lines but it was still going to be a steep bill that Dreigenzo had to pay. Once Noah was inside his room, he closed the door and opened his closet on the other end.

He grabbed a dark-crimson, sleeveless jacket and put it on. Then he grabbed an unmarked version of the normal SSS uniform. This uniform had primarily black colors, complete with a matching balaclava, fingerless gloves, ballistic vest and high-tech goggles, along with a belt for carrying all sorts of equipment. After putting it on, Noah went to his desk near his bed and grabbed a rifle leaning on it. At first, it looked like a basic Remington rifle but it was actually a highly modified Remington rifle that shot lasers instead of bullets (hence the lack of a magazine slot, as it was replaced with a battery).

This was Noah’s magnum opus, since he had a passion for engineering. A commissioned project by Dreigenzo to enhance the Service’s arsenal. For several weeks, Noah’s been working on it. With the help of his power (Laser), he was

easily able to create a weapon that could fire super-heated energy beams. This prototype is able to bypass all forms of ballistic protection, leaving behind a scorched and smoking hole within its target.

The only way this project was ever possible (and actually *working*) was because of the alliance the Secret Soul Service had with Hell. The only problem with this prototype was its weight, as it was covered in thick wires that connected to the battery in the magazine well, as well as connecting to a big, rectangular box that sat where the scope used to be. Considering his own position in Dark Mark as a double agent, Noah has been discreetly sending Discount his progress on the rifle through Web-Beneath since the project's inception (including the many blueprints and notes he and several others have made about it). Noah kept all the information regarding the project on a specific laptop he kept in his room. After retrieving it from his desk, as well as several other back-up drives, he put them all in a black backpack and put it on.

As he was getting his gear together, Noah overheard radio chatter and more footsteps outside. Chances are that the mercenaries Triple-S hired finally showed up. Noah didn't really interact with them much but his twin sibling did. She described them as "just another, dime-a-dozen soldier-for-hire." The majority weren't unhuman and he hasn't met any that were. It did seem a little strange for a faction like the Secret Soul Service to even *use* money. They're hiding from all sorts of government agencies and militaries, so it's not like they're paying taxes. They're literally partnered with Hell, in which Triple-S *could* have all the manpower they needed *but* the seal restricts those who can enter and exit Hell - even if it's cracked. Hence, as of right now, hiring soldiers of fortune for extra manpower.

Since Noah's current mission required him to go out in public, Noah had to limit the usage of his own power. He glanced over his laser rifle as he laid it on his bed.

*I won't be using this thing much. Unfortunately.* He thought as he checked the safety on the rifle and holstered it on his back. With his outfit, most would assume him to be of the GHRC, or some other military - which is a common sight these days. Noah has red eyes, which no human can normally have, which would be risky but cosplaying exists. However, Noah knew of the countless incidents the



GHRC had over accidentally detaining and/or even killing human cosplayers because they *thought* they looked unhuman. It's a very popular meme that still goes viral every now and then. A knock was then heard on Noah's door.

"Come on in, whoever you are." Said Noah as he finished putting the rest of his gear on, balaclava in hand. The door opened and the person was revealed to be Nyx. Her entire silhouette being as big as the doorway.

"Oh hey, Nyx. Ready so soon?" He asked as she stepped inside his room.

"A little." She responded, sounding a little anxious. "How's that rifle coming along?"

"Going great, actually! Just gotta figure out how to recycle its ammunition. Other than that, it still has no recoil because... y'know, *lasers*." He cracked a smile and put the balaclava on. Nyx smiled, too, always intrigued by her brother's inventions.

"Noah," She started, getting back to what she wanted to say with a dejected expression. "I'm not sure how *we* can do this. There *must* be a reason for Kanya's actions!"

"I know." Noah said somberly, trying his best to lie with his body and voice. "Rest assured, we *will* find one. Now let's go find and take care of Primal, while also bringing Kanya and Icemantis back."

Nyx smirked and headed out of the room, with Noah trailing behind her. The two were ready to go.

### ***Back to Primal, Icemantis and Kanya...***

***(Stampton Bridge - Amon Tobin)***

It was dusk and cloudy, and the three unhumans were making their way to the upper northeastern part of Ephemeral City. It was an industrial area with most of the buildings being abandoned for years - perfecting hiding spots for everybody, regardless if they're unhuman or not. This specific area was called "The Dust" by officials. Once there, the team of unhumans decided to split up. Primal would check out the outskirts, Icemantis would check out the alleyways and smaller buildings and Kanya would check out the abandoned factories. Icemantis contemplated the decision but she was reassured by Primal that more ground would

be covered this way. He also said to hurry with their objectives, as no one knows if Gehenna is even near her goal or not, or if Luhki is leaving.

It was a good choice. There weren't many people who lived in the Dust, meaning more open areas for unhumans to move around in. That, however, doesn't mean they're safe, as the Global Human Restoration Coalition routinely patrols the entire city every day. They always capture a few unhumans, especially during the Sweeping (most of which come from the Dust). Plus, to the eyes of many, this place was more like a shanty town.

The Dust has a rather curious origin. It began like any other industrious area in a city but, in recent years, it has been completely taken over by a group of homeless people calling themselves "Reptiloids." There were a few unhuman members, which would be enough for the GHRC to wipe them out but all the Coalition did was eliminate said unhumans and moved on - leaving the faction relatively unscathed. The Coalition doesn't actually care about the faction, only the unhumans involved. Then the city got involved themselves, pissed that the GHRC didn't wipe out the faction, deploying police, SWAT and FBI units. The Reptiloids however, were unusually well-equipped for a bunch of homeless people, pushing back all law enforcement without much effort. Ephemeral City's mayor is considering deploying the National Guard to retake the Dust but only time will tell when that happens.

Before the group split up, Primal, using his powers, fabricated three transparent, compact radios made of his powers and gave two of them to both Kanya and Icemantis to communicate with. The radios latched onto their clothing like magnets. After an hour of checking the outskirts, Primal radioed in and reported finding nothing of notice. Icemantis did the same a couple minutes later and the two met up near the Dust's park, their radios dissipating as they got closer to each other.

"Do you think we should ask some of these people for help?" Questioned Icemantis as she landed beside Primal on the rooftop of an abandoned building. Didn't need his help this time but the landing was rather rough.

"Y'know..." started Primal "...we don't actually know if one of them is unhuman or not - the Reptiloids, I mean. Couldn't hurt to try."

“I haven't really noticed them in my exploration.” Added Icemantis. “I imagine we have to be careful of who we suspect is one of us, right? I’ve heard stories of Coalition agents acting as spies.”

“Yeah, noted.” Primal said, leaving her question hanging in the air. He was already familiar with the tactics the Coalition pulls to get closer to unhumans. “By the way,” he continued “my helmet’s got a zoom feature, along with some other quality-of-life shit. Your suit got something similar to that? Discount has some high-tech stuff, so chances are that suit of yours does.”

Icemantis felt fortunate enough to understand whatever computer was in her suit. It gave her a heads-up display that was rather simple and wasn’t cluttering her vision. Plus, if she wanted to, she could simply disable the HUD from sight (which she did). While the eyes had a blue glow from the outside, she could see normal colors from within. After searching for a few seconds, she found the suit’s camera features. It felt almost natural to use as she navigated the menu with just her thoughts and eyes.

“Just how advanced is this thing and where did he even get it?” She said quietly to herself. It stunned her. However, before she could get distracted, she zoomed into the shanty town up ahead and started eying its people. This area of the Dust, the park, was the hot spot of the place before the Reptiloids took over. When they did, they transformed a good chunk of the park into a mega fortress made out of scrap metal, cars and the buildings already there. It’s one of the largest places a homeless person could safely live in the States. Even some of the homeless of New Jersey would trek their way out to Ephemeral City because the Dust was worth the travel alone. Parts of the park that weren’t part of the fortress had many trees and a large pond that still had clean water, surprisingly. There were tents within the park and many had campfires outside of them. It was as if the people living here wanted to make this place a stronghold. Like they wanted it to be separate from the rest of society, which is why a lot of people that live here are often regarded not as “Reptiloids” but as “sovereign citizens,” usually with distaste. It was a mess to look at, as was the rest of the place with its broken street lights, destroyed or hollowed-out buildings, ruined streets and sidewalks.

One would be lucky to even find a building in the Dust that had working heat and electricity, because the city shut down all supplies going into the Dust

when the Reptiloids took over. One could only wonder as to how the Reptiloids had the resources they needed to even do *any* of this. Icemantis was simply amazed at the commitment these people had (despite everything else).

“Alright, I’ll go ask around.” Said Primal. “Most of these people don’t respect the GHRC. So, chances are they respect us.”

“I would hope so.” Said Icemantis with a tinge of nervousness, still scanning for any unusual suspects.

“Reptiloids are a bit hostile towards anyone unfamiliar, so I’ll only be questioning the civvies.” Primal noted. “Stay here. Be on the lookout for any unhumans and notify me when you see one.”

Icemantis nodded and Primal hopped off the small building, floating down towards the entrance of the park-turned-shanty-town. For ten minutes, Primal asked around if the people had seen any unhumans lately. They all gave different responses but all led to the same answer; no. However, Primal noticed something strange about one individual he asked. A man in his late 40s, in a clean business suit and tie with black and white hair, striking yellow eyes and an unconscious smile. Something about his posture and the way he talked seemed strange to Primal, as he was squatting in the middle of the gravel path, which led back to the park’s entrance. Primal could’ve sworn that he looked familiar...

“If you’re lookin’ for unhumans, you’re outta luck! However, you are lucky that this community’s acceptin’ of your kind.” His accent was a combination between a southerner and a New Yorker, yet his pitch was a little higher. Although the people here gave Primal weird looks at first, none did anything against him. The outfits most of the people wore here were ones you expected someone homeless to wear. The Reptiloids, however, were just *miserable* to look at; all types of clothing stitched together and combined with trash bags and even wearing scrap metal for armor. Some even wore trash bags as hoods, poking out eye holes for them. It made this rather clean and strange individual stand out amongst the homeless and Primal *had* to know why.

“Let me guess; business man recently down on his luck?” He asked, to which the stranger chortled, shaking his head.

“Quite the opposite, bud. Tell you what,” he snapped his fingers as he stood, reaching into his coat pocket and pulling out an engraved, rose-gold colored

business card and handing it to Primal “you’re a busy person, it seems. So, if you need help with... well, *anything*, just call that number and hope that *I* ain’t busy!” The way he moved his body around as he talked and his smile at the end of his sentence sent a chill of unease down Primal’s spine. Nevertheless, he took the card and put it in one of his jacket’s pockets while still having his eyes fixated on the stranger. To which, said stranger found it offensive and revolted, his smile turning into one of aversion.

“Damn, you don’t have to stare so much!” He turned around and walked the other way, disgusted. “You look alien enough with that helmet on!”

“Hey, wait!” Primal shouted as he caught up with him. “Are you unhuman?”

The stranger sighed begrudgingly and turned on his heel, facing Primal again with his hands in his coat pocket.

“Maybe!” The stranger quickly replied, his eyes outlining Primal’s shape.

“Sincer you’re the obvious unhuman, that’s the only obvious answer I’ll give.” He smirked but Primal wasn’t having it.

“It’s a yes or no question, dipshit!”

The stranger held his hands up to his face, palms open in a jokingly shocked way.

“Woah, bud! Simmer down!” He relaxed his hands again.

“Stop speaking in riddles and give it to me straight.” Primal was getting a little impatient and it showed in his stance as he turned his back sideways, shoulder pointed towards the stranger. “Just tell me if you *are* unhuman.”

The stranger raised a brow at Primal’s body language, hands back in his pocket. “Seriously?”

He looked left and right with a chuckle, shaking his head.

“Buddy, I’m busy! I gave you that fuckin’ card for a reason. Call me later!”

He started to walk away again but Primal grabbed his arm with a tight grip.

“What’s so important that you have to do right now?”

“What’s so important that *you* have to do right now?” The stranger repeated, in an almost mocking tone of voice.

“This is about saving the world.”

The stranger held back a laugh, the idea of “saving the world” being humorous to him. He looked back at Primal, a grin on his face.

“Really?” He let go of the laugh. “Nice stand-up routine, bud!” A perplexed expression grew on Primal.

“Hey, listen to this; the Coalition’s here to sta-“

“This is *not* about the Coalition!” Primal interrupted, already losing his patience with the man.

“Oh?” The stranger perked an eyebrow. “Then call me later, dipshit! What else is that card for?!” The stranger pulled his arm away from Primal with surprising force and jumped into the sky. Primal couldn’t track him with his helmet, the stranger was far gone in the blink of an eye.

“Fucking hell!” Primal groaned and sighed. Dispirited, he started heading back to Icemantis. As he approached the gate where he entered the park, there was a skinny child who wore nothing but trash bags and had a bed sheet as a cape. Primal immediately knew what this was, judging by their weird stance and hands behind their back.

“Excuse me, sir, may I shine your helmet?” They asked, almost innocently. Primal didn’t even say a word, just walked away, not even batting an eye at the kid.

“Sir?” The kid called out to him again, ignored once more. Primal saw three Reptiloids standing on the far side of the park, overlooking the kid with binoculars. Primal knew they were with him and could tell the kid was hiding a weapon. Or, he was unhuman but even then, they wouldn’t be of much assistance.

*What could a kid possibly know about Luhki?* Primal thought. When he returned to Icemantis, she questioned why he ignored the kid. “It looked like they asked you something. What was it?”

“Kid was bait. Old trick in these streets.” Primal responded. “In a place like this, traps can come in all shapes and sizes. Always keep your head on a swivel, Icemantis. Plus, let’s not forget the time limit we’re on. We *have* to make the most of it, so I wonder where the hell Kanya is.”

Icemantis sighed briefly before asking Primal about the man he was talking with.

“Some strange asshole unhuman that wouldn’t help.” He responded, crossing his arms. “Gave me this card and said ‘call me later.’” Primal telekinetically moved the card up to his face, giving Icemantis a good look at it before putting it back in his pocket.



“So, he *is* unhuman but just... wouldn’t help immediately?” Questioned a confused Icemantis.

“I’m as lost as you are.”

After a moment in silence, the two unhumans could hear what sounded like digging escalating the building they were on, getting louder and louder. It was revealed to be Kanya and she had some good news.

“I didn’t actually find an unhuman,” she said through a strained voice as she pulled herself up and onto the roof, “but I *did* find someone that knew him. They said he’s in a safehouse in the southern part of the city but didn’t know which one.”

“Well, we at least got a lead!” Said Icemantis with some optimism, relieved at not having to do much else in searching for Luhki’s, like hanging around in this place. “What else did you find about him?” She continued.

“Not much else! Just where he might be.” Kanya replied.

Icemantis sighed but at least she could get out of the Dust.

“Okay, I’ll run this info through Discount and see if he can get a lead on the safehouse.” Primal explained, pulling out his phone telekinetically and raising it up to his face. He memorized the number on the card the stranger gave him, their name being Johnny Noack. He saved it in his contact list and called Discount. At least they were getting somewhere. They only hope now is that Luhki will actually help them. After all, not every unhuman treats each other the same way.

### **CHAPTER THREE:**

#### **Show Yourself**

**Theme: Drums and Riffs - Kelly Bailey**

Twelve hours have passed since both Nyx and Noah scoured the city for the three unhumans. Although their intentions are different for what they want to do *with* them, their *want* of finding them is the same. Eventually, both regroup with a few demons to discuss further plans on how to find them. They're surprised that the demons haven't actually been able to find them, since they're pretty reliable when it comes to manhunts. Noah, even after all this time, still found it strange that these creatures are what actual demons look like. Nothing like what is commonly depicted in religion and other media.

Tall and lanky, with a platinum-colored body, lacking facial and bodily features, made completely out of sharp edges. They can change the shape of any extremity to a weapon (like swords or barbs) and they can cast hell-magic from their bodies (a natural ability, which all demons possess but get more powerful if that demon is of a higher rank). The demons that stood before both Nyx and Noah were soldier demons, which are less powerful compared to their higher-ranking brethren. They are, however, ferociously obedient.

It's hard to believe that all religions of Earth have lied or have been misled about what demons really are but Noah didn't mind it. He grew up with them, after all. He then suggested to Nyx that they split up to cover more ground across the city and she agreed. Soon, she and the demons split up to find Primal, Icemantis and Kanya, while Noah headed over to a closed boutique, leaning against the wall and pulling out his phone. He had received a notification from Discount that revealed to him the location of the three unhumans. Below it was an attached text message that read, "I've yet to find the location of Luhki, who is what they are after. However, I'm getting closer. I'll keep you posted."

Noah responded with, "got it, boss. I've split up with Nyx and some demons, so I'm headed their way."

Discount made a fast response, “be absolutely sure you are not followed by the demons. They are a great danger to this mission.”

“Don’t worry, when I request to be alone, they accept it. Always.” Responded Noah before putting his phone away in his pocket and securing it tight. He double-checked his gear, making sure the pouches were secured and that he had everything he needed. It was comforting that everything he had was in place, so he pulled up a black balaclava, put on his red goggles and hurried to his objective, which thankfully wasn’t far. On his way there, he noticed police and GHRC agents telling, or forcing, people into their homes, overhearing that the entire city of Ephemeral will be undergoing lockdown. They did not provide an explanation nor how long it would last, for not even *they* knew how long it would be.

Noah ignored this issue for the time being. He then suddenly came across a roadblock recently set up by the Coalition. Armored vehicles and, as expected, a lot of armed soldiers. Too risky to even get *near*. So, Noah turned the other way and into an alley, climbing up on a dumpster and using it to climb onto a fire-escape staircase, using it to get to the roof. Noah found himself to be great at parkour, as it was one of his favorite pastimes as a teenager. So, he traversed across the rooftops, jumping from building to building and avoiding line-of-sight with the GHRC and police force. Eventually, Noah finally made it to the location, a cafe that was conjoined with two other buildings. It was, thankfully, closed and peering into the insides revealed that the cameras had been disabled. Noah unpacked a thin, platinum-colored spike from one of the pouches on his belt. It’s a technology courtesy of Hell, capable of unlocking any lock with a simple insertion. He then unlocked the front door and entered the dark building, closing the door behind him and storing the skeleton key back in its rightful pouch. He took off his mask and goggles and was suddenly greeted with a purple energy blade pointed right at his neck. Primal had been found and he was about to slice Noah’s head off when he quickly spoke.

“Whoa, whoa, Primal! Take it easy, I’m with Discount!” Noah said as he almost flinched at the encounter. “This get-up I have here is just a disguise - I’m a double-agent!” He reassured, which made Primal lower his guard with a sigh, the energy blade disappearing.

“Then tell me next time! What’s with the fucking silence?” He turned the other way and headed towards the back, irked. “Follow me. If Discount sent you then you probably know of the mission he sent me on.”

“Yeah, you’re one risky bastard.” Noah piqued as he followed behind Primal and into the kitchen. “You could have just done the SSS raid stealthily but you just *had* to go loud, huh? You kicked a hornet’s nest with that stunt you pulled off but at least you got your part of the job done, huh?”

Entering the kitchen, Noah saw a surprised Kanya leaning against the wall and a confused Icemantis adjacent to her.

“We’ve got a visitor, y’all.” Spoke Primal. “He’s with us.”

“Oh hi, Kanya.” He greeted her with a wave, while she stood still in perplexion.

“W-wha...” She trailed.

“Yeah, sorry I couldn’t reveal this sooner, but I’ve been a double agent for a while now.”

“*A WHI- FOR WHO!?*” She instantly responded with a shout.

“Discount.” Said Noah nonchalantly, which made Kanya even more bewildered.

“But the- you- what the *FUCK!?*” Her reaction made Noah a little guilty about his decision to betray the Secret Soul Service. Unlike Kanya, Noah had been contemplating it for a *long* time - even talked with Discount about it. He remembered the words he said to him on that day, “when you join my organization, there’s a purpose that you seek. A dedication to all unhumans in the world. Playing it the *nice* way didn’t work. It’s why we’re playing it *their* way, understand?”

“Yeah, I get it... Seriously, I do.”

“Again,” said present-day Noah, “I’m sorry. I will explain soon but right now all of you need to find Luhki.” Coincidentally, a notification from his phone alerted him to a text from Discount. Opening it, he found an attached location to Luhki. “Ah, speak and you shall receive! Look at this.” He held up his phone screen in front of Primal, Kanya and Icemantis. Sure enough, it told them that Luhki was located inside a building near the famous wrestling stadium of Ephemeral City. Primal knew where it was and asked Noah to send him the

information to his phone, both giving each other their own contact information for future use.

“Oh, and by the way, the police and GHRC are beginning to lock down this entire city. They’re most likely going to do the usual ‘unhuman cleansing’ of the city.”

“Hmmm,” thought Icemantis, “I’ve heard of that before. I think it’ll reduce the number of traffic. Good for us, I think.”

“The only people you’ll have to worry about is the GHRC, which there will be more of, on top of police, demons and the Secret Soul Service.” Added Noah. “Eh, police shouldn’t be an issue for long, though.” Commented Primal. “Coalition makes them wait like everyone else.”

Kanya zoned everything out, her only attention being on the realization that Noah wasn’t actually with the SSS and that he had been a traitor longer than she had. She wondered if Primal knew about Noah before and also wondered how his sister would react. Her thought of Nyx’s reaction to their betrayal of the Secret Soul Service, a group that they had spent most of their lives in, was worse than what she had thought of before.

“So,” continued Noah, clapping his hands together, “that’s the game plan, then. I gotta do my part, so y’all do yours...” He went for the exit door behind the rest of the group, before turning back to Kanya with an apologetic look. “...and my part involves telling Nyx the truth.” He said in a quieter tone before speaking up again, looking at Kanya with a somewhat regretful face. “Look, I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you sooner but I couldn’t. There was no... *time*. Quite frankly, I didn’t know events would play out like this!”

He was about to part ways before Kanya interrupted by getting in front of him.

“If you’re going to tell Nyx, you’ll have me with you. Hell, there might be a chance she’ll join *us*!”

“That’s the idea.” Noah responded. “I have a feeling that she won’t, though. I mean, Kanya, I like your idea but it’s too risky because all three of you are under Triple-S’ manhunt radar.” He pointed his finger to her, Primal and Icemantis. “What if she tells the demons or any nearby agents instead? That’ll jeopardize this *entire* mission and-”

“YOU know Nyx better than *anybody* else - even I!” Kanya interjected. “Again, there’ll be more odds in our favor if Nyx joins us. It’s worth the risk, Noah. You know why we’re doing this?”

Noah knew and slowly nodded.

“We *both* have the same reason but...” He sighed and pondered for a bit, eventually agreeing to have Kanya tag along with him.

“Alright, fine. Hopefully, she’ll convert to our side upon being given the truth. Putting it to thought, I believe *that* chance will be big.” Said Noah with some optimism as he exited the cafe, with Kanya trailing beside him. Before he left with her, he turned to both Primal and Icemantis saying, “You two know what to do. We’ll regroup later, so stay safe out there!”

After they left, Primal sighed and looked at Icemantis. Her suit’s glowing blue eyes stared back at his helmet’s glowing red eyes.

“You’ve been through helluva a lot recently. Are you sure you’re up for this?” He asked with some concern.

“Certainly am.” She responded with some amount of confidence. *Though a break would be nice.* She thought immediately afterwards. Even if she wasn’t, what would she do then? She had a feeling that being with Primal would increase her survivability. Icemantis knew she couldn’t do this on her own.

“You sure?” He asked somewhat skeptically.

Icemantis sighed, finally making the decision to tell Primal how she really felt about this adventure.

“It’s a lot to deal with, y’know?” She began. “I volunteered to be with the Secret Soul Service and their experiment with mutated unhumans but all it consisted of was sleeping in a pod and lying down on a metal table with tubes and needles in my body. If it wasn’t that, I would instead be fighting against the lightheaded feeling of exiting a cryo pod after being in there for a few weeks, o-or even months. I wasn’t *born* an unhuman like you, or anyone else! Triple-S injected me with the gene and now I look like this - which, to Dreigenzo, I wasn’t supposed to have ice powers! I’m thankful that you helped me escape, Primal - I really am - but now we have to *save the world?*” She trailed off at that point. “I’m not sure if I can handle that.”



“It’s better than being trapped in an ice box, right?” Primal asked after a moment of silence, wanting to bring her spirits back up. “Hey, Dark Mark’s got your back. This world isn’t as bleak as it looks.”

“I guess,” shrugged Icemantis as she began to walk towards the exit with a deep breath “but let’s just find Luhki, okay? Maybe then, we can rest.”

## **CHAPTER FOUR:**

### **Let Us Go**

#### **Theme: #8 "Blur" - Aphex Twin**

The four unhumans set out on their objectives. Kanya and Noah went to the west side of Ephemeral City, where Nyx was waiting for Noah inside a closed store, while Primal and Icemantis headed to the northeastern side (where Luhki supposedly is). The information given by Noah from Discount said he was near the big wrestling stadium, inside one of the nearby buildings. While on their travels, the four Unhumans mainly stuck to the rooftops and alleyways, always making sure to obscure themselves in shadows and blindspots. Primal used his soul-tether to escalate buildings and Icemantis used her ice powers to make herself have extra mobility, while Kanya and Noah both used their parkour skills to get around.

Still, the anxiety of being out in the open was ever-present. It was made a little easier due to the GHRC preparing people for the Sweeping but that only meant this city would soon have an increase in its population of soldiers (if only temporarily).

Ephemeral City, despite being in New York and near Manhattan Island, didn't have many tall buildings. Most of the buildings were conjoined but there was a lot of street space as a result. It's like a more organized version of Manhattan, even having its own subway system. The subway was, unfortunately, shut down and had been that way since 2016. Supposedly, there was an incident involving an unhuman but the story most people believe is that a massive, accidental chemical spill caused the entire subway system to be rendered inoperable.

The subway system would be a perfect way for an unhuman to travel without risking too much exposure out in the open. Primal would've used it but it's been crawling with GHRC soldiers ever since the incident, so that option was out of the window. Primal routinely checked behind him to see how Icemantis was doing and, to his surprise, found that she was performing the traveling aspect of her powers quite well. Because she wasn't born with the unhuman gene, she didn't get

the absolute mastery and knowledge that normal unhumans get. Instead, she only got the instinctual side of it. She supposed it was better than nothing.

The GHRC was beginning to do their monthly city sweep, also known as the Sweeping. As the four unhumans traveled to their destinations, they noticed that the streets were more empty than usual and could see helicopters off in the distance. The police force of Ephemeral City never teamed up with GHRC soldiers in sweeping the city, for the Coaliton made them wait alongside everybody else. Sometimes, the National Guard would be there, too but that was a rare occasion and it had only happened once, so far. To the civilians of this city (and in the rest of the world), it was just another day at the office. They soon accepted that the GHRC was now a part of their lives, something that the unhumans have a great difficulty coping with.

Kanya and Noah arrived at the store just in time. However, just beforehand, Noah told Kanya to stay put as he headed inside. Two lesser demons and Nyx awaited him near the entrance and, before his sister could speak, Noah disintegrated the two demons into a pile of ash by shooting lasers out of his hands.

*“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!”* Nyx exclaimed, utterly shocked at Noah’s action.

“Sorry but I need to talk to you about something that the demons shouldn’t hear.” He began to walk closer to his sister, then shouted behind himself “KANYA, GET IN HERE!”

Kanya walked in and Nyx’s shock became bewildered. “Nyx, for a while,” Noah began. “I’ve been a double agent. I’m not actually with the Secret Soul Service.”

“The fuck?! Then who are you with?” Nyx immediately asked afterwards, “You, Kanya and I were all *born* into it. You-“

“I understand how angry you are, Nyx.” Noah interrupted with a tone of genuine care. “But please, let me explain and then you can ask questions at the end, okay?” Nyx sighed heavily and leaned against a wall next to the remains of a demon, her arms crossed.

“I’m with Dark Mark. A few years ago, I discovered something disturbing in Dreigenzo’s office. You all remember how mischievous I was back then, right?” Kanya smirked and Nyx scoffed.

“Well, in one of my efforts to uncover what secrets the SSS kept hidden from us, I managed to shoulder surf Dreigenzo inputting his credentials onto the computer. I waited, like, two days for Dreigenzo to leave his office for more than five minutes. So, in that short period of time when he left, I snuck onto his computer, inputted the credentials, and there I was, gazing upon the many secrets only both Dreigenzo and Syraux knew - and perhaps a few others. So, I made absolutely sure not to move anything around but Dreigenzo left a peculiar document open. At first, it didn’t seem important; a bunch of translated demon texts attached to *a lot* of pictures. Then, I started focusing on what the text and images meant and there I put the pieces of the puzzle together. Most of the images were of Unhumans, but the ones that stood out to me the most were the ones under a section called ‘RITUAL REQUIREMENTS; IMAGES OF THE ARTIFACTS/PERSONS.’ It contained only pictures of Unhumans and what I assume to be the ritual items themselves.” Noah paused for a moment. “Actually, there was one normal human amongst the pictures and I immediately recognized who it was.”

“Who?” Nyx asked, seemingly more intrigued than enraged now. “Our good ol’ President, Jack Torrent. Every image in that document had a caption either below or above it, usually describing who this person was and what purpose they served in this ‘ritual.’ There was no caption for Jack, strangely. He seems out of place to me. It makes me wonder why Jack, of all world leaders, is the only one on that list and without a caption.”

This next part coming up Kanya already knew. It was the main reason she betrayed the Secret Soul Service in the first place.

“Then,” Noah sighed abruptly, remembering what he saw next as clearly as day. It felt vile to him “I scrolled all the way down and saw pictures of... *us* with the caption ‘THE SOULS OF THREE RAISED UNHUMANS. WILL NOT WORK IF THERE IS NO LOVE FELT FOR THEM.’”

“Bullshit! You’re making this-“  
“Making it up?” Kanya suddenly interjected Nyx. “I was shown two weeks ago and couldn’t believe what I was seeing! The evidence was overwhelming and it’s why I betrayed the Secret Soul Service - *they were going to sacrifice us to Hell!*”

Noah pulled out his phone and showed Nyx the pictures he took of the contents in the document. She even checked the date they were taken and the acceptance finally set in. Noah then continued his story.

“There’s more to Hell than we think, Nyx. They are currently locked under a powerful seal. *We* did that. By *we*, I mean Unhumans. Back in the middle ages, or at least the start of it, we locked them up. Somehow, around the early 1800s, a crack formed on Hell’s seal and Syraux managed to squeeze her way out, bringing some demons along with her. You know how Dreigenzo describes the War of 1812 as unhumans suddenly going extinct due to a plague conjured up by a doomsday cult?”

Nyx nodded her head slowly, still processing the outstanding information she was receiving.

“Well, it’s a lie. The War of 1812, to us unhumans, was our last battle against Hell before they wiped us out and deactivated our gene. I got that much information by reading more into the text document and believe me, I’m still just as shocked as you are.”

So much information just dumped all at once. A world’s whole weight crashing onto her shoulders. Even with her strength, Nyx didn’t feel powerful enough to burden the truth. “Please, excuse me.” Said Nyx, before she started walking down the barren isles by her lonesome. Both Kanya and Noah knew to leave her alone for the time being. It was *mind-boggling* to her. The demons were nice to them growing up, and so was Dreigenzo but it seemed it was all just a facade. A classic trick only stereotypical demons perform. However, it also made a lot of sense to Nyx. It explained why Syraux and the demons were rough towards her, Kanya and Noah sometimes. They were key components to the ritual and were probably a little impatient. After wandering the isles for about eight minutes, Nyx rushed back to Noah demanding to see the rest of the information he had found on that document, for she *still* had a hard time accepting it. After going through it again, Nyx asked Noah how he got away with it.

“A few days beforehand, I had overheard from both a demon and an agent discussing some mysterious figure named Discount and his faction. I did some research on my own and found out that they’re an organization dedicated to aiding unhumans in their daily lives.”

Noah briefly thought about how the Dark Mark found him, deciding to bring it up now.

“Anyways, I reset the document back to where it was originally and left the computer in the same state Dreigenzo left it before. I exited the room and went on with my day as usual - if a bit on-edge. I came into contact with Discount days later, because he had tracked my web activity and wanted to meet with me in person. So, I showed him everything I had gotten from the computer. I wanted to convert to his side so badly and, needless to say, he said ‘welcome aboard’ and the rest is history.”

Kanya now knew Noah’s side of the story, but still couldn’t believe that Dreigenzo was willing to do this to them. All those years raising them to be great unhumans, to be good people, was to be squandered at the perfect moment. Such betrayal was on a level reserved for gods - which was why they’re considered mythical. They’re not real but this felt just as such.

“So, where does Primal fit in all this?” Nyx questioned, to which Kanya shrugged.

“He’s helpful.” Noah responded. “Been with Dark Mark longer than I have. We’re all working together to find Gehenna, who’s a key part in the ritual.”

Gehenna. An important figure Nyx once knew - if only in passing. Nyx asked Kanya about the aftermath of what happened when she and Primal broke Icemanitis out. She caught her up to speed, explaining how they got to Discount and the plan they had to find Luhki. She also explains that both Primal and Icemanitis were on their way to Luhki right now. There was still a lot of information to digest, so Nyx suggested that both Noah and Kanya regroup with Primal and Icemanitis and that she would catch up to them later. Kanya was about to question her loyalty but stopped herself, for she knew Nyx was now on their side.

Before they left the store, Noah and Kanya told Nyx the location of where to rendezvous. After they left, Nyx just sat down in between the ash piles of what were once two lesser demons. She contemplated for a while, thinking about what to do next and the actions of her consequences, should she betray Triple-S - betray her father and mother. She then stood up and took a deep breath, exhaling with bittersweet courage. The Secret Soul Service gave her a life that most unhumans

would want to grow up in, as it wouldn't involve fighting for survival everyday, but now Nyx's new life was just about to begin.

(#15 "*Shiny Metal Rods*" - *Aphex Twin*)

As Nyx exited the store, the daylight shining in her face, she was suddenly greeted with a magic ball of fire striking her stomach. She endured the hit and before she could look at her attacker, her arms were slashed. She whirled around and grabbed her attacker's head with her large hands, realizing that it was a lesser demon. Her shock quickly transformed into rage as she easily crushed the demon's head with her hand, dark green blood splattering the ground as she dropped the demon. Crushing their head like that resulted in deep cuts in her palms.

Nyx glanced around as she saw a few more demons swarming her from every angle. A stalker demon pounced onto her from above, digging their feet deep into her shoulders as they prepared to execute her with their large, sword-arms. Nyx, in quick haste, reached over her head, grabbed them, then pulled them out of her shoulders and slammed them into the pavement head first, their neck instantly shattering upon contact with the ground. Her palms' wounds were now even worse, as they started to bleed profusely, the skin now dangling from it. From her left, another lesser demon tried to greet her with a stab to the face but Nyx dodged the attack, kicked them to the ground, and squashed their head under her boot. Thankfully, her boot was sturdy enough to not be punctured.

Then, one more lesser demon stabbed her through her sides, somehow missing her vital organs. She launched a kick backwards, kicking the lesser demon's crotch so hard it broke their pelvis, thus letting Nyx pull their knife-hands out of herself and jamming it into the demon's neck. She felt no pain as her hands and fingers were drenched in blood, covered in numerous lacerations. She endured every aspect of it.

Then, Nyx heard the buzzing of a helicopter from above. She looked up and saw a jet-black attack helicopter complete with green stroke lines, finally seeing the Global Human Restoration Coalition's logo on the tail. The helicopter was an apache. The Sweeping has just begun and Nyx thought it was over as the apache began targeting her. Suddenly, another stalker demon pounced onto the cockpit of the helicopter, ran up to the rotor and sliced through it with their own body like a

hot knife to butter, landing on the ground flawlessly as the helicopter itself crashed in the store's parking lot next to Nyx.

"*DISSENTER!!*" roared the stalker demon as they unleashed a fury of hellfire from their mouth and towards Nyx. She quickly took cover behind the crashed helicopter, whose pilots were still alive. They opened the cockpit while whipping out their pistols and tried to shoot Nyx but she reacted quicker than they did and smashed their heads in with the pure impact of her fists, brain matter splashing in her face. Now there was demon and human blood on her hands but she wasn't done yet. The stalker demon flew in from above but Nyx caught them midair by grabbing their leg and slamming them into the pavement as hard as she could. Their spine and wings were broken but they were still alive, so Nyx corrected that by snapping their neck.

Nyx took a few breaths, looking upon the carnage that had just happened. Her power made sure that she wouldn't easily succumb to the damage that was inflicted upon her (no matter how serious it was). If she had any other power, then her hands would've fallen off from the first demon. Nyx, in a hurry, ran out of the area as fast as she could. She didn't know where she could hide, for she was used to demons teleporting her out of trouble. Now she was on her own, covered in the blood of her former family, having to face the Coalition on her own. Nyx then found herself in an alleyway and happened to find a root cellar. So, she decided to break the lock on the door and entered the cellar, closing the door behind her.

She took this brief moment of peace to catch her breath. The root cellar was old, yet still looked properly maintained and was well-lit. She found herself a first-aid kit and stopped her wounds from bleeding, applied medical bandages over the wounds on her hands and side, barely having enough to cover up her own shoulders. It would not hold forever but it will have to do for now. Nyx sat down on the concrete floor, she was going to wait before moving out again. The GHRC would surely be riled up now after getting the report that one of their apaches crashed. They would be swarming this area with a *lot* more soldiers soon and Nyx did *not* want to be around when that happens. For now, she rests, thinking of the next part of the plan; regrouping with the unhumans. Ironical how she was to capture them. Now, Nyx was imagining how her parents would react to this sudden betrayal. It was not a pleasant thought.



## *Two hours later...*

### (Erges - Katharsys)

The way seemed clear and Nyx left the cellar, now finding herself in the middle of the Sweeping. The patrols that seemed regular around Ephemeral City were *much* more aggressive now - and with three times the amount of Coalition soldiers. The soldiers were also more thorough with their searches now and it greatly bothered Nyx. Not only that but they now patrolled with heavily armored vehicles, such as tanks, humvees and trucks containing even more soldiers.

Fortunately, she knew this area well, as, in the past, she had aided the Secret Soul Service by acting as a guard when they made deals with mercenaries, of which they'd often meet here - a housing complex filled with many apartments. It was a great place to blend in. This complex's most notable landmark was a park in its center, which was a few blocks away. Nyx knew all the alleyways and hidden pathways set by the SSS. The only problem was that she was nowhere near them.

On her way there, Nyx encountered a rather large patrol of soldiers and was spotted by them before she could even hide. She ran the opposite way as fast as she could to the other side of the street, jumping over a wooden fence and into someone's backyard. Their dog was barking from their window but Nyx kept running forward, hearing GHRC soldiers chattering ahead on their radio, (presumably about her). There was no time for hiding now.

Two GHRC soldiers barely turned around in time to face Nyx as she jumped over another wooden fence and pummeled them into the ground. She hurled her fist into the right one's face, the glass of their mask's visor shattering as their face became mangled after Nyx was done beating them into a pulp. The one on the left struggled to break free of Nyx's tight grip. They stabbed her in the arm multiple times with the blade on their left arm but it seemingly had no effect and Nyx simply finished the job by twisting their neck until she heard a *snap!*

Nyx moved on, ignoring the pain as a mass amount of adrenaline surged throughout her entire body. She began rushing towards the building in front of her as she heard more soldiers heading in her direction. She kicked the door down and ran up the flight of stairs, then seeing a frightened civilian who was currently shielding their kids with their arms. Nyx paused, a split-second hesitation before

she regained focus and continued running upwards. She kicked the roof's door open, emerging into the outside world again.

"Unhuman sighted!" Said a GHRC soldier from the adjacent rooftop, who would soon be accompanied by the rest of his squadron, opened fire on Nyx with their assault rifle (a SACRUX). She got hit by a few bullets and ducked under a wall. These bullets were a lot more painful on impact, because they were flechettes, which would tear the flesh off of a normal person. Nyx, not really knowing what to do next, was surrounded and, in the back of her mind, completely fucked. She overheard the patrol but they were too far away for any sort of clear hearing. She wanted this patrol, or at least one soldier, to just get near her so she could grab one of them and use their body as a meat shield but no soldier pursued her. Instead, the squadron just waited - not even tossing a grenade or flashbang, for they knew she would just throw it back at them. Then, she heard multiple footsteps coming up from the stairs below, mixed with yelling.

"Stay back and in the corner!" Ordered a soldier to the mother, of which she immediately obeyed as she grabbed her panicking and crying kids, trying her absolute best to calm them down.

"Up the damn stairs - MOVE!" He commanded his squad as he pointed at the stairs that lead to the rooftop. If Nyx's life was to be taken here, then she'd do it on her own terms. She hastily stood up and rolled towards this new squadron, shattering one of the soldier's ankles with her fist as she stole her weapon, a USAS-12, and then used it against her comrades, using her as a meat shield at the same time. This was not without getting hit with a few more bullets herself, with one even grazing her cheek but at least Nyx was in a safer position now than before.

So, with this new squadron dead after mag-dumping the USAS-12, she snapped the neck of her meat shield, refocusing her attention on the soldiers that had previously attacked her. Heading back up the stairs, she saw a row of soldiers lined up on that same rooftop, weapons at the ready. Charging at them with their dead comrade in hands, Nyx leaped onto their rooftop successfully, meat shield in her left hand as she punched the soldier to her right. The impact was so hard it caused them to be knocked flat on the ground. The soldiers to her left kept firing,

even though the meat shield was absorbing the bullets, they knew it would eventually break.

“You’re gonna die!” Said a soldier to Nyx’s right as they fired a hailstorm of 7.62mm bullets from their SCAR-H into Nyx’s left knee, with a soldier behind him providing assistance by shooting 12 gauge slugs from her Saiga-12 at Nyx’s chest. Tossing the corpse towards the group on her left, Nyx gritted her teeth in response to the massive pain, charging at the SCAR-H soldier as they needed to reload. She slammed him with her shoulder, causing him to stumble and bump into the soldier behind him. She crashed her fist into his chest, causing him to drop his weapon in response to his ribs being cracked and his lungs being shifted around. She shoved him into the soldier behind him and the two fell over. Nyx took the Saiga-12 out of their hand, whirled around and shot at the soldiers who just now recovered from having a corpse thrown on them. They were forced off the rooftop by the slugs violently impacting their armor multiple times, unlikely to survive the trip down.

Then, Nyx felt a blade stab into her spine and grunted in response, dropping the Saiga. The soldier pulled her blade out, whipped out her Glock-18 and unleashed a fully-automatic fury of 9mm onto Nyx’s entire back. She felt the bullets violently settle into her muscles like wasp stingers, in which they were held back due to the layer of armor nestled in between her skin and muscles. Nyx whirled around and punched the pistol away, breaking it in two and almost sending the soldier with it, too. She then tightly grabbed both of the soldier’s arms and sent a powerhouse of a kick into her groin. Over and over and over. The soldier cried in agony as what felt like gallons of blood began pouring down from her legs - no longer feeling her hips. Nyx then put her foot on her chest and used her raw strength to tear the soldier’s arms off.

The soldier was now screaming her lungs out as she fell face-first to the ground, pouring out an incredible amount of blood. Nyx then rolled her over on her back as she heard them groan somebody’s name. She was too heated to care, then she proceeded to stomp on the soldier’s head numerous times, each impact becoming more and more filled with a cruel rage, until her head crunched under her boot and splattered the area in skull fragments and brain matter. As Nyx stood amongst the carnage, she closed her eyes and screamed into the sky, then looking back, bewildered, to see the last soldier standing up to face her - despite his broken

ribcage. The two stared at each other in a pseudo-standoff, with the last soldier of this squadron looking around at his fallen brethren and exhaling a breath of defeat - which quickly transformed into rage.

“Fuck..!” He said as he painfully reached for his sidearm.

“Please don’t...” Begged Nyx through heavy breaths, enduring the burning of her bleeding.

“JUST DI-“ Nyx kicked his hand away from his sidearm and smoothly led a fist into his face before he could finish speaking. With his broken ribs and a broken jaw, he fell on the ground. Despite the insurmountable pain, he still, albeit limply, reached for his sidearm. Nyx slammed her foot onto his head, breaking the armor that protected it. Blood poured out of his cracked mask but he still reached for his pistol with a trembling hand. Another slam of her foot, this time it finally killed him, with his head being reduced to nothing but a pile of gore like the last soldier.

Nyx knew now wasn’t the time for a breather nor to contemplate things. She jumped onto the next rooftop and continued towards her goal. She had seen enough and just wanted to run away. However, her fleeing didn’t sit right with the Coalition. Looking out onto the streets below, she could see tanks, M1 Abrams, flattening cars like bugs as they approached, slowly aiming their cannons at her. Nyx managed to dodge their fire by jumping onto the fire-escape staircase behind the building before they could even do so. Rushing down the stairs and reaching the bottom, she noticed a squatter jump at the mere sight of her.

“UNHUMAN!!” He shouted as he started digging in his overflowing shopping cart of items, likely searching for a weapon. He wasn’t even *close* to finding it before Nyx shoved him against a brick wall and turned the upper half of his head into a pasty, red mist, with a quick fist. It even made a hole in the bricks and some of the blood even landed in her eyes, causing her to be briefly disoriented as she rubbed the blood off. In situations like these, all that an unhuman can do is run or quickly dispose of the person calling them out. The latter being safer, for the person could call the Coalition’s hotline and those soldiers are *known* for being relentless in their search (even having protocols for teleporting and invisible unhumans).

Nyx’s blood left a trail in her wake and she could hear the helicopters buzzing getting ever so closer. In the midst of her confusion, she found a manhole

with the words “SSS” etched into its center and didn’t hesitate to run up to and break it by stomping her foot on it (which caused it to break in two). She was relieved to find one of the hidden pathways, though it didn’t seem so at first. The path would actually be in this sewer, close by, no less. Squeezing her way in, she had hopes that the Coalition would give up their search for her and move on to others. For now, hiding in the pathway of the long and empty sewer complex of Ephemeral City was *the* safest option. Even if that meant enduring the awful smell and trudging through sewage. The pathway itself would lead into a hidden room, filled with all sorts of emergency supplies and other goods for SSS members who found themselves between a rock and a hard place. The rumbling of tanks above confirmed that the Coalition wasn’t done pursuing her. As soon as she entered the hidden room however, Nyx would spot a demon and two agents near the four sleeping bags in the corner of the room.

“Holy shit, Nyx!” One of the agents said in utter shock at the sight of her bloody appearance. “The fuck were you doing up there?”

The demon suddenly stopped the other agent from going for a medkit near the supply cabinet next to Nyx by putting her arm out in front of him.

“The stalker that went with the others sent a distress signal right before their expiration.”

“So?” The agent responded.

“It was Ny-”

Nyx interrupted the demon by effortlessly lifting and throwing the entire cabinet at her and the agents. The demon simply sliced it in two by just standing still and letting her own body cut it. The agents, however, tumbled over and onto the sleeping bags. Supplies spilled all over the floor and the demon cut through it all by running through them and dodging Nyx’s attempt at a grab, then creating a large gash on her left arm by simply running into her. The wound was so deep that bone was visible. She was about to hurl a ball of hellfire at her but Nyx roundhouse-kicked her head and kicked her again into the wall. Nyx then jammed her fingers into the middle of her face and tore her head open. Her fingers were now cut in two but she had other problems to deal with. As she turned around, she saw the agents pull out their sidearms and they fired upon Nyx, with several of

their rounds even hitting her head. Thankfully, the rounds did not go past her skull and were, instead, stuck in her skin.

She grabbed one of the agent's lower jaw, gripped their upper jaw with her other hand and exerted enough force between the two to completely rip off their lower jaw. They tried screaming but it was hastily silenced by Nyx snapping his neck. In quick pacing, Nyx slammed the last agent against the concrete wall with her entire body, then slammed her boot into their neck, when she actually intended to hit his face. The agent lost all of their breath but none more would be gained after Nyx successfully turned his head into splattered gore by slapping her hands together in between his head.

With heavy breaths, Nyx started to slow her breathing. She saw that some of the medical supplies were sliced beyond repair but some remained. For now, she would lie down here to recover, moving on when she felt ready.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **Union**

#### **Theme: Aftermath - Nine Inch Nails**

Ephemeral City was now in total lockdown, as was the rest of New York. GHRC patrols were now *much* more aggressive with their search and the Ephemeral Police Department were instructed to stay indoors like everybody else, no longer being responsible for the city's safety. Nyx felt enough time had passed for her to move on, since her wounds were now mostly healed. It was incredibly risky to walk outside in public viewing before but now it was like traversing a warzone. Fortunately for Nyx, experience was on her side. However, she usually would have a demon use their hell magic on her so she could become invisible. Now, she must rely on herself to get to her goal.

For a split second, Nyx started to blame herself for causing herself to suffer but the relief to get out of the sewers and breathe that surface air again made any thoughts of self-blame disappear. Nevertheless, Nyx was getting closer to her destination and it only took her around an hour. Only a few more miles to go.

#### ***Back to Primal and Icemanits...***

"Here we are," said Primal to Icemantis as he stood on the rooftop of the very building they were supposed to find Luhki in. It started to get cloudy and he could hear the sounds of gunfire in the distance. Ephemeral City now sounded like it was in the midst of a skirmish, as the gunfire sounded less prominent now than how it did fifty minutes ago. Although it wasn't obvious, Icemantis hated standing out in the open like this and always looked in every direction for any type of threat. Humans, GHRC soldiers, SSS agents and demons could be anywhere now and Icemantis hated every second of it. Primal, however, was used to the feeling. He floated down to the sidewalk below, in front of the building, with Icemantis following suit by using the fire escape ladder on the side of it.

“Let’s head inside and find Luhki, then we contact the rest with an update.” Informed Primal to Icemantis.

“I hope they’re doing okay,” she said with worry “it’s terrible out here!” Primal chuckled, “You should’ve seen this place back in 2015.” He then scanned the building for any hostiles with his helmet and it resulted with zero lifeforms..

“Nobody is inside.” Said Primal. A relief for sure but it was strange that a hotel had nobody inside - especially now. So, Primal and Icemantis entered the building, their eyes glowing against the darkness as they checked every corner and room they went past just to be sure that no unwanted person was with them. Once the coast was clear, they had trouble trying to figure out where specifically in this three-story building Luhki was. So, Primal texted Discount to see if he could come up with some information to help them.

“I do not know of that building’s infrastructure. You’re on your own.” Said Discount’s reply. Primal sighed, so he and Icemantis began checking every single nook and cranny for some kind of hidden room. Eventually, Icemantis discovered a keypad within the crawl space. After careful inspection, the keypad, despite the fact it was fully interactable, was revealed to be fake and she removed it, seeing that it covered up a white button with a red triangle pointing downwards.. She pressed it and the empty crawl space began to open up. Upon hearing the mechanical sounds, Primal came down to inspect what was going on.

“Oh, damn,” he said in realization as the mechanical noises continued to whirr “that’s clever.”

### *(Falling - Nine Inch Nails)*

The crawl space opened up to reveal a staircase leading down to a bigger, more compact room. The two unhumans went down the wooden stairs and discovered that the room only had an elevator and a large United States Central Intelligence Agency insignia on the floor. This took them by surprise and both began to worry more about what they would discover if they took the elevator down.

With a deep breath and no other options, both called the elevator up. When the metal doors opened, they entered and noticed that the elevator panel only had two buttons; one that signified the current floor and the other signifying the bottom. Primal pressed the bottom button and the elevator doors shut and it began



to go down. As the elevator was heading down, Icemantis sighed deeply, taking this moment as a quick breather. Primal, however, didn't know what he would encounter in the room beyond, no matter if Luhki was here or not. So, he readied himself for anything and as the elevator stopped and the doors opened, the two unhumans were met by three other people pointing weapons at them.

The one on the left wore an open, grey trench coat with black accents, wearing a black t-shirt underneath, along with crimson pants and black shoes. The most notable feature of this man was that he had what appeared to be a metal lower jaw and missing the left side of his face, complete with exposed upper teeth. He also had long, white and flowing hair. Though he held no visible weapons, he was intimidating enough. The one on the right looked younger, had somewhat long dark-pink hair and wore red and blue clothing (like a jersey) and also wore protective padding on his elbows and knees. They also wore a dark-blue helmet and his arms had what looked like two grenade launchers protruding from them. The one in the middle seemed to be the oldest. He wore a closed, black trench coat and matching hat, both complete with silver, secondary accents, also having yellow facial hair and green eyes. He pointed a fully-loaded M1A1 Thompson at both Primal and Icemantis.

"Who the *hell* are you?" The one in the middle spoke. Primal lowered his guard, realizing who this person was.

"You're Luhki." He said with a calm attitude, almost nonchalantly.

"I fucking know that - answer my damn question!" He rapidly responded.

"I am Primal and this is Icemantis. We've been looking for you and we mean no harm. Discount sent us. You know who that is?"

Luhki lowered his weapon slowly as he realized who went by that name. He then told the other two to ease off and they both sheathed their weapons.

"Dark Mark... Well, thankfully, I'm allied with them." Muttered Luhki under his breath before speaking up. "What exactly do you two want?"

"We need your help," began Icemantis "and Discount believes that you can provide that. I assume he's getting desperate, because otherwise he wouldn't have sent us to search for you."

"I'm not a Dark Mark member but even I know Discount never gets desperate. I find it strange but it proves you two aren't here to kill or capture us."

“If you weren’t Dark Mark,” spoke the scarred man, “you wouldn’t know of them at all.”

Luhki sighed. “Alright then, follow me.” He gestured to both Primal and Icemantis. “Savâge, Warpig...” he said to the two next to him. Savâge being the one with a ruined face and Warpig being the non-scarred one “...keep a close eye on them, please?” Luhki then led both Primal and Icemantis out of the elevator and into a large room with a big, oval shaped table in the middle of it, with office chairs surrounding it. The CIA insignia was also seen on the floor and the ceiling above, though both looked heavily worn down. As Luhki escorted Primal and Icemantis, the two couldn’t stop looking around the room in utter curiosity. It seemed run-downed and felt empty, yet was still maintained well enough. It was dimly lit by a wide blue-white light coming from the ceiling.

“This building used to belong to the CIA as I’m sure you’ve guessed by now.” Explained Luhki as he walked to the front of the desk. “For what purpose I’ve yet to know. They’ve cleaned this place out since then. This large room that we’re in was their... well, I would describe it as a ‘meeting room.’ Connected to this room are four other rooms. Mostly barracks and whatnot but most of the rooms have been walled off by tons of rubble. I’ve also yet to figure out why but I have more important matters on my mind.” He sat in one of the chairs.

“Please, take a seat.” He gestured to Icemantis and Primal to the seats next to him. They complied and noticed that the seats were rather comfortable to sit in, despite how old they looked.

“Which is figuring out what kind of ‘help’ Discount wants from me. Please, explain that.”

“Yeah... the *boogeyman of the black market* needs help? What for?”  
Questioned Warpig.

“We need to get an artifact from a person of interest named Gehenna. A demonic artifact, specifically.” Primal began. “We believe she’s aiding Syraux in completing a large rit-” He was suddenly interrupted by Luhki.

“Stop. I know what you’re talking about.”  
Icemantis tilted her head in curiosity. “Really?” She asked.

“Yeah, we’ve been trying to close in on her for almost a year now.” Said Warpig. “Asshole’s got some invisible tracks that’s for sure! Didn’t know about that whole demon thing, though. You’re not lying about that, yeah?”

“No.” Primal simply responded.

“Interesting.” continued Luhki, a little surprised. “Well, we believe that we’re getting closer than ever to her. We’ve learned about Gehenna through another target of interest that we’ve been tracking for a *long* time. However, before I tell you that, how about the two of you tell us your story? That way we’re on familiar grounds and that the two of you aren’t actually the Coalition’s unhuman soldiers.”

Primal and Icemantis then proceeded to tell their story, specifically of what happened in the past two weeks and leading up to Primal’s raid on the Secret Soul Service’s main HQ, as well as telling them the information Noah found on Dreigenzo’s computer and Discount’s plan to save the Earth from Hell. It took a bit of time, which seemed of the essence.

“...and the rest is history.” Concluded Primal.

“Damn, that’s... wow.” Said Warpig in awe.

“Now that’s incredible.” Spoke Savâge as he crossed his arms.

A mechanical whirring sound could be heard from above and both Primal and Icemantis looked concerned as to what it was.

“Oh, don’t mind that.” Spoke Luhki. “That’s just the crawlspace reverting back to normal. By the way, how the hell did you two figure that out?” He questioned, looking genuinely curious.

“I knew something was off about the keypad, so I removed it and discovered the button it was hiding.” Said Icemantis, feeling a little accomplished.

“Impressive.” Complemented Luhki. “Looks like we have to change that part of our security. Savâge, can you go make sure that door is shut and the keypad back to where it belongs?”

“You got it.” Savâge’s entire body then suddenly transformed into a state of gas and he disappeared into the ventilation system. Primal and Icemantis had never seen a power like that before, so they were a little surprised. After a few minutes, Savâge came back down while Luhki was discussing plans with Primal and Icemantis.

“More of Primal’s friends have shown up.” He said, reverting back to his normal form. “Thanks for telling me what they look like, I would’ve melted them otherwise.”

“The other three are here already?” Questioned a somewhat surprised Luhki.

“Yes. They’ve all made it, it seems. I’m curious as to how that big girl managed to get here unscathed, or how she concealed herself out in the open.” The elevator then closed its doors and started to go up.

“Big girl?” Warpig repeated, though a little quiet. “Oh, you mean Nyx? Primal said she was big but like, how big?”

“You’ll see.” Savâge replied, knowing Warpig’s curiosity.

“It was chaotic up there, so I hope they’re alright.” Said Primal as he and Icemantis turned to face the elevator. Sure enough, when the elevator doors opened, out emerged Kanya, Noah and Nyx. She had to duck under the doorway to get out. Everybody was a little worried about each other but nevertheless, they were all glad to see each other again (and to see that their plan had worked out after all). They exchanged pleasantries and Nyx audibly gasped upon seeing Savâge’s face.

“Holy shit, dude!” She exclaimed.

“What the- How are you still alive?” Kanya asked, trying not to focus on that part of his body. Savâge simply sighed, having been through this conversation many times before.

“I’ll tell you how I got my injury later. I’m alive thanks to a *damn* good doctor.”

“I think your doctor missed a spot, dude.” Said Noah after a moment of silence. “You’re still bleeding, too!”

“The doctor was unable to regenerate my injuries but could stop their negative effects.” Savâge explained as Noah took a seat. “Their power enhanced my body, allowing it to support this kind of damage as if nothing happened. To me, it still feels like I have a face.”

“Huh... I guess It’s better than nothing.” Said Nyx, feeling a little sympathetic. “I’ve been there, man. How long have you had that?” She asked as Kanya crossed her arms, leaning next to the table.

“Nearing two years now.” Savâge answered, taking a seat himself. He didn’t believe that Nyx had been there though but understood why she would say that. “Enough about me. Let’s form a plan.”

This was only the beginning of something even more dangerous. Primal’s only hope is that they see through it to the end. He texted Discount informing him that they had found Luhki.

“Work with him. He is onto something that will be of great benefit. I’m still busy on my end. Demons have, unsurprisingly, great stealth. SSS chatter on the internet and on radios have gone silent. I have a feeling it won’t last but, for now, you’re all on your own. So, get busy.”

## CHAPTER SIX:

### The Essence of Time

#### THEME: The Reaction - Nine Inch Nails

The newly formed group of unhumans started discussing further plans, while also getting familiar with each other. At first, they seemed to be getting along well, though Warpig couldn't stop being bewildered by Nyx's amazing height and build. She was used to this type of reaction, as many people, even demons, were impressed by her physique. Primal, Luhki, Icemantis, Warpig and Savâge already had a prototype for a plan. Luhki had a lead on a special information broker that they've been following for a good amount of time. An unhuman and former wrestler, Fevurr. For a while, he had been seen doing business with an unhuman that matches Gehenna's description. Not only did that catch the attention of Luhki's group, they had figured out that Fevurr may, in fact, have possession of one of the many demonic artifacts. Before Primal and Icemantis showed up, they assumed it was some sort of rare artifact, possibly stolen from somewhere (they, technically, weren't wrong). Using the information Noah found on Dreigenzo's computer, it was concluded that Fevurr did, in fact, possess one of the artifacts.

*"THE HUNTER MUST SUCCEED FOR THIS TO WORK. THEIR BLOODS ON HIS HANDS IS ENOUGH.*

*Gehenna will make sure he gets what he wants - that crazy bastard.*" Said the text that labeled the artifact in the document Noah still had a copy of in his phone.

What took Luhki, Savâge and Warpig so long to do was now easily accomplished and they couldn't be more thankful. The situation they were in before presented an absurd amount of difficulty to even acquire such information. Thus, for a time, they were stuck in the dark. Now all that was left to do was to find Fevurr and obtain the artifact from him.

"So, do you guys know where he is?" Nyx asked, likely already knowing the answer.

“That’s, unfortunately, where we are stumped.” Responded Luhki, looking a little less hopeful.

“For the moment.” Said Savâge, who stared at the ground in contemplation, like he was nervous at telling the next part. “We encountered him before.” He continued, looking back up to see the gaze of everybody staring back at him as he sighed. He was now confident to tell the story. “Roughly two years ago, I got these injuries from him.” He touched his metal jaw and his ruined face, feeling the fresh blood from them both. “He ambushed me in the wrestling stadium not far from here - managed to split me up from everybody else. During the battle of my life, he used his power to make me use my own power against myself. I lost the left side of my face, because he forced me to melt it with super-hot gas. Then he ripped my jaw off. Like I said before, I’m alive all thanks to Luhki and that doctor.”

“Shows exactly who we’ve been trying to deal with for the past two years.” Said Warpig, who seemed upset at the mere thought of Fevurr. “A fucking maniac. Y’know, there’s a story that dates back to the early formation of wrestling television, AKA, the career Fevurr managed to keep, despite being unhuman. He’s lucky his power’s easily hidden, ‘cause y’all know that others don’t have it so easily.” Some agreed with the statement. “Anyway,” he continued “he was once in a prominent wrestling gig for a while and was actually getting some decent popularity, despite his not-so-healthy relationship with... anybody else. Basically, to make a long story short, he killed somebody on live television with his powers. He’s been on the run ever since and the rest is history, which is to say... I don’t really know much about his past. Not a lot of people do.” He seemed genuine about that statement, with a little hint of bias. Then Savâge chimed in.

“When you’re revealed as unhuman to the public, your records are scrubbed clean. Sounds good, in a sense but those records are still kept *only* by the Coalition.”

“So, that means the GHRC still has them, right?” Questioned Icemantis, only now learning about this information and being surprised by it.

“We would assume so.” Replied Luhki, not really having an answer. “GHRC’s fucking weird. They give out lots of info to the public but most of it is false. They keep the truth to themselves and to their allies until it suits their purpose. They think it’ll cause a panic otherwise. However, I think it’s unnecessary

to plunder a GHRC facility or similar just for files relating to Fevurr. I think it's better if we try to find camera footage of places we think he'd be."

"But the information would still be helpful." Said Icemantis. "The better we know our enemy, the more weak they are."

"In a sense," responded Primal "but that doesn't matter if they still beat us. Let's at least try to find his whereabouts first, any additional information would be helpful. Now, who's willing to go back up there?"

"Woah, during the Sweeping?!" Said a surprised Warpig. "That's not wise *at all*."

"I'll stay here. I've had enough run-ins with soldiers. Said Nyx, still slightly feeling the pain of the injuries she sustained earlier in the day, despite the fact they were all healed-up by now.

"We have all sorts of supplies on the ground floor. None of you have to stay down here, just be aware of any unknown passerbys when you go up." Informed Savâge as he walked with Nyx to the elevator. Then he turned into gas and flew into the vents again.

"I'll be on watch up there, too. Hey, Nyx, hold the elevator for me!" Said Noah as he jogged hurriedly to Nyx, who hadn't even pressed a button yet.

"I'll go with you, Primal." Said Luhki with a newfound courage in his face. "Might as well make the most of the time we have left."

"Hey, count me in, too!" Added Warpig and so did Icemantis.

"I'm staying here." Kanya said as she started to walk towards one of the hallways. "Dodging soldiers wasn't fun, so I'm gonna go exploring."

"Hey, it's mostly rubble but have fun!" Said Warpig as he entered the elevator with the rest of the group. When the elevator went up, the crew that was going (which was Primal, Icemantis, Warpig and Luhki) felt a sense of adventure but also tension. Warpig and Luhki hadn't done something like this since Fevurr nearly killed Savâge. For Primal and Icemantis, it reminded them of breaking out of the Secret Soul Service, though not nearly as grand of a scale. Specifically for Icemantis, she was feeling a sense of near-accomplishment and hoped she hadn't jinxed it yet. Things were looking greater and she had finally begun feeling as if she was achieving something.



When the elevator stopped and its doors opened, Savâge was there as the others were heading outside, then he stopped Luhki.

“Heading out to find Fevurr without me?”

“You know you’re always welcomed to go along any mission, Savâge. Especially this one.” Said Luhki with a somewhat welcoming tone.

“Thanks. It’s best if we split up and exit through other sides of the building y’know. There’s a lot of GHRC outposts and I suggest we find one near the wrestling stadium. Something in my gut tells me *he’s* hanging around there.” There was a bit of anger within Savâge’s voice when he got to the part about Fevurr. He obviously wants revenge and to the others, it was very understandable. However, Icemantis had hoped that she didn't have to see it herself. She has a feeling that Savâge will do much worse to Fevurr than Fevurr ever did to him.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **Hunters**

**THEME: Delay - M.O.O.N**

The unhumans decided to split up again, this time in a much larger group than before. It was a treat to all of them that they had good chemistry with each other, but some were still more suspicious of others. Still, those suspicions were rather minor and would probably be easily resolved if a confrontation ever happened. The war drums of the GHRC were now louder as they lit up the night sky. News broadcasts were down at the request of the Coalition themselves, so nobody knew what was actually going on until the next day - when they would be fed incredibly convincing lies (unless they saw it with their own eyes).

A whole entire day of war, then it was back to business as usual the day after. Perhaps *skirmish* is a more appropriate word. The unhumans knew that their fellow kin were being slain but they didn't know that maybe (just maybe) those unhumans were actually bad people deserving of those fates. Either way, this newly formed group of unhumans made their way to the stadium and split up into separate groups.

Primal and Icemanis went together to infiltrate nearby GHRC outposts for any information regarding Fevurr. There were two in particular that were close by and, thanks to the GHRC's sweeping, had a lot more soldiers than usual. Luhki went on his own to infiltrate an outpost bigger than the other two. It was farther away and functioned more like a defense station, complete with three times the guards and other Coalition personnel, including soldiers from various branches of the US military. Savâge and Warpig went to the stadium directly. They both knew Luhki can easily infiltrate any kind of GHRC building but were a little more concerned about Primal and Icemanis, even after hearing their stories.

Savâge insisted to Warpig that he go alone but Warpig instantly refused. He nearly got killed the first time facing Fevurr and he was not about to let that happen again.

“That’ll get you killed!” He argued to Savâge. “His time will come, because I can just... blow him up from a distance, yeah?”

“Or maybe he’ll just kill us the moment he sees us.” Savâge responded as he and Warpig walked into the stadium entrance from the somewhat vacant parking lot.

“Or maybe *you* can have an open mind for once! Heh... Get it?” Warpig said humorously, which made Savâge roll his eyes and sigh. He still found it somewhat amusing and liked Warpig’s positive and energetic attitude, even in tense situations. In his honest opinion, it made them better to deal with (at least currently). Before their journey, Primal asked if any of them would like a “radio device made of my powers.” They all said yes, since communication would be of utmost importance during a mission like this. Speaking of, Primal and Icemantis spoke through said radios, saying that they found the first of two outposts and are ready to take action. Luhki said to hold their positions until he made it to the defense station. It took a while but he eventually did.

“Okay, commit to your plans, everybody.” Said Luhki through the radio. “Warpig, Savâge, stay where you are until we get the information we need. If we don’t, then proceed deeper into the stadium and find Fevurr. If you find a demon instead, then try not to kill it. It’s useful to us alive - if we can interrogate it. Now... radio silence.”

Primal made sure that everybody’s radios were silent by using his power to make them disappear. They all planned to rendezvous at the stadium whether they managed to get their information or not. No communication would be made in or out unless Primal re-manifested the radios himself. Both he and Icemantis stood on the edge of a rooftop overlooking a GHRC outpost. It was starting to rain and soon it would get heavier.

The outpost itself was small. It functioned more like a checkpoint for cars and passer-bys, as it was installed directly on the street. Cameras were stationed overlooking all sides of the outpost itself and there were two towers connected by a bridge that was above the street itself. In those towers were two GHRC soldiers keeping watch with guns at the ready. Below on the ground were three more soldiers patrolling around and inside the outpost. The bottom of the towers held a cubicle with one person sitting inside them, usually typing away at a keyboard.

They also functioned as camera operators and both Primal and Icemanis needed to get whatever information off those computers relating to Fevurr one way or another.

Primal and Icemanis decided to commence their assault at the same time.

Icemanis would freeze the cameras and the soldiers at the top of the tower solid and Primal would make quick work of the soldiers below, including the camera operators by twisting their necks with his power. After the threats were neutralized, Primal, with haste, scanned through the computer for any Fevurr-related files. He carefully looked in the camera's video files, which were located within a folder on the desktop. Seems this computer had a reset recently and all files past last week's date were removed. It felt annoying but Primal didn't lose hope yet. He went to the other cubicle room and did the same thing, only to turn up nothing. He had hoped that maybe this computer hadn't undergone a recent reset but that was *exactly* the case. Primal sighed in disappointment and exited the cubicle room, floating up to meet Icemanis on the bridge.

"Find anything?" She spoke with a hint of hope.

"No." He responded.

"Damn. Oh, well, time for the next outpost!"

Icemanis then left by ice-jumping her way onto a rooftop, with no rough landing this time. Primal looked at the frozen statues of Coalition soldiers and decided to put them out of their misery by blasting them away with a soul bolt that shot out of his hand. They shattered into a thousand little pieces on impact and Primal resumed following Icemanis.

The next outpost had much of the same layout and number of GHRC soldiers. Same plan and execution as last time and it resulted in the same way, too.

"Still nothing?" Said Icemanis next to a frozen statue of a soldier on the bridge of the outpost. The rain was developing further now.

"Yeah. I almost can't believe it myself but I assume they wipe their computers of any info before the Sweeping commences - probably backs it up somewhere else." Primal guessed. It was his best guess as to why the computers had little-to-no information on them. It made sense to the two of them but, nevertheless, they headed back to the stadium to regroup with the others. Primal had to admit, Icemanis was getting a lot more comfortable with her powers but she

was also not comfortable with flat out killing. *Understandable for somebody new to this unhuman world.* Thought Primal. *However, it's a bad idea to spare anybody in GHRC like that. I'll talk to her about it soon.* Again, like last time, Primal stayed behind for a few seconds after Icemantis left to kill the frozen soldiers.

Luhki's infiltration of the defense station was, in his eyes, easy. He, at first, wanted to lure a guard and steal his uniform for an easy way inside the station, but he decided against that as it would draw a lot more attention. So, instead of getting a guard's uniform, he found a lone, wounded GHRC trooper and struck him from out of the shadows. He dragged their unconscious body to a dumpster in an alley and discarded them into it, before donning their uniform and weapons. Luhki coughed.

"Guy must have been smoking." He smelled the lingering smoke of tobacco when he donned the mask. Putting his curiosities aside, he noticed that there was a laceration wound in the left leg of the uniform, close to the ankle. In order to have a more convincing disguise, Luhki pulled out a knife from its sheath and slashed his leg appropriate to where the uniform tear was. He easily got through the pain like it was nothing but then he looked at the wound again and thought it wasn't convincing enough, so he slashed it again harder and deeper this time.

It hurt more, and he grunted in brief pain as a response. Ignoring it, he walked back towards the defense station and promptly entered through the back entrance, of which had two guards that acknowledged Luhki's presence and said he should see a medic but didn't say anything else. The defense station itself was a large building surrounded by an imposing concrete wall that spanned a couple of city blocks. Connecting the walls were concrete pillars that provided a perfect vantage point for snipers. A *lot* of GHRC soldiers patrolled the outside perimeter of the building but there were even more on the inside. Nevertheless, it was around the third time in Luhki's life that he had been inside a defense station.

The layout was somewhat different but he navigated it with relative ease. Once he had found the room with the camera operator, he knocked on the locked, steel door several times.

"You prick." Spoke a muffled voice behind the door. A GHRC agent opened the door and Luhki, knowing that the coast was clear, shoved her back into the

room and started attacking her. She wore no helmet, so Luhki's rapid punches went towards her head. One blow made her dizzy for a brief moment as she stumbled over a swivel chair, to which she picked up and threw at Luhki. He managed to dodge it but the agent tackled him to the ground. At this point, Luhki activated his power and he made no attempts at struggling as the agent pulled out her FN Five-seveN, turned the safety off and was stunned to hear a click rather than a bang. The gun jammed and its barrel stared into Luhki's eyes at a claustrophobic distance. Before the perplexed agent could even attempt to unjam her weapon, Luhki punched it away and shoved her off of himself. She tried recovering but kept slipping, falling back down to the floor like there was an invisible puddle of oil beneath her. With haste, Luhki rushed over to her and slammed his foot onto her neck, hearing a significant snap as he did so. With a sigh of relief, he deactivated his power, shut the door behind him and went onto a computer on the other side of the room. It was below a vast array of security monitors showing the camera feed. Thankfully, there were no cameras in this room, something that Luhki knew the GHRC would soon eventually add after today. After digging through the computer's files for any Fevurr-related information, he turned up nothing.

"Dammit!" He cursed out in frustration. Turns out the Coalition even did a reset on their defense station computers. Luhki now had to report back to the group with bad news but he had hoped that maybe Primal and Iceantis found something. The only real problem was getting back outside without causing too much suspicion. Luhki looked at the dead agent and moved her body to a dark corner of the room, also grabbing her pistol and holstering it just in case he needed it.

*A good delay. Don't want them discovering her too quickly.* He thought as he left the room calmly.

"Damn," a passing soldier said to Luhki, noticing his leg wound "stop cuttin' yourself."

Luhki scoffed as he went the opposite direction of the soldier and back out the way he came. The guards didn't say anything again and Luhki promptly left the vicinity. Before heading back to the rendezvous point, he went back to the same alleyway he knocked out the wounded soldier in and took off the uniform, donning his normal clothes back on and throwing the soldier's uniform in the nearest trash

bin. Luhki then began walking back towards the stadium, hoping that at least the rest of the crew found something feasible.

Primal, Icemantis and Luhki regrouped at the stadium and Primal turned the radios back on. They stayed under the roof since it was raining harder now, complete with lightning.

“Did y’all find anything?” Asked Luhki through the noise of the heavy rain. “Because I got nothing.”

“The defense station, or whatever it’s called, had nothing about Fevurr?” Questioned a surprised Icemantis.

“Holy shit, then why are you called Luhki?” Said Primal with a sly grin and a chuckle. Luhki glanced at him through narrow eyes and sarcastically replied “So the dude named *Primal* was unable to *track* anything?”

“Okay, I get it.” Continued Primal, admitting this tiny defeat. “Let’s find Savâge and Warpig. We’ll figure something out!” They all walked into the stadium through the front door, with Primal and Icemantis trailing behind Luhki. The interior looked spacious and felt more akin to a baseball or football stadium than a wrestling one (even though it’s been closed for the off-season). The decorations were nothing too fancy, as it was mostly just silly advertising that did nothing but to serve as filler for blank spaces. Normally, the doors into the stadium would’ve been locked but they were broken open, probably by either Savâge or Warpig. The lights were off and resulted in the place being pitch black, with the only light sources coming from Primal’s and Icemantis’s glowing eyes. Icemantis had her suit’s blue night vision turned on while Primal had his helmet’s red night vision on. For Luhki, he could clearly see the way forward thanks to his new partners.

“Hey, so,” began Icemantis as they continued walking forward “I’ve never really fought the GHRC before. My only encounters with them was before I was put in a cryo tube and I was just a normal civilian back then. I’ve no real clue what they’re actually like.”

Primal looked back at her, realizing that today was her first time she ever fought the GHRC. This made him curious about something.

“Hold up, do you have *actual* combat experience? Did the Secret Soul Service teach you?” He asked with utter curiosity, which Icemantis nodded.

“Occasionally, they would get me out of the tube to interact with people and to train. I’m guessing they did it because they were...” She paused, she really didn’t know what the SSS even wanted with her (other than research) “...bored, I guess? Maybe Dreigenzo saw something in me because I’ve actually been to Hell to do my training.”

Primal and Luhki both looked at her in shock and then amazement.

“Wow!” Exclaimed Luhki.

“You’re serious?” Asked Primal, to which Icemantis confirmed his suspicion. He whistled in an impressed way.

“No wonder you’re a natural in combat - at least from what I’ve seen.” Compliment Primal, to which Icemantis felt humbled by.

“You did your training in that infernal shit hole? This plan has more of a chance at success then!” Said Luhki.

Icemantis was flattered. “Aw, thanks. It was mostly parkour and combat training that didn’t involve my powers and they were very strict about me wandering about - especially the demons, they were the most concerned and scared the life of me sometimes. But none were scarier than Syraux herself! That devil instilled fear into the heart and mind of a person by just having a presence! It makes me wonder why Dreigenzo is so infatuated with her. No matter what, those two were always together.”

“You opened a whole Pandora's box of questions, Icemantis.” Said Luhki as he started digesting the information. “One of them being; what does Hell look like?”

She thought about it for a few seconds, as they all turned a corner and entered a new room, which looked like a staging area. She was trying to find a perfect explanation for what Hell looks like, especially to those who are used to seeing countless depictions of it in religion.

“Green.” She answered.

“Green?” Said both Primal and Luhki, not expecting it.

“Yup! It looks like it’s within a hollow planet, too, as there’s no sky and just more... look, it’s hard to describe. On one end, there was this seemingly endless landscape of rock. On the other side was this *huge* wall of green fire out in the distance. Demons usually hung around where there wasn’t fire, much to what I



believed about them at first. I mostly did my training near this large tower that reached the... well, ceiling, if that makes sense.” Her confusion stopped any pondering. The information was, in their honest opinion, exciting to both Luhki and Primal.

“I don’t really know. I’ve never actually questioned it and only focused on what Dreigenzo told me to do.”

There was some silence, which Icemantis broke a few seconds later.

“I’m kinda glad the Secret Soul Service trained me.” She reminisced. “I didn’t like the... actually, let me word it better; I wasn’t in the best of shape beforehand. I didn’t *really* see eye to eye with their methods. Slowly, though, I realized there were a lot of good people there. The training was rough and even brutal - I even fought demons, sometimes! I got encouraged to get stronger and, well, I have killer muscles now!” She said, flexing her arms in a proud way. “Congratulations, Icemantis.” Chuckled Luhki with a smile. “But let’s save this topic for another time, I see Savâge and Warpig up ahead.”

Warpig himself seemed happy to see the rest of the crew again. “Hey you guys... and gal!” He and Savâge were inside the wrestling ring. The place seemed a little unsettling, with the abandoned seats and dim lighting only adding to the mood. The two seemed to have been talking about something, which Luhki was curious as to if it was either small talk or a development.

“So, did y’all...” Warpig trailed his words off all of the sudden and his head somehow felt too heavy for his body to even support anymore. All but Savâge felt the same way and soon they all fell down unconscious. Savâge was confused, scared almost. He tried shaking Warpig awake and checked for his pulse. While it was still there he wouldn’t wake up. Savâge wasn’t so sure about the others. So, he disappeared and reappeared beside the rest of the crew, checking their pulses to see if they were still alive. Turns out they were and Savâge sighed in relief. Still, the anxiety didn’t go away and Savâge started analyzing the entire room for the source of what led to his friends going unconscious. It surely wasn’t his own powers, he has full control over them and the last time he checked he wasn’t emitting any gasses. Then, a sudden realization that he didn’t like. There was gas being poured into the building, coming from the vents. Using his power, Savâge traced the powerful gas back to its source.

It came from outside and worked its way through the ventilation systems. The Secret Soul Service had been following all of them and none were the wiser! For how long was currently irrelevant to Savâge, because he had to get his friends to safety.

*(Decade Dance - Jasper Byrne)*

A squadron of Secret Soul Service agents emerged from the two corridors in front and behind Savâge. Dressed in black armor, stylized in yellow stroke lines, they cautiously approached the unhumans with weapons at the ready, wearing gas masks. Focusing on his friends, Savâge attacked the agents near them, using his gas power to render himself invulnerable to physical attacks and invisible to the naked eye.

“Unhuman disappeared!” Exclaimed an agent. “Keep an-” Blood then started pouring from her ears, nose and mouth as Savâge started melting her insides by conjuring up super hot gas within her own body.

“Shit! Fall ba-” Another agent exclaimed before he and the two other agents behind him suffered the same exact fate. Savâge then looked down at his unconscious friend and allies and wondered, in a situation like this, how exactly he was going to get them out.

*Must rid the Secret Soul Service from this place!* He thought with a newfound determination.

Savâge didn’t know how many were in the building but he quickly went to work on the other squadron of agents in the room, finishing them off the same way he did to the others. Their bullets, as well as their tactics, proved to be useless. They were playing it off by ear but it’s the only form of a strategy that has proved to be actually useful in the event of combating an unhuman (due to their unpredictability).

This little raid conducted by the Secret Soul Service, compared to the powerhouse that is the Coalition, had tricks up its sleeve, though. An unhuman SSS agent then emerged out of a green hell portal, wearing the same uniform as the others. What made them an unhuman was what appeared to be glitches surging throughout her own body. She pointed at Savâge, for she could clearly see him using her own power, and “bounced” off the ceiling and the floor towards him in a rapid zig-zag pattern that otherwise would’ve induced panic in a normal person.

Savâge phased through her but she reappeared instantly behind him, forcing him out of his gas form by using glitches and paralyzing him in place with such. She then summoned a fully-loaded Beneli M4 (a semi-automatic shotgun) in her own hands, switched the safety off and aimed it at Savâge's head. He expected to die right then and there and was nearly accepting of it but then there was a sudden pause as a bullet penetrated her throat and she collapsed on the ground, holding onto her gushing wound with both hands. She was desperate, using her own powers to try and make herself recover faster. Luhki then ran up to her, grabbed the Benelli M4 and shot her multiple times in the head with it. Brain matter and skull fragments sprayed the floor with each shot as Luhki needed to make sure that this enemy was absolutely dead. Savâge's paralysis broke when she died and he was relieved to see Luhki again, ignoring the necessary violence he had inflicted because it saved his life.

Luhki pointed the shotgun upwards and used his free hand to help lift Savâge off the floor. He was also wearing a gas mask, scavenged from an agent.

"You alright?" He asked with concern. Savâge nodded in response as he got up. "I'm the only one awake, by the way. Let's get the others."

"I'll cover you." Savâge responded.

The two then headed back into the room where their unconscious friends were. They had to get them outside the building, since the gas was proving lethal enough, but it was going to be hard with the Secret Soul Service still crawling about (plus, potential Demons).

"Here's a plan," Luhki started to explain. "You clear out the building of any remaining hostiles and I'll move our friends outside."

It sounded reasonable enough and was the only good plan they could come up with (at the moment), so Savâge nodded his head in agreement, transformed into gas and navigated through the entire ventilation system, searching for threats. Luhki first began by carrying Warpig outside, dragging him by the legs (compared to the others, he weighed the lowest). Then followed by Icemantis and finally Primal. The thunder shook the rainy night but at least these three were no longer breathing in dangerous gasses. Luhki just had to hope that no GHRC patrol would spot them, even if his power influenced the chances of life.

What did spot them, however, was not the GHRC. Three Demons, one of them a Stalker, dropped from the rooftop and simultaneously landed with a crash that shook the ground somewhat. They immediately began to attack Luhki but the Stalker slipped on the wet sidewalk and fell. This gave Luhki more of an opportunity to dodge, narrowly avoiding the blades that swung for his head. He thanked himself that he still had the Beneli M4, so he shot two rounds into a pouncing Demon. The pellets were merely deflected off the demon but the impact remained the same, their rib cage breaking in response. They flew at Luhki like a ragdoll and he almost dodged them entirely but got slashed in his right arm. The pain was sharp and he grunted in response. He saw that the Stalker Demon was preparing to fire Hell magic out of its mouth, so he shot them in their mouth, the pellets reflecting off their lower jaw and through the roof of their fleshy mouth, the pellets finally finding rest within their brain.

The M4 was now out of ammo and Luhki had no more shells to feed it, so he whipped out the pistol he saved Savâge with earlier (an FN Five-Seven) and was about to shoot the last Demon, but they had already closed the distance and sliced the gun in half. This would've been unfortunate but as soon as they sliced the gun, the bullet had already gone off and a 5.7x28mm round penetrated through the Demon's skull. Luhki shoved the corpse aside, wincing as he had just cut his own hands by doing so. He sighed in relief as he stood, dropping the now broken Five-Seven. He then saw Savâge reappear beside him, who had just seen the work he had done, expecting much.

"It's clear and I dispelled the gas." He informed Luhki.

"Great. Thank you." He sat leaned against the wall, tightly clutching his new wounds with his hands, trying to stop the bleeding. "Let's wait until they wake." He said, wincing. "By then, we can safely move back to base."

"I'll find you a first aid kit. Saw some as I was maneuvering through the building." Savâge disappeared again and reappeared a few seconds later with a first aid kit in hand. Luhki thanked him as he took it, opened it and used the contents within to temporarily treat his wounds. His ankle, palms and arm were now wrapped in bandages and their bleeding had stopped.

“Alright, let’s state the obvious,” began Luhki. “We are NOT carrying all three of them by ourselves.” He pointed to Icemantis, Primal and Warpig. “Instead, we’re gonna get one of those cars and drive the hell out of here.”

“That will attract more attention.” Replied Savâge, looking at the few cars that were still left in the parking lot. There was a white SUV just ripe for the taking (and perfect for carrying unconscious passengers)! Luhki smiled, well-aware of the danger.

(Pulse Phase - Kelly Bailey)

“I get your concern but my power’s got us covered.” He reassured, walking towards the SUV with a full plan in mind by the time he arrived at the driver’s side of the vehicle. He broke the window after struggling to do so with the force of his elbow, unlocking the door from the inside. As soon as he got in the car, he started to hotwire it. As he heard the vehicle’s engine rumble in activation and the alarm deactivating, he drove it closer to Savâge and the others. The two then started carrying the others into the empty seats of the SUV.

When it was done, Savâge got in the passenger seat and Luhki drove his way back to the safehouse, parking the car a good distance away so as to not draw too much attention. The patrols and war drums of the GHRC’s distant firepower were being drowned out by the heavy storm, the only way of seeing without the use of man-made light sources was now through the electrical flashes of nature, because both Luhki and Savâge had realized that there was a sudden blackout. A force outside of their control (or maybe a simple accident) may have been the cause of it.

*It’s a good thing that the safehouse doesn’t run on the same grid as every other building.* Luhki thought with a hint of optimism.

When the car was parked, both Luhki and Savâge got out hurriedly and opened all the passenger doors so they could carry their friends to safety, only to realize that Icemantis had just woken up. She seemed a little dazed, holding her aching head with one hand as Luhki helped her to her feet, helping her walk since she was struggling to do so. The rain was incredibly loud, so he only focused on getting her inside.

*Thank god her suit’s eyes glow.* Thought Luhki as both he and Icemantis made it safely to the entrance of the safehouse. The door opened before either of them made it to the steps and out came Noah, confused as to what was happening.

“Jesus!” He exclaimed, stepping aside.

“Nah, just me!” Quipped Luhki as he made his way inside with Icemantis. She stumbled her way to the nearest couch and collapsed on it.

“Primal and Warpig are still in the car, unconscious - let’s go!” Said Luhki urgently to Noah as they both made their way back to the car. They found Savâge carrying Warpig, as he was much lighter than Primal.

“Get Primal, I got Warpig!” He said as he passed both Noah and Luhki, to which two went up to the SUV and, much like Icemantis, found Primal sitting up, awake.

“What the hell...” He groaned, clenching his stomach as he started to feel like throwing up. He got out of the car on his own, telling Noah and Luhki that he can still walk to safety. As soon as he made it inside, he collapsed on the ground, puke leaking out of his mouth.

“Savâge, their bodies are still full of that deadly gas! You need to remove it, now!” Luhki ordered, to which Savâge took action almost immediately, starting with Primal.

## CHAPTER EIGHT:

### Tomb of the Agents

#### Theme: The Reaction - Nine Inch Nails

Kanya believed that there had to be *something* under all of this rubble. She knew, from what Luhki told her, that this place used to belong to the Central Intelligence Agency. It was some sort of bunker, from what she assumed to have been built during the Cold War. It seemed that whoever ran the place decided to keep it running long after said war was done but some type of event took place that eventually led it into the state that it is today; a remnant from a bygone era, a tomb containing (potentially) useful secrets and discoveries. It was already the perfect hideout for anybody under the sun, as long as one doesn't mind going out for food and water every now and then.

The heating and electrical systems still seemed to be in working order (although they tend to be a bit finicky at times, especially during the winter season). Whatever happened to this place piqued the interest of Kanya the moment she saw the CIA insignia. The curiosity was just begging to be answered, like an irritating itch that just *couldn't* be scratched enough. Who would design such a place and why? Kanya decided to check out the barracks, as it was the only room not buried underneath tons of rubble. It was pitch black, even from the outside viewing in. Fortunately, being a hybrid, Kanya had access to natural night-vision.

Upon entering the room, she noticed that some of the bunkbeds were still in maintained order. "Some" being only three and they were all close to the doorway. Kanya believed that Luhki, Warpig and Savâge occasionally slept down here, probably in case things got too hectic on the surface. The rest of the beds and their respective containers were too dirty and possibly beyond cleaning now. Kanya went to the other end of the room, noticing a line of disorganized dressers and old lockers with numbers on their doors. Inspecting them, she found out that only two were locked and were the only ones actually containing items of interest. So, she decided to use her sharp claws to open one of them by cutting a hand-sized hole through the steel. It didn't hurt and required minimal effort and thus, Kanya

reached into the hole and released the latch, opening the door to reveal a good amount of dust covering the insides of the locker. There was a top shelf that appeared to have a framed photo and a desaturated, wool teddy bear leaning next to it. Kanya grabbed the photo, causing the teddy bear to finally move in according to gravity in over who knows how long, wiping the dust off the picture to see what it was.

It appeared to have been a photo of a woman and a presumably teenage dude in a forest, probably on a nature trail judging by the wooden pathway and trash can in the background. Who knows if this even belonged to the woman in the picture or to their (presumed) lover that once worked here, or if it even was a couple at all! The answer of what and which would probably be forever unknown but Kanya didn't let it bother her too much, so she put the photo back to where it was and even repositioned the teddy bear to where it once leaned. The other items in the locker was an old-looking leather jacket, a ballistic vest, a black suit with a matching tie, all still hanging up on clothes hangers, along with brown every-day shoes and black work shoes, vertically stacked books about crafting, and a pistol laying on top of a few loaded magazines, which took up the rest of the space on the bottom shelf.

Kanya moved onto the next locker on the far-right end of the row. She opened it up the same way she did to the last, still with the same amount of dust, clothing and gear. However, there were different miscellaneous items this time. The photos in this one were not framed and seemed to have been taken from a polaroid, pinned to the inside of the locker door for what Kanya believed to be motivational reasons. She could tell that some had dates on them but they were too faded to make out. Some of the other stuff that was pinned up were not even photos but were instead rewards for a service well done in the agency.

*It seemed that this person was an outstanding agent and liked to boost their ego every shift. Typical.* Scoffed Kanya as she shut the door and looked around the room again. She noticed a lightswitch not far from where she was and went to flip it on but it didn't help. Peering into the doorway next to her, all she found beyond it was an empty hallway that only led to a dead-end. More rubble.

*What the fuck even happened here? A CIA facility undergoes a mass exodus and for what?* Complaining to herself made Kanya think more about the situation,



as she liked being kept on her toes. Perhaps she'll find clues elsewhere or maybe they're just buried deeper beneath all of this rubble. Kanya hated leaving questions unanswered. It felt wrong in a strange place like this. So, she decided to check out the other rooms. After exiting the barracks, she went straight ahead, passing the big, conference call-looking table and into darkness yet again. This hallway, however, had nothing worth exploring, as it was walled off by... more rubble. She checked the last two hallways in the conference room and it resulted in much of the same.

"Fucking hell." Kanya thought out loud with frustration. Situations like this gives her an opportunity to dig deeper and... well, she may have just gotten an idea.

She was heading back to the elevator when something caught her eye. If one were to stand in front of the elevator doorway and turn right and go down the hallway, there would be another doorway that led to a unisex bathroom. There was no door, as it was lying flat on the ground, covered by cobwebs. In fact, a majority of this bathroom was covered in webs and Kanya could also see that the stalls were on their last legs. Stepping onto the tiled floor, an awful stench of rotten flesh and bone seeped through Kanya's senses like a slow burn, causing her to revolt and step out of the room for good. Before she left, she saw the feet of a skeleton in one of the closed stalls, which was probably another reason she got the hell out of there.

"Yeah... no." Kanya cringed at the thought of further exploring that room. "Oh, c'mon Kanya, It's just a damn bathroom!" She said to herself, then making her way to the elevator button and calling the lift down. She got in and went to the floor both Noah and Nyx were presumably on, seeing her brother as soon as the doors opened.

"Oh, hey. Almost forgot you didn't join them." He remarked as Kanya passed him, which made her stop and look back as soon as she reached the stairs.

"What?" He questioned the disapproving look Kanya now had on her face. "Y'all work great as a team - so far."

"I believe that." She sighed and continued walking up the stairs, with Noah following, out of intrigue. "I believe that we were great before your betrayal. Before mine. Now we're being thrust into a 'save-the-world' scenario and who

asked for it, huh? Me? You? No!” It was a stressful situation no doubt and “stressful” may be putting it lightly.

“They put this on us. Dreigenzo, Syraux... to think we were practically *raised* by them!”

Noah let Kanya vent. This was her way of coping with the stress.

“I just- I don’t know what to think anymore. This is all so... fucked.” She felt like crying but held the tears back.

“Yeah,” Noah said with a solemn sigh as they entered the dark living room, feeling a heavy weight on his shoulder as he discussed this topic again. “It felt like all those years of parenting was just a brainwashing tactic and the crazy thing about it is that Dreigenzo... more or less, still cares about us. It’s a requirement, after all.” It was the most perplexing thing about the ritual - about Dreigenzo. Who comes up with these requirements and who would willingly follow them? To them both, Syraux would never create something like that. Maybe before she met Dreigenzo but that was a different time. She’s changed a lot and the siblings all knew that.

Dreigenzo is not a cultist. He’s a prodigy and a caring father. He’s married to Syraux, *the* Devil but the siblings all know that she loves her children just as much, too. Despite being the Devil, Syraux was far different than any devil depicted in religion and mythology (a title only gained because of her vague similarities as to how demons stereotypically appear).

This thought was plagued with stress and Kanya doesn’t know how to deal with it. Noah had *much* more time to accept it but it didn’t make the reveal hurt any less. So badly, had he wanted to confront his parents right then and there. So. Many. Times... an opportunity never taken.

Dreigenzo, their father, has to *love* them for the ritual to work. The rain outside was starting to come down hard, judging by how fast the pellets were hitting the windows.

“So, did you find anything down there?” Noah asked Kanya, who was leaning against a wall with her arms crossed, sighing. He wanted to discuss something else, to get their minds off this topic for now.

“Not really. Found a cursed bathroom and a barracks full of vintage shit. Other than that, most of it is blocked off by rubble, which leads me to this: can you help me get rid of the rubble with your lasers?”

Noah didn't take long to think about it and said yes, figuring that it would take a while before the rest of the crew came back from their mission.

*This will help clear my mind.* He thought as he walked towards the elevator with Kanya. Going back down to the underground facility, Kanya instructed Noah to destroy the rubble in the barrack's hallway. He started by placing a laser orb on each corner of the hallway right next to the rubble blockade, then stood a few steps back. Stretching his arm out towards the rubble and opening his hand, the orbs formed an incredibly thin laser wall that perfectly matched the hallway's diameter. Noah then sent it forward, seeing the rubble eradicate with glee.

"Love doing that - it never gets old!" He commented as he erased the laser wall. Both he and Kanya walked down the newly opened, empty hallway with a slight sense of adventure.

"Hang on," Noah told Kanya quickly, "you may see in the dark but I can't." He summoned a small, bright energy orb and made it hover above himself. Now the way was lit up and he could see much better now. It acted much like a flare, only brighter and with an infinite fuel source. They turned the corner and noticed that the hallway turned into another blockade of rubble, so Noah did the same sequence as before - only with more results this time.

"I'm starting to think that maybe you're destroying old stuff with your laser." Said Kanya, crossing her arms.

"Yeah but everything has a takeaway, eh?" Replied Noah, then noticing additional doorways ahead. Peeking into one of them, he found nothing at first but only because it was still dark. The energy orb took a little while to catch up and when it did, Noah saw what the room held within. Corpses that are still decomposing amongst a violently ruined room, as cabinets and drawers were pulled open and knocked over. Paper, dirt and dried blood colored the room, filling both Noah's and Kanya's mind with new, curious assumptions as they looked inside. Looking up, the ceiling appeared as if it was about to collapse. In fact, the ceiling in the now-cleared hallway was just dirt now and somehow it was still holding together. Careful inspection of the dirt made Kanya notice that there were pipes running through, some belonging to the city and some belonging to this place. It was hard to make out their purpose as the text that once labeled them was faded.

“Yeah... this... see, this is cool yet *fucked* at the same time.” Noah didn’t really know what to say. Despite having been with the Secret Soul Service for as long as he remembers, despite having been to Hell several times, the situation he found himself in perplexed him to the point of being speechless and nervous. Kanya stepped into the room carefully, realizing that it was some sort of break room for the staff. The smell was almost as bad as the bathroom’s, making Kanya plug her nose with her fingers. Noah expected to find rats but there were none. Besides the insects and other, much smaller creatures, this place was seemingly void of life.

Kanya reached the end of the room, right next to an open, empty fridge with a corpse beside it. They were curled in the fetal position, clutching what seemed to be a notebook in their arms. Food wrappings, empty plastic bottles and MREs surrounded them and they, upon closer inspection, had the least amount of rot compared to everything else. Unplugging her nose and having to endure the rigors of an awful smell, Kanya reached for the notebook, moving the corpse over on its back and pulling it out of their hands. Hearing the cracking of bones that hadn’t moved in years sent chills down Kanya’s spine. She was used to seeing death but, until now, hadn’t seen it like this. She swept and blew some of the dust off the notebook as she walked out of the room.

“Oh, look at that!” Said a surprised Noah as he looked closer at the notebook, his excitement then turning into disappointment rather quickly. “It’s rather thin.”

“Oh, sure, like I made this thing!” Said Kanya as she opened it up to the first page, its spine creaking as it hadn’t seen use in years. Thankfully, the text within was written in pen and was still readable. There were a few stains on a few of the pages, including mold on some of the corners.

“We should’ve worn gas masks. Who knows what we’re breathing in right now.” Noah commented as he saw the notebook’s rot.

“We don’t have any, Noah.” Kanya responded, taking note of the text she was reading. Every page had the same format but different text. They looked like codes but their exact purpose for what would be revealed as Kanya turned to the second-to-last page.

“Oh... oh my fucking god.” She slowly said in realization. It took Noah some time but the text read as follows: *IF OVERWHELMED BY HOSTILES, DETONATE THE EXPLOSIVES AT THE ELEVATOR AND THE ENTRYWAY. IF ALL FIVE ARE NEEDED THEN GOD BE WITH US ALL.*

“Holy SHIT!” Noah’s eyes were wide open now and both he and Kanya looked back and forth at themselves and the notebook. “This is what caused the rubble! I thought an earthquake did all that!”

“So that means they only got one bomb off, ‘cause obviously the elevator’s still standing,” Kanya added. “Just look at how many codes there are - it’s on every page! Maybe that’s why that, uhh... person, died with it.” She looked beyond into the tunnel and could see that there was more rubble ahead.

“We are not going deeper. I don’t want to discover any undetonated explosives.” She started to turn away but Noah stopped her.

“If only one bomb exploded, then why hasn’t the other one?”

“I don’t know? Why hasn’t the ceiling collapsed? Either unhumans or the CIA caused this to happen but... ” She sighed and took one good look at the notebook. “...I don’t really feel safe down here anymore. If those bombs are still active...”

Noah sighed, deciding it was best if they stopped for now. Then he got an idea. “How about I find the elevator bomb and deactivate it?”

“With your hands?” The idea sounded dangerously concerning to Kanya. “Why not just vaporize them with your lasers?” Kanya suggested, to which Noah responded quickly.

“Nah, the explosion would still go off. The one thing my lasers can’t destroy. If those bombs are still here, just waiting to be activated, then they *have* to be dealt with.”

“Maybe.” Kanya said as she headed back to the elevator, taking a good look at it and sighing.

“Kanya,” Noah started, placing a hand on her shoulder. “I know we die if I make one mistake trying to disarm it but it will *never* happen. Believe me, you know how much of a tinkerer I am.”

“But you haven’t messed with bombs before.” Kanya added, looking a little less hopeful.

“I know! But I’ve messed with similar things and I *have* to do this. You *know* that. I understand that you’d rather abandon this place ASAP but this is the only safe house we have found! If all those bombs go off, there will be even more chaos and it wouldn’t be just us dead.

Kanya finally decided that, if she were to die, then this would be the quickest and better way. In her opinion, it’s better than being killed by demons or the Coalition.

“Alright, let’s do this.”

**(Focus - Nine Inch Nails)**

Noah already had a plan. A plan that would involve him playing it off by ear when he saw the bomb. The notebook didn’t even describe the ordnance the bombs were carrying - hell, not even where they were. The person that wrote in it specifically told the location of just two out of five bombs, one of which already detonated *years* ago. If it had that much power in collapsing what was beyond the rubble, then Noah assumed the bomb in the elevator had the same amount of explosive potential.

Noah told Kanya to send the elevator up and she did. Noah then used lasers to vaporize the steel doors after they closed. When it was clear, the two crouched at the doorway and stared at the concrete floor with the intent of finding the bomb. The two quickly came to the conclusion that the bomb itself was buried in the concrete. The other problem was the elevator itself. They didn’t want to damage the cables they saw, so Noah thought long and hard about a way to move the bomb out of the concrete.

“Damn. Guess I’ll have to do it here.” Noah put on his goggles, which enhanced his sight by granting him heat vision. He could still see in the darkness thanks to the floating, bright orb that still hovered above him but the heat vision made it even easier to detect the exact location of the bomb.

“Well, the bomb isn’t too far down.” Noah said to Kanya, still looking at the bomb with more worry than before.

“Good, we won’t have to reach for it.” Said Kanya, thinking nothing else of it.

“It’s just... It’s right *here*.” Noah placed his pointer finger on the exact center of the concrete floor. “Literally a few centimeters from my finger.” Kanya’s heart skipped a beat and she started to feel the acceptance of death.

“Fuck...” She placed both of her hands behind her head, the feeling of anxiety rising with each passing second. Noah took off his goggles and took a deep breath. Using the same pointer finger, he shot a thin continuous laser beam out of it and carefully cut around the bomb. Kanya was dead silent as she watched the almost surgical work Noah was doing. Carefully placing both of his hands flat on the surface, he formed a rectangular laser and pushed it down as slow as a snail, watching it vaporize the concrete with unblinking eyes. He stopped instantly as soon as he saw the bomb, his hands high in the air.

“Oh my god.” Kanya put her hands over her mouth and felt her heart beating even faster. Noah felt the same way but couldn’t let fear take over his focus right now. Thankfully, the bomb was positioned in a way that the panel was facing Noah. Upon opening it, he saw the circuitry and wires that he was dreading to face. The realization that he didn’t know what to do next hit him like a truck. All he had to do now was to guess. A gamble.

*I wish Luhki was here, maybe he’d show his power off.* Noah thought as he summoned an ultra-thin and short laser out of his finger. His breathing rapidly rose as he moved his hand closer to the wires. With a cry of determination, he sliced through two wires. The split-second realization that it actually worked made both Noah and Kanya sigh of relief. They knew, however, that it wasn’t over yet. There was still the problem of moving the bomb itself. Noah began by widening the hole with his lasers, which allowed room for the bomb to actually move. The device itself was only half the size of Noah’s leg. But something so small that can cause that much devastation needs to be rid of. After picking up the bomb with the aid of Kanya, Noah discovered yet another problem; where to put it. Kanya suggested that they should put the bomb in the bathroom next to them. Since it was now deactivated, the only thing that could actually detonate it was either a spark or tremendous force. Noah agreed, since they had no other option and it would be unlikely that it would explode just sitting in an abandoned bathroom. The two carefully stepped over the door and entered the bathroom. They did their best to ignore the awful smell and carefully set the bomb down next to the stalls. It was out of view from the outside but they would definitely tell everybody else about their discoveries. After exiting the bathroom, the two felt a surge of excitement and

jumped up and down into a frenzy of happiness and the two hugged each other tightly in victory.

“FUCK YEAH!” Kanya shouted as she gave Noah a high five.

“I’m a fuckin’ natural!” Noah laughed and looked back at the bomb, knowing that, for now, it was safe and that they would deal with it some other time.

*(Steroid Legend - Ville Kallio)*

Calling the elevator back down and taking it back up, Kanya went up the stairs to tell Nyx of her discoveries, while Noah sat in the living room waiting for the rest of the crew to come back (and to take a breather). Hopefully by then, they’ll actually have some good news to offset Noah’s bad news.

“So, how’d exploring go?” Said Nyx as soon as she noticed Kanya walking up the stairs, not noticing what was in her hand. “I was busy exploring these rooms, which were mostly bedrooms.” She seemed as if she was disappointed by her findings, that the rooms didn’t really contain much aside from what the usual apartment in New York would have.

“Yeah?” Questioned Kanya with an eyebrow raised.

“Yeah! Around four rooms on this floor and four more upstairs. A weird apartment, if you ask me.”

“More like a weird secret CIA base. I guess they needed some extra rooms to look convincing to the public... or maybe just for themselves.”

Not only was there the mystery of the underground facility, but the mystery of this building, too. Was this building and the facility built *for* the CIA, or did they simply *move in*? Even considering both outcomes didn’t unwrap this mystery that had a neat bow attached to the locked box of all the seemingly convenient answers.

“Anyways,” continued Kanya “I found some relics. Like old lockers, skeletons, and even cobwebs! Oh, and this, too.” She handed over the notebook to Nyx, who took and opened it up, flipping through the pages and slowly understanding what it was about. Chills were sent down her spine due to the contents within. She didn’t want to believe it but she was quite literally reading the truth. A feeling all too familiar.

“You’ve gotta be fucking kidding.” Nyx said with a worried chuckle. She looked back up at Kanya, concerned as ever. “Should we leave then?”



“No. Since one of the bombs detonated a long time ago, Noah and I found the one under the elevator. He defused it and we have it sitting in a rotting bathroom now.”

Nyx was relieved to hear that.

“The fact that the CIA are willing to plant bombs in a city such as this and for what? This still makes no sense, what ‘hostiles’ were they concerned about?” She recalled the personal entry in the notebook.

“We have to dig deeper. There’s *gotta* be more answers than that.” Nyx paused, thinking for a bit. “Wait, where did you even find that? Last time I was down there, the hallways were blocked off.” She asked.

“Noah helped me by disintegrating the debris. We stopped after finding this.” Kanya waved the notebook a little bit. “I think Noah’s taking a break right now, so maybe later we can head back down and explore more of the facility.”

Nyx nodded in understanding, then asked another question. “So, where’d the debris come from?”

“The ceiling, which one area is now, uhh... dirt.” Kanya explained it the best she could but it was quite literal. “It still bothers me that it hasn’t collapsed yet. Maybe something more is holding it together.”

The rain outside started to become even heavier than before, which was apparent due to the sudden increase in its noise.

“Jeez... this rain.” Nyx walked over to the window and looked outside. The rain’s growing intensity was making it hard to see. “I think an unhuman’s causing this.” She assumed.

“Yeah, forecasters didn’t say anything about *this*.” Kanya noted, realizing it herself. The weather forecast did say there was going to be rain but they probably didn’t predict it to be *this* heavy. “Sheesh.” Nyx added with a nervous look, wondering about the crew and their well being during all this. She walked away from the window and went back downstairs and into the living room. Her head just barely touched the ceiling but she could still stand up straight (at least). The sound of a helicopter flying over the building briefly cut out of the noise of the rain. Nyx, Noah and Kanya, for a split second, all thought the helicopter was for them - that the GHRC had found them somehow. But it wasn’t for them and it probably wasn’t the Coalition. Only when the sound of the helicopter merged with the rain did the

three unhumans continue their break. The average livelihood of an unhuman was *exactly* like this and, while these three were used to the relative safety of the Secret Soul Service, this new feeling was uncomfortable. They're now a part of the world that Dreigenzo didn't want them to be in.

Back at the Secret Soul Service headquarters, Dreigenzo leaned on the counter in the kitchen, his hands wrapped into a fist that his chin rested upon, his face filled with an expression that spelt "losing sleep" as he stared blankly into the heavy rain, thinking about his children. He could hear the footsteps of Syraux entering the room. She knew his distress all too well and hugged him from behind. Dreigenzo held her hand tightly and Syraux wrapped her tail around his waist with the same amount of grip.

*Please, at least be safe out there...* Dreigenzo thought as he did his absolute best to fight back tears. He one-hundred percent knew that they were more than capable of being outside. *That* wasn't the issue. The issue being multiple things colliding into one. Not only did three, incredibly loyal *unhuman* members betray the organization they grew up in, not only did they have to hide from both the demons and agents, but also the matter of the Coalition and their current sweeping operation of Ephemeral City. There's more Coalition soldiers now than there were a day ago. Chaos had been happening for the entire day and the rain was simply drowning it out for who knows how long. When it clears, the Coalition will simply move back in and continue. Putting some more thought into it, Dreigenzo assumes they might already be looking for the cause of this heavy rain. It's not the first time something or somebody tried to stop the Sweeping.

## **CHAPTER NINE:**

### **Flash**

**THEME: Lab Practicum - Kelly Bailey**  
**(Extended Mix)**

It felt like a fever dream to Icemantis. Where things go by so quickly that there's not enough time to fully process it. She always wondered what she was doing with her own life, curious that there was something special about herself. She kept thinking about it and it went back to her days as a teenager, when the question first popped into existence. It was like a jigsaw puzzle with a missing piece, only this piece would later be found thanks to the efforts of the Secret Soul Service.

Icemantis was never an unhuman. Her perception of the world back then is completely different to what is now - all thanks to the duplicated unhuman gene she was injected with years ago. Courtesy of Dreigenzo, because he wanted to create a one-hundred percent copy of the gene itself, something that he'd been striving to achieve for all his life. While Icemantis' results were promising, it wasn't enough. She had the instinctual abilities of an unhuman but lacked the knowledge and mastery of one.

From that moment she signed on, her life forever changed. She now can't go outside without running the risk of being shot, whether by the Coalition or some vigilante. Dreigenzo hadn't given up hope though, so he kept Icemantis around a little longer to conduct further tests (and to keep her safe from the world). Then, the gene mutated and she became a human-mantis hybrid... well, *almost*. The only things on her body that resembled a mantis were her antennae, mouth and, although more vaguely, her eyes (which have a dark-blue sclera and thinner pupils).

Still, even becoming an unhuman didn't fully answer the question that bothered her so much. It was more like the answer had merely been *hinted* at. When Icemantis was being tested on, she had no concept of time, for Dreigenzo would always put her back into cryo stasis. Cryo technology was an investment the

SSS had made long ago, now finally paying off. They had gotten it through an outside source and combined it with hell magic to enhance its capabilities.

At the time, Noah even remarked that it was, “like having early access to crazy tech.”

Icemantis had believed that a week went by for her testing, when, in reality, it had been a year and a half. She didn’t age the entire time she was in cryo stasis. A realization that would hit her hard when she woke up from her dream-like state.

She had been in Hell several times because some of the tests required her to be in such a place. Most of the time, she would train in an open and flat area. Other times, on hills and sometimes, even within the buildings. The architecture of Hell’s communities seemed similar to that of humans. It didn’t take long for Icemantis to realize that Hell was its own planet, separate from the solar system she was used to. She even asked Syraux if she discovered the planet, or if she and the demons originated from here.

“Focus on Dreigenzo’s orders.” Was the only answer she got from her. Syraux didn’t really interact with Icemantis much. Only watched her as she trained, discussing new results with Dreigenzo and fellow scientists.

“Icemantis.” It was a calling she heard a lot.

“Icemantis!” She thinks they have gotten used to her unhuman name. In fact, she couldn’t even remember her real name due to how much time she spent in stasis.

“Icemantis, wake up!” So, she did, breathing heavily as she found herself in an unfamiliar environment. It took her a few seconds but she realized that she was back at the safehouse, with Luhki and Savâge crouching beside her.

### *(Falling - Nine Inch Nails)*

The relief hit the crew like a breath of fresh air. Icemantis was the last and took the longest to wake up, so some had begun to think that she had actually died. Luhki grew a grin on his face upon seeing her wake and Savâge could rest easy knowing that he actually saved a life today.

“The good news is that you’re still in one piece.” Said Luhki as he grabbed her by the arm and pulled her up to her feet. She stumbled a bit, leaning on Luhki as a counterweight so she wouldn’t fall over.

“With the bad news being your balance.” Commented Savâge as Luhki guided her to the single-seater couch behind him. Icemantis sat down and looked around the room to see Nyx, Noah, Warpig and Kanya standing around her. Beside herself was Primal laying on the couch and on his side, with a trash can near him (already containing puke).

“Oh, you’re awake...” He said wearily, clutching his stomach with one hand as it groaned.

“That’s, uhh, good... right?” Icemantis said in a hazy confusion.

“Of course...?” Primal slowly responded with a raised brow. “The more hands... the better this will go. Plus, you dying would make us more miserable than this world already is.” Icemantis’ curiosity made her stare at the window in front of her, which had its blinds shut, hearing the unusually heavy rain outside as she contemplated Primal’s words.

“We’re not in a hurricane, right?” She questioned, looking back over at the group.

“Nope.” Kanya said, crossing her arms and leaning on the nearest wall. “Just some dickwad making everybody else’s lives miserable.” Icemantis chortled at her comment and leaned back into the seat, getting more comfortable as she sighed.

“Well, now that’s settled,” began Noah. “Did you find anything?”

“No.” Answered Primal before Luhki could.

“Coalition wiped their drives clean of any data prior to today.” Said Luhki, still finding it irritating that they couldn’t find what they were looking for. “Instead, we got gassed by the Secret Soul Service at the rendezvous point!”

Noah, Nyx, Warpig and Kanya were surprised.

“Oh, so that’s what got us!” Warpig realized.

“They found us already!?” Questioned a shocked Kanya.

“They only found us at the stadium.” Savâge informed. “Luhki and I wiped them all out, then we made our escape. At least this storm covered our tracks.”

“I don’t even think they expected *us*.” Added Luhki. “Because if they knew about Savâge, they wouldn’t have gassed us.”

“There were also demons.” Continued Savâge. “Not much, though. More of the SSS fodder than them. Oh, and they had an unhuman that nearly killed me. She

had this weird power similar to reality warping, I guess, but Luhki stepped in at just the right moment to finish her off.”

Nyx had a hunch that she knew what type of squadron they had dealt with. “That unhuman was their main driving power. Must have been a seeker squadron, because demons appeared when you killed her, correct?”

“Yep.” Answered Luhki, which confirmed Nyx’s suspicion. She had been in a few seeker squads before, always acting as its leader. The missions themselves didn’t take very long to do, especially if demons got involved.

“They send seekers out to deal with runaways, on search and rescue missions and, more rarely, on retrieval missions. One unhuman leads the squad, with demons acting as backup. There’s usually a stalker demon to assume command of the squadron in case the unhuman dies, so I guess you saw one of them, too.”

“Yeah... not what I was expecting a demon to look like, to be honest.” Luhki added, thinking back to it. “At least bullets can kill them.”

“Hey, speaking of, why didn’t you bring your gun?” Said a curious Warpig before he realized why immediately afterwards. “Oh, right, it’s a Thompson and...”

“...and the Coalition doesn’t use old guns.” Luhki finished his sentence. “And still, my quest for a replacement is ongoing. I’ve yet to see a Coalition soldier carry a Vector or any other gun chambered in .45 ACP - that isn’t a sidearm.” He seemed rather irked, as if his search for a replacement had been going on for a longer time than expected.

“Is that how the Coalition uses guns?” Asked Icemantis, to which Luhki shrugged.

“I’ve got no clue as to how the Coalition manages their weapons. From what I’ve seen, every soldier uses whatever gun they want. Anyways, our mission was, obviously, unsuccessful. Let’s rest and wait for this storm to clear. Afterwards, we’ll start formulating a plan.” Luhki passed by Nyx and headed up the stairs and to the bathroom. His clothes were still drenched from the rain and he needed to dry them. Kanya called out to Luhki just before he stepped on the stairs. “Hey, wait!” Luhki turned his head to her, curious. “Noah and I found something important.”

She went into the small kitchen area and grabbed the notebook on the island, bringing it back to show to everybody.

“When all of you were gone, Noah and I did some exploring in that underground facility... *thing*.”

Luhki raised a brow at the sight of the notebook. He’s sure he’s never seen it before, as he and the others had explored the place many times over! His mind questioned what it contained and where they even found it.

“I basically used my lasers to clear the rubble.” Explained Noah, which seemed to satisfy Luhki’s curiosity. “Not all of it but some. Found that notebook in a break room of sorts... and a bomb under the elevator.”

The reactions seemed to be varied but all resulted in the same thought.

“*WHAT!?*” Exclaimed Warpig, Luhki, Primal and Icemantis, who sat up a bit too quick for her body to handle. Savâge and Nyx both had shock on their faces and all, except for Noah and Kanya, had the expression of danger. Before panic could even ensue, Kanya spoke. “It’s been defused!” The wave of relief struck the crew yet again, with most leaning back into whatever comfortable position they were in before. Kanya continued. “Turns out, it was buried under concrete and the CIA were planning to use them in case this base became too dangerous for them to continue whatever dumbass operations they were doing. From this notebook, there are five bombs...” she waved the notebook a little bit “...that number is now three because of Noah and also because the CIA had used one before - probably the entryway one.”

“Entryway..?” Luhki’s thoughts trailed as he slowly glanced over to the crawlspace hiding the entrance. He was now beginning to doubt that it was the *actual* entrance.

“Wait, wait, the entryway that *we* know of isn’t the entrance?” Questioned a perplexed Warpig, pointing to the general direction of where the crawlspace was with his thumb.

“Probably.” Answered Noah. “Y’know, to me, it always seemed more of an exit than an entrance. Think about it; this place hardly resembles a hotel on the inside! It’s a three-story house with a bunch of bedrooms. The outside’s just a facade - made to look unimportant and thus, unsuspecting. The CIA probably only

used this building as a sort of... well, safehouse. Much like how we're using it. I'm still not certain on what purpose the facility serves, though."

Luhki had never really thought too much of the hotel like that. To him, it was just a place to hunker down for a few weeks or, in his case, two years. It was one safehouse he always came back to, mostly because it was in a good part of town and definitely *not* because it had an underground facility hidden behind a keypad-locked fake crawl space that was also hidden in a building made to be inconspicuous! On second thought, this place might've been the best safehouse he had ever found so far. And now was finally the chance to explore what was once inaccessible. With the use of his power, he can make sure that the bombs *never* go off under *any* circumstance. In his opinion, it was the perfect opportunity to pass the time, at least until the storm dies.

"And whatever happened then to make them use one of the bombs may or may not still be down there." Added Nyx. "Then again, we have powers that the CIA doesn't have."

"Let's not underestimate the danger." Said Luhki. "I suggest that those who want to explore the underground get ready to do so. I'm very intrigued by what this place is hiding from us. Afterwards, we'll begin our second hunt for Fevurr. Sound good?"

The crew seemed to be in agreement. They were *all* curious as to what laid beyond the rubble. Primal, Icemantis and Kanya chose to sit this one out. Kanya stated that, if everyone else was going down there, then she would be up here for lookout purposes (and to watch Primal and Icemantis). Luhki went upstairs to one of the bedrooms for a change of clothes, putting on a plain, grey t-shirt, fingerless leather gloves and dark brown pants held together by a leather, black belt. The room he claimed as his own had a bathroom with its own, small shower room, which he tossed his wet clothes in. In fact, all the rooms in this "hotel" had the exact same layout with about the same amount of stuff. Luhki's room had a row of tables up against the walls, with various desktop computers and laptops organized amongst them. Above them, were two windows, of which their blinds were always shut. In the direct opposite of the room, there was only one bed. It used to be a bunk-bed but Luhki cut down the upper half and put it elsewhere in the building.



Organized on the walls were rows of posters, maps, pictures and all sorts of paper. Some were official documents that were once secret to the GHRC, others belonging to various groups that Luhki had an interest in - including Discount's. All of the ones that were on the walls had lines of string planted on them. Most were connected to each other and some points had notes written in marker. It was usually the pictures that had notes, always of important figures in the world - black market individuals included. What all of this meant to Luhki was merely a means of figuring out a bigger picture.

Jack Torrent, Fevurr, the Coalition's Divisions, sightings of demons, Discount, and others, such as the infamous, now defunct, terrorist group that was once led by a duo of unhumans named Iodi and Krasnov. There was even part of the wall that was solely dedicated to figuring out the mysteriousness of the 2016 United States election. Jack won that because all the other candidates and their families went missing, with the blame going to the terrorist group. Many suspected Jack and some still do but he quite literally had a scar that proved his innocence (plus, his story matched, so whatever beliefs people had about Jack causing the disappearances were merely conspiracies). However, even after two years, the investigation into the disappearances of the candidates, along with their families, was *still* ongoing. There was even part of a newspaper pinned up on that section of the wall that contained former President Barack Obama's statement about the investigation.

He basically said that the candidates disappeared overnight, with the families following shortly afterwards. The main head of the investigation was the National Security Agency themselves, with occasional aid from the FBI and CIA. Obama demanded that, because no real evidence had turned up since, they increased their effort. Even the GHRC joined in but they only did it on the suspicion that unhumans were involved. There were but Iodi and Krasnov hid their tracks amazingly well. So well that, when suspicion died down, the Coalition backed out. Luhki feels as if they still have their eyes on it anyways.

*Why wouldn't they? It's the biggest disappearance case the U.S. had ever faced before... and perhaps in history.* Luhki thought before catching himself getting too distracted in his wall of information, so he went back downstairs. Savâge was no longer soaking wet, for had used his powers to dry himself off. He

also did the same to Icemantis, Primal and Warpig, in which they thanked him afterwards.

“Oh, cool, I go to get myself dried off and Savâge does it for everybody else.” Luhki said with a hint of sarcasm, slightly annoyed.

“You didn’t ask.” Savâge responded, which Luhki found himself agreeing with. It wasn’t that much of a big deal.

“That’s true and I’m here anyways, so let’s get started.” He and the rest of the crew that was going went past the fake crawlspace and down to the elevator. Savâge, instead, took the ventilation system downwards by forming into gas again. He met them all in the facility when the elevator doors opened up, with Nyx being the last one to exit.

“Not used to normal sized elevators?” Commented a joking Noah to Nyx as she crawled her way out of it. She quite literally had to crouch in order to properly fit inside it. She’s no stranger to cramped spaces but the Secret Soul Service always had taller door frames, ceilings and whatnot to accommodate her size. It was something she grew up with, along with the fact her clothes were custom-tailored by Dreigenzo himself.

“Getting there.” She sighed as she did a quick stretch. Warpig checked his weapons by forming them from out of his limbs. He knew, from instinct alone, that they were fine but a physical check didn’t hurt. Luhki went to the big, round table and picked up a bandolier strapped full with .45 ACP magazines for his Thompson, which he also picked up and loaded with a full mag from one of the pouches. He put the bandolier on as soon as Noah summoned a bright energy orb and made it hover above himself, this time changing its color from red to green as it was a much brighter color.

### *(Impenetrable Life - Ville Kallio)*

“So where do we go first?” Asked Savâge as he approached Noah.

“Well, we might as well start where Kanya and I left off.” He responded. “This way.” He went straight ahead into the dark halls of the facility as the rest of the group trailed behind him.

“See that bathroom?” Noah pointed out as he passed it. “That’s where we put the now-defused bomb. Got no other place to put it. Don’t really know about the rest of the explosives.”

“I’m sure we’ll figure it out when we get to them.” Luhki acknowledged. “Let’s just see what awaits us at the end.” What laid beyond their expectations already had a foundation - added on by Noah’s and Kanya’s discoveries. They all had different ways of forming theories as to who or what drove the CIA to abandon this facility. Whether that thing was an actual, physical threat or not.

Noah believed that the “threat” had long since passed. Savâge and Kanya both believed the CIA had brought this upon themselves, that whatever they were doing in this place, no matter what it was, would’ve always led to their exodus. Luhki and Warpig believed that there was more to this place than meets the eye, thinking about why exactly the CIA had to hide such a place - to even *construct* it in the first place. Noah’s and Kanya’s “excavation journey” opened up a near limitless amount of questions. The most prominent being just how big this place really was. A seemingly massive and well hidden underground complex hidden beneath a city in New York - and it wasn’t built by the GHRC. Nyx, however, was on the fence about belief at this point. It didn’t really matter much to her - the facility. For all she knew, all of their theories and beliefs could actually be true (one way or the other). As they kept walking down the dark halls, there wasn’t really much to gander at, even with the green orb’s brightness, nothing else was revealed. Just emptiness mixed with their echoing footsteps as they walked the wide hallway.

They turned a corner and passed the break room Kanya had found the notebook in. Noah had pointed it out, like he did the last room. A few stopped to peek in, often repulsing at its putrid stench and continuing on. Nyx, however, took the longest look, her eyes still adjusting to the darkness. With a sigh, she continued following the crew, remarking in her mind that there was at least *one* point of interest so far (though she had a feeling the facility wouldn’t contain much else). If abandoned rooms with skeletons and strange smells was all this place was going to offer, then finding those bombs would be rather easy and Luhki would be right in considering this place as the “perfect safehouse.” The crew thought of this place as strange, not because of what was already discussed about it before, but because of their pre-made perception of what an abandoned facility would contain.

“Y’know, I find it strange that we’ve only found two rooms so far.” Spoke Warpig, no longer containing his excited curiosities. “But I guess if what *we* knew as the entryway is *actually* the exit, then suddenly it’s making a lot more sense.”

The crew had approached a large pile of rubble blocking their way, so they all took this opportunity as a little break before going any further.

“Makes you think about where on the surface the entrance could be.” Warpig continued, crossing his arms.

“One of these hallways may lead to it and by that point, it could be swarming with Coalition soldiers.” Added Kanya with worry, which perplexed the group a little bit. “Look, who knows if the Coalition even knows about this place. However, I *very* much believe that they’ve found the main entrance and are guarding it carefully. Hell, they could be trying to clear the rubble like we are!” “Eh, I’m not too sure about that.” Doubted Noah as he started to set up a laser wall by going to the wall’s corners. By then, everyone had backed up, giving Noah enough space to safely operate. The laser wall had formed and Noah sent it forward to clear the rubble like he did earlier in the day... with a *much* different result this time.

“What the *fuck*...” Kanya said slowly as she was the only one able to see beyond the darkness.

“What do you see?” Warpig asked her, right before Noah sent the green orb forward to illuminate the darkness. The rest of the crew could now see that the area beyond no longer appeared to be a part of the facility but rather, connected to it. The hard floor changed into dead grass and the walls became dirt, with the ceiling being much the same, except without the exposed pipes. Kanya and Noah were the first to walk forward, with everybody else hesitantly following behind. Luhki whistled, while Savâge was confused.

“Is this area unfinished?” He thought out loud as Noah created another laser orb (this one red), sticking it into the hard ceiling of the facility before continuing forward and making the green orb return to its previous state.

“I don’t know, man.” Said Warpig as he noticed stone bricks in the walls and floor, covered in dead overgrowth. “We might’ve just stumbled onto a whole new place entirely.”

“This expedition... I’m not sure if we should even *be* here.” Luhki added, also noticing that the hallway was now ending, merging into a smaller one.

“Dammit...” Nyx sighed as she had to slightly crouch in order to fit in the smaller hallway. The crew then noticed that the hallway they were in had window

sills with moss hanging above them, which didn't appear to lead to anything, just into more overgrowth and darkness. Although it was subtle, it was also becoming harder to breathe, due to lack of air filtration. Kanya scratched some of the grass away on the window sills and noticed that they were covering stone bricks.

"I don't think this area belongs to the CIA guys." Noted Kanya as she wiped the moss off her claws and continued walking, before immediately jumping back with claws at the ready when she heard a loud *crack* under her feet. The crew stared into the source of the noise but were still unsure what exactly it was due to how much dead moss was covering it. Even with the light of the bright, green orb, it was still hard to make out. Kanya, upon closer examination, quickly realized that she had just stepped on a human skull.

"Stepped on a skull - what the *hell*!?" She exclaimed as Warpig stood closer to the somewhat hidden remains of the skeleton. It took a few seconds but he saw that the skeleton was leaning over into one of the windows, as if this person was trying to escape from something below.

"Hey, Noah," said Nyx as she leaned out one of the windows, noticing there was a floor below, "get an orb in here."

"Got it." He responded, making another, red laser orb almost instantly and throwing it onto the floor below like it was a flare. Thus, it was revealed that there were many human skeletons that littered the floor, with some even looking as if they were trying to climb the walls. Few got chills crawling up their spines, while some simply stood in awe at what was assumed to be the aftermath of a battle. Their weapons and armor gave a clue as to how long ago this was. Swords, axes, maces, shields, steel armor and helmets... all now ingrained into the walls, becoming a part of the dead flora - *beyond* restoration. What the crew stumbled into was not just a battlefield but a piece of medieval history.

"Holy SHIT, WOW!" Exclaimed Warpig, nearly raising his arms up in excitement.

"The fuck?!" Exclaimed Kanya as she leaned over the ledge to get a better view, genuinely perplexed at what she was seeing.

"I'd run, too, if I was the CIA and saw this." Said Savâge as he crossed his arms. He couldn't really express it but he was surprised.

“I thought I picked a safehouse, not a massive tomb.” Mumbled Luhki, still trying to piece together the logic of this place. It got him thinking that maybe the CIA had a good reason to do what they did to this place. Yet, despite all this, the unhumans felt a strange sense of familiarity. Not like nostalgia but a feeling of connection and none had this feeling greater than Nyx. She felt more a part of this place than the others and she wasn't sure why. Her anxiety was gradually rising as she was finding it hard to breathe due to her size and how this section of the facility had no ventilation.

“Guys,” Nyx started “I’m having a hard time breathing. I’m gonna head back.”

She turned away from the crew and started walking back from whence she came. However, she stopped suddenly, realizing that no one gave her a response when they usually do... and the fact that the laser orbs suddenly ceased to function. It was pitch black now and Nyx could feel the hairs on her body stick up as her confusion and worry rose.

### (*Chamber of Reflections - Sjellos*)

“Hey, Noah!” She shouted. “The orbs! Summon a-“ She screamed when the entire area erupted in light and Nyx closed her eyes quickly, rubbing them and blinking rapidly to get used to the sudden new brightness. When her vision adjusted, her heart skipped a beat and her expression transformed into dread as she saw Syraux stood where everyone else used to be, for they had simply disappeared.

“I weep.” Syraux spoke, her deep voice echoing throughout the area as Nyx got into a defensive position, fists at the ready as she stared at Syraux in fear. This was something Nyx had experienced a couple of times throughout her life, usually as a mild punishment for misbehavior. This time, however, with her betrayal to the SSS *and* Hell, she didn’t know what her mother would do now.

“You were given to us.” Syraux continued. “You accepted us, even saw Dreigenzo as a father and me as your mother at such a young age.” Syraux’s voice almost sounded strained but it was too vague for Nyx to make out, because she wasn’t really focusing on the Devil’s words.

“You held promise.” Syraux continued. “You had setbacks but improved upon them, becoming the Secret Soul Service’s most trusted agent. The responsibility is mine,” Syraux started to walk towards Nyx, who steadily backed

away, slightly lowering her fists, “you should’ve been given greater details about your role with us. Same with Noah and Kanya.”

“Did you do anything to them - *or to anyone else here!?*” Nyx yelled at her, becoming frustrated as tears started to form.

“They’re healthy as ever. No harm done, of course.” Syraux responded calmly, still keeping her stride. “As are your other acquaintances.”

“Fuck you! *Fuck* you and your ritual!” Nyx barked back, standing her ground. “Guess it won’t work anymore since father needs to have *true love* for us, huh?! What sick fuck sacrifices their own *KIDS?!?*”

Syraux just let out an exasperated sigh.

“It’s always the *‘fuck you...’*” She mumbled, then almost immediately raised her voice even louder than before, which sounded slightly distorted this time.

“You’re not in control, so stop it. You didn’t read correctly. Dreigenzo has the love already - has had it since your childhood.”

This agitated Nyx even more. “The FUCK does that mean?!”

“It means that part of the ritual is completed.” Syraux answered almost instantaneously. This made Nyx’s heart sink as tears rolled down her face. She didn’t want to cry but she couldn’t hold it in any longer.

“You, Kanya and Noah would’ve been granted a chance, however. All of you would’ve been converted into demons but you would also be given the opportunity to fight for your human forms again.”

“Why tell me this now? Wouldn’t it make sense to tell us this *earlier* in our lives - to prepare for it!?” Questioned Nyx, now more puzzled than angry.

“We had considered that.” Answered Syraux, her voice returning to normal, seemingly more relaxed. “However, your father and I came to the conclusion that none of you would cooperate with us if we *were* to tell you. It was too risky to commit, as the original plan was a much smoother option. I have no other choice in what I’ve committed my kind - my *home* - to do. You and your siblings understand this already. However, to emphasize; Dreigenzo still loves you all and it will be a much better life for you and your siblings if you all returned to us now. The seal that binds my realm will inevitably break and I *will* set my demons loose on this planet. It’s better to return to comfort than to stay living in fear, Nyx.”

Nyx stuttered but her words fell into silence. She hated to admit it but Syraux was right.

“Unhumans are vilified. Hated. Feared. There was a time where there was hope for unhumanity but then the GHRC developed their anti-psychic technology. Then, that hope was gone. Now, they all live in this brutal and cruel world, never truly dying - only suffering. You deserve better than that. I know it.”

“I deserve better than dying and being reincarnated in a body I don’t want.” Nyx replied.

“My hands are tied.” Responded Syraux, sternly. *“You. Know. That.”*

Silence fell because Nyx knew the meaning of Syraux’s words. The Devil stopped walking, her white, glowing eyes staring into her daughter’s. They both shared a mental desperation that this would end up in a better outcome but both also held a feeling that it wouldn’t quite end up that way.

“Speak of this to your siblings.” Syraux spoke to break the silence. “You all have forty-two hours to decide. If you don’t return... then you know what will happen.” There was a hint of regret in Syraux’s tone. It was hard to make out but Nyx could hear it. Then, the Devil fell backwards and disappeared into the ground with an abrupt, small burst of green flame that enveloped her. A few seconds later, Nyx would suddenly experience a massive headache and she fell onto her knees, clenching her head as the pain grew. Then, she blacked out, falling face-first into the grass with the light around her shifting back into total darkness.

### *(Interlude - Chromacle)*

The unhumans heard a thud behind them and quickly turned their heads to the source, seeing Nyx lying flat on the ground with almost no movement. Noah & Kanya rushed over to her side, immediately checking her pulse. It was there and at a seemingly normal level, which was a big relief. After this, they, along with the rest of the group, canceled their expedition and carried Nyx back to the elevator. When they arrived back up at the surface, they laid Nyx down on the carpet in the living room where Primal & Icemantis used to be, with Warpig grabbing a pillow and putting it under her head.

“What happened?” Asked a worried Icemantis as she came down from the stairs, with Primal following behind her.



“Nyx passed out, probably because of lack of air filtration.” Answered Savâge. “She’ll be fine, I hope.”

Noah sighed and sat down on the couch, still worried about his sister.

“Damn,” said Primal as he put his hands in his pockets “it got that bad down there, huh? Did any of you find anything?”

“Noah cleared more rubble and we discovered that the facility led to some sort of medieval-looking place.” Said Kanya as she leaned against the wall behind herself, crossing her arms, still looking at Nyx. “Bunch of skeletons covered in dirt and overgrowth. Then Nyx passed out before we went any further.”

“Well, I can finish the expedition for you guys. My helmet’s got a filter and respirator built within, so I’ll be fine.”

“Go right ahead,” said Luhki as he went into the kitchen “we’ll be up here taking care of Nyx.” He started grabbing medical supplies from the cabinets above the stove, along with snacks and other foods since he was getting rather hungry (and assumed the others would be as such).

“Hey, weren’t you & her previously sick on the couch?” Warpig asked Primal & Icemantis as he realized.

“We managed to recover while y’all were gone.” Answered Primal.

“I thought it would’ve taken a bit longer - not that I’m not complaining.” Added Icemantis. “Oh, and Primal? I’m not gonna come with you. I may feel better but this suit doesn’t have any filters as far as I’m aware.”

“Okay, that’s fine.” He responded as he started heading down the stairs and towards the elevator. “I’ll be back with all sorts of artifacts for y’all.” He said somewhat jokingly as he entered the elevator. It got a chuckle out of Noah & he shook his head in response.

## **CHAPTER NINE:**

### **The Erebus Exodus.**

**THEME: Life - Nine Inch Nails**

Primal made it to the part of the facility where the crew stopped. He was standing at the exact spot where it merged with the overgrowth and ventured forward. His helmet had built-in night vision but only in red. At this point, it was something he was used to. He then made it to the windows that overlooked the area below, seeing that Noah's laser orb was still active. In fact, the orbs that Noah set in place earlier were as such, which made it easier for Primal to know exactly where the crew stopped. However, from this point on, he was headed towards uncharted territory.

His helmet couldn't detect any lifeforms nearby, so it was safe to say that this area had none to speak of. It made sense to Primal, as this area was once completely sealed off. So, if anything *did* live here, they would've been dead by now. Plus, the helmet was rarely ever wrong and Primal found whatever information it gave to be incredibly trustworthy. Still, it didn't help beat the suspicion that something could *potentially* live here, even after all this time (whether it was hostile or not). So, Primal kept his guard up just in case and continued forward.

Walking down the narrow hallway, he found that it turned left into another hallway of the same architecture. This one, however, had piles of rocks pushed up against the wall, remnants of the windows that once stood. Primal assumed that an explosion must have caused this. The medieval times did have explosives & powerful weaponry, such as cannons but Primal couldn't find any when he looked down on the floor beneath. If there was a cannon, then it must have been destroyed and/or buried.

This theory was quickly dismissed as Primal searched for the cannonball near what would be the epicenter of its impact, yet found zilch. His helmet then picked up toxic particles in the air, which caused it to instantly activate its respirator subroutines, causing Primal's integrated mask to fully seal. The area

around his neck tightened, too, as to not let any particles slip through. This didn't bother him, though, as it wasn't *too* tight.

Continuing forward, Primal turned right and then left, finding himself in a large room that had a pit in the center, with no bridge to speak of. Looking up, there was what seemed to be an incredibly old lantern that was still being held up by rusty chains ingrained into the ceiling. It seemed as if it was ready to fall at any minute. Across the open & deep pit, was a doorway that led into the next room. So, Primal backed up as far as he could, ran and jumped over the pit, using his powers to propel himself upwards as he floated across, landing right in front of said doorway. Then, he became curious and decided to look into the pit to see just how deep it was. Thanks to the night-vision, Primal could see the pit's end, gazing upon the broken bridge that once stood long ago, with the shattered remains of human skeletons all over it. Primal whistled in amazement and continued his journey, heading past the doorway. He noted that the overgrowth seemed to be less and less frequent as he continued forward through this strange place. He also noticed what seemed to be several metal objects mounted on the wall, which he quickly figured out to be mounts for torches. The room up ahead would surprise him the most, though.

"This..." he began as he stepped out of the hallway and onto a slope that led downwards, the floor now being revealed to be made of smoothed, yet hard stone "...is fucking wild." He finished, his voice barely echoing as he analyzed this new room. It was large just like the last one but much longer and became more narrow as it went further. The biggest standout of this room was the dark-brown water beneath, which was what the slope led towards. Jumping-distance away was a platform that acted as a bridge into the next room, still made out of that same stone. Primal hovered towards it, taking some time to crouch beside the water and having the helmet analyze it. To say it was dirty was an understatement.

*It seems that the only lifeforms in this place are of the micro scale.* Primal thought before standing up again and looking to his left, staring at the doorway ahead. With a sigh, he continued. This was going to be the last room he explored before calling it a day.

As Primal ventured forward into the hallway, he noticed that it suddenly became darker with each step he took. He increased his night-vision's brightness

and gain but to no avail. When it became too dark, Primal decided it was best to disable his night-vision, summoning a bright, light source in his hand that acted as a torch. He found it confusing the amount of turns he was taking in this hallway. Left, right, left, right, then straight ahead for another two minutes before making another right and left towards a straight path again. What was stranger still, was how clean the walls, floor and ceiling were gradually becoming - as if they were being maintained. Then, Primal had made it to the end of the hallway, emerging into a medium-sized, square room with the most mysterious object on the far end of the room. It looked like a large coffin but it was made of metal and was open wide, its insides containing nothing but what looked like stars that dimly lit up the room. On each side of the room, adjacent to the unusual device, were other large metal objects.

However, these ones were shaped like diamonds and didn't seem to open at all. On each center of these objects was a faintly glowing symbol Primal had never seen before. To him, it looked like an eye crossed with a sun. What these objects had in common was that they all touched the ceiling, so Primal was left guessing as to how they even got here in the first place. He had decided to drop his torch in the middle of the room, pulling out his phone to take pictures of the entire room and all its details, just so his curiosities could be shared with the others. He silently remarked that he should've taken pictures of the rooms before but it didn't matter, because he was gonna head back the way he came anyway. Turning his phone off, he turned back to the hallway but abruptly stopped himself when the helmet briefly detected a lifeform up ahead.

"Uhh, what?" Primal questioned, immediately raising his guard. The helmet *never* glitches as it wasn't a computer, so why it did *that* greatly perplexed him. The helmet informed him that the information brought upon him was not false. There *was* a lifeform - if only for a second.

"That doesn't make sense." Said Primal as he prepared himself, purple energy surging around his arms and into the palm of his hands. He backed up and stayed in the room directly next to the torch that he put down. However, he could see in his peripheral vision that it was starting to flicker. It grabbed his attention when he realized that its pattern wasn't random. If only he knew morse code. Primal took this as a sign of an ambush.

*Been ambushed before. These scare-tactics are useless.* Primal thought as he kept his calm, maintaining his focus on the hallway as he pointed his hands towards the darkness, ready to unleash his power on whoever was stalking him. He could hear the faint hum of the gate behind him, which sounded almost mystical. Primal did *not* want to know what would happen if he stepped inside it, so he got into a position that reinforced his stance.

Then he heard the sound of a chilling chuckle echo throughout the hallway and his vision suddenly changed the way it perceived colors. The color of blue and yellow were now dominating the others and Primal felt slightly dizzy. The helmet informed him that he was being psychically attacked but resisted a majority of its damage. Still, neither of them could properly make out who or what the attacker was. Suddenly, Primal heard a ringing in both of his ears, similar to that of tinnitus. Then he was flung into the attacker by an unknown, yet tremendous force. He was forcefully stopped by his enemy when he was a foot away and was flung back to his original position with the same amount of force. Apparently, he hadn't moved at all but the attacker made it appear as such. As if his very soul was torn out of his own body and forced back in. It all happened in under a second. During which, Primal's thoughts were briefly crowded with horrific, disturbing imagery. It shook him off balance, causing him to prematurely discharge his own attack into the ground.

He stumbled into the wall next to the doorway, gripping onto the corner as he started to have a splitting headache. His eyes were burning and he blinked rapidly as he felt wounds forming from them, covering the old ones. He couldn't even tell what his attacker looked like, with the only feature he made out being their vaguely humanoid appearance. The yellow and blue of his vision became overwhelming as he heard them giggle at his suffering, which made him furious. In response, Primal summoned a ball of purple energy in his left hand and peaked into the hallway where his attacker was. For a good few seconds, he saw what they actually looked like. A humanoid figure wearing ancient medieval armor, their skin color was muted, which matched the dusty and rotting grey of their armor. Their skin seemed sunken in, ready to fall off at a moment's notice. Primal heard the ringing again and fired off a powerful soul bolt directly at the enemy just in time, blowing their right arm completely off. They shrieked in agony and fell face-first,

clutching their now bleeding wound as hard as they could. Primal then rushed in, energy blade at the ready.

They were squirming, curling into the fetal position before Primal held their neck against the ground and stabbed the energy blade through their head. Any noises that they were making suddenly stopped and Primal breathed easy as he stood straight again. His vision returned to normal and his mind relaxed, staring at the corpse of this medieval unhuman, whose blood was a muted pink. Primal could feel a slight, painful tinge on both his eyelids and he blinked rapidly. The aftermath of being psychically attacked. He knew how to take care of it, though - if only he could even take off the helmet, his eyes were starting to get irritated.

He looked back at the device and saw that its mystical properties were now gone as if it just shut itself off. Primal decided that he had seen enough and promptly began to leave and return to the crew. However, just before he did, he took pictures of the medieval unhuman and of the rooms he hadn't taken pictures of with his phone.

On his way back, Primal finally contemplated what he had just experienced. "Medieval zombies?" He exclaimed to himself as he looked at the photos of the unhuman he had just slain. He assumed them to be a zombie but, in a world like this, they very much *could* be one. Much like how demons differ a *lot* compared to their religious counterparts, zombies could differ from their fictitious counterparts. Still, the question of how such a person was able to live that long confused Primal the most. Considering that they used psychic attacks, Primal assumed that part of their power kept them alive that long. The more disturbing factor was their giggle as they attacked him, which proved that they still had cognizance - even after all that time.

Plus, in order to even use psychic powers properly, one had to maintain an above-average intelligence. For unhumans, however, this wasn't a problem as most psychics automatically gained the required intelligence at age thirteen, no matter their experiences thus far. However, this didn't mean that they *weren't* immune to other psychics draining their own intellect. This fact alone made psychics the most powerful of all unhumans, as one could simply force people's brains to revert back into their primal selves (or, as a more common tactic, make them braindead).

Despite that, it didn't stop the GHRC from doing what they did. They simply adapted to all kinds of unhumans, outfitting their soldiers in advanced armors that gave them resistances to all kinds of unhuman attacks. No one knows how they managed to find a resistance against psychics, because, at the time, only fellow psychics could resist each other. It was because of this development, that the GHRC dominated the unhumans and as such, allowed them to have unlimited access to all corners of the Earth. Many nations wouldn't have liked that and some still don't but the Coalition proved that it was necessary for the Earth's survival, so they allowed it. The Coalition was originally formed by the United Nations but became independent soon after the development of their new armors.

They are the biggest and most powerful military organization known to man, with divisions for each continent. They are unbound - unrestricted by laws set by *anyone*. Such an organization would've fallen a long time ago had it not been for their founder, who, to this day, still leads the GHRC. Known only as The Founder, his leadership alone demands respect from each and every one of his soldiers, agents, scientists and representatives. It is through his actions and vigorous training that every person working for the Coalition respects the law of whatever nation they're in (but that doesn't mean they *have* to follow them). Many have speculated as to whether or not The Founder is a psychic unhuman himself but that was more of a joke theory, if anything. A joke shared by fellow unhumans on Web-Beneath, as a way to cope with their current living conditions, somehow finding an ounce of comfort knowing that, at the very least, an unhuman was responsible for all this.

Primal sighed deeply, clearing his thoughts as he had now made it back to the elevator. He gazed at the rubble blocking the other hallways, wondering if they, too, contained ancient medieval ruins with ambushing psychics waiting for who knows how long for a potential victim. The pain in his eyes from earlier was now gone, because at this point in his life, Primal was used to being psychically attacked. Even then, no one could see the wounds due to his helmet.

Primal's psychic powers came from his helmet. Even before he discovered it, from his toddler years until age fourteen, he *felt* unhuman. Regrettably, he wished that he hadn't killed the medieval unhuman but it was either his life, or theirs. In his eyes, they were an intelligent zombie, hostile to anyone but themselves. Thus, Primal felt it was necessary to put an end to their presumed

misery. All for the sake of his own survival. Before pondering too much on the matter, Primal pressed the elevator button, leaned back on the wall and watched as the doors closed.

“Just another day.” He commented to himself as a way to rest his nerves, putting his hands in his pockets as the elevator went up. He was starting to relate to what Icemantis said hours ago, about how she felt that they had to quickly move to the next objective without a break - how she suddenly found herself in a save-the-world scenario. No one wishes for such a thing, as the burden was heavy enough. Primal didn't feel like wasting time though, because who really knows just how close Syraux is to collecting the artifacts and starting the ritual? It *could* happen at any moment and that is what scared Primal the most.



## **CHAPTER TEN:**

### **Acid Drip.**

#### **THEME: Fresh Air - Anesthesia**

Nyx slowly woke and stood up, briefly seeing stars as her body started to adjust back to normality.

“Oh, thank fuck!” Said her relieved brother on the couch beside her. She stared past him, wondering if she should actually deliver Syraux’s words.

“You fell *hard*! I was starting to worry, y’know?” Noah held a brief chuckle before realizing why Nyx had a thousand-yard stare. Then his expression immediately changed to one of dread.

“Oh. Oh, no, no...” The hairs on Noah’s body started to stand up straight in response to the goosebumps. What he saw on Nyx was something he had seen before. Faded markings were vaguely seen under her eyes like scars. They were still noticeable, despite being small. The aftermath of a psychic attack. The difference, however, was that these markings were green instead of the usual fleshy pink.

“Did she..?” Noah asked her, desperately wanting ‘no’ as an answer, despite his brain *knowing* that wasn’t going to be the case.

“Yeah. She did.” Nyx responded solemnly. Noah exhaled a short breath of anxiety, he couldn’t even bring himself to stay sitting, so he started to pace around the room.

“What did she say?” He asked her again, to which a hesitant Nyx struggled to deliver the answer. She could hear Syraux’s voice echoing in her head, replaying that moment over and over again.

“Forty-eight hours.” Nyx repeated, staring at Noah’s eyes. “That’s how long she’ll wait for us to return. If we don’t, then we’re marked hostile.”

“Okay..?” Noah was confused by this. “Well, they’ll have no luck completing the-”

Nyx interrupted him. “No. No! Syraux explained to me that we’re no longer needed. They already have what they need from us. So, all that’s left for them is

searching for the items. Syraux proposes that we return, because... well, I hate to agree but it's safer there than it is here."

Noah started to speak but Nyx continued.

"They deliberately left out a significant detail about our part in the ritual. I... I don't think it's right but she confirmed that we would still be alive by the end of it. They didn't tell us that because... we'd freak out too much."

"Are you-" Noah started before letting out a stress-filled chuckle, realizing that she was right. "That- oh my *god*..." He was shocked, so much so that he stopped in his tracks and sat back down on the couch, contemplating.

"I mean, what *do* we do? I know it's not *all* of Hell but there's still Triple-S and the Coalition and other bullshit that we have to deal with now!"

Nyx was silent. Noah's optimism staggered for that moment as he fought back tears. The two of them knew just how powerful the Secret Soul Service is, mainly because they're backed up by Hell. Both didn't know what to say but they both knew they couldn't return to the Secret Soul Service.

"We have to tell the others." Noah told Nyx, to which she nodded in agreement. The rest of the crew were upstairs, in Luhki's room, discussing in great detail and excitement over what Primal saw during his expedition. They crowded around him, looking in awe at the images he had taken from his phone. As the siblings entered, everyone was relieved to see Nyx awake and seemingly healthy again. Some commented on the scars on her eyes, with Primal immediately identifying them as psychic wounds. That's when Nyx told everyone what happened to her when she was rendered unconscious, even telling them that they won't return to the SSS. Luhki and Warpig wanted to say something but they couldn't find any words, so they just continued to listen. Savâge was surprised, not only at that but at Syraux's actions. Now he has a somewhat clearer picture of who exactly Syraux is. Primal was much the same, albeit a little more worried. If they want to find Fevurr, they need to do it *now*. Kanya was the most devastated of the group, with her and Icemantis asking the most questions, mainly about the logistics and reasoning behind Syraux's actions. They knew that Nyx didn't have the answers but Kanya felt she *needed* them. Once the acceptance settled in, she leaned against the wall with a heavy sigh, no longer speaking.

“So, just to reconfirm,” spoke Luhki, breaking the silence “you all are not going back, right?”

“Of course we aren’t.” Answered Noah. “At this point, we’re too far in our mission to go back. Even if we did, I don’t think things would be the same.”

“Syraux seems like she’s betting that none of you will return.” Said Savâge after some consideration. “With all of you gone, she, along with Dreigenzo, are definitely going to try and accelerate their plans.”

“We need to hurry with ours, then.” Regarded Luhki. “If only we weren’t stumped...”

“Yeah, we’re grasping at straws if neither we nor the GHRC know about Fevurr’s whereabouts.” Commented Warpig. “Maybe if the black market boogeyman himself were to *actually help*, then we’d probably be on his trail by now!” He seemed rather irritated that Discount wasn’t providing much input when it came to this.

“Y’know, that’s a good fuckin’ idea.” Primal realized as he pulled out his phone. “Hold on...” That’s when he saw the text that Discount sent him, which was sent a few seconds ago. “Uhh, he said ‘I’m coming up the stairs.’ Did he actually..?” Primal let his words trail as he and the rest of the crew heard footsteps coming up the stairs. They could see a cloaked figure walk past the window by the stairs, revealing themselves to be Discount himself, as evident by the green diamond on his chest and the patterned, yellow stripes on his black clothing. Even as he approached, it was still hard to see his face, thanks to his hood obscuring it.

“You all reached nothing. So, you need help.” He began, the crew now having their eyes fixated on him. They were bewildered as to how Discount got inside, for they didn’t hear the door open *at all*. Primal and Noah less so, as they had an idea for what his power was. “Fevurr is more cunning than I thought he was. He’s not alone.” Discount continued as he stopped in front of the doorway to Luhki’s room. “I’ve contacted many of my members in New York and the surrounding states to be on the lookout for Fevurr, providing them all the necessary details about him. I also told them of the developments that all of you have made. You are all gradually becoming more popular in my faction, so try not to disdain it while you still have the help.” He reached into his left pocket and pulled out an unmarked tablet with a case similar to the one on Primal’s phone.

“Fevurr, without a doubt, has a phone on him. He’s disabled its cellular data manually but it occasionally switches back on when near a cell tower. We’ve picked up a few pings in various cities over the past few hours, so searching these locations for him should ease your search.”

“A few in various cities?” Repeated a confused Noah. “Are you sure he just doesn’t have multiple devices?”

“No. That’s why they’re worth checking out.” Discount answered. “The pings in question are still in New York state. One is here, in Ephemeral, in the Dust, strangely. The other close ones are in Brooklyn, near Ocean Hill, Manhattan, near the Battery, one near the center of the White Plains and one in Queens, near St. John’s University. There are two other pings, both of which are on Long Island - one in Northport and the farthest being in Montauk. Set up who will go to these locations, use this tablet as a point of reference.” He handed over the tablet to Noah, who took it and looked at the already-pulled-up map with green markers signifying said locations.

“Wait, wait, wait.” Began Warpig, to which he had Discount’s full attention. “You can’t just suddenly appear in our house and drop this shit on us without *telling us first*. Hell, if Primal didn’t read your text first we would’ve shot you!”

“You wouldn’t have.” Stated Discount, though his voice was seemingly monotone in sound, there was a slight hint of assurance.

“Regardless,” continued Warpig “how the hell did you get in?”

“I’ve been following Primal ever since I tasked him, Kanya and Icemantis to search for Luhki.” He explained. “When I discovered the safehouse, I entered it and have been here ever since.”

“Well, that explains why the doors were unlocked when we arrived.” Primal noted, a bit surprised.

“I *seriously* need to tighten my fucking security. I, apparently, have backdoors!” Said a somewhat annoyed Luhki, crossing his arms.

“You’re a frequent Web-Beneath user. Hide your data better.” Added Discount, which got a slight chuckle out of Warpig and Icemantis.

“Anyways,” he continued “as a reward for all that has been accomplished so far, I have brought an appropriate amount of unmarked, custom phones for all of you to use.” As he finished his sentence, as if it was directly on que, a grey duffle

bag instantly manifested itself into reality near Discount's feet. He shoved it closer to the crew with his foot and Nyx picked it up with one hand, setting it on the bed behind Savâge and unzipping it. Inside were not only phones but other types of equipment as well. Compact first-aid kits, slings and harnesses, ammunition and, of course, the phones themselves. There were also clothes but these were too big for any normal person. They, however, were a *perfect* fit for Nyx. She was a bit excited to finally get some new clothes and immediately took them and headed into the bathroom to change.

"Yep. Mine!" She said happily as she closed the door behind her in a rush to change out of her filthy clothes at last.

"Heh, well, thanks." Said Noah to Discount as he got a phone out. "It doesn't matter the phone we choose, right?"

Discount shook his head no. "It has come pre-installed with many Dark Mark apps and services. Keep. Them. Close." He emphasized. "Communication is important for this mission. I highly advise setting out when the Sweeping is over."

"That will take, at minimum, a day." Spoke Savâge as he started customizing his new phone already. "Plus, this storm is still just as heavy as it was hours ago."

Warpig whistled, amazed at just how large the storm was when he viewed it on his new phone's weather app.

"Man, check this out!" He held the phone out to everyone so they could see the screen. Ephemeral City was completely engulfed in an incredibly large red circle. By the looks of it, they were all in the center of the storm, with its length also covering Manhattan and Long Island, along with partially covering New Jersey and Connecticut. It didn't completely engulf New York but it was a shock to the crew to see that it was all just *red*. Constant heavy rain and thunderstorms mixed with unusually high winds that have spread onto two other states? Definitely the work of an unhuman.

"Because of *that*, the SSS are playing the waiting game just as we are." Noted Kanya as she grabbed her new phone. Due to her claws, it was slightly difficult to use, even with the screen protector. "Still, plenty of time to plan, huh?"

"Correct." Answered Discount as he put his hands behind his back. "When the storm dies and the Sweeping ends, I will have my closest contacts to go to

these locations and scout them out. When either of you head to these locations, meet up with them. I'm sure you'll know what'll happen next."

"Okay!" said Nyx as she emerged from the bathroom, now wearing a grey, plain shirt with long sleeves and black pants held tightly by a dark-brown belt. The outfit itself was seemingly made for long journeys, as evident by its many pockets and with how comfortable it felt. "What next?"

"Figuring out who goes where." Primal responded, deciding not to get a phone due to already having one. He then looked over at the tablet Discount set down earlier. "There's, uhh, seven locations and eight of us. It'd be best if we hit these locations at once. That way, when we do find Fevurr, we can, hopefully, corner him. So, who wants what?" Primal asked the group and it took a while before everybody settled on who goes where. Ultimately, it was decided that Kanya and Warpig go to White Plains together, Savâge to Manhattan, Icemantis to the Dust, Primal to Queens, Nyx to Brooklyn, Luhki to Northport and Noah to Montauk.

Ephemeral City borders Connecticut, also being close to Playland Park and Long Island. The Dust, White Plains and Northport are likely going to be the locations done first. Discount later explained that, once the Sweeping is over, he'll have the crew be individually picked up in vehicles driven by other Dark Mark members, effectively giving them a taxi to their respective locations. Since having the crew be picked up at the same location would be too suspicious, they would instead be picked up at a designated place in the local area at different times. The crew questioned just how exactly they were going to do that due to most of them looking too much like an unhuman. Discount explained that he'll use his powers to disguise them. Although they'd appear visible, no one else will take notice of them, as if they're unaware. Since the storm was still raging, the crew took the remaining time to properly set up their new phones, which already had the numbers of every other phone, just without names. Once they were named, the crew studied the areas they assigned themselves to quite well. Since the locations of the pings happened inside buildings, usually in hotels, they seemed much easier to deal with since they were not outside. The one exception, however, being at the Dust, which seemed to have pinged within its park.

When the Sweeping is over, It's likely that Fevurr, the SSS and the crew are going to be making their move at the exact same time. Most had a feeling that they'd figure out just how exactly Fevurr was able to be in multiple, far-away locations in just under a few hours. Savâge felt a bit relieved that now they actually have an idea of where to find Fevurr, instead of scrambling inside outposts and defense stations on a whim that there *might* be information. Even if someone doesn't find him at one location, there'd at least be some evidence as to what he was doing before he left. Nevertheless, the crew prepared themselves for such a mission, recognizing that now they *all* work for Dark Mark. Discount explained that he would remain at the safehouse, keeping watch on it and making sure contact between each member of the crew was still established. With nothing else to do, the crew decided to rest. Luhki stayed in his room, on his computer, changing his security on the internet and Web-Beneath to be much safer (and with less backdoors, this time). Icemantis, Kanya, Primal, Nyx and Noah decided to pick a room to be theirs, since this "hotel" still had unoccupied ones. They didn't have much of anything to customize their rooms with but Luhki told them "Hey, don't get too comfortable. This place is still a safehouse, not a permanent residence. If you do want to decorate it, that's completely fine. Just be prepared to make a sudden escape if shit hits the fan, okay?"

Primal then provided a satirical comment. "I'll be sure to decorate my room like a government conspiracist, then!"

"Fuck you." Luhki said lightly.

Primal then closed his door with a smirk, heading straight to the bed on the far side of the room. It was next to the closet, which after opening its sliding doors, Primal wasn't surprised to see it empty. The bed itself was comfortable to lay in, though it looked like it belonged in a military base due to its somewhat small shape and metal frame. The cloth of the bed, blanket and long pillow offset this seemingly uncomfortable look. The rooms of this building had a similar layout; semi-compact, one closet and a bathroom with a shower. They all had the same wall color, too, a very light aquamarine. With the floors being wooden.

"Wait till he realizes that's the one without a drawer..." Luhki whispered over to Icemantis. Then a muffled "You've gotta be fucking kidding" was heard and the two unhumans shared a brief laughter.

Kanya picked a room (a downstairs one, near the staircase and kitchen) and immediately crashed into bed, face-first. She sighed heavily into the pillow as she realized that they won't have any clothes for tomorrow... nor for the days after that. Kanya's room was the only one without a window, strangely enough. To her, it didn't matter much, because her room back at the SSS HQ was just as minimal in appearance, like she kept it as is the day she got it. She'll likely do the same with this one.

Both Nyx and Noah picked a room on the third floor, with theirs being across from each other. Both used this downtime to customize their phones a little more, with Noah then taking his laser rifle and setting it inside the closet.

"Hmmm..." he began thinking to himself as he stared at the leaning rifle. "Maybe I'll give it to someone." He concluded as he closed the door and went straight to bed. Nyx then went downstairs and to the duffle bag, grabbing one of the first-aid kits and heading back into her room's bathroom, taking her clothes off and setting them on the sink countertop. Slowly she unwinded the dirty bandages on herself, wincing a bit due to the slight pain. Her wounds were recovering greatly, as they didn't nearly look as bad as they were hours ago. They weren't swelling but she decided to take a cold shower with her open wounds anyway, as it would constrict her blood flow to those areas, reducing the chances of swelling and inflammation. She was taller than the showerhead itself, so she took it off and held it above her head as she just stood with her eyes closed, letting out an exasperated sigh as water drenched her body.

She noticed that the shower itself didn't hold any shampoo or conditioner products. Considering that this room wasn't previously occupied by anyone, there was no need for such. It still irritated Nyx. "This day... fuck it." She said to herself as she clutched her own hair.

Icemantis' room is the closest to the staircase, being on the second floor with Luhki's, Primal's and Warpig's. Closing the door, she pressed the small button on her suit's eyes and it opened up from the back, air whooshing out as she took off the suit, naked once again. The sound of the whooshing took her back to the many times she'd be taken out of the cryo pod for further experimentation. The experiments themselves weren't cruel in the slightest. If anything, they were more like training sessions than experiments. Icemantis remembered when she kept



asking and begging to no longer be kept in the cryo pod, wanting to instead stay out and continue socializing. Sometimes, her requests were granted and other times, they weren't. Icemantis then folded up her suit and put it beside her bed. Then she walked into her bathroom and stared at herself in the mirror, seeing the ice covering her naked body and the mantis features she had gained by being an experiment. She gently stroked her long antennae and touched her mouth, remembering the exact day she got them. It was 2015, the same year she volunteered. She emerged from the cryo pod for the very first time, almost panicking at the sight of her new features. In the midst of her confusion, Dreigenzo told her something that she would then always remember.

"If you do not accept this new part of yourself, then you will fall. Just remember that neither we nor you did this. *You* volunteered. *We* put the gene in you, then the gene *itself* decided your power - which seemingly came with an appearance change!" Dreigenzo could see Icemantis' expression of dejection and sighed.

"It's difficult, I know." He let out a brief chuckle as he started to briefly reminisce. "Reminds me of when I first got *my* powers." He held his hand out as if he was holding something, then a scimitar formed out of thin air and into his grip. Icemantis was taken aback, not expecting Dreigenzo to be unhuman. "It was short-lived, though." He dispersed the scimitar. "Syraux unlocked my full power as if I was a normal unhuman. That's the thing you and I got between us, y'know? We were injected with the gene, not born with it like everybody else. However, you, uhh... have to *train* to properly use it. I know this because, for that short period of time before I met her, I didn't know *jack shit* about my power! Afterwards... I knew everything. It used to be that I could only summon shivs and nasty-looking daggers but now I can summon swords of *unbelievable* quality without even thinking! That became a part of me as much as the ice on your body is now a part of you."

Icemantis didn't know what to say but the last part stuck out to her the most.

"I volunteered because I didn't know what to do anymore." She responded in a somewhat raspy voice, still recovering from being in cryo stasis for a few months. "After my uncle and dad, I..." She paused, not knowing how to continue her words.

“Okay, well...” Dreigenzo said, breaking the silence “...take your freezing hands off my laptop.”

Present Icemantis snickered, then sighed. She headed back towards her bed and wrapped herself in the blanket, trying to fall asleep. Eventually, the ambient emptiness of the room, along with the rain, caused her to fall into a deep sleep in the midst of her thoughts.

When the night passed, the storm subsided quickly, as if its root cause was finally put to rest, or it simply stopped like any other. The Sweeping resumed and, at this point, the crew decided to not take any chances and headed back down into the facility to hide. Eight anxiety-induced hours later, it stopped. The majority of the Coalition forces that entered New York state went back to whence they came after the Sweeping was done. In that period of time, the crew could occasionally hear rumbling that echoed throughout the facility, coming from outside. It happened at seemingly random intervals, with varying degrees of power but nothing too dangerous. Discount said he could use his powers to conceal this place but the crew all agreed that it was potentially risky during a time like this. What if they steamroll over the safehouse with a tank, or blow up the whole block? That’d make the concealment useless. The GHRC is intelligent and unbound, they would use any method necessary to take out unhumans, or *suspected* unhumans - including extreme methods.

After the Sweeping was over, the crew headed back up, relieved that the safehouse was still intact. It was midday and New York was open once more and back to business as usual (with Ephemeral City now having power again). New York’s police were now back in charge of the state’s safety and the unhumans made one final preparation for their biggest mission yet. They all dressed appropriately for the occasion. All of them were wearing the slings provided with medium-sized pouches attached to them, of which the pouches had the compact first-aid kits inside. Discount, using his tablet, sent out a message to his assigned drivers as soon as the crew was prepared. This gave them the signal to drive to the locations provided to pick up their respective crew members. The crew themselves were all in the living room, prepared as ever and anxiously awaiting their turn to go.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN: Twisted Animator**

### **Theme: *Alive - Daft Punk***

“Kanya, Warpig,” began Discount after receiving the first message from their driver “head out now.” He then sent their phones a message that had the driver’s location attached, along with a picture of the vehicle. It was a dark-green SUV, similar to the one Luhki drove the day before. The driver was parked in a store’s parking lot not too far from the stadium.

“Stay safe, Warpig.” Said Luhki from the kitchen.

“Hey, we got the minds and powers.” Responded a confident Warpig. “We got this.”

Luhki smirked, believing it to be true. They had done numerous missions like these in the past but this one, compared to the others, provided a sense of urgency. The three siblings shared a brief hug before Kanya followed Warpig out the door, stepping into the sunlight on a rather sunny day with clear skies, the ground still wet from the rain. There weren’t many people out, even after the Sweeping. Soldiers, less so. Warpig looked at his phone and the message he got from Discount, informing him of where exactly their driver was.

“Driver’s down a few blocks. Green SUV.” He informed Kanya as they both turned right and went down the sidewalk. There was a person heading down their way but she was oblivious of both Kanya and Warpig - like they weren’t there at all. Even though it was Discount’s power that protected them, Kanya still felt tense as the lady passed by them both. After turning a corner, the two unhumans saw the dark-green SUV parked near the sidewalk, its engine still running. Warpig knocked on the passenger-side door and the driver rolled down the dark window, glancing at them both with a skeptical look.

“Hey, Discount’s driver,” began Kanya. “You know who we are.”

“Yeah, the description matches.” He replied, feeling a slight sense of relief. “Get in.”

The driver unlocked the doors and the unhumans entered the car, both sitting in the back seat. The driver locked the doors and took off the emergency brakes

and was about to put the car in drive but another, much louder knock came from the passenger's side.

"Roll the window down." Said a lone GHRC soldier. The driver sighed calmly, while both Kanya and Warpig tensed up at the sight of the soldier as the window went down. Warpig himself prepared for the worst, balling his hands into a fist as seam lines formed on his arms as he paid close attention to the soldier.

"What's the problem, mate?" The driver asked, both hands on the steering wheel.

"Making sure you were the one that actually opened this car's door." She responded. "It seemed off from my perspective. Didn't see a hand reach out to close it."

"I did close it - from the inside." This was the best response the driver could offer, as he saw no way to squirm out of this situation with words alone.

"You fucking liar." The soldier responded as she raised their shotgun up, a kitted-out Benelli M4, to be visible. "If you closed it like that, a hand would've been visible. Plus, you're still in your seatbelt and the time it took me to be here after I saw the door close was three seconds."

Neither knew what to do about the soldier. They could drive away but that'd make her call in others to chase after them, something they all knew they couldn't get away from. The last resort was to kill her and hope no other is around to see it. With quick thinking, Warpig raised his right arm towards the soldier. Out from the seam lines formed a long-barrelled coil gun, which seemed alien in nature. Warpig then shot the soldier with it and it made a thunderous sound, the projectile penetrating through her visor and exploding out the back of their head, blood and brains gushing out as she crashed into the sidewalk, due to the tremendous force.

"FUCKING DRIVE!" Exclaimed Warpig as the driver immediately shifted the gear into drive and stepped on the gas, rolling the window up, too, for good measure. The traffic was a lot lighter than usual, so speeding off wasn't a difficult task. The driver, after a few minutes, had to slow down to the speed limit as they neared a traffic light and the three breathed a sigh of relief.

"Warpig, what the fuck!?" Yelled an angry Kanya as she looked at him, the driver stopping in front of the red light.

“Hey, that saved our lives!” He immediately responded, feeling slightly offended. “I’d rather deal with one soldier than... well, any more than that!”

“Alright, settle down, you two!” The driver said as he pulled his phone out from his shirt’s pocket. “I’m not gonna take any chances, so I’m asking Discount for some extra protection.” He sent a quick text to him, of which it read only two words, “PROTOCOL: MARINE.” Four seconds after that, a response read “granted” and the driver put his phone back into his shirt’s pocket as he turned it off.

“Okay, the car’s got the same protection as you guys. It won’t last, though.”

This information sounded sketchy to Kanya. “Wait, wait, why couldn’t he have done that before?”

The driver responded with a quick answer, much to her surprise, as the light turned green and he drove straight. “You two got psychic protection. Now, that’s also applied to this car. Because of that, there’s now a psychic concentration that the Coalition can detect. There’s a good amount of that going around and we’re emitting only a small level of it. If we’re lucky, we’ll go undetected.”

“You said it won’t last, so how long will it last?” Asked Warpig as the gauss rifle on his arm formed back inside his body and the seam lines disappeared.

“Right about now.” The driver responded as he turned the left turn signal on and stopped at a stop sign. “The license plate just changed, so even if we do get suspected by the Coalition, they’d be out of luck.” He turned left, entering a more busy side of the city. They needed to pass by Playland Park to get to White Plains, which was thankfully a few miles up ahead. They drove on Playland Parkway, then got onto I-95 without any issues, then eventually coming onto I-287, continuing straight towards White Plains. Warpig made a comment about how expensive Playland’s tickets were as they drove past the park and Kanya noted how Rye seemed less populated than usual, as the traffic was light, likely because of the Sweeping. The drive to White Plains was somewhat quiet, then Kanya asked the driver something.

“Hey, did you scout the building?”

“No.” He responded. “Someone else did. You’ll be working with him from then on. He’s wearing all-silver and is albino. You’ll see.” After ten minutes, the traffic started to pick up but they had all made it to White Plains at last. They got

off I-287, passing by a dental office and a few GHRC soldiers, driving down the street until the driver parked at the entrance to an apartment.

“I’ll be parked out on the street. He’s inside. When everything’s done, come back to me.” Said the driver as he unlocked the doors again. Then, all of the sudden, the passenger doors opened and the man they were to meet stood before them. The description matched but they were wearing a light-red backpack, bald and were a black albino.

“Jesus fucking-!” Said the startled driver as he stared at him with an irritated look. “Don’t do that!”

“I agree.” Said Warpig as he exited the car, with Kanya following suit. Both were only a little startled by his sudden appearance.

“They’re basically invisible, gotta act like your car ain’t possessed.” He said to the driver nonchalantly, to which they scoffed.

“Yeah, tell that to the soldier twenty-five minutes ago!” He said as the albino man shut the door, driving off to the nearest parking space.

“Kanya, Warpig,” the man said as he turned to look at them both, having a curious look on his face regarding their appearance. “I’m Wyatt. Why are you both not wearing armor?”

Warpig lifted up his t-shirt to reveal a lightweight ballistic vest underneath while Kanya felt a little stumped.

“Why do we need armor?” She asked, with Warpig snickering as he put down his shirt.

“Before y’all arrived, I checked out the building. I noticed a large gathering of people up on the eighth floor - *armed* people wearing black and yellow, bearing the SSS insignia on their shoulders. I asked the front desk about it but they were completely oblivious to them, like they weren’t there at all.”

*Hell magic.* Kanya thought almost immediately. *Maybe that’s how Fevurr gets around so fast.*

“Well, sorry, I wasn’t aware that fucking Triple-S was here!” She excused.

“Ah, don’t worry about it.” responded Wyatt, ignoring her rising tone. “In fact, we need to do this quietly and *fast*. Who knows just how long they’re gonna be here for. Follow.” He turned around and walked into the building, with the two unhumans following suit. As they walked through the lobby, they both felt like

who-knows-how-many eyes were watching them, though nobody was even *aware* that they were there in the first place. It was nerve-wracking, the subtle anxiety seeping its way into their minds as they saw the sheer number of people in the lobby alone. Warpig felt it less so, because he had walked out in public many times before without issue. For Kanya however, she had never done such a thing. Even if the demons used their magic to conceal her, she always felt that it wasn't enough. The only other time she had encountered GHRC soldiers was a few years ago, due to a failed disguise - a memory she regarded as a terrible experience.

The group then entered an elevator, heading up to the eighth floor almost immediately. Wyatt pulled out a sidearm from his jacket's inner pocket, an FN FNX-45 Tactical, kitted out with a small red-dot sight, a silencer and extended mags.

"How many are there?" Warpig questioned as he began to prepare himself, seam lines forming on his arms again.

"Eight. They'll be on the left side, furthest door down on the right." Answered Wyatt as he turned his gun's safety off. The elevator had just made it past the third floor.

"There could be demons, too." Added Kanya as she stretched her claws out.

"Maybe." Wyatt said as he took off his backpack, opening the smallest pouch and taking out two flashbangs and putting them inside his jacket's pocket.

"'Could' meaning there will, Wyatt." Kanya reaffirmed as he closed the pouch and put the backpack back on. "They're gonna see through our concealment. Plus, they're made of edges so that gun's not gonna do much." She didn't sound too optimistic about the situation, which bothered Wyatt slightly.

"Hey, I can form weapons that aren't ballistics." Warpig chimed in. "I'll try to limit the explosives, though." Wyatt turned his head back to look at him with a raised brow, seemingly impressed that was Warpig's power.

"What?" Questioned a confused Warpig at Wyatt's expression.

"Use it well." He said as he turned back as the elevator passed the sixth floor, cocking his gun's slide back. "Because you'll be in the front. I'll cover you from behind while Kanya watches our six."

Warpig liked that plan, so he formed a forked, grey electrical weapon out of his left arm, which was roughly the same size and length as it. The weapons he

summoned from his body parts still looked mechanical instead of organic, unlike what Kanya assumed them to be. The elevator finally reached the eighth floor and stopped, the group now prepared for what was to come. As its doors opened, Warpig took the lead, heading left and aiming his weapon down the hallway, with Wyatt right behind him and pointing his pistol to the right. Seeing that there was nobody down that side of the hallway, Wyatt turned left, aiming his pistol, with both hands, down to where Warpig was aiming at. Kanya followed suit, walking backwards as she kept her eyes out for any signs of an ambush. It was clear, for now.

As they approached the last door, they could hear chatter coming from within. Wyatt double-checked the room number and confirmed with the two unhumans that this was the room that they're looking for. Wyatt pulled out a flashbang and whispered over to Warpig and Kanya, hastily telling them the plan. They nodded their heads in agreement, easily understanding it. They all then leaned against the wall next to the door, weapons at the ready. Wyatt pulled the flashbang's safety off and was just about to knock on the door when it was suddenly opened by a Triple-S agent. In rapid succession, Warpig pulled and shoved them aside, with Kanya stabbing them through the roof of their mouth with her claw, then Wyatt tossed the flashbang into the room. The loud *bang* was heard and Warpig moved in first, seeing five agents all stumbling around the room, groaning as they rubbed their eyes, with Warpig aiming his weapon at the center-most target. Without a second thought, he fired and a bolt of lightning struck his target, to which they squirmed violently. The bolt was so powerful that it chained to every other agent in the room and they shook just as violently. Then, after a second, an agent's head exploded, then another had their heart rupture, another had their hands explode and the last two had their brains melt from the lightning's sheer power alone. The center agent, meanwhile, had their chest burst from within and they violently flipped backwards onto the couch like a ragdoll, sending a projectile of gore and bones from their chest. It splattered on Warpig, with Wyatt getting some, too. The blood and fragmented bones even went out into the hallway.

*"HOLY FUCK!!"* Screamed Warpig as he used his right hand to wipe the blood from his eyes. When he came back to his senses and witnessed the gore, he



could feel vomit crawling its way up his own throat. Even Wyatt averted his eyes as Warpig projectile-vomited onto the carpeted floor.

“So much for quiet - what the *fuck!*?” Shouted Kanya as she entered the room herself to see the chaotic aftermath.

“God. Dayumn!” Exclaimed Wyatt as Warpig recovered from puking.

“I thought they got insulation, so I overcharged the gun.” He said profoundly as he stood straight, coughing.

“Kanya, keep watching the rear! We got five agents and there’s still two more.” Ordered Wyatt, still keeping his cool. Kanya nodded and went back to keeping an eye on the hallway. They all knew that the loud noises would bring unwanted attention, so the urgency settled in fast. At this point, Wyatt took the lead and headed into the bathroom on the left with slow, easy steps. Inside, he found a scared agent sitting on the toilet with her pants down. She raised her hands up at the sight of Wyatt, surrendering. At first, he hesitated but then realized that it would be best if no member of Triple-S were alive to tell this tale. However, he would save that for later. So, he stood still where he was, gun pointed at the agent’s head. Compared to the others, she wasn’t even armed.

“Answer our questions, *then* we’ll let you live, got it!?” He declared, to which she responded by nodding her head rapidly.

“What’s Fevurr got to do with the Secret Soul Service?” He asked in a commanding voice.

“That fucker? He’s a courier!” She responded almost quickly, her mind racing and body shaking in fear. By this point, her body already forced her business to be done with, instantly. “H-he’s a contractor, has been for years! Recently, he’s been assigned to transport a special item-”

“A demonic artifact, isn’t it?!” Warpig called out as he entered the bathroom beside Wyatt, having cleared the rest of the room and finding no other hostile.

“U-uh, n-no...” The agent stuttered with a bad attempt at lying.

“DO NOT FUCK WITH ME!” Hollered a furious Warpig as he aimed his weapon and got closer to her.

“Y-YES, IT’S ONE OF THE ARTIFACTS!” Cried the agent, tears forming down her cheeks. “He was here some time ago, told to set up shop after the

Sweeping! We were waiting for the demons and then y'all did your thing!" She whimpered as she fell off the toilet in fear.

"Why?" Asked Wyatt.

"Fuck you!" Responded the agent with a meek spit towards Wyatt. Both he and Warpig weren't satisfied with the answer but then Kanya called out, "hey guys, I hear company comin' up. Finish it, now!"

"Yeah, we're just about done." Responded Wyatt as he shot the agent twice in the head, then moving out of the bathroom. Warpig closed his eyes and sighed, following Wyatt and closing the bathroom door.

"FREEZE, KANYA!" Shouted a Triple-S agent down the hallway as they emerged from one of the elevators, pointing a pistol at her. Both Warpig and Wyatt stood still, then got out of sight, with Wyatt whispering over to Kanya that she should allow them to get close so that they could take them down. With a sharp exhale, Kanya raised her hands up.

"Don't wanna hurt ya!" Said the agent as they approached her.

"Shut the fuck up and cuff me already!" She responded somewhat impatiently. This got the agent to hurry up and he drew his pistol away as he stood behind her, reaching for the cuffs attached to his belt. Wyatt peaked from behind a wall and shot the agent in the kneecap. He fell on his injured knee, moaning in pain. Then, Kanya whirled around and slashed his face wide-open, delivering a killing blow right afterwards by stabbing through his skull and into his brain. Her claw was jammed a bit but, after a few, struggling attempts, managed to get it out, wiping the blood off on the agent's body after they fell.

"Okay, let's go!" She said to both Warpig and Wyatt as she began to run down the hallway, with Warpig following closely behind. When they reached the staircase, they turned back to see that Wyatt hadn't followed them. In the midst of their confusion, they saw green fire form right outside of the room and from it emerged a stalker demon. Their hearts sank as they witnessed the stalker roar and leap towards Wyatt. Their body penetrated through his and they stuck to each other like a strong adhesion, the two then crashed through the window, falling down as Wyatt screamed in agony. The stalker then used its flying capabilities to soar upwards and away from the group at breakneck speeds. By the time Kanya and

Warpig entered the room to save Wyatt, it was too late. The grim image of a broken window, next to a number of corpses beside it, was all they saw.

“WYATT!” Kanya called out in shock. “DAMNIT!”

“*Oh, shit!*” Warpig exclaimed, then not letting the moment absorb him too much. “Kanya, we gotta get out of here!”

“FUCKING-” She let out a frustrated scream and ran back towards the staircase, acknowledging Warpig’s words. At this point, the hallway was filled with people and Kanya abruptly stopped, before realizing that Discount’s disguise was still in effect because no person reacted to her nor Warpig (who ran past her and the crowd). The driver, meanwhile, saw the stalker demon fly with Wyatt. Almost shocked at what he was witnessing, he turned on the car and got out of the parking space he was in, then waited apprehensively for both Kanya and Warpig at the hotel’s front entrance. After three minutes, he spotted the two run out of the entrance and unlocked the doors. As soon as they got in the backseat and closed the door, the driver took off once again before either of them could even say “drive!”

“Thought you two were a quiet bunch!” Said the driver as he slowed down and stopped at a red light. “What the fuck was that thing that took Wyatt?”

“A stalker demon!” Replied Kanya, trying to calm herself down by taking deep breaths. “We walked right into an SSS nest - a room full of agents and one fucking ambushing stalker!” She was visibly upset at the loss of Wyatt, even though they had only just met.

“Fevurr wasn’t there,” added Warpig, “but he was there hours ago, carrying an artifact. He seems to act as a courier for Triple-S, some kind of mercenary - which makes him more than just a broker.”

Sirens could be heard up ahead and two Coalition vehicles zoomed past the driver’s car, heading towards the hotel.

“Well, you all got out before *they* arrived.” The driver remarked as the light turned green, then drove straight. “Even if Fevurr wasn’t there, that’s one location down. Don’t know if the others found him or not. The group chat’s been real quiet since I picked you two up.”

“Let’s just head back, okay?” Said Kanya as she put her seatbelt on and laid back in her seat, wanting only some quiet for the remainder of the ride. As she

stared out the window, lost in her own thoughts, Warpig sent a text in the group chat detailing what they had just discovered.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE: Mind Detonator**

**Theme: Ms. Minnie - Auto Delta Time**

“Savâge, it’s time.” Discount said to him after receiving the driver’s message. He forwarded Savâge the location of the driver to his phone.

“Got it. See y’all later.” With that, Savâge disappeared from thin air and reappeared right next to the driver’s car, a blue SUV. It was a good blocks away from the safehouse, though it didn’t matter much if it did. Savâge then knocked on the window of the passenger seat and the driver, upon seeing his open-wounded face, jumped at the sight of him.

“Oh my god!” She exclaimed as she put her head on the steering wheel and calmed her breathing. “J-just get in.”

Savâge rematerialized in the passenger seat but this made the driver visibly unhappy.

“Please get in the backseat, I might actually barf.”

Without question nor worry, Savâge, once again, rematerialized, this time in the back seat, putting on the seatbelt.

“I’m sorry but-”

“No, no, it’s fine.” He interrupted the driver, knowing what she was about to say. “I get that all the time. It bothers me not one bit.” Had this been from the mouth of any other person, they’d be lying. However, there was a sense of truth coming from Savâge, so the driver accepted it.

“Name’s Gale, by the way. Battery Park, yeah?” She asked him as she turned off the emergency break and put the car in drive.

“Yes.” He answered as they got out of the parking space, merging with the other cars on the road. After a minute of silence, Gale decided to break it.

“Hey, do you ever get the question of covering up your face? It seems like it hurts leaving all... *that* just exposed to the open air.”

“It doesn’t. I like it this way.” Savâge responded nonchalantly.

“Huh...” said a nervous Gale. She wanted to look in the mirror to look at his face again but she resisted the temptation, knowing she would vomit at the sight of it again. “Oh well, as long as it works for you, I guess.”

With a nervous laughter, she continued to drive, then going on I-95 and staying until she had to change to I-287 once they reached Schuylerville. Savâge had asked her if she scouted the building, having a positive “yes” as an answer.

“It’s a hotel next to the Native American Museum, on Bridge Street. There was *a looooot* of Coalition activity there, last time I checked. Tanks and everything - I think I saw a Killdozer, too! Hopefully they’re gone by the time we get there.”

Savâge shared her hope. Though it made him wonder just who exactly the Coalition were hunting for if they needed tanks and a *Killdozer*. A Killdozer is a special unit in the GHRC, with the leader being equipped in a massive suit of armor, similar to that of a juggernaut/EOD suit. The Killdozer has two times the resistances of a normal Coalition soldier. Because of this, they are flat-out immune to psychics. They are also commonly seen using weapons (like LMGs) in one hand, due to the incredible strength bonus that the suit provides. Even with all that armor and heavy gear, they are still agile. Not enough to be faster than a normal Coalition soldier but fast enough to give pursuit, hence why they often act alone. They are an army just by themselves. They’re an unhuman’s worst nightmare and it’s all because of their immunities, powerful weapons and absurd resistances. Killdozers are why the Coalition rarely use tanks in urban combat. Less collateral damage done to said environments, since most of their fights are in busy cities, such as New York. Still, shivers were sent down Savâge’s spine as he continued to think about the situation. Even if it was just a leftover from the Sweeping, that sheer presence of Coalition soldiers, plus a Killdozer, was a situation not even Triple-S wanted to be in.

“If they had been there since the Sweeping, then maybe they scared Fevurr off.” Savâge theorized.

“*If* he’s even *been* there.” Responded Gale, taking a left turn to go on Randall’s Island. “If he is, then the Coalition has him and some Soul Service dudes trapped. Now, the question remains of how to get in without being suspicious... because that disguise of yours might not work on such a gathering of soldiers.”

“Really- oh, right.” Savâge corrected himself, realizing that the Coaliton has countermeasures against invisible unhumans. Whether that be through one’s own power, or through somebody else’s, the Coalition *knows* how to deal with psychics like Discount (and maybe they already have).

“Our best bet is for me to enter the building from a blindspot. You stay in the car and when I reappear, drive away.”

“Yeah, I got that part.” Understood Gale, remembering the training she had to do before becoming an expert driver for Dark Mark. Of which, the test required her to keep a good amount of concealment. She sighed upon seeing the toll booth up ahead. After stopping the car at the toll and paying it (more expensive than she liked, due to the aftermath of the Sweeping raising the prices), she continued on to Robert F. Kennedy Bridge, then turning onto FDR Drive and driving straight. The traffic was busy again once they reached Manhattan, as if nothing had happened the day before. Along with the traffic however were GHRC vehicles, mainly consisting of humvees and armored trucks. Upon reaching Alphabet City, the traffic was almost unbearable.

“Fuckin’ traffic.” Gale commented as she was forced to go three miles an hour. “How do you live with this?”

“I’m not from here. Though, I’ve seen worse.” Savâge replied, having his arms crossed as he laid back comfortably in his seat.

“Oh, where are you from?” Questioned a curious Gale.

“Pre-irradiated Detroit.” He answered, seeing the traffic pick up slightly. Gale was taken aback by the answer but it almost made sense to her.

“Heh... then you’ve probably seen worse than New York traffic, huh?”

“Mmhm.” He responded, not really interested in the conversation anymore. Gale picked this up and continued driving, the traffic finally moving at a normal pace. Driving past the Lower East Side and then the Brooklyn Bridge had no more difficulties but, when they finally arrived at the Battery, they saw the influx of Coalition soldiers and vehicles. Gale drove into a parking space and parked the car, pointing out to Savâge a police officer arguing with a Coalition soldier. It seemed as if Bridge Street was closed off.

“Don’t worry. Like I said, wait here. I got this.” Reaffirmed Savâge before he disappeared into thin air again. Gale sighed, reclining her seat back a little bit.

“At least he’s doing it fast.” She said to herself before pulling out her phone. “I wonder how the others are doing?”

Savâge phased through the building’s ventilation systems and rematerialized in a clean bathroom, right in front of a row of urinals. Thankfully, there was no one to see him, so he peeked out into the hallway. It was empty but he saw a house-keeper’s cart turned over in the middle of the hallway. Savâge then walked up to the cart and, upon inspection, he noticed the spilled chemicals left a trail of footprints that went further down the hallway, along with several bullet casings and shotgun shells.

Savâge guessed that the SSS agents here encountered the Coalition and took no chances. As far as he knew, he couldn’t hear the sound of gunshots. *Maybe the two are at a stalemate.* Savâge thought as he walked along the blood trail, which led into the stairwell. *If that’s the case, then I catch them by surprise and have them cornered - force them to hand over Fevurr-related info. And if he’s there himself...*

His thought was immediately cut off by the muffled sound of an explosion, shortly followed by rumbling. Wasting no time, Savâge formed himself into gas again and floated through the ventilation systems to check the source. Savâge stopped himself as he made it to the thirteenth floor, for he saw that there was a skirmish between Coalition soldiers and Triple-S agents. They stood far from each other at each end of the hallway. A huge hole had just been made in the middle that led down to the floor beneath it, as well as the floor above. Small embers were being drowned out by the sprinkler system, which had just activated along with the fire alarms. Savâge just waited for the perfect opportunity to step in, hiding in the vents.

The agents were held out in one of the rooms on one end of the hallway, while the soldiers held out in the stairwell, occasionally peeking out to take potshots at each other. One soldier even managed to cripple an agent by shooting her in the left hand with his H&K G11-R. It was in burst-fire mode, so her hand was mangled by the rapid spray of 4.7mm caseless bullets, forcing her to drop her own gun (a SPAS-12) and fall backwards in pain. Another agent took her spot shortly thereafter but the soldiers quickly moved upwards, getting inside the other rooms and using them as cover. Savâge moved from one vent to another,



eventually ending up in the same room as the agents. The windows were boarded up and there were now three wounded agents being treated by a single medic. Two agents watched the living room windows while two more were near the door.

“We’re taking a fucking beating! Where’s that escape!?” Yelled one of the agents into his radio, having finished reloading his rifle (an H&K G36C).

“We can’t provide it, all parties are being ambushed!” Responded a panicked agent on the other end of the radio, to which their end sounded chaotic with what sounded like bullets and energy beams whizzing by them. “You’re gonna have to fight your way out!”

“So we just spent all that time setting up here waiting for Fevurr and now we have to go *all the way back down!*?” Said the medic in a frustrated tone.

“Cut the chatter, we’re using plan C!” Responded what Savâge assumed to be the leader of this group as he peeked out the room with his G36C, firing a couple rounds into the hallway. He backed off as his head was *just barely* grazed by a 4.7mm round.

“GOD. FUCKING. *DAMMIT!*” The leader agent winced as he clutched his head with his free hand.

“Give up now and we’ll let you live!” Shouted a soldier closest to the room of the agents.

“Sir, that may be our best shot! Fevurr ain’t coming back.” Said the medic as he finished sterilizing the hand wound of the freshly shot agent. Savâge then decided to make his move and rematerialized right in front of the medic, his hands out as a show of him meaning no harm.

“SIR, UNHUMAN!”

“No, wait, I’m here to help!” Pleaded Savâge as the leader and the rest of the agents pointed their weapons at him. “Come with me and I’ll let you live. In return, you must answer my questions!”

“Well, we have no other choice. Fucking do it!” Responded the leader with no hesitation.

“Sir!?” Questioned the perplexed medic. Before anything else could be said, Savâge used his powers to render the leader, the medic and the agent near the leader invisible and then into gas, as well as himself. Then, he flew himself and the agents through the vents and outside onto the rooftop of the building. In mere

seconds, he rematerialized inside Gale's car in the backseat, the three agents also rematerializing in the empty seats.

"What the FUCK!?" Said a shocked Gale as she was jumpscared by their sudden appearance.

"Drive, Gale!"

Gale was reassured as soon as she saw Savâge, assuming this to be a part of whatever plan he had. She put the vehicle in drive without hesitation and drove off, intending to be far away from the current gathering of Coalition soldiers.

"Find a safe spot, we're interrogating these people!" Ordered Savâge, to which Gale accepted and turned left at a green light.

"Hey, where are my patients!?" Exclaimed the medic to Savâge as soon as he realized.

"Had to leave them behind. Not enough room in this car and if you wanna argue, I'll kill you where you sit." Answered Savâge as he stared at the medic. After a few seconds, they growled in defeat and laid back in the seat.

"Hmmh, actually, I have a better idea." Savâge said after three minutes of silence. "Gale, drive to the safehouse, I'll interrogate them right here and now."

"Ooo...kay. Got it." Said an addled Gale, making a sudden right turn and heading back the way they came.

"Aw, fuck, seriously?" Complained the leader agent.

"If any of you try to escape, I'll melt your head off. You may not notice it but I'm slowly injecting your lungs with methane. Don't tell me what I want to hear? I'll accelerate the process." With the threat firmly in place, the agents became stiff out of fear.

"H-how the fuck are you alive...?" Said the agent next to Savâge, pointing out his wound. Then, he suddenly had a coughing fit and started to feel lightheaded, leaning fully back in his seat while breathing raspily. The sickly feeling went away just as fast as it came.

"Not important." Responded Savâge, not even looking at the agent. His attention was on the leader instead, who stared back at him, nervously glancing at his teammates. The medic had thought they had escaped a terrible fate and his hope was diminishing by the seconds.

"What do you-"

“I know about Fevurr.” Savâge interrupted the leader. “I know about the ritual. Where.” He leaned ever so closely to the leader, hand on his seat, slightly building up the methane in his lungs. “Is.” The leader slowly leaned back, starting to feel lightheaded as he fully focused on Savâge. “He?” Savâge knew how intimidating his wound was, using it to his full advantage until the leader could practically smell the dried blood. Gale just focused on driving, trying her best to focus on the road.

“He was... supposed to be where we were.” He explained in short breaths, feeling his heartbeat increase. “Told us that Gehenna was on her way down south with a ritual item and that he was about to charge the one he had. Then the fucking Coalition found us! I thought we could move after the Sweeping had passed and...”

“And he didn’t appear, huh?” Added Savâge, finishing the leader’s sentence. “Because of the Coalition?” Savâge reduced the number of methane in his lungs so he could speak more clearly.

“He told us he was in the lobby but when we went down to meet him, he was gone - had sent a text saying to leave and that’s when the fucking ambushed happened.”

Savâge tilted his head, curious as to why the Coalition was after him, too.

“Any idea as to why *they* were there?”

“No!” Answered the leader quickly. “We held out in that hotel because of the Sweeping and that *damn* storm!”

“How does Fevurr get around so fast and why does he need to be in so many places?”

“Teleportation from stalker demons and I don’t know that last part, we were just sent to hold out in the hotel until he arrived.” The leader was now very forthcoming in giving out information, for he believed it would save his and his teammates lives.

“Why?” Savâge continued his relentless questions.

“Medic’s got a charger for the item.” The leader pointed to the medic, who stared at him with a betrayed look. “Fevurr was gonna use it to complete his part of the ritual.”

“Give. Now!” Commanded Savâge as he turned to face the medic.

“Fuck- fine!” He immediately handed over the item of interest from one of his pouches, which appeared to be a wide, cylindrical object made entirely out of some unknown, dark-purple material. It seemed fungal in nature as Savâge felt it. Grabbing it, he turned back to the leader to ask one last question.

“Now, where is Fevurr?”

“Don’t fucking know!” Answered the leader, which wasn’t what Savâge wanted to hear. Feeling his breathing getting short, he started to panic a bit. “No, really, we don’t know - he just left us!”

Savâge felt satisfied with the answers.

“Hmm... I believe all of you.” He responded as he slowly laid back in his seat. The agents sighed in relief and the car fell in silence once more, if only for a few minutes.

“Savâge, what do we do now?” Asked Gale as she avoided taking the toll booth by driving the long way around. Savâge didn’t answer, the agents lying back in their seats as they started to feel tired.

“Hey, Savâge!”

“Just drive, Gale.” He answered simply.

“Yeah, I know that.” She responded quickly. “I meant with them.” She pointed a thumb at all the agents.

“We’ll worry about them when we get back.”

The agents started to feel light headed but their tiredness was overwhelming and they soon fell asleep. Gale glanced at all the agents, realizing what Savâge had done and nervously sighed, chills being sent down her spine. Then, Savâge pulled out his phone and started to text the group about his success, seeing other messages, too, from those of the group that had completed their part already (along with sending them a picture of the artifact, which he dubbed “The Charger”). Even as he did, Gale thought there was something extremely deranged about Savâge - about unhumans in general. If they wanted humanity to accept them again, then why are they so violent?

## **CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Danger Illustrated.**

**Theme: Force Maker - Brian Eno**

Primal had a feeling he was next and his suspicions were confirmed. “Primal...” said Discount as he got the message from the driver, looking up at him with certainty, “...you know what to do.”

Primal nodded his head and left the building, taking a deep breath as he walked. Shortly after, he received the driver’s location, which was behind the safehouse. The streets and sidewalks were busy again but no one seemed to mind Primal’s presence, all thanks to Discount’s efforts in keeping him and the rest of the crew psychically obscured. Primal lifted himself up using his own powers and flew over the safehouse, landing smoothly next to the passenger side of the driver’s car, which was a dark red Nissan SUV. Primal knocked on the window and the driver rolled it down, revealing himself to be a dark-skinned man with long, jet black hair and an impressive beard, wearing an off-red, sleeved shirt, black fingerless gloves and brown khakis, with blue shades on his head. While it was subtle, Primal could also tell he was wearing a ballistic vest underneath his shirt.

“Oh, hey, Primal.” said the driver as Primal opened the door, as if he recognized him. Primal got in the passenger seat and strapped himself in, closing the door. Their phone was magnetically attached to the top of the dashboard, displaying where they needed to go.

“Been a while since we worked together.” It was at this moment that Primal finally recognized who this driver was. A somewhat tall man with two-toned extra-long braided hair (black and white), wearing a kitted-out leather trench coat (colored primary off-red and secondary white) over a bandolier full of shotgun rounds that covered a Quake 3 Arena t-shirt. The dark pants he wore weren’t as busy compared to his coat but there was a knife holder near his ankles and Primal could tell his boots were from a GHRC soldier. To make Kanin’s outfit complete, he wore big, square shades.

“It’s only been a few months, Kanin. Now, let’s go to St. John’s University, we don’t need this to be longer than it already is.”

“Hopefully you don’t have to piss while I’m driving on I-95.” Said a sly Kanin as he pulled out of the parking space and started following the path his phone’s GPS suggested he take.

“I was infected by some unhuman prick, which made my bladder and other organs hurt like crazy - in case you forgot.” Primal retorted.

“Hey, I was just joking, man.” Kanin said through a brief chuckle.

“Anyways, did you get a look at the place?” Primal asked as Kanin just barely made it past a yellow light.

“Was a bit lost on where to go - Discount always assumes we know everything he does.” Kanin responded. “Figured it out, though, because I saw a bunch of Secret Soul Service agents rushing into a housing complex near the university. They seemed to have spread out amongst the buildings and I didn’t want my cover blown.”

“Ah, so they’re playing *that* game.” Primal theorized that the agents were setting themselves up for defense. Why else would they need to be spread out like that?

“Seems like it.” Said Kanin as he continued driving. Minutes later, after managing to get past the building-up traffic, he drove past Playland Park. Primal then had the realization that he could’ve just flown to the location but then he wondered about the presence of Coalition soldiers and asked Kanin about it.

“Oh, there’s a lot of them there!” He said with a somewhat surprised look. “I get that it’s post-Sweeping but man, Queens is *swarming* with them.”

“Damn. I was just gonna fly there but...” Primal trailed his thought, almost upset about it.

“Heh, yeah, bad idea.” Said Kanin as he merged onto I-95. “They’d see through that disguise and I’m not even sure you’d survive that many of them.”

“Maybe not out in the open.” Replied Primal. “I can, however, take care of a bunch of grunts indoors.”

“Even if it’s unfamiliar to you?”

“I’ve dealt with worse, Kanin.” Added Primal as he stared at a Coalition truck driving past them.

“Uh huh... because fighting a small part of a global army is a day-in-the-life of Primal, eh?” Even knowing just how powerful Primal was, Kanin was doubtful of his capabilities.

“It’s for the betterment-”

“-for the betterment of unhumanity, yeah I heard this speech before.” Kanin finished his sentence, knowing what Primal was about to say. “You *know* what happens if the Coalition just... *dies*. A power vacuum like that would make Chaos Day look like a footnote.”

“Chaos Day?!” Primal was offended and sat up in his seat a little more, looking directly at Kanin. “You call our reactivation what the GHRC calls it?”

“What?” Kanin was genuinely perplexed as to why Primal was upset. “That’s literally what happened! The whole world fell into chaos because all of a sudden, people got superpowers and not just the stuff you see in comics or movies, either. I’ve seen powers of such absurdities. I wonder just *why* - *why* would anyone want to keep that?”

Primal sighed and relaxed back into his seat, staring out the window with a hand on his helmet.

“We don’t choose our powers, Kanin.” Primal explained. “You know how random it is. I don’t need to remind you of how it defies genetics.”

“Some crazy-ass shit to live with that type of randomness, though.” He responded. “It’s why I’m afraid of havin’ kids. Don’t know if they come out unhuman and if they did, what power they’d have!” Kanin drove around a slow driver and got back on his lane.

“Reminds me of that one story I heard about a hospital out in North Dakota burning to the ground with no survivors. It was one those big fuckin’ city hospitals, too. Coalition claims there was an unhuman and, lo and behold, footage comes out of a screaming infant - *who was made of fire*.”

This caught Primal’s attention as he raised a brow at Kanin, intrigued.

“No one knows what happened to the kid. Fire departments all around say it was the worst fire they’ve ever dealt with.” Kanin continued on I-95, staying in the left lane.

“The whole building burned to ash in a matter of *seconds*,” he continued, slightly raising his voice as he remembered the full story, “the flames were blue and

purple, it was- sheesh, it's *fucked* just thinking about it! I mean, the *entire hospital* and the area around it was reduced to ash in *seconds and it was an infant!*"

"Shit... it's the first time I'm hearing about *that*." Commented an amazed Primal. Coming from any other person, Primal would've dismissed it as GHRC propaganda but he knew Kanin to be a trustworthy individual. They continued on I-95, eventually, after an hour and a half, reaching Queens. They had to cross the unavoidable Manhattan traffic, which slightly delayed their arrival. Nevertheless, Kanin found a parking spot on Grand Central Parkway, near to where he scouted the agents.

"I saw them enter those buildings." Kanin said as he pointed out the four buildings to Primal, which were all next to each other. All he has to do now is go to each one individually, for he saw no way of taking all them out at once without causing too much collateral damage. Collateral was something Primal can live with but he didn't want to alert the Coalition. He saw soldiers patrolling the streets both on foot and in vehicles."

"Okay, I'll start with the house in the middle," Primal explained to Kanin, "then hit the others as fast as I can as soon as I get the information I need. If Fevurr's there, then I'll try to capture him. I believe him to be a psychic, so we'll both have to take extra precautions when dealing with him. Oh, and if I need help, I'll call you."

"Sounds good," said an approving Kanin. "Try not to get infected this time!" He quickly added as Primal went out the car and shut the door. He just chuckled, then sighed, briefly stretching his body before walking to one of the middle houses. They were all two-story buildings, with the farthest one being the widest. Next to it, were two large trucks carrying Coalition soldiers, both of which were now driving off. Primal would've started at that house but he felt starting in the middle would save him some time hitting the rest. He intended on leaving no survivors but knew he had to fight his way through before getting what he wanted. As he approached the house, his helmet informed him of a *strong* psychic presence. Not as powerful as the zombie knight's but close enough. The helmet then scanned the house and noted there were several individuals within, all armed to the teeth with weapons and armor.



“What about the other houses?” Primal asked his helmet, to which it prompted the same response, except none of the other houses had *that* presence. A lot of armed Triple-S agents but no demons.

“Hmm... good enough.”

Primal assumed that Fevurr was in the house he was in front of. He’d have to change his plan, now that his presumed target is nearby. With a deep breath, Primal walked up to the dark-brown door and leaned on the wall next to it, knocking on it and then ringing the doorbell. He readied his powers, his hands radiating a purple energy. The door had stained windows on it but Primal knew he was invisible to his would-be enemies and, hopefully, Fevurr. An agent slowly opened the door, a fully loaded, kitted-out H&K MP7 in their right hand as they peaked their head out the doorway, completely unaware of Primal (for he was not able to perceive him). He was not expecting visitors and was greatly concerned. The door shut but Primal could still hear what he was about to say.

“Hey, Fevurr, you playin’ with me? I heard a knock on the-”

*(Gun Metal Grey - Simon Viklund)*

That was all the information Primal needed to hear as he blasted down the door with a thrust of his hands, sending the agent flying into the wall as debris rained on his body.

Then, his head exploded into pieces by an energy beam fired from Primal’s hands. The house’s insides were tight, as if all the rooms were *too* close to each other. Primal quickly entered and sent a psychic message to a nearby agent to kill herself with her own shotgun (a Kel-Tec KSG). Almost instantly, she resisted the message, having a stronger will than Primal thought. It, however, did not save her head from being horizontally torn open by Primal’s telekinetic powers. She crashed onto the floor as another agent emerged from the kitchen to check what was happening. He perceived no threat and was greatly confused, even fearful. Then, all of the sudden, an overwhelming urge came over him and he shoved the barrel of his P90 onto the roof of his mouth. His fingers were forced to hold the trigger as fifty 5.7mm rounds were sprayed through his head. He was dead by the second bullet but Primal didn’t care, just watched as blood, skull fragments and brain matter decorate the wall and the ceiling. Then, he finally let go of the corpse, it falling down, face-first, on the still-hot, empty bullet cartridges.

“Shit!” Another agent exclaimed from the kitchen, turning on her radio in a hurry. “Fevurr, we’ve got hostiles! Whatever you gotta do, do it fast!”

Primal simply walked over and behind her, stalking her as she slowly scanned the dinning room for a hostile. Another agent rushed down the stairs and Primal vertically tore him apart and tossed his corpse near the agent in the dining room. She vomited in her black mask the moment she saw the organs trail across the floor towards her.

“O-oh, fuck ma-” Her head was suddenly sliced horizontally and she collapsed onto the organs and mass amount of blood, adding onto it with her own. Primal then floated up the stairs, seeing yet another agent crouched by the doorway, wielding a Vepr-12 and just *itching* to use it. Before Primal could do anything, the agent suddenly shot her gun and Primal felt hot buckshot pierce his stomach, shatter his spine and fly out his back. The impact caused him to fall backwards onto the floor, groaning as he put his hand to where the profusely bleeding wound was. Primal, in heavy breaths, summoned a dark-purple energy to where his wounds were, suddenly feeling no pain nor bleeding as he stood back up. As fast as he healed his wounds, however, another injury would slam against helmet, knocking the wind out of himself as he stumbled backwards into the kitchen’s sink.

“*FUCK!!*” He exclaimed, in desperate attempts to control his breathing.

“Got an invisible intruder, keep an eye out!” The agent said on her radio as she ran down the stairs, her Vepr-12 still drawn as she went to where she assumed Primal’s corpse would be. Still, she couldn’t perceive his appearance and felt a nauseating sensation as her steps abruptly became heavy.

Then, her ankles twisted backwards and the bones in her feet shot up and pierced out of her skin, her kneecap promptly imploding as the nerves on her femur contorted and snapped, causing her to scream her lungs out in utter agony. The flesh of her legs then turned inside out and collapsed in on themselves. Her pelvis was bent into a U shape before snapping, its newly sharp ends repeatedly scratching her viscera. Her organs shifted around uncomfortably and the skin around her arms suddenly vaporized into hot steam as her ribcage bent in on itself, cracking into multiple pieces before she was, essentially folded in half.

Primal then flung her head-first into the oven's glass pane, shattering upon impact. Then he pulled her hair up along with her head, turned her around and kicked his foot into her jaw, her gums immediately bleeding. He kicked again, harder, teeth dropping out this time as she barfed out blood. Then he kicked with the aid of his power, her entire mouth caving in to match the shape of his shoe. Primal pulled his foot out and let go of her hair, seeing her fall backwards dead onto the floor with gritted teeth, heavy breaths and balled-up fists. His helmet scanned the house again, noting that the psychic presence moved next door.

With a calm sigh, he walked and stood in the dining room, facing the wall of the living room. With a heavy throw of his right arm that would impress even the most elite of baseball players, he fired a soul missile (an oval-shaped ball of purple energy) from his hand. The wall exploded open, sending debris everywhere. The debris would've slashed and penetrated Primal had he not set up a protective, transparent energy shield around himself. He saw the house where the psychic presence was currently in, so he launched another soul missile and it blew up the wall leading into the kitchen. Primal walked through the hole and it appeared that this house's layout was similar to the last but less claustrophobic (maybe more so with the newly-made hole). He glanced around and saw several, dead agents, along with their body parts, scattered all over the floor. There was even a dead Demon among the wreckage. Two Lesser Demons then jumped down the stairs in a hurry, their feet stabbing into the wooden floor. Seeing the carnage, they tried to flee but Primal twisted and opened both of their necks with his power, their dark-green blood mixing in with human blood as they fell onto the floor.

"JUST GO, I'LL COVER!" Ordered an agent up the stairs to someone to her left. Primal then noticed a flash of green light coming out of the doorway as the agent held the trigger down on her MP7. Primal was nowhere near her line of fire, so he sent a quick, yet detailed psychic message to her that caused her to uncharacteristically pull a grenade out from her left pouch, remove its pin and let go of it. By the time it exploded, Primal had flown to the second house down the street, the closest to the long house. The presence had moved on to this one but Primal felt as if he should attack directly to where it is right now. So, he flew up to the roof and blasted a hole open to the room they were in. That's when Primal confirmed the presence to be Fevurr himself, as he saw him wipe away the

shrapnel on his face. However, Primal found himself unable to move and was suddenly assaulted with thousands of malicious messages infecting his mind. It caused his head to ache terribly and he fell backwards, cracking his spine on the wooden fencing in the house's backyard. The breath from his lungs instantly escaped his body and Primal felt he could no longer move his own body anymore. Then, the helmet took control and summoned the dark-purple energy Primal used earlier on his spine and it healed back to normal after a few seconds. He stood with haste, regaining his breathing once more.

"Thanks - I fucking *hate* that psy-" That's when Primal realized that Fevurr's psychic presence was no longer visible. In fact, he had disappeared entirely, which upset Primal greatly.

"*No, that slimy motherfucker!*" Primal flew over the house and back to Kanin's car, only to see that he, too, was rushing to it.

### ***Earlier...***

Kanin saw Primal burst the house's door open and enter the building, sighing as he reached in the backseat for his newly acquired boomstick.

"A bit slow when you're just doin' it yourself."

He grabbed and pulled out a Franchi SPAS-12, customized with a tube that held eight 12 gauge rounds and complete with the stock hook. Kanin got out of the car and adjusted the hook to fit under his right forearm, then pulled out a Glock-18 with an extended magazine, carrying it with his left hand. He had many 12 gauge rounds along with 9mm pistol mags inside the pouches on the sides of his belt. He turned both of the guns safeties off and confirmed that his SPAS-12 was in semi-auto mode as he approached the long house's front entrance. When Kanin did, he shot the hinges off the door with it and kicked the door down. With great speed, he entered the house and activated his power of Bullet Time. The agents within the rather fancy-looking and spacious living room couldn't even react, for he moved faster than they. Kanin just went up to his targets individually and shot them in the head with his SPAS-12. The gore of red mist stayed in place, moving ever so slightly. He saw three agents on the stairs near the door and took care of them with a four-round burst from his Glock-18 to their heads. He deactivated

Bullet Time but not before standing behind a wall to take cover from the blood and gore splattering the entire room. The collective sound of the agents dying made Kanin rush out of his position and up the stairs, before seeing a tall, muscular man with pale skin and white hair emerge from the doorway that the stairs lead up to. He wore what seemed to be casual clothing but carried an item of anomalous properties in his hand, as it looked strange and almost derailed Kanin's focus on him.

"HEY, STOP!" Kanin yelled after him as they ran back into the hallway. Without missing a step, Kanin ran after him, Bullet Time activated but it was ultimately too late as he saw him disappear in a flash of green light, leaving behind only a small, green ember.

"*Fuck!*" He yelled in frustration as he deactivated Bullet Time and hurried back to the car, holstering his pistol and opening the driver-side door with haste. He put his SPAS-12 in the backseat and put his seatbelt on, putting the car in drive but holding onto the brakes. Just when he was about to wonder about Primal, they opened the passenger door with their own power and closed it just as quickly as he sat down. Kanin let go of the brakes and stepped on the gas, tires screeching as Primal texted Discount.

"Protocol: Marine is active!" Primal said to Kanin after getting a swift response from their leader. Kanin then took a sharp u-turn onto the correct side of the road. "We should be good but keep driving fast, the Coalition will be here soon!"

"The fuck happened in there!?" Kanin asked as he sped past several cars, who didn't seem to be aware of their presence at all.

"Fevurr happened! He got away and I got no intel!" Primal responded as he looked out the back window to see if anyone was pursuing them. So far, so good.

"What about the last house?" Kanin asked once again. "We didn't hit that one."

"Coalition will swarm that place in a few seconds, more than I could ever handle! It's not worth it, just drive back to the safehouse!"

"Yeah, I figured that!"

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN: A Dark World**

### **Theme: *The Ghetto - The Gimp***

Icemantis was nervously sitting on the couch, waiting to be called.

“Icemantis, your driver’s here.” Discount said to her, sending the location of the driver to her phone. She got up and was about to walk outside but stopped right at the doorway.

“Your power will work, yes?” She didn’t sound very confident, unsure as to its effectiveness.

“It will.” Discount simply responded. “Large gatherings of Coalition soldiers, however, I would avoid. They can tell where there’s psychic manipulation.”

“How does that work?” Luhki asked from the kitchen counter. “It’s something I *still* can’t wrap my head around.”

“Their armor is coated in an invisible substance that has strong resistances to psychic abilities.” Discount explained. “This resistance builds up in groups, so a normal squadron of soldiers will easily detect a psychically invisible person.”

“Well, that’s good to know. Thanks!” Icemantis said as she began walking to the door, expecting a response from Discount when there was none. Luhki seemed pleased with the answer, slightly nodding his head.

“Good luck out there, Icemantis.” He said to her before she left.

“Is that you imprinting your luck onto me or-“ Icemantis was then interrupted by Discount, who slightly raised his voice, “get to your driver.”

“Okay, okay!” Icemantis exited the building and shut the door behind her, sighing briefly before pulling out her new phone and seeing the text Discount had sent that had the location of her driver. She put the phone back into her suit’s pocket and briefly froze at a random civilian passing by. They did not notice her and she was relieved that Discount’s power was actually working, so she resumed walking to the driver’s car.

It felt tense just walking along the sidewalk, passing civilians that looked as if they weren’t at all affected by the Sweeping a day ago, nor the intense storm that

also happened. To them, it was just a guaranteed day off. While Ephemeral City wasn't as crowded as Manhattan, there were still a lot of people walking along the sidewalks, with cyclists biking alongside them. Icemantis was cautious as to not bump into anybody, just in case. The car wasn't far, it was a dark-purple SUV parked alongside other cars at the end of the sidewalk, its manufacturer's logo strangely torn off. The strangest thing about it however, when Icemantis looked in the window, there was no driver. The car wasn't even on, the keys nowhere to be seen. Icemantis assumed that they were elsewhere but why and where? She went around the front of the car and to the driver's side, abruptly stopping at the sight of a perfectly geometric square cut into the asphalt, directly in front of the driver's door. Icemantis slowly peered over it and noticed it was pitch black. She couldn't even tell if it had any depth or not, nor if it was the driver's doing (for all she knew, they could be unhuman).

Icemantis was greatly confused and was halfway to the sidewalk before the ground beneath her broke into that exact same shape and she fell into total darkness. Her yelp was muffled as the two squares disappeared.

*(Relentless Coil - Aubrey Hodges)*

Icemantis fell for three seconds before landing roughly on her feet, falling forward onto the dark grass. She barely managed to catch herself with her hands, the suit absorbing most of the impact, so she barely felt any pain. She rose up, stumbling before letting herself lean against the smooth, cold, black rocks that made up the walls of this place. It was completely dark, which caused Icemantis to activate her suit's blue nightvision. Even then, it just barely helped because the ceiling was also made of the same rocks, with hardly any ambient light to be apparent. She looked up at the ceiling from whence she fell through but saw no hole.

"W-what...?!" Stuttered a stressed & confused Icemantis. She glanced around the area and noticed several hallways all leading to different directions. What she also noticed was the unusually cold atmosphere. If Icemantis' body wasn't already mostly covered in ice, then she likely would've succumbed to the almost zero-degree temperature of this place. She did *not* want to go any further, so she looked up at the ceiling, raised an open hand and shot a steady stream of cold air that froze over a small portion of the ceiling. She jumped and punched the ice,

which weakened the rocks so much that the impact of her fist shattered it. Yet, despite this, the rocks simply regenerated before Icemantis' very eyes, stunning her.

With no other choice, Icemantis had only several options and all of them involved picking which path to go down. The only noticeable one was the very right path, which had blood smeared on the wall next to it. This was the path that Icemantis decided *not* to go down, even if the back of her mind told her that's probably where the driver ended up. Not really knowing what to do, she decided to go to the very left path and, when she passed the doorway, she felt a sudden change in the air. Looking back, the doorway had somehow shut itself without a noise. Icemantis' heart rate started to pick up as fear began to hook onto her. She tightly held her hands together in an attempt to calm herself before moving on.

This new area looked the same as the last but was perfectly rectangular with so much open space. The other curiosity was how the grass was still alive. It looked dead and had black coloring, its length reaching up to Icemantis' ankles. It was dark but it gave off a slight ambient light which made Icemantis' nightvision not so useless - even if she couldn't see more than six feet in front of herself. Walking on the grass was like walking on snow, despite the dirt beneath it not being such. Icemantis just kept pressing on, going past another doorway and turning right into a long hallway. She walked down the hallway for three minutes before turning left, which led her into a larger room that had two floors and a staircase (also made of the same rocks) to her right that led to the second floor. Beneath it, was a gated doorway that continued the path. Although, it seemed it had no way to be opened.

The second floor seemed to have small statues placed on pedestals. Walking up the stairs to get a closer look at them, Icemantis couldn't tell what *exactly* they were depicting. Three humanoid figures in heroic poses, all wearing different outfits. Two were female while one was male. The very left statue was one female having a skull for a face and wearing what Icemantis assumed to be medieval armor, with blades protruding from her arms and past her fists. The middle statue was the male, wearing a hooded cloak and having no visible eyes. The very right statue was the last female, though this one was the strangest, as it was wearing a torn dress and had one singular, massive eye, with protruding tendrils as her head.



All of the statues had no color and were clearly shabby. Icemantis touched the male statue, feeling that part of it was made of marble while the rest of it was made of granite. An odd combination of materials would perplex Icemantis but she was already at her limit of confusion. Putting the statue back to where it was, she headed back down the stairs and grabbed the gated door, freezing it over in but a second. She then shattered it with a kick, expecting it to regenerate but (much to her relief) it didn't.

*I guess only the rocks are capable of doing that.* She thought to herself, continuing forward. This hallway was wider, more circular and with strange writings embedded into the wall. The letters seemed to be in English but instead of being spelled like how it would normally be, they were spelled in pronunciation. Pronouncing them outloud, Icemantis noticed that it was all random words strung together. Among the text were thick scratches that cut deep into the rocks.

*How come these don't regenerate?* Icemantis complained to herself as she gazed at the ruined writings of a strange language. *And why am I here? Wait a minute...*

Icemantis pulled out her phone and went into the maps application, though it showed that she was still in Ephemeral City, at the same spot where she found the SUV.

*If the map can't help me...* She went into her contacts application and saw that only Discount's was listed. She called him but the phone menu disappeared just as quickly as it came. She tried again but it happened once more. Then, in the third attempt, Icemantis suddenly felt a slight headache as the phone menu faded away. Neither attempt made the phone ring and Icemantis, on her fourth attempt and in more of a panic, felt a vague burning sensation on her eyes. Blinking hard and rapidly got rid of the pain but now Icemantis' eyelids felt slightly heavier. She continued calling Discount but each attempt failed the same way, with the pain in her eyes, the ache in her head and the beating of her heart becoming gradually worse with each call. Icemantis felt her brain pound the insides of her skull, like it wanted to break free of its hold in a rhythm that matched her heartbeat. She struggled to put her phone back into its pocket - she was getting desperate. She called once more but it actually started to ring! Icemantis was feeling nauseous as she held the phone to her ear, her breathing slightly heavier now.

...

*Hello. Call accepted.*

She felt like crying but she couldn't figure out why. Her eyes watered and it began to sting, so she clenched them shut.

*Hello... Unnamed Ally. Hello.*

"How many times is it going to say that?" Icemantis said out loud, a vague frustration in her voice.

*Voice confirmed. Unnamed Ally has been identified as "Icemantis" and will be renamed as such.*

"I- Eh... *what!?*" She was stunned. Again.

*Psychic status... obtained. Psychic damage found. Scanning...*

"Am I calling Discount, or getting a check-up?"

*Condition... healthy. Verified for talk. Obtaining... Obtaining location... whyareyouhere?*

That last part was said in a much quicker, quieter, yet deeper voice. It was overshadowed by several beeps that followed a two second interval. Icemantis darted her eyes around the dark hallway, for she suddenly felt an overwhelming feeling that someone else was here. After the eighth beep, a loud beep akin to that of an emergency alert system sounded. This caused Icemantis to flinch, pulling the phone away from her face. Even with her arm extended, the beeping was still loud. She then decided to put the phone on speaker after the beeping was done.

*ERROR! IMPOSSIBLE LOCATION! HAZARDOUS PSYCHIC FIELDS DETECTED! EMERGENCY PROTOCOL "HAYWIRE" INITIATED. URGENT CALLING ENGAGED.*

The ringing this time sounded faster and the person who answered was even quicker.

"Hey." Said a familiar voice. "You know who it is."

"Discount, I-" Icemantis was quickly interrupted by him.

"Listen. *Carefully.* You are in a place that is *brimming* with psychic hazards. I can feel it emanating from this phone, even more so when you speak. Now, I have you in an anti-memetic bubble, which cancels out the hazards. This is as much help I can do right now because you are deep within psychic territory, Icemantis. Deep within unhuman ruins, I assume. That place that the rest of the group explored

yesterday? It was an ancient unhuman ruin, which are usually filled with psychic hazards as a way to fend off trespassers. I'll try my best to pull you out of there. You need to trace your steps backwards. Try to find your starting point, or at least get close enough to it. These hazards... even for me, they're too much. I can only hold up the bubble for so long. It will deteriorate, *fast*, when I hang up. So, when that happens, *run*."

"Wait, why do you have to hang up? Also, if you can set up this invisible bubble around me, can't you-" Again, interrupted by Discount.

"I am emanating the anti-memetic bubble from your *phone*, not *you*. I have it set so the hazards don't see you but they *do* see your phone. This call must end because of the psychic signals currently pouring out of my phone."

"O-oh. I see." Icemantis took a deep breath and sighed, not really understanding but not caring as to why right now. She shivered as chills went down her spine. "Well... I'm ready."

"Go, now!"

The call ended and Icemantis darted back from whence she came, which wasn't a long distance as she ended up back at the start of the room in less than three seconds. When she turned back, the statues from upstairs were placed in front of her feet but they were destroyed, seemingly shattered into pieces as if they always had been. There was one, smaller statue standing in the middle of the destruction. It depicted an armored, small male with a loincloth, oversized shades and a sharp helmet, with blades protruding from his wrists.

*A visitor in my time of need...* The strange voice from earlier spoke again, louder, slower and disembodied this time.

*Don't. Run. I'll make the pain worse.*

Icemantis stared at the new statue for three whole seconds, paralyzed by fear before everything turned a blinding white and she fell into a familiar hallway, her head aching in pain. She was then caught by large hands that easily engulfed both of her shoulders. They belonged to Nyx, as she stood Icemantis up with ease.

"Whoa, whoa!" Nyx exclaimed as Discount ran up the stairs beside her.

"It worked. Get her onto a bed." He ordered, which Nyx didn't hesitate doing. She quickly opened the door to Luhki's room and helped her walk over to

the bed. Icemantis collapsed onto the sheets, face deep into the pillow as her eyes started to burn furiously.

“She appeared out of nowhere!” Said a surprised Nyx.

“Yes. Now let her rest.” Discount simply responded, as if he’d been through this exact same situation several times before. “She’s been exposed to a great number of psychic hazards, her mind is now pouring out the residuals.”

“Shit, how did she even appear out of thin air like that?” Nyx asked out of genuine curiosity.

“I pulled her out of whatever unhuman ruin she found herself in. To make it short, I manipulated the hazards to believe that I had the power of teleportation, thus they allowed her to be teleported here. I’m going to assume the driver didn’t make it, either. So far, I haven’t gotten a signal from him.”

Nyx sighed, just glad that Icemantis was okay, feeling somewhat gloomy about the driver.

“Considering the time frame, I don’t think they made it to their destination.” Discount explained as he exited the room. “I will send others to pick up their trail, instead. So far, the news about Fevurr has been the same, ‘we were so close, we just missed him. He got away.’ He was last seen where Primal was, at Queens but Primal described him being teleported away, so he could be anywhere else.”

“I guess that’s where I come in.” Said Nyx as she followed Discount.

“Correct,” he answered, heading back down the stairs. “I will tell your driver to speed it up. Get ready.”

The front door then opened, revealing Kanya, Warpig, and their driver (who was very surprised at Nyx's height).

“Oh, y’all are back so soon!” Said a surprised Nyx before turning sympathetic. “I saw the text about Wyatt, sorry to hear that.”

“It’s fine, sis.” Said Kanya as she immediately sat down on the couch, pushing her back against the cushions and sighing. “I can go through a fucking carton of cigarettes right now.”

“Hey, I feel the same way.” Warpig said as he sat down with her, putting his feet up on the glass table. “But smoking’s bad for you, Kat Girl.”

“Call me Kat Girl again and I’ll fucking castrate you with my *claws*.” Kanya snapped back, which got a slight chuckle out of Warpig as he raised his open hands up to his chest.

“Alright, I’ll back off! I’ll leave you alone.” *She kinda is like a cat, though.* Warpig thought afterwards.

“Pyret.” Discount called to the driver, getting his attention. “You’re going back out there with Nyx this time. Now. You’re taking her original driver’s mission.”

“Got it, boss.” Responded Pyret, accepting his new responsibility as he headed out the door without losing a step. “Alright then, Nyx, let’s go. You can fit in my car, right?”

“If I crouch, then yeah. Anything’s possible, at that point.” She followed him out the door and shut it behind herself. Discount then stared at both Kanya and Warpig, noticing the blood stains on themselves.

“Wyatt was a great person and I knew him, personally. Don’t blame his death on yourselves. He’d want you to be greater than that.”

Warpig closed his eyes and leaned his head back, resting his hands together at his stomach. Kanya just sighed again as she crossed her arms, also closing her eyes. Out of respect, Discount left the room, heading down to the elevator so he could figure out just where *exactly* Icemantis and her driver ended up. He had a feeling that it was within the ruins of the underground facility. Considering the vicinity he picked up Icemantis’ signal was so close to the safehouse, he had a *very* safe bet.

*If she found that many hazards so close to here, then why hasn’t this place shown any? Perhaps what Primal found has the answer I need... or the other blocked off areas do.*

So many questions but Discount knew he had all the time he needed to answer them. He pressed the button within the elevator and headed down to the underground facility, determined to see the cause.

...

*You thought you could escape **me**?*

*What kind of fool do you take **ME** to be?*

*I am losing your signal, Alice. You’re too far.*

*However, your associate here Isn't. Unfortunately, he is of no use to me.  
I have all that I need from you. Here ismygifttoyou.Untilwemeetagain.  
LOOK.UP.*

Icemantis was lying down on the bed, a cold sweat enveloping her as she woke from her nightmare. Half a second into opening her eyes, she saw a red, silhouetted and static-y man, looming over her and then disappearing into thin air. Icemantis gasped and instantly rose out of her bed, back up against the wall. The moment she realized that person was gone, she calmed her breathing and slowly descended back onto the bed.

“Why is this happening?” She said to herself as her anxiety started to spike. She then took off her armor and pushed it to the side, then wrapped herself in a blanket and curled herself into a ball. Closing her eyes caused her to wince.

## **CHAPTER FIFTEEN: Depth.**

**Theme: Life - Nine Inch Nails**

Discount stood at the overgrown hallway, the laser orbs left by Noah fizzling out. It was total darkness but Discount did not care. He could walk in it just fine. He remembered the pictures Primal showed quite well but this place was linear enough to walk through without a guide. Every room he walked in, he scanned for any sort of psychic presence. The scan yielded no results for every room he passed and he pressed onwards, stopping at the corpse of the “zombie” that Primal killed. This particular room held a presence, which was at its strongest at the mysterious device. Primal’s picture of the device showed that it contained stars but, since he killed the zombie, it no longer did.

Discount touched the mysterious device, noting that it hadn’t rusted despite being made of metal. It was coffin-shaped but Discount quickly theorized that it was more like a gateway shaped like a coffin. He had been in ancient unhuman ruins before, seeing things that only the ancient unhumans could have ever invented. It made him wonder if the CIA ever got this far and if they did, what exactly did they research down here? Was it kept a secret from the GHRC? The CIA doesn’t really like the GHRC, mostly because of their unbound, global presence. They would never admit it but they consider the GHRC to be infringing on their territory, considering that the Coalition has their own soldiers and agents also within the CIA. So, it’s possible that the Agency was looking for something to even the playing field. Even if they did, Discount knew they couldn’t do anything about the Coalition. They held onto fringe hope and this is where it got them.

Discount then entered the “coffin” but nothing happened. The psychic presence was somewhat stronger, though.

“The other areas must be cleared.” He spoke to himself, already forming a plan as he walked back to where he came. “After everyone is done with their missions, this place *must* be excavated.”

***Meanwhile, with Nyx and Pyret...***

### (Thunderground - Locknar)

Nyx had to somewhat lay down in the back seat of Pyret's car, somewhat more comfortable than what she imagined. Her weight slowed the car down a little bit but Pyret managed. Since Nyx was taking over Icemantis' original mission, she would be heading to the Dust instead of Brooklyn. She had been there a few times but never really explored it. It was a place she didn't feel comfortable with. Something about it just felt off.

Pyret parked his car near the border of the Dust and exited the vehicle, with Nyx having to crawl out of it. The car ride was mostly quiet, with the only thing that Pyret and Nyx were discussing was how exactly to do the mission. The location of Fevurr's presumed location was on the far edge of the Dust. They'd have to go deep into that territory, which could have unwanted hostiles. So, they just decided to go in together through the front. If anything, they were prepared to perform a full frontal assault, which is why Pyret brought a KS-23 and a bandolier full of 4 gauge shotgun shells to go with it. He kept it in his trunk, as well as a few other gears such as a lightweight ballistic vest, with two pouches for extra ammo, a stylish red & white jacket to wear over the vest, a sling for the shotgun and a slick, shiny machete that looked extra sharp as well as its holster, which was attached to his hip.

"I call this beast 'Closer Encounters.'" Pyret said as he started loading the KS-23, almost proud of it. "Stole it from this scarred bitch that almost killed me two years ago."

"Yeah?" Nyx was sort of surprised. She didn't know much about guns but knew bringing a weapon like that into a place like this would be overkill. "I bet you call the machete 'Closest Encounters.'"

"How'd ya know?" Chuckled Pyret as he sheathed Closest Encounters and cocked Closer Encounters, then putting it on the sling before eyeing Nyx with an eyebrow raised, piquing her curiosity.

"...What?"

"You're not really armored." He said, looking up at her. "They *could* be armed."



“Part of my power’s hyper-regeneration.” Nyx explained, without wanting to go further into detail. “I’ve survived *much* worse.”

Pyret shrugged his shoulders and said, “Suit yourself” before entering the Dust, with Nyx trailing behind him. The place didn’t look much better (in fact, it looked worse).

“I knew this place was bad but *damn*.” Commented Nyx as she took in her surroundings. It almost bewildered her that this place even exists at all - especially in the state it’s in now.

“Like. Hell.” Responded Pyret, feeling much the same. “Must be worth it.”

There were a few locals eying Pyret as he and Nyx walked deeper into the Dust, mostly because Pyret was armed to the teeth. Thankfully, Discount’s protection was working on Nyx (she didn’t even worry about it anyway). The locals all wore scraped-together clothes and makeshift armor, which, to Nyx, was odd.

“You see what they’re wearin’? I wonder why...” Her thoughts trailed but was given a quick answer by Pyret.

“Beats me.” He responded. “I think they like to pick fights with the Coalition and police. Or anyone, really.”

“Not that their armor does them any good.”

“I think they have quite the courage.”

Pyret and Nyx noticed that the Dust looked more deteriorated the more they walked further into it. The sidewalks and roads might as well be one, due to their destroyed nature. The only part of the Dust that looked “alright” was the park, which is where the two needed to be.

“Ah, shit.” Said Pyret out loud as he looked into the park. “All the way in there... *goddamn*!”

“That is one fortified park.” Noted Nyx as she was genuinely surprised at the wall of cars. She also noticed a big collection of buildings behind the park that were decorated in scrap metal, with catwalks and towers on the roofs.

“Since when was all that added? I thought the Coalition hit this place!” Pyret seemed annoyed, almost nervous to venture forth despite his gear.

“Maybe they did and the locals here just fortified it for next time?” Nyx assumed, not really having an answer. Pyret just sighed.

“We’re not going back, so let’s just press on. I don’t see another way in so... through the front it is!” Pyret & Nyx both walked into the park and followed the concrete path to a large metal & concrete gate at the far-end of the park. Seems that this part of the Dust was fortified with whatever the locals could get their hands on and it was surprisingly well-constructed, too. The large door was connected by two brick buildings, which were armored by a wall of destroyed cars. One of the windows of the building opened up and a fully clothed, armored local, wearing what looked like dirty Coalition gear, started shouting at Pyret.

*“HEY! What the hell do you want, outsider?”*

“Uhh, passage into this part of town?” He responded simply, then added to make himself sound more convincing, “I’ve never seen this part of the Dust, did y’all just build it?”

*“We don’t call it the Dust! It’s the Zone! Fuck off and never come back!”*

The local then activated his goggles and it glowed in indigo, similar to the colors that the North American Division of the GHRC wears. He was scanning Pyret but suddenly noticed Nyx beside him when he couldn’t previously.

*“Hey, who’s that beefy bitch!?”*

“The fuck?” Nyx was greatly stunned, not at the insult but as to how he could even see her. “How can he- wait, is he wearing GHRC tech?” Nyx took a closer look and realized that the shouting local was, in fact, wearing such. It answered her question. Though, it seemed to be mashed up with other bits of junk, making it appear as crudely-stitched-together high tech armor. She had a feeling that, if this local was equipped with *that* sort of armor, then everyone else here also had similar gear (possibly including weapons).

“Look, we mean no harm!” Pyret pleaded, trying to prevent the situation from escalating further. “My partner and I are just looking for someone highly dangerous and he *could* be here! It’d be of great benefit for you and us if we just work together to find him.”

The local looked behind himself, as if someone was getting his attention. A few seconds later, he looked back at Nyx and Pyret.

*“Nah! Sir Lizard says this place stays under lock down! Now fuck off or be greeted by .30-06!”* The local reached behind his back and pulled out an M1 Garand, generally aiming it at Nyx & Pyret.

“Fuck...” Sighed a disappointed Pyret. “I hate going loud!”

“Just shoot him already!” Nyx got in front of him, acting as a shield in anticipation as Pyret pulled out his KS-23 and turned the safety off.

### *(Fallen Flame - CRY.NN)*

The local tried firing his rifle but it jammed, then his left shoulder was eviscerated by a 23mm projectile. Dying and groaning, he turned his head to his partner behind him and said, “Avenge me..!”

“Those motherfuckers!” Shouted the partner as he pressed a big red button on the wall that said “FOR INVASIONS ONLY!” Alarms started to blare and Nyx immediately went to work on the gate. In just a few hard punches, which sent shockwaves across the gate itself and into the towers, causing cracks to appear in them, it was knocked down - flattening those under it.

A shocked Reptiloid, which is what the armored locals seemingly call themselves, shouted, “WE GOT INTRUDERS!” and ran the other way.

“Guess my disguise is fucked then!” Said Nyx as she charged forward, with an impressed and smirking Pyret covering the rear. It was as if he was waiting to see some action. This part of the Dust was more narrow and linear, also having campfires outside of every building, with Reptiloids populating them and cooking strange things (due to boredom). Upon seeing what had just transpired, they took all out their weapons (mostly blunt & edged melee weapons, along with small-caliber weapons) and attacked the duo.

The first Reptiloid tried swinging her dagger at Nyx but it broke upon impact without even scratching Nyx, who enveloped the Reptiloid’s entire head within the palm of her hand and crushed it with ease. A Reptiloid beside her gasped and puked inside his mask, it being mixed with blood and teeth as Nyx kicked his jaw into the roof of his mouth. He died from shock shortly after that. Nyx then felt little knives stab her back, turning around to see a Reptiloid wildly tossing knives at her. Before any more could be thrown, their head was turned into a gory mist by a shot from Pyret’s KS-23.

“Goddamn, that’s powerful!” Complimented Nyx before disarming a Reptiloid to her right by taking his sword and slicing his own neck wide open. He fell to the ground, bleeding profusely and gargling, hands reaching towards his

wound. Nyx ended his misery by slamming the entire sword through his skull and through the asphalt.

“Says the one punching them to death!” Pyret quickly replied, then crouching and shooting a charging Reptiloid’s groin off, her blistering scream filling the air before she died of shock. “We need to get to high- *GAH!!*” Pyret was abruptly shot in the shoulder by a Reptiloid’s pistol from the building behind him. He rolled onto the ground and aimed his KS-23 in the general direction of the shot, firing two rounds into the middle-right window. He tried firing another time but the *click* caused him to reload.

“NYX, COVER ME!” He yelled to her as she backed up towards him. His shoulder was in pain but thankfully, the vest stopped the bullet. A Reptiloid rushed towards Nyx and ducked under her haymaker of a fist, then stretched himself upwards at him, sending her flying to the roof of the building in front of Pyret. He heard the Reptiloids laugh and chuckle as he got up, having fully loaded Closer Encounters by then. The ones here held guns instead of melee weapons and there were even more of them pouring into the street. So, Pyret retreated into the building Nyx was sent to, shoulder-charging the door open and slamming it shut behind him.

The building’s interior looked just as bad as it did on the outside, though the presence of smoke was more concentrated here. Pyret noticed an unarmed Reptiloid wearing an intimidating black mask at the other end of the hallway and aimed his shotgun at him. The stranger just raised a hand and Pyret found himself suddenly pointing his own gun upwards, the barrel slowly reaching to his head.

“No, NO!” Pyret screamed, resisting the psychic messages influencing his mind to the best of his ability. The psychic Reptiloid struggled, increasing the strength of the messages before it was suddenly interrupted by the Reptiloids outside shooting into the building with reckless abandon. Both the psychic and Pyret dropped to the ground, avoiding the gunfire. Pyret then used this opportunity to aim Closer Encounters at the psychic and fired, their guts pouring out as the projectile punched through their stomach. When the gunfire stopped, Pyret hastily stood up, sprinted past the dying psychic and ran up the stairwell beside him. On his way up, he quickly noticed an ambushing Reptiloid to his left and shot her in the chest and then in the head, her blood and gore painting the wall behind her.

Loading his gun with three more shells, Pyret continued up the stairs and kicked the door open to the roof.

He saw that Nyx was struggling with dealing with the unhuman Reptiloid, due to his stretched-out proportions making it impossible for Nyx to land a lethal attack. Pyret noticed that this Reptiloid had a brief pause in between his rapid attacks, which made them vulnerable. He then aimed Closer Encounters where he believed they would pause and fired, soon finding his prediction successful as the Reptiloid's head exploded into chunks of gore.

"Thanks!" Said a grateful Nyx with a thumbs up, wiping blood away from her eyes. "Now what?"

"Fevurr is definitely gone - we've gotta abort!" Pyret urged as he pulled out his phone, texting Discount "REQUESTING PROTOCOL: SHADE." However, the message couldn't be sent because Pyret dropped it due to his hand being shot by the gatekeeper Reptiloid, who sat in a room from across the street, having a clear sight of his targets.

"FFFUCKKKIINGGGG-!!!" Exclaimed Pyret through gritted teeth as Nyx pushed him behind her, tanking the other seven rounds with her back. It hurt badly but no bullet penetrated through her armor layer and she could feel the wounds healing already.

"Vengeance!" Yelled the gatekeeper. *PING!* Went the Garand's enbloc clip as it flew out of the chamber. As quickly as it flew out, another went in. "Die, muscle beast!" Gatekeeper exclaimed as he cocked his Garand ready, firing several more shots at Nyx. As Nyx tanked the rounds, she noticed that some of the Reptiloids were scaling the building she was on.

"I don't believe he's gone yet, Pyret!" Nyx said in haste, realizing that the Reptiloids had them surrounded. Pyret stood, pulled out an Adrenaline syringe from one of his pouches, used it and then pulled out Closest Encounters.

"Oh, fuck it then!" Pyret yelled as he felt the adrenaline surge, ignoring his bleeding hand. "Let's kill these idiots and-"

He was interrupted by a Reptiloid pummeling him into the ground. Another shot at Nyx with his dual-wielded M1911s. Nyx charged at and drop-kicked them off the roof. Then she was met by multiple stabs, slashes and gunshots once she stood back up. She grabbed the nearest Reptiloid, her hand easily piercing their

neck as she felt their spine and promptly crushed it. The dead Reptiloid was then used as a melee weapon against his comrades.

Pyret, however, was getting his face beaten by the Reptiloid that pinned him down. Seeing an opportunity in between the punches, Pyret quickly sent a cross-punch to the woman's chin, then to her gut (which was unprotected by any sort of armor). She fell over onto her sides in pain as a swift Pyret grabbed his machete, stood and sliced her head clean off like a hot knife to butter. He heard another Reptiloid rush toward him from his rear, so he revolved around and sent the blade of Closest Encounters straight through their head, vertically. The scrap helmet they wore was utterly defenseless against the surprising sharpness of the machete. In fact, none of the armors anyone wore here would work against Pyret's blade.

Nyx had to drop her dead Reptiloid as she grabbed another by the throat, squeezing so hard that they were decapitated moments later, blood gushing out of their neck. Turning around, she was shot in the head by the gatekeeper, stumbling backwards as the round fell out of her head. Thankfully, it didn't go through. Her armor layer was as reliable as always. Then she was shot in the same place again and fell off the roof, crashing onto a dumpster and flattening it and its contents completely. It smelled horrible and now, so did Nyx.

Pyret had just stabbed a Reptiloid through her heart, before the snap and whizzing of multiple .30-06 rounds convinced him to go back down the building, using the recently killed Reptiloid as a meat shield to protect him from sniper fire as he picked up his phone on the way down.

"Goddamn lunatics!" Cursed the Gatekeeper as he backed away from the window, then running across multiple hallways. "They're slaughtering us! I doubt Muscle Beast is dead, so I need to call on my Best Friend!" He reached a locked room with a steel door at the end of the last hallway, pulled out a key from his coat pocket and inserted it into the lock. As he opened it, he had to stop himself from admiring his .50 caliber M2 Browning (which he called Best Friend) as he knew those intruders were still killing his people. He checked to see if it was loaded and, satisfied that it was, started lugging it back to his original position (while also bringing an ammo box full of .50 caliber rounds).

Pyret dodged a Reptiloids hatchet by a hair and sent his machete through their heart and out their back. It was like stabbing water with how easy it was to pull his blade out of the body. Another Reptiloid ran up the stairs but wasn't paying attention to their surroundings, having their head sliced off by Pyret's blade.

"HE'S UP THERE, SHOOT THROUGH THE FLOOR!" Commanded a Reptiloid from downstairs as he saw a head roll down the stairs. With haste, Pyret reached into one of his pouches and pulled out a grenade. Pulling Its pin, he peaked downstairs and threw it at three Reptiloids, who were looking upwards.

"Oof-!" Exclaimed a Reptiloid as he felt something hard punch his chest. Before he even got a *chance* to see what it was, the grenade exploded and the three had their bodies violently torn apart, blood and gore being sent in *every* direction. Using this brief moment of opportunity, Pyret pulled out his phone and sent a quick message to Discount. After a couple seconds, a ping alerted him that Discount approved his request for an "imperception field." Breathing a sigh of relief, Pyret holstered his weapon back in Its sheath, went downstairs and walked out of the building, seeing the blood bath he and Nyx caused.

Armed Reptiloids carefully approached the building with weapons at the ready. Pyret simply walked by them, the imperception field clearly working. He had to find Nyx and get the hell out of this garbage-made place.

Nyx stood up and groaned, wiping the garbage off her face. A Reptiloid ran past her and Nyx jumped, putting her fists up in a stance. She dropped the stance in confusion as she saw the same Reptiloid run past Pyret as if he no longer cared about him.

"Nyx, Discount sent us an imperception field!" He explained to her. "I think that Gatekeeper's a psychic though. So, let's avoid him so we can't get detected like you did."

"Got it! I knew the Dust sucked but this *really* sucked!" The two then ran past the group of Reptiloids that had just kicked down the door to the building, searching for their intruders. Nyx and Pyret both made sure to avoid the Gatekeeper's line of sight and, once they got past the destroyed gate, made a beeline towards the car.

"Hey, didn't you want to stay and Fevurr?" Questioned Pyret as he opened his car's trunk and threw in his gun and pouches.

“I’ve changed my mind.” Answered Nyx. “He wouldn’t want to be around those bunch! Do you think he’s elsewhere in this place?”

Pyret closed the trunk and went to the driver’s side, then pulled out his phone as he got a notification.

“Nah,” Pyret said after looking at the messages sent by Primal and Savage in the group chat. “He definitely knows we’re onto him. I’d say that this operation is done for.”

### ***Back with Discount...***

#### ***(Life - Nine Inch Nails)***

Discount was at the dilapidated conference room after having spent some time doing a deeper exploration of the ruins. Vague psychic signals were present in the air but they were too small to cause anything significant. At worst, they would cause a feeling of anxiety. A normal human could be in this place just fine. Noah’s laser orbs had fizzled out at this point and Discount found nothing new after combing through the ruins a second time on his way back.

He stared at the rubble blocking the path to the other parts of the ruins. Most of the psychic signals were coming from that direction. Ancient unhuman ruins typically contained these signals as they are created from a failsafe system in case something happened. Sometimes, the signals would be so strong that they could cause instant death and Discount was glad that he hadn’t discovered those here (not yet anyways).