

The Crushing Trials:  
Conduct Unbecoming

By Jace Merryweather

## Chapter One:

### Richard Refuses, Dick Denies

“Look, everyone knows you will defeat both teams tomorrow. It’s no secret, you’re the best the best has to offer. But you haven’t fought the Champ. And frankly, he doesn’t want to destroy you. You’ve been in the games since you were thirteen, right? Nine years. Wow. But that isn’t enough.

“Simply put, you’re both out of your league. So tell ya what. We’re gonna make this painless.” The gentleman laid a hand on the black lockbox. “You take this cash. Get busted up a bit, put on a show. In the end, lose. He’ll spare you, you run off richer. The payout isn’t as much as the pot, but you’ll go home in generally one piece. Got it?” The gentleman smiled, confident. It was a fair deal.

Before the gentleman were two seasoned Crushers. The first, a large man with a cybernetic right arm gripping the chair. His clothes were simple. A grey t-shirt and black cargo pants, matching combat boots. His jaw was strong, clean-shaven, and without acne despite his youth. A mop of dark, clean hair topped his head. His arm was a dull grey, the hiss of nanites audible with every shift. His eyes, the colour of polished sapphires, bore into the gentleman. His name was Richard Joseph Loggins, Crusher Code *Atlas*.

Resting on the left arm of the chair was the second Crusher. A dainty woman wearing a black knee-high dress stitched from four pairs of cargo pants. Two Iron Bore brand .357 revolvers rested under her arms. Her arms themselves were metal below the elbow, a solid red line running from inside her elbow to her wrist. The arms were custom made, the latest in high-tech compact cybernetics. Her hair hung to her shoulders, brown as whiskey and just as smooth. Her eyes, green as pine needles, stared at the black lockbox. Her name was Richard Hill Loggins, Crusher Code *Sigbin*. She answers only to ‘Dick.’

Richard rubbed his jaw. He looked to Dick, a silent question in the bend of his brow.

Dick shrugged, her mouth quirking. “I don’t see why we shouldn’t just take the money.”

The gentleman smiled. “Excellent choice. I’ll inform my employer of your decision.” He pulled out his cellphone. “He’ll want to thank you personally.”

“Oh, no no no.” Dick tutted. “We’re not throwing the fight. We’re taking your money.”

The gentleman frowned, his simple mind whirring. “I . . . Don’t think I follow.”

“Okay. Let me make this painless.” Dick stood. “Look at me.”

“What?” The gentleman’s attention was captured.

“Now tell me, what’s the first rule of brawling?” Dick asked, flanking the gentleman.

“Huh?” The gentleman’s face screwed with confusion.

“Never, ever take your eyes off the mean one.” Dick smiled. “I’m the nice one.”

Richard leaped from the chair, slugging the gentleman in the solar plexus. Air wheezed out of him, his face red from the sudden blow. The pain was searing, but paled in comparison to the gentleman’s wounded pride. His bribes were never denied.

Shifting his stance, Richard pushed his fist forward, nanites buzzing with effort. He lifted the gentleman’s feet off the ground, hitting the door. The gentleman slammed through the wood and into the door across the hall, making a sizable dent. Richard released his breath, relaxing his stance. He cracked his neck.

“Denied!” Dick cried, crossing her arms in front of her torso, forming an ‘X’. Her eyes widened as she took in the full extent of the damages. “Damn it Richard. We’ll need a new door.” Dick pouted.

Richard smiled. “Or a new room.” He gestured to the black lockbox.

Dick punched Richard in the arm. “I like the way you think, brother.” She put her finger to her chin in thought. “You think we can rent a fancy suite with a bubble bath?”

“Ha! Does the mighty Crusher want a ducky?” Richard guffawed.

Dick huffed. “No. I want a little boat.” She held her hands twenty centimeters apart. “About ye big, with little flowers drawn on it.”

"What do you want a boat for?" Richard asked.

"Can't be a sea monster if you can't capsize a boat." Dick replied. "Obviously."

"Oh, pardon me sister. I don't fantasize about the next *Empress of Ireland* in the comfort of the tub." Richard replied, crushing the lockbox's lock with his boxy fist. He lifted the lid, letting out a low whistle. "Damn. This is a tenth of the pot, at least."

"10 million?!?" Dick asked, bouncing towards the box. "Holy shit! We're living it up tonight brother! I'm talking high-end courtesans and belly button shots! Whooo!" Dick snapped her finger. "Wait, wait, take half, put it on us."

"As a bid?" Richard asked.

"Hell yes. It'll be so nice to have some cash if we win!" Dick pumped her arms in the air.

"*When*, dear sister. When we win."

Dick froze, a frown settling on her cheeks. "Oh. Yeah." She played with the hem of her dress, her eyes downcast. "We can't afford to lose."

Richard shook his head. "No. No we cannot." He turned to the lockbox, snatching the bills. "Dishonor demands death."

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Richard Joseph Loggins and Richard Hill Loggins were born to a corpse on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2225. Their father, a man of many regrets, had none in naming his daughter Richard. In honor of the second son he couldn't have.

Richard Joseph Hill Loggins. Crusher Code *Paladin*. Professional Crusher. Dedicated father to his two children. Champion of the people. Handsomest man in the games. Strongest man. The bees knees. An oblivious, downtrodden narcissist with little hope or future without his only friend in the world. Missus Loggins.

After the twin's birthday, Richard Joseph Hill Loggins took to drinking before fights, drinking during fights, and drinking after fights. His violence was contained to the Arena, so his children never felt blows. No, he bruised his children through training.

The twin's day started at 4 AM, their first task a grueling affair. Massive underground obstacle courses filled with piranhas, crocodiles, rope bridges, flamethrowers, poison darts, rabid monkeys, little ammo, climbing walls, waterfalls, pitfalls, trapped halls, wrecking balls and the odd komodo dragon. If it was a holiday, they got a special prize at the end. Groundhog Day consisted of beating honey badgers to death. Easter was spent hunting for ration eggs in a snake nest. Christmas consisted of twelve hired ninjas dressed in Santa hats and kunai.

School began at 8 AM. All things considered, everything went well in kindergarten and half of elementary. In middle school, however, the twins were at a severe disadvantage. Richard Joseph Loggins was often pestered by his colleagues, finding his large frame and quiet mannerisms a strange combination. He didn't care much for their opinions, and swatted their insults away as easily as he threw them off the local cliff.

His sister, Richard Hill Loggins, immediately acquired the nickname 'Dick'. She escaped her torment for a year with the power of numb disdain and volunteering with the lunch ladies so she wouldn't have to talk to anyone. Just wash dishes. After watching a few techno-drag shows online, she decided 'positive acceptance' was the answer, fully embracing the name 'Dick.' It didn't hurt that she could kill every kid in her grade with an eraser.

After school, the twins had a two hour block to complete homework. If finished early, they could laze around. At precisely 6 PM, their father would engage them in a few hours of their preferred combat style. Boxing and brawling for Richard. Sniping and krav maga for Dick.

At 8 PM, the twins were dismissed to partake in hobbies or rest. Richard often found himself on the hammock in the backyard, quietly processing the day in his mind. Dick went to her room, toying with hardware and simple robotics. Secretly, she sewed dresses and skirts out of the military-grade

pants and shirts her father made her wear. When her father found out, he merely shrugged, telling her she could wear them so long as they didn't interfere with mobility during training.

Richard Joseph Hill Loggins was only a fun father once a year. Exactly 6 months from the twin's birthday, their father would wake them with breakfast and a wallet full of cash. The next 24 hours would be spent doing exactly what the twins wanted. No school, no training. Just the three of them and all of Gaia, Mars and Luna to explore. Richard and Dick often chose walking in the park and street corner tacos.

The twins, despite the titanic effort of their father, found themselves content with life. They even grew to love their father, who pushed them every day to become stronger, to deny death with sheer physical intensity. They met the challenge enthusiastically. After all, they were their father's children.

Twelve years passed in this manner. On the thirteenth, they woke one day and found no father freeing wolves to chase them down. No school shuttle swinging by to escort them to hell. They laid back in the grass and waited. And waited. Watching the sun and purple hazed clouds. Breathing air calmly instead of erratic gasps. It was a past-time the pair cherished.

Therefore, it could only be fleeting.

Not a mere twenty minutes after the twins truly relaxed, a shuttle spewing flames fell from the sky, exploding nearby. A large metal panel spun from the wreckage, slicing Richard's right arm from his shoulder, cauterizing the wound. A flaming fridge bounced from the shuttle's lounge room and crushed Dick's forearms.

The corpse of their father splatted in front of them.

A man in dark armor smashed into the ground next to their father. He drew himself to his full height, a good 6'3". The armor on his body was fashioned after steel-plate from ancient times. The armor hissed and whirred, adjusting to his every movement. A silver hog's head was emblazoned on the breastplate. His face was covered by a gnarly sharp helmet, the eyes a cold abyss. He turned those eyes to the twins. He lifted his foot and brought it down on their father's sizzling head.

**"Crushed."** The Dark Armor growled.

The twin's fainted.

When they awoke, they found themselves in a hospital with prosthetic arms. Their father had left them a literal ton of money. The twins left their father in the dirt, a bouquet of daisies on his casket, his wife scarcely a meter away.

The twins did not tell the police about The Dark Armor, at the insistence of Dick. Richard didn't see much point in arguing at the time. Dick always had a reason.

Momentarily directionless, they settled down at an orphanage for a time before accidentally setting it on fire. With no other avenues left to explore, they followed their training.

Richard meditated on his mind, sharpening his instincts and resistance to pain. He explored every secret his flesh had to offer. He knew his limitations, and sought to stretch them.

Dick, meanwhile, engineered her weapons. Her area of specialty was compact weaponized cybernetics. From her efforts came two new arms, filled with every gadget and gimmick Dick could think of. She even made it so when she flipped someone off, a harpoon would shoot out of her arm. After hers were complete, she gladly assembled one for her brother.

They were the youngest team to ever survive The Crushing Trials.

## Chapter Two:

### Sensational Semi-Final

“Dick.” Richard whispered.

“Hm?” Dick yawned into a mouthful of breast. “Wha?”

“Get up and get ready. The fight's in an hour.” Richard left Dick's room to meditate in his own, clearing his mind for the coming battle.

Dick groaned. “I'll show you ready. Built his damn arm, guy can crush concrete. Can't let me sleep for five minutes.” Dick mumbled, pushing herself up on her arms. She crawled over one of the naked women in her bed and fell on the floor. She grabbed the side of the bed and pushed herself up on shaky legs.

“God damn Teresa.” Dick whispered to herself, her gaze flitting to the two women in her bed. “If I die today, I can die happy.” Dick stumbled her way to the shower.

Twenty minutes later she emerged, wrapped in a pink towel, her arms polished to a high sheen. She walked to the dresser and pulled out a pair of panties, a bra and one of her sewn dresses. A pair of arms wrapped around her waist.

“Leaving so soon?” Teresa whispered in Dick's ear.

“Gotta clock in, and time for you to clock out.” Dick leaned back, pressing a kiss to Teresa's cheek. “You and Lisa.”

“I'll be cheering for you.” Teresa murmured, licking Dick's ear.

“I'm not paying you for that.” Dick replied flippantly. “Do what you want.” She shrugged Teresa's arms off, pulling on her undergarments. She slid into the dress. “Zip me up?” Dick asked.

“Is it hard to believe that I want you to win?” Teresa asked, pulling up the zipper.

“No. Because you know if I win, I'll be asking for you again.” Dick turned around, grasping Teresa's chin. “So clear your schedule for tonight. Yours and Lisa's.” Dick nodded at the bed.

“What if I want you all to myself?” Teresa purred, a hand languidly exploring.

“Then you'll have to convince me I only need one.” Dick whispered huskily, pulling Teresa in for a short, intense kiss.

“Just give me tonight.” Teresa breathed when they parted. “I'll show you some convincing.”

Dick smiled. “I look forward to it.” Dick left Teresa wanting, closing the door to her room. She walked across the hall and knocked twice. Richard opened up.

“You ready?” Richard asked.

Dick smirked. “Nine years ready, bro.”

“Okay. Let's – oh. Gimme a second, I gotta plug my phone in.” Richard closed the door.

“Plug in your phone?! You didn't do that when you woke me up?” Dick half-yelled, throwing up her arms. “Hell, you didn't even charge it last night? What if we get separated?”

“Then I'll just scream til I find you.” Richard called from behind the door.

“God damn it Richard!”

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The Global Crushing Trials have thirteen international combat divisions around the world, each with their own Overseer. Overseers are the arena master. They direct terrain, Genie and death bot placement, and general management of their arena.

Twelve of the divisions are dedicated to tournaments that run for twelve months and decide the top contenders in each division. The thirteenth month focuses on the Champion division, gathering all twelve division leaders to fight each other for a chance to challenge the Champion. And they get to die in the greatest arena on Gaia.

The Coliseum. An arena built around the original roman coliseum, it measures ten kilometers in diameter. The original coliseum is placed in the exact center, shielded by experimental nano-tech defense bots to prevent damage or blood stains.

0 degrees of the original coliseum, the Arena is dotted with small lakes and two massive rocks, towering 130 meters into the sky. At 90 degrees, the Arena is forested, with small caves dotting the dense foliage. At 180 degrees, the Arena flattens in a small desert, sparsely populated with cactuses, genetically modified to grow needles a meter in length. There's also another rock, 122 meters high with edges sharp enough to cut steel. At 270 degrees, the Arena's land rolls up in massive hills, some 50 meters tall. A small lake is sequestered within the hills, but otherwise it's the most pleasant place in The Coliseum.

- ✓ 1. <sup>Ancient Coliseum, but still technically correct</sup> The ~~Callisaem~~
- ✗ 2. <sup>Thinner Forest</sup> The ~~Forests~~ Of ~~Duma~~
- ✗ 3. <sup>Slit</sup> ~~Sharp~~ Rock
- 1/2 4. Olympia's landing
- ✗ 5. ??? ? <sup>Hammer Rock</sup>
- ✓ 6. The Humble Hills
- ✓ 7. Devil's Desert
- ✓ 8. The Quarry <sup>good job!</sup>



4 1/2 / 8  
office hours!

Jessica Rawthorne

A toddler's rendition of The Coliseum for geography class.

The outer wall of The Coliseum is ninety meters tall with a width of fifty meters. The top of the wall slopes inwards at negative twenty-five degrees for seating. The sides of The Arena were marred with bright, colourful compositions drawn by local graffiti artists, hoping to leave their mark on the only world that matters.

The Inner Ring of the Arena was populated with shops and TVs, allowing those who wish for a closer view of the action and a hot meal to sit down and enjoy. The cuisine came from every corner of human civilization. Sushi, pizza, tikka masala, tamales, kielbasa, ramen, perogi, lamb, crepes and even french fries.

Richard and Dick approached the entrance, an unassuming hole flanked by an appropriately imposing sculpture of two ancient warriors crossing swords, forty meters tall. The statue on the left bled from its side, while the right bore no wounds. The twins soon found themselves craning their necks to look up at the screaming gold faces. They entered the Arena.

“Damn, I never get tired of seeing those things. Do you, Richard?” Dick asked.

Richard shook his head. “Of course not. They’re rather impressive. I wonder how many lost their lives building it.” He squinted, trying to look for blood in the faint seams of the statues.

“Whoa, when did you get all Debbie Downer? Why would anyone have to die?”

“They are statues of the first two Finals Crushers. The victor, unmarred and the loser, bleeding. I cannot imagine such a sculpture wouldn’t kill those who built it.” Richard turned his head to his sister. “Can you?”

Dick sighed. “So, what, it’s the Arena’s Blucifer?”

Richard nodded, smiling. “Perfect comparison.”

Dick huffed. “Whatever. We’ve got a half-hour. Let’s get something to eat and get down to business.” Dick pointed. “We can go to that pizza place we went to last fight.”

Richard frowned. “I was hoping we could go to that pho place. I haven’t had good noodles since we were back on the west coast.”

Dick grinned. “Shit, you’re actually suggesting for once. I can’t say no!” Dick grabbed Richard’s hand and started marching. “To noodles!”

Dick led Richard to Pho-King Good on level three of the Inner Ring. The shop was empty save for a middle-aged Sikh sitting behind the register. On her chest was a name tag with the word ‘Hue’ typed on.

Hue pushed her glasses up her nose. “How may I help you?” She asked.

“Two bowls of Pho Tai Nam, please.” Dick replied.

“Ah, you’re the Crushers fighting today, hm?” Hue smiled. “For gracing this shop, it shall be a gift.” She turned and began preparing two servings of soup.

“Thank you.” Dick bowed slightly before sitting at the bar, Richard joining her on her right. They watched in silence as their host prepared the noodles. A moment later, she slid two large bowls to the twins, filled with broth, noodles, and still-pink cuts of beef. The pair snagged some chopsticks and soup spoons from the dispensers and dug in.

“Thanks for the food.” Dick said, chomping on her first bite.

“Of course. And in case you didn’t know, the meat is Jhatka!” Hue declared proudly.

“Ah. Do you slaughter your cows here then?” Dick gestured to the restaurant.

“I do not personally kill them. My husband does that, in the back. This store is his pet project.” Hue scowled. “I didn’t know what he’d named it until it was already done.” Her face suddenly brightened. “But it brings in business and business is good. I can just never invite my mother or father to see it.” Her eyes fell. “And I’m running out of excuses.”

Dick snorted. “Well, I think it’s great.” She said earnestly.

Hue nodded. “See, it works its magic.”

“But why open a restaurant here? Near all this brutality and death?” Richard suddenly piped up. Dick's eyes widened in surprise. Richard was never that forward.

Hue's face fell. “Because my husband's brother died here. And he has yet to let go.”

Richard frowned. “I'm sorry.”

Hue shrugged. “It is less painful that it was. He stays to grieve, and to heal.”

“So why do you stay?” Dick asked through a mouthful of noodles.

Hue smiled. “Because I want to share this meal with those who want it. You could very well die, as could everyone who even watches the Games. If even one of them wants a bowl of soup, I want to be here.” Hue said simply, without arrogance. A broad smile lit her face. “Besides, my husband couldn't run this place properly even if he did go to that business seminar.

Richard looked at his near empty bowl. “What was his brother's name?” Richard asked.

“His name was Binh.” Hue frowned. “Crusher Code *Red Fletcher*.”

Richard nodded. “I will remember his name. Thank you.” He slurped the rest down and set it on the bar. “I appreciate that.” Richard stood. “You ready?”

Dick looked at her bowl. “I'm not done yet!”

“We've got ten minutes to get up there. Expedite the process.” He said, looking at the clock in Pho-King Good.

“Hrm!” Dick huffed. She quickly slurped the food down and let out a massive burp. “Thanks for the food Hue!”

Hue nodded. “I'm happy you enjoyed it. May your game find you well. Don't get eaten by a Genie.”

“We will win. We won't waver.” Dick called over her shoulder. The pair went out the door.

Hue shook her head, sighing. “No one wins the Trials.”

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The announcer wiped the sweat from his forehead. This would be his ninth year as commentator of The Coliseum Arena. The Semi-Finals always left him giddy. Who will challenge the Champion? Age and speed? Bravado and brawn? Youth and talent? The uncertainty left him shaking with glee. He leaned over, staring down at the Arena from his perch fifteen meters above the Inner Ring. He pulled his microphone forward and switched it on. Curtain.

“Ladies and gentlemen! Gaians, Lunars, Martians tuning in, and all present at The Coliseum, welcome to the Semi-Final match of the Champion bout! As you know, the Semi-Finals compose of three teams of Crushers thirsting for blood, instead of just two! That's one and a half times more carnage!”

The announcer point below him. “At 0 degrees, a pair of warriors seeking fame, fortune, and a beautiful place to call home. The first, a supple snake with more venom than charm, let's give it up for *Medusa*! And standing next to her, a shimmering spider who cares only for death! Let's give it up for *Anansi*!”

The announcer pointed towards the heavily forested side. “At 120 degrees, a pair of brothers, one of two sibling teams we have here today! You know the first by their hotheaded temper and blinding speed! Ladies, it's *Unthragor*! With his closest brother. . .” The announcer bit back a laugh. “*Ted*.”

The announcer pointed towards the bunkers and hills. “And at 240 degrees, a real treat for the audience! The youngest pair to ever enter the American local Crusher Division and fight their way to the American Global Crusher Division! The man with a metal arm and does all the talking with his fist! Let's hear it for *Atlas*! And his sister, known for her bubbly energy and cheerful demeanor, she's got the face of an angel and the soul of a demon! *Sigbin*!” The announcer cried. The audience matched his enthusiasm, a storm of cheers echoing around the Arena.

“Last chance for the bathroom, bro.” Dick grinned.



"If it becomes a problem, the Arena is partially forested." Richard replied.

Dick shuddered. "Ew. Gross."

"Crushers!" The announcer spoke as the cheers died down. "Fight with honor! Embrace the warrior's death! **Crush** all who stand before you!"

The crowd went ballistic.

Dick put her finger to her chin. "Embrace death, and crush those who stand before you. Feels like I'm getting mixed signals."

"Especially from him." Richard nodded at the announcer.

"Yeah." Dick looked out at the Arena. A vast expanse of forest and huge rocks, rivers and a few clearings here or there. The land was scarred with previous battles. Blackened trees, huge holes in meadows, the corpses of monsters and battle-bots littered the land. The twins have bled this Arena twice before. They will do it thrice more.

"Let. The match! BEGIN!" The announcer screamed. The world went in a frenzy, and all six Crushers stepped out into the Arena. The announcer leaned back, satisfied, and switched the microphone to audience-only.

Dick cracked her knuckles. "Let's get down to business."

Richard nodded. "How do you like our odds against the snake and spider?"

"I'd say fair. I watched their match from a few days ago. *Medusa* replaced her legs with some sort of articulated tread leg, so she actually moves like a snake. Really, really fast, goes around trees, has guns inside that pop out." Dick made some dying sound effects.

Richard's brow quirked. "And her companion?"

"Replaced *her* legs with a hexapedal system similar to the legs of a tarantula. Can scale the rocks around The Coliseum like no one's business, due to their sharpened tips." Dick smirked. "Has an amazing ass, considering she battles nude."

"So no armor." Richard mused. "She would be a more vulnerable target." Richard rubbed his chin. "What of their honor?"

"They're content to sit around and hide in the Arena, but outside their honor is unbreakable. And despite their sneaky play style, they're guaranteed to not interrupt a duel between teams."

"And the brothers?"

"Little honor to speak of, and killed every Crusher who disagreed with their methods. They're fairly tricky, the pair often ganging up on single members of teams while ignoring or immobilizing the second member. *Unthragor* is the main power, and you would tackle him, as he's too strong for me. I would fight the support brother, *Ted*, and prevent him from laying traps on you or immobilizing me. So we could kill them first and then face the creepy crawlies, but we'd be slightly fatigued, and I wonder how long they'd let us rest before they got impatient." Dick shrugged. "What suits you?"

"The brothers. I'm sure you understand." Richard answered.

Dick nodded. "Of course. We'll deal with the creepies when we get to them." Dick turned slightly right. "They're at 120 degrees in the circle. If they studied their opponents at all, the pair should be going for us." Dick began walking in their general direction.

"Why would they come for us first?" Richard asked.

"*Medusa* and *Anansi* both have superior mobility over the brothers, and frankly us as well. To the brothers, we appear the weaker target, due to our speed and perceived firepower. So, to waste less strength, they'll kill us first, assuming we won't wear them down as much as *Medusa* and *Anansi* would. That would allow the brothers to fight the creepy crawlies at max possible strength." Dick put her hands behind her head, breathing in the fresh air. "Of course, that's assuming they know *Unthragor* is incapable of sneaking, so they can't hide. And that assumes they're capable of logical thought."

"*Ted* fits that bill, I believe." Richard pointed out.

"Yep! So I'm confident we'll meet the poor bastards." Dick poked Richard. "It's also why I'm fighting *Ted* and you're taking hot-head fire-pants."

“Oh?” Richard placed his hand to his chest. “Me? I thought you wanted to kill the guy with the massive flamethrower.”

Dick waved her arms. “Oh no. Nuh-uh. He’s all yours.”

“Thanks.” Richard replied wryly. “I’m so happy.”

Dick chuckled. “I know you are.” Dick focused on her arm. A small screen flipped out, a map of the Arena and the current time on-screen. “We’ll probably see them in around an hour, unless a death bot or Genie pops out to say hi. Probably a half kilometer, 180 degrees from the ancient coliseum.” She willed the screen closed.

Richard bowed, gesturing to the forest beyond. “Lead on your Majesty, Queen Dick.”

Dick curtsied. “Why thank you, Sir Richard. Let us hunt some monsters.” She skipped off, Richard following.

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“How long have we been walking?” Dick asked.

“I’m not the one with a watch in my arm.” Richard looked pointedly at her wrist. “You check.”

“But I wanna know if you know.” Dick whined.

“Jesus, are you ten?” Richard sighed, rubbing his face.

Dick smiled. “Nope. Just your sister.” She willed her watch open. “We’ve been walking for thirty minutes.”

“So we have another thirty to walk. Pipe down.” Richard ordered. “I can’t hear them if you’re blabbing.”

“I was just hoping something interesting would’ve happened by now!” Dick complained.

“What? One of the death bots? You want to fight a sentient tank right now? Or a Genie? We can fight a Manticore, Cerberus, maybe even a real Dragon!” Richard clapped his hands together with mock excitement. “We can try getting ripped apart, digested and shat out by genetic monstrosities!” Sarcasm oozed from Richard’s teeth.

“Or just one.” Dick remarked.

“Hm?” Richard asked.

“While you were ranting and raving, a Dragon popped up in front of us. See?” Dick pointed.

Richard followed her finger. It led to a thirty-meter long black Dragon, half the body wrapped around a small hill, it’s mouth of serrated teeth open and drooling. It’s two legs dug into the ground, it’s wings spreading menacingly.

Richard sighed. “Doesn’t this usually go the other way?”

“What. Me not paying attention and you pointing out the terrible threat we’ve encountered?” Dick asked. Richard nodded. “Yep, that’s what usually happens. You feeling okay bro?”

“I think the steak was a little too blue last night.” Richard stepped into his boxing stance.

“We should get that checked out.” Dick focused on her arms, and nine articulated blades jumped from the posterior side, a total of eighteen razor sharp claws at her disposal. “Food poisoning isn’t a joke.”

The Dragon roared, lunging at the pair. They rolled to opposite sides. The Dragon buried its head where the pair were moments before. The twins jumped to their feet, running down the length of the lizard’s body.

“Model!” Richard called out, ducking under the wing.

“Wyvern class! Black means bad! Coughs acid!” Dick screamed, slicing at one of the wings. The Dragon flinched, turning on its legs to follow Dick.

“Weaknesses!” Richard yelled, ducking under the tail.

“Eyes, ears and ass! Everywhere else is too heavily armored!” Dick turned around, facing the Dragon. “I vote the eyes!”

"Me too!" Richard jumped onto the hind legs of the Dragon. From his metal fingertips, five blades popped out. He slammed them into the Dragon, strengthening his grip.

The Dragon snorted in annoyance, turning to face Richard. A bullet whizzed into its ear canal. The Dragon turned back.

"That's right, look at me ya prick!" Dick cried out, her revolver smoking. Her claws were her only sign of agitation, the blades swishing back and forth in small movements. Her eyes reflected nothing but determination.

The Dragon's eyes narrowed. Its throat began pulsing, and the Dragon bent over, retching. Dick danced out of the way as a ball of acid flew from the Dragon's mouth. The goo splashed in the grass, immediately digesting the ground.

Richard began climbing up the back of the Dragon, his claws barely noticed by the Dragon as it focused its rage on Dick. Richard made it past the shoulder. The neck. The base of the skull. The crown. He grabbed a nearby horn with his left hand. He focused on his right arm. His hand split down the middle, pulling out and reforming fingers into a barrel. He stuck it into the Dragon's eye and fired.

An eight kilogram iron ball laced with nano-explosives bore into the eye, splitting the pupil and colliding with the sphenoid, cracking through into the brain's right frontal lobe. The explosives tripped somewhere between the pituitary gland and parietal lobe. The explosives flung Richard off the Dragon head. Richard fell with a *splat*, his entire back covered in Dragon guts.

Richard shook his head, trying to clear the haze in his head. He blinked, his eyes burning from the sun. A shadow stepped over him, blocking the sun. The shadow holstered her guns.

"Well," Dick said, wiping some brain off her dress. "You're paying for my dry cleaning and a week of counseling."

"Hell no. You knew what I was doing. You should've dodged." Richard snapped.

"Do you *know* how many hours it took to sew this dress? If there is a single spot on it after two cleanings, you'll be fighting *me* for the Championship." Dick transformed her left arm into a hose, washing the offending viscera off her dress and arms.

"Ya know, for a real murderer, you can be a little whiny." Richard remarked, lifting himself to his feet.

"I'm not a murderer right now Richard, I'm your sister. And your sister loves her clothes. So don't fuck with them." She said, each syllable hard and direct.

"Ya know bro, I'm glad we've got a supportive relationship." *Unthragor* remarked, emerging from behind a hill.

*Unthragor* was a large, stocky man. Almost as large as Richard. His hair was a tousled dirty blonde. His eyes were modified, glowing a dull orange even in the midday sun. His arms held a massive flamethrower, primed and ready.

"Me too brother. I feel we've always had an easy understanding." *Ted* replied, emerging from the top of the hill, a small jetpack powering his ascent.

*Ted* was the more modest one of the pair. His body was not weak, but it couldn't match his brothers natural intimidation. He relied instead on the plethora of gadgets attached to his belt, chest, and legs in little pouches. He lowered, hovering next to his brother.

"You're the smart one." *Unthragor* prompted.

"You're the strong one." *Ted* replied.

Dick pinched her nose. "Can anyone else say rehearsed?" Dick looked at her fellow Crushers. "Do none of you care about ratings? At all? The people love in-the-moment speeches." Dick huffed. "Dumbasses."

"Don't be mean." *Ted* tutted.

Dick looked at her wrist. "You're both twenty-five minutes early."

"We thought best to keep away from the snake and her spider. Get some distance, kill you quickly." *Unthragor* boasted.

Dick looked at her brother. "Richard, did you notice them during the battle?" She whispered. Richard shook his head. "Me neither." Dick looked around the area. "There's probably some traps. Keep an eye out and pull them the way we came."

"It's not nice to whisper!" *Unthragor* yelled, firing his flamethrower at the pair. They jumped back, skidding on their feet. Dick flew further than Richard. Upon landing, her ankle caught some thread, hanging taut above the ground.

Dick looked down. She dug her claws into the dirt and flung herself forward. A second later, a hastily buried mine triggered. Dick landed next to Richard, unscathed. "Shit, that was close!" She exclaimed, brushing some grass from her dress. Dick looked at *Ted*, jerking her head back at the mine. "Your doing, right?"

*Ted* nodded. "But of course."

"You need to learn the difference between miness designed for infantry and miness designed to destroy military transport vehicles. Second one has a bigger boom rating, but you neglected the fuse, which delays to allow reinforced wheels to roll over so the explosive has less car to go through." Dick blew a stray piece of hair from her eye. "You idiot."

"Hmph. I'll be sure to modify that." *Ted* mused.

"Remember for your next life." Dick replied cheekily. She dashed forward, slicing at *Ted*. He lit his pack, flying back two meters, just out of range.

*Unthragor* snarled, turning his flamethrower towards Dick. He was violently knocked to the ground as Richard barreled into him with his right arm. Richard grasped *Unthragor's* ankle, lifting him above his head and slamming him back into the dirt. *Unthragor* grunted, his brain stunned. Richard, using both hands, flung *Unthragor* into some trees. A second later, *Unthragor* exploded.

Dick and *Ted* looked *Unthragor's* way. Dick responded first, doubling over with mirth.

"H-h-holy shit! Aaahahahaah! Did your brother just set off a trap?!" Dick looked at *Ted*, her face contorted with glee. "How incompetent can you get?!" She choked out before another round of laughter seized her.

*Ted* scowled. "Shut your mouth, bitch." *Ted* cupped a hand near his mouth. "Bro! Are you alright?" *Ted* hollered.

"Don't worry about me! Your mines can't do shit!" *Unthragor* responded from beyond the trees. "Come an get me *Atlas*!"

*Ted* smiled. He looked back at Dick, who was still giggling. "Why are you still laughing?" *Ted* asked, peeved.

Dick's mirth suddenly ceased. She straightened her back. "I'm sorry. I just can't wrap my mind around it. You're both terrible at this. So I'm wondering how a pair of honorless scumbags found themselves Division Leaders. It boggles my brain." Dick scratched her head. "But, to be honest, I don't really care all that much." Dick's mouth stretched wickedly. "No use in asking the dead questions."

"You seem to have underestimated us." *Ted* smirked. "That will get you killed."

Just then, *Unthragor's* mangled corpse flew past *Ted's* smug face. *Ted's* smile fell into dismay as his eyes followed his brother's corpse, skidding on the ground. He turned back the direction it had come. Richard stood tall, his right arm covered in blood and viscera.

"But. . . When? How? I didn't. . ." Tears flowed as *Ted* tried to piece together what happened.

Richard held up a chunk of flesh. "Hard to scream when your throat's torn out." He bit coldly.

*Ted's* face contorted with rage. "You MOTHERFUCKER!" He screamed, grabbing two thin discs from his belt, preparing to throw them.

Dick pulled her guns and shot *Ted* in the head. He crumpled to the ground, blood pooling in the vibrant green grass. The two discs blinked red. Then they exploded. *Ted's* viscera rained on the grass, his legs left for future burial.

Dick scoffed in disgust, retracting her claws back into her forearms. She walked to a nearby hill, laying herself into the plush green.

"That was easier than I thought it would've been." Richard remarked.

"We got lucky." Dick sighed. "If *Ted* had gotten the right mine, I wouldn't have my legs right now. I'd be on fire, and you'd be dying. *Ted's* mobility would've ripped you to shreds." Dick looked at the brilliant blue sky. "It was only due to their incompetence that we succeeded."

"I can appreciate a woman who's honest." A soft voice called out from the trees. A woman slithered out.

Her upper body was heavily armored in black steel plate. Her face was helmeted with the visage of a screaming witch with snake hair. Her lower body was a long, articulated tread leg, holding her height to around five meters. She struck an imposing figure, one that captivated anyone nearby. *Medusa*.

Dick lifted her head, facing forward. "Better to face mistakes and improve than let the seeds of incompetence take root. But that's just my philosophy." Dick pointed a thumb at Richard. "That guys philosophy is to bash shit in until it's dead. Not much room for error with that strategy."

*Medusa* smiled. "He seems well suited to bashing things."

Richard cracked his neck, snorting.

"Where's your friend at?" Dick asked.

"Just over there." *Medusa* nodded at trees behind her. "She's scanning for traps." A few explosions popped around the area. "Guess she's done scanning."

A woman fell from the sky, landing just a meter away from *Medusa*. Save for a massive gun strapped to her back, she was buck naked, her only modesty a large mane of hair that reached down to her obliques. Several locks kept her bust modest and her bust only. Her skin was fair, her hair a pleasant brown, her eyes a startling silver.

Her legs ended midway down her thighs. The stumps were attached to two independent rings, each with three legs stemming from the rings. Each leg was long and thin, ending in a sharp point digging into the grass.

The newcomer bowed. "Pleased to meet you, *Atlas* and *Sigbin*."

Dick stood, returning the bow. "Pleased to meet you as well, *Medusa* and *Anansi*." She gestured to Richard. "Please excuse my brother. Around others he's the strong and silent type. Around me he's a bigger brat than I am."

Richard shot Dick a menacing glare.

*Medusa* crossed her arms, smirking. "Is that so? I'd like to see that side of him."

"He only confides in family and bed-mates." Dick turned to *Anansi*. "You wouldn't happen to have someone caught in your web, would you?"

"Not at the moment." *Anansi* replied. "And not really looking for one either."

"Would you say no to coffee, then?" Dick asked.

"If I don't kill you, I'll think about it." *Anansi* smiled.

"Fair enough." Dick stretched her arms above her head, yawning. "Sorry about this, but could you give us a moment to rest? We did just kill a Dragon and two Crushers."

*Medusa* inclined her head. "Of course. Would five minutes be fair?"

Dick looked at Richard. He nodded. Dick turned to their opponents. "Works for us." Dick sat in the grass, retrieving a bottle of water from her arm. She took a few swigs before offering some to Richard. He took the bottle and downed the rest.

Dick patted the grass near her. "Won't you two sit with us? I've got some jerky and a few sweets." Dick smirked at *Anansi*. "Though none as sweet as you."

*Anansi* smiled. "I'll have some jerky. Sweets are rewards, not snacks." She lowered her body down next to Dick's, taking the proffered meat.

Dick smirked. "And what can I do to earn such a reward?"

*Anansi* sighed. "Win the Championship and throw all your money away."

"No problem." Dick smiled. *Anansi* scoffed. Ignoring her, Dick turned to *Medusa*. "Would you care for some jerky?"

"I would." *Medusa* replied, sitting across from Richard. Dick tossed her and Richard some jerky. The party fell silent, enjoying the snack and peace, while it lasted.

"That is a nice dress." *Medusa* remarked, breaking the silence.

"Oh, you like it? I made it myself." Dick beamed, tugging at the messy fabric.

"When did you find the time to learn?" *Anansi* asked.

"When I could." Dick replied quietly, her face falling.

"I'm sorry." *Anansi* said. "Did I remind you of something best forgotten?"

"No sorrow necessary. The memories this dress carries are nothing more than reminders." Dick looked at Richard. "

"And why is that?" *Medusa* asked.

"That's between us and the Champion." Dick replied.

*Medusa* shrugged. "Very well. I believe the five minutes are almost up. Shall we?"

"Of course. Would you prefer single combat, or shall we just go for it?" Dick asked, standing up. The claws in her arm snuck out.

"You'll be my opponent, *Sigbin*." *Anansi* answered, lifting her body from the ground.

Dick smirked. "I knew you'd come around."

Richard and *Medusa* stood. They walked away from their partners, disappearing behind a hill.

Dick and *Anansi* faced each other. They placed their closed fist into their right palm. Without breaking eye contact, they bowed. They slowly straightened, their minds cutting through unnecessary thoughts right to the fire of competition.

Dick and *Anansi* tensed. Then they tore at each other.

Claws met with leg, the clash of reinforced steel ringing out. Dick swiped overhead, *Anansi* dodged left and poked with her leg, only to be met with Dick's arm. *Anansi* snarled, pulling her gun strapped to her back. Cocking the mechanism, *Anansi* took aim and let loose a volley of blue plasma rounds at Dick. Two grazed Dick's shoulder and leg, and one buried itself in her thigh.

"Shit!" Dick yelled. She dug her left claws into the ground and clenched. She flew five meters, avoiding another volley. She skidded just shy of *Anansi*, her claws raking her opponents legs. Dick pushed, lifting three of *Anansi's* legs off the ground.

In a second of desperation, *Anansi* flexed her three grounded legs, springing herself thirty meters, landing awkwardly fifteen meters from Dick. She stabilized and lifted her gun.

Dick focused on her arms, and a small rocket-propelled box flung out, spooling titanium-grade twine behind it. Dick chucked the box at *Anansi*. The box fired its thrusters, wrapping the twine around *Anansi's* arms. The gun fell from her hands, landing in the grass.

Dick smiled, and pulled.

*Anansi* jerked forward, her legs scrambling for balance. Then she leaped again. The twine spun out. *Anansi* smiled. She'd knock *Sigbin* off balance and land on the Demon, dealing the final blow.

*Anansi* felt a sudden jerk. She looked to *Sigbin*. The Crusher had embedded her claws into the dirt to provide purchase. *Sigbin* wasn't going anywhere.

*Anansi*, on the other hand, was going to fall face-first into the ground. She grimaced.

"Of all the fucking ways to—" She was interrupted by the ground greeting her face. Her spine cracked in seven places. Twice in the lumbar, thrice in the thoracic, and twice more in the cervical. The entire left half of her face was crushed. Her left eye popped out, hanging by a nerve. Ribs collapsed, puncturing stomach lining and lungs. Her forearms snapped. Her legs thrashed in agony, ripping apart the ground. She screamed, blood pouring from her teeth.

Dick reeled *Anansi* towards her. *Anansi* stopped just short of Dick. She looked up. Her eyes met the barrel of an Iron Bore .357.

"Do you surrender?" Dick growled.

"I surrender." *Anansi* choked out.

“Good.” Dick holstered her pistol and undid the twine. “Is it bad?” She asked, rolling *Anansi* onto her back.

“What the hell do you think?” *Anansi* snapped, getting red on Dick’s arms.

“You’ll need two STEM packs.” Dick checked her arm. “Luckily I’ve got four. I can spare two.” Dick grasped *Anansi*’s arm. “Take a deep breath.”

“Huh-?” *Anansi* looked down just in time to watch Dick set her left arm. “AAAAAAAAAAAH!” *Anansi* screamed.

Dick worked quickly, setting *Anansi*’s right arm. Dick pushed the crying Crusher onto her side. She plucked the STEM packs from her arm casing, stabbing one into the base of *Anansi*’s skull, and again at her lower back. *Anansi*’s eyes were closed, her body thrashing with pain. Dick placed her palm against *Anansi*’s forehead.

“It’s okay, little spider. You’ll be fine.” Dick soothed.

*Anansi*’s thrashing calmed as the STEM packs worked her system. Her screams quickly turned to groans. After a few moments, the Spider opened her eyes.

“Thank you.” *Anansi* sighed, pain melting from her body. Her popped eye slowly slid back into her skull. She rolled onto her back, eyes blinking in the sun.

Dick sat down next to *Anansi*, sticking her third STEM pack into her leg. She sighed, the hole in her thigh closing. “Good fight.” Dick commented.

*Anansi* laughed. “Foolish on my part. I’m used to fighting my prey where their movement is limited. But instead we met you here, with hills and grass.” *Anansi* put her hands behind her head. “But there is an upside to losing here.”

“What’s that?” Dick asked.

“It is beautiful.” *Anansi* sighed, closing her eyes with relief.

“Yeah.” Dick murmured. “Too beautiful.”

“Hm?” *Anansi* quirked a brow. “What do you mean?” She asked, opening her eyes.

“I’m not hearing Richard or *Medusa*’s fight. What are they up to?” Dick asked, standing up.

“Perhaps it is already done?” *Anansi* suggested.

“No.” Dick walked to the top of the hill, scanning the area. She spotted her brother and *Medusa* sitting in the grass across from each other. Between them was a small. . . board?

Dick walked back to *Anansi*, plopping next to her. “It’s fucking chess.”

“What?” *Anansi* asked.

“God damn it! He’s always doing this!” Dick threw her hands up. “This is why we get shit ratings! He can’t just go in and brutally murder someone! No, gotta try beating them at chess first! Of course the fans wanna see a chess match! That’s why they watch DEATH GAMES!” Dick crossed her arms in annoyance.

“I’ve seen your brother’s fights. He brutally murders anyone who doesn’t agree to a peaceful challenge.” *Anansi* pursed her lips. “And you haven’t brutally murdered me.”

“Well, duh. Can’t meet you for coffee if you’re dead, right?” Dick pulled her knees to her chest. “Besides, I want to fight you again. You’re worthy of a proper battle.”

“This wasn’t?” *Anansi* gestured to her still-healing body.

“Nah, too short. I went after you like I wanted to kill you.” Dick smirked. “Next time I’ll go after you like I wanna fu-”

“ATLAS AND SIGBIN TAKE THE WIN!” The announcer screamed. “The twins are going to the Finals!”

“Guess Richard pulled a checkmate.” Dick flashed *Anansi* a broad smile. “How about that coffee?”

“No.” *Anansi* answered.

“Wonderful! Let me know if you change your mind!” Dick replied cheerily.

## Chapter Three:

### Dick's Divulgence, Richards Reminiscence

"How'd you become a Crusher?" Teresa asked.

Dick's shoulder's tensed. "I'm not paying you for curiosity."

"Nope. I'm doing that all on my own." Teresa replied cheekily. "Do I need to do more convincing?" She asked coyly.

Dick swatted Teresa. "You've done your share." She turned away from Teresa. "Now let me sleep."

"Come on. I wanna know." Teresa slid closer.

"You do this with all your clients?" Dick snapped.

"Oh no. None of mine have been Crushers." Teresa smirked. "You're the first."

"Ah, so I'm a novelty." Dick pulled her phone from the bedside. "What's Lisa's number again? Maybe she can shut you up for a few hours."

"Then you can have two whores yakking your ear off all night long." Teresa murmured, nibbling Dick's lobe. "Come on. I crave your history."

Dick dropped her phone. She turned, facing Teresa. "You really wanna hear another story filled with disappointment and insecurity? Darling, I'm no different than you are. I just had the right circumstances."

"The only people who become Crushers are the imprisoned, the desperate, and the bloodthirsty. You are not imprisoned. You are not desperate." Teresa cupped Dick's face. "So what burns your blood, Demon?"

Dick stayed silent. Teresa continued nibbling, along the jaw, around her pulse, right on the collarbone. Dick sighed. "Vengeance, pure and simple. I've only ever known one life. Filled with training and mockery. My father only knew strength, and sought to beat it into us. It's all he ever had, and mother." Her voice was monotone, betraying nothing.

Dick set her back against the headboard. She pulled her knees to her chest. "I think he was so hard on me because I look like her. Spitting image at every birthday. And she couldn't handle childbirth, something no one has died from in a hundred years. She made national news as a companion piece to failures of modern medicine." Dick hugged her legs closer. "He saw her face in every shop for months.

"So instead of treating us like his kids, he trained us like soldiers. He got what he wanted. There aren't many things that can kill me. But I have to buy warmth in my bed. I could end up killing my friends one day in an Arena. The life he molded for me does not suit my desires."

Dick clenched her fists. "What he did doesn't matter anymore. Because I still love him. He gave what he had to give. My father was killed by a Champion with no honor. An honor branded into me since I first knew my father." Dick's eyes tinted red. "Dishonor demands death. And that is the lowest price we shall accept."

"You'll face him tomorrow, won't you?" Teresa whispered.

"Yes. And I'm not sure if we'll live." Dick smirked. "You can see why I needed convincing." Dick reached to the nightstand, pulling out some bills. "Here's some extra to stay quiet. I can't have the world hearing my sob story."

Teresa pushed the bills away. "I'm off the clock." Teresa breathed, her palm hot on Dick's belly.



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“Best two out of three?” Richard asked.

“Only if I can be black this time.” *Medusa* replied.

“If you must.” Richard took a sip from a half empty Silver Sherry. “I wouldn’t trust it though.”

“Because you just lost with it?” *Medusa* grinned.

“Because I won with it back in The Coliseum, and now it betrays me.” Richard leaned forward.

“Be honest. Did you let me win?”

“Oh, absolutely not. *Anansi* would’ve kill me.” *Medusa* nodded at the drink in Richard’s hand. “I think I have a distinct advantage I did not have in The Coliseum.”

“Heh. *Anansi* looked pretty pissed you guys didn’t win.” Richard smirked. “Is that why she turned down Dick?”

“Oh no. Not at all.” *Medusa* said quietly. She finished setting up the board. Richard’s white pawn went first, advancing two spaces. *Medusa* smirked. “Speaking of Dick, is your sister always so flirtatious?” *Medusa* asked, her own pawn advancing.

“She’s always been the entertainer. The spotlight suits her.” Richard advanced his own pawn. “She’s grown used to seeing things she wants and tearing after them.”

“Was she always like that?” *Medusa* advanced another pawn, freeing her bishop.

“Of course not.” Richard pulled out his knight. He showed no sign of elaborating.

“Then what of you? Were you always the quiet type?” *Medusa* pressed, not swayed in the slightest. Her bishop advanced.

Richard rested his chin on his hands. “I’ve found one learns the strongest lessons in the quietest places. So I do my best to keep my thoughts clear.” He flicked his knight forward.

“But you talk around your sister.” *Medusa* remarked.

“She has currently taught me all I can learn from listening. The only way to glean new information is to speak to her.” Richard pinched his nose. “She doesn’t exactly follow my school of thought.”

“That’s a rather cold reason to speak to your sister.”

“It’s the reason I would share with a stranger.” Richard looked at the board.

“Oh? I thought you confided in family and bedmates.” *Medusa* remarked.

“I don’t confide about family to bedmates. At least, not immediately.” Richard nodded at the board. “It’s your turn.”

“Oh. Pardon me.” *Medusa* pushed another pawn forward, allowing space for her rook.

“What of your partner?” Richard asked,

“What of her?”

“What does she think of my sister’s advances?” Richard pressed.

“Oh, blasted child can’t take them seriously.” *Medusa* put her palm to her face. “You know how she goes into battle nude?”

“I’m vaguely aware of that.” Richard placed a knight.

“Would you believe she hasn’t dated in years?” *Medusa* brought out her rook. “It’s torture to watch. She’s become a Crusher sex symbol, and it drives the douchebags out of the woodwork. She hasn’t found a single decent person to show interest.”

“Why does she battle nude, anyways?” Richard asked.

“She’s uncomfortable if she can’t feel the wind.” *Medusa* sighed. “Fucking nudists raised her. Burners.”

“Ah.” Richard nodded. “Damned if she’s naked, uncomfortable if she isn’t.” Richard took a bishop. “If it is of any consequence, my sister is a decent person. Genuine. She needs stability.” Richard rubbed his chin.

“Stability?” *Medusa* perked up. “Doesn’t she have you?”

"That's the trouble." Richard replied. "She's always had me, and no one else." Richard paused. His face screwed with indecision. Then he sighed, giving in. "You know why she's so damn flirtatious? She does it as a show. Not because she doesn't take it seriously. I'll bet you anything she'd love to take *Anansi* out and show her a real good time."

"But?"

"She expects it to fail. Every time." Richard pinched his nose. "Expectations become reality. Her confidence is built on sand. Your partner can see it. Everyone can see it."

"Her bravado is boundless." *Medusa* smirked.

"As is her stupidity." Richard lifted one of his captured pieces, rolling it in his fingers. A pawn. "I can only hope she'll find someone worthy of her, and soon."

"You'll keep an eye on her, won't you?" *Medusa* smiled. "Like a proper big brother."

"Ha!" Richard chortled. "That's ridiculous. I'm not the one keeping an eye on her." Richard pursed his lips. "Though *Paladin* did tell me to protect her at all costs." Richard leaned back. "She's keeping an eye on me."

"Pardon?" *Medusa* asked.

"Oh, sure, I'm the only one she feels completely safe around, but she's never needed protection. Even in school, when the bullying was worst, I never stood up for her. I couldn't." Richard smiled. "She always beat me to it, then helped me beat up the kids picking on me."

"In fact," Richard continued, "She's the one who convinced me to become a Crusher, in the hopes of meeting him."

"Meeting who?" *Medusa* inquired.

"The man who killed our father." Richard replied flatly.

"Oh. Is he here? At The Coliseum?"

"Yes. And we're going to kill him tomorrow." Richard said.

"Is it the Champion?"

"No, not the current Champion. An older one. But he's here. And we can only challenge this one if we can kill the current one." Richard set the pawn in his palm down.

"Why?"

"Honor demands it." Richard smirked. "It's the one thing my sister and I have in common. Well, that and our love of women. We got that from father too." Richard's brow furrowed. "But her honor? Hers burns. Me? I would've been content with lazing around on a farm, growing hemp and slaughtering pigs. I'd love to have a family." Richard sighed. "But, she's right. She's always been right."

*Medusa* lost her smile, staring at the board. She frowned. "Tell me *Atlas*." *Medusa* began, moving her knight. "Would you still like to have a family?"

"More than anything." Richard moved his rook. "Check."

*Medusa* moved her bishop, slaying his rook. "Checkmate." *Medusa* retorted.

Richard sighed. "Damn. Should've seen that one."

"Anyone could make that mistake after a few Silver Sherrys." *Medusa* slithered behind Richard, her arms wrapping around his chest. "That's two out of three. I win."

Richard grinned. "What do I get?" He asked cheekily.

*Medusa's* lips stretched into a faint smile. "Anything."

## Chapter Four:

### Flaming Fast Final

“Welcome, welcome! Gaians, Lunars, Martians! The match you’ve all been waiting for! The Final match of the thirteenth month! Let’s give it up for the challengers, seated in The Coliseum itself! *Atlas* and *Sigbin!*” The announcer yelled into his mic. The audience went red with glee, screaming and chanting prayer and pity into the Arena.

The challengers were seated in the ancient auditorium, waiting for the Champion’s cue.

“And approaching from 25 degrees, the one! The only! The Devil himself! *Beelzebub!*” The announcer about pissed himself with excitement. The stadium melted in a cataclysm of cheers.

The Champion was two meters tall, his head clad in a black helmet, horns a meter in length curling outwards, the faceplate three screaming faces. The eyes seemed to glow orange. His bare chest was scarred from swords and maces, guns and fire. His lower body was covered in a simple fur kilt, a human skull hanging from a thick leather belt. His right hand firmly held a halberd, four meters in length, the blade wide and heavy. His left hand, a single wretched revolver carved from whalebone and dipped in a sheet of graphene.

The audience gushed. Here was their moment of utter satisfaction. Thirteen long months led to this day. An almost-annual clash of the strongest warriors on the planet. This battle would doubtlessly surpass the past. It would last for at least an hour, and no one would know who was winning until the final blow was dealt. The audience craved it. This anticipation of escalation.

*Beelzebub* stopped just short of the challengers. The audience suddenly grew quiet. The announcer flicked a switch on his mic, silencing his voice in the Arena. No one would dare disturb the Crushers now.

*Beelzebub* held his arms akimbo. “You both taking me on?” He asked.

Richard stood. He turned to his sister, gesturing. “Ladies first.” He offered a hand.

Dick smiled, taking his hand. “You’re too kind.” She rose to her feet, placing her toes against the edge of the dusty arena. She took a breath, and fell. Her claws erupted from her arms, scratching against the nanite-reinforced stone of The Coliseum. She landed with a soft *puff*.

*Beelzebub* scowled. “Cybers? Bugger, they’re always a pain.” He spat on the ground. “Right. Let’s get on with it.”

*Sigbin* pressed her left fist against her right palm.

*Beelzebub* rolled his eyes. “Oh, fine. First, we bow.” He pressed his fists together and bowed, his eyes going to the ground. He lifted his head.

*Sigbin* sliced her claws through *Beelzebub*’s second vertebrae, separating his head from his body. His helmet stuck in the dirt, vibrating back and forth from the force. His body wobbled on unsteady feet, then fell to the ground. The dust was soaked in red.

The entire Arena was silent. Slowly, the announcer flipped his switch. “Uh. . . *Atlas* and *Sigbin* have won the Championship.” He switched his microphone off, collapsing in his seat.

In the Inner Ring of the Arena, a middle aged woman who brought biscuits into church every Sunday, turned to her friend and said what everyone was thinking. “What the flibbajibs just happened?”

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“Uh, con-congratulations!” The Coliseum Overseer stammered, approaching the challengers with his clammy hand held out. He gulped at the sight of *Beelzebub*. She’d just cut him down, in the middle of a bow. Out of all the people he expected dishonor, it wasn’t *Sigbin* or *Atlas*.

Of course, dishonor wasn’t against the rules. But it certainly painted a target on your back.

*Sigbin* turned to the Overseer. “Where’s the cash?” *Sigbin* asked.

“F-f-floating down from there.” The Overseer pointed. A small, flying jackpot was quickly descending to their location. The Overseer pulled out a microphone. “You can say a few w-w-words if you like.”

*Sigbin* snatched the microphone, flipping it on. She tapped it against her palm. Low rumbles echoed across the Arena. She nodded, tossing the microphone to Richard.

Richard caught the mic and smiled. “Good afternoon, occupants of The Coliseum.” He gestured to himself and his sister. “We are, as you know us, *Atlas* and *Sigbin*. The Titan and The Demon. Children of Richard Joseph Hill Loggins, Crusher Code *Paladin*. One of the most honorable to partake in the Trials.” The money landed behind Richard.

“You see, ladies and gentlemen.” Richard continued. “It is for that very honor that we come here today. *Beelzebub* is merely an example of the dishonor wrought upon us, in the form of a cowardly bribe.” Richard smiled. “Naturally, we blew it on a variety of vices, but did not agree to his terms. Which was to throw the fight. And that is why he lays dead before you, without ceremony.” Richard waved his hand to the cooling *Beelzebub*. Dick jumped on the pot of money. 100 million in all.

“Our father died in our front yard, his head crushed by a Champion outside of the Arena. The Champion wore not hellfire but eternal darkness. The Champion acted without honor, attacking a fellow Crusher outside of the Arena.” Richard’s eyes narrowed. “Dishonor demands death.”

Dick focused on her arm. Her left finger opened. Flame spewed forth, consuming the 100 million.

“As fellow Champions of the Arena, we challenge you. Freddy M. Hanks! *Hades!*” Richard screamed.

Silence. The crackling flames, the slight breeze, the fading footsteps of a frightened Overseer. High above the Inner Ring, a finger flicked the microphone switch.

“I accept.” The announcer replied.

## Chapter Five:

### Hell-lo *Hades*

“Who the hell is *Hades*?” Old Man Peter yelled out.

“Shush grampa! I can’t hear the tele!” Miranda scolded, turning up the volume.

“You shush yourself, young lady! I fought in World War IV, I’ve earned the right to speak!” Old Man Peter snapped.

“And how you abuse it. Grampa, for the last time, no one cares how many Lunar Nazis you’ve killed.” Miranda sighed.

“Two-hundred seventy-six! With a combat knife, and some stale rations!” Old Man Peter declared.

“Old Man Peter! I looked up *Hades*!” Tim called from the next room. “I can’t believe I forgot about him!”

“Who?” Old Man Peter looked around.

“*Hades*! The guy was a big shot Champion twelve years ago. Then he lost to a Crusher called *Whip* eight years ago, who lost to *Beelzebub* three years ago. *Hades* was spared by *Whip*, and completely disappeared after the fact.” Tim walked in, phone in hand. “Apparently, *Hades* has been hiding in the Arena as its commentator. I wonder how he got that job?”

“Groveling, most like.” Old Man Peter sniffed. “Bloody pathetic. A Crusher working as a commentator. Back in my day, we had to watch Crushers fight in alleys and backstreets, paying online black markets for a subscription fee. And we didn’t have someone spell out the whole fight to us. No! We just had an underground Arena and some tweaked cybernetics. Why, I remember when-”

“For the love of - shut up grampa! *Hades* is on the move!” Miranda pointed.

“Who the hell is *Hades*?” Old Man Peter shouted.

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The announcer landed his car in the coliseum, a good ten meters from the twins. He stepped out. He was short, a mere 1.6 meters, with a rather large nose and scruffy fuzz along his chin. His eyes were the colour of dull silver, piercing through thin black glasses at the challengers. He settled two fingers on his chin.

“Hm. I thought disappearing would be enough.” The announcer - *Hades* - mused, approaching the pair. “You two brats have made quite a reckoning with the Crushing Trials. Taking the Champs head off in a single blow? That’s guts right there.” *Hades* held his arms akimbo. “But where’s the entertainment? Where’s the show in a mere execution?”

“Dishonor doesn’t deserve the dignity to defend itself. *Beelzebub* made Champion with bribes and assassinations.” Dick looked to the severed head. “A pity his pride won out. He might have stood a better chance killing us outside of the Arena.” She turned back to *Hades*. “But that would’ve been taking a leaf from your book.”

*Hades* held up his hands in surrender. “Business, my dear, nothing more. I was merely protecting my brand.” *Hades* scowled. “Of course the fucking Overseer didn’t find my brand worthwhile anymore.”

"The arena master?" Richard asked.

*Hades* looked at the discarded microphone. "Is that thing still on? Because if it is, I have said waaay too much."

"I think you should continue." Richard said, as subtle as a hammer.

*Hades* shrugged. "Well, I am gonna die today. So how about this? When you defeat me, I'll tell you something interesting. If you give me a proper warrior's death."

"You wish to die with honor when you have led a life devoid of it?" Richard snarled.

*Hades* shrugged. "Eh. Don't want Ma to be disappointed in me."

Richard opened his mouth, ready to deny *Hades*.

"We agree." Dick replied.

Richard swung his head around. "Dick, this man, he—"

"I know better than you what he's done, Richard." She looked to her brother. "So shut up and go along with it."

Richard shut his mouth and went along with it.

*Hades* smiled. "Great. Let's get on with the fight then." He held out his arms, then paused. "One question. Why didn't you guys just report me? I was sloppy, left two witnesses. My armor isn't exactly common either."

"We can't get to you in prison, *Hades*." Dick replied coldly.

*Hades* chortled. "Fair enough!"

The air around him shimmered. *Hades* tensed. A pair of gauntlets suddenly appeared, black and sharp. A moment later, pieces to cover his arms popped into existence, clasping *Hades* tightly. A breastplate followed, black with a sigil of a hog's head emblazoned in silver. The rest of the suit followed. Skirt, legs, feet, and head. The armor was fashioned after steel-plate from ancient times. His back held a massive black claymore. On his head rested a gnarly, sharp helmet. His eyes were black as sin.

Dick paled. This was the Dark Armor. This is what Crushed her father. She placed her fist in her right palm. Richard followed suit.

"Not going to take my head off, are you?" *Hades* asked.

"We agreed." Dick replied.

"So you did." *Hades* placed his fist in his right palm.

The trio bowed, never breaking eye contact. They straightened. *Atlas* stretched his shoulders. *Sigbin* unsheathed her claws. *Hades* drew his claymore.

*Atlas* launched himself at *Hades*, fist held high. His arm met his opponent's claymore, steel ringing out. *Sigbin* followed, using *Atlas* as leverage to jump over and behind *Hades*. She turned around and swiped. Her claws met *Atlas*' arm. They rolled away from each other. *Hades* fell with a smash, destroying the ground. He stood tall, staring at his open hand.

"Still got it." *Hades* murmured. He lept at *Sigbin*, slicing at her neck. She slid out of the way, and *Hades*' claymore cut into the earth, tearing a deep gash. *Sigbin* barely brought her arms up in time to block *Hades*' foot. He kicked her back eight meters, ripped his claymore out of the dirt and blocked *Atlas*' strike, locking *Atlas*' arm with his sword.

*Hades* smirked. "Are you having fun, Richard?" He shoved *Atlas* back.

*Atlas* shrugged. "I've had better days."

*Sigbin* dug her claws into the dirt, launching towards *Hades*' back. *Hades* twirled, his claymore meeting claws. He swung, launching *Sigbin* at her brother. *Atlas* snagged her by the arm, setting her on her feet. He brushed some dust off of her.

"You okay?" *Atlas* asked.

*Sigbin* nodded, wiping her mouth. "He's still fast, for a pruny old jackass."

*Atlas* looked towards *Hades*. "Strong too. We need to surprise him."

"You're off to a bad start!" *Hades* called out. "I can hear you!" *Hades* paused. "And I'm not pruny, you damn kids!"

"You look like a forgotten raisin in Phoenix sometime in July!" *Sigbin* called back.

". . . Words hurt, you know." *Hades* grumbled.

"Come on, old man!" *Sigbin* taunted. "Or do you want me to fetch you a hoverchair?"

*Hades* launched himself at the pair. His claymore swung out, catching *Atlas*' right shoulder, shoving the Titan aside. *Hades* flicked his wrist, slicing at *Sigbin*. She jumped back, claws deflecting. He caught her left arm with his right hand, crushing the claw blades with his gauntlet. *Hades* brought his sword down.

"AAAAAGH!" *Sigbin* screamed, falling back. She grasped desperately at the ground, pulling herself away from *Hades* with her remaining claws.

*Atlas* saw red, and turned to rush *Hades*. As he gained ground, *Hades* held *Sigbin*'s malfunctioning arm high. His glove slowly squeezed *Sigbin*'s arm. *Hades* looked *Atlas* dead in the eye.

"**Crushed.**" *Hades* said gleefully, *Sigbin*'s arm scattered in the dirt.

*Atlas* smirked. "She's got plenty of those!" He raised his fleshy left fist. *Hades* responded in kind. Knuckles brushed knuckles. *Hades*' hand came away with blood. *Atlas*' hand came away broken and bloody. *Atlas* fell to his knees, biting back pain. *Hades* casually lifted his foot, kicking *Atlas* back six meters. The Titan rolled to a stop next to his sister.

*Sigbin* knelt down. "Are you fucking joking?" She hissed. "Where was that a good idea?"

*Atlas* groaned. "I thought it was time I get a new hand."

*Sigbin* pinched her nose. "Get up. We're going to kill him, and then I'm going to give you a crash course on bone density."

"You gonna make me use crayon again?" *Atlas* asked.

"No, coloured pencil." *Sigbin* smiled, bending her knees.

*Hades* held his arms akimbo. "Come on. I'm just an old man." The Crusher taunted.

*Sigbin* raised her right fist. *Hades* tensed. Slowly, *Sigbin* raised her middle finger.

*Hades* sighed. "Really? You trying to get a rise out of me? You'd have better luck calling me old man aga-"

A small, half meter collapsible harpoon shot out from *Sigbin*'s arm, lodging itself in *Hades*' leg.

"Son of a bitch!" *Hades* swore.

*Sigbin* snarled, moving before *Hades* could react. Two tiny knives flit from her arm into her hand. She dug her claws into the ground, and surged at *Hades*, flinging the knives.

*Hades*, ignoring the harpoon lodged in his leg, deflected one knife with his sword. The other stuck into his left pauldron. Two metal rods on hinges swung out from the center of the knife and stabbed into *Hades*' armor. He looked at the knife, his hand moving to remove it. His fingers clenched as 3000 Volts jolted his system for a tenth of a second.

*Sigbin* slammed into *Hades*, knocking the claymore from his grasp. Her right claws stabbed into his left shoulder. *Hades* screamed, knocking her off with a haphazard blow. *Sigbin* danced back. *Hades* drew a breath.

*Atlas* tackled *Hades*, knocking the wind from him. *Atlas* grasped *Hades* by the neck and skirt, lifting the knight above his head. *Atlas* grunted, his broken hand searing with pain. He tossed *Hades* ten meters. Directly at *Sigbin*.

*Sigbin* smiled. She lifted her right arm, her claws exploding out. *Hades* fell directly onto her claws, skewered in the lungs, belly, legs and balls, the blades missing his heart. One of the blades twitched, slicing *Hades*' arm off. He cried out, then bit his tongue. *Sigbin* let the old Champion roll off her arm onto the grass. The blades were soaked with blood.

*Hades* groaned, pulling himself onto his back. He propped his torso on one arm. "Well come on. Let's go." He goaded *Sigbin*.

"You've lost." *Sigbin* replied.

"Nah, I'm still good. Let's go." *Hades* coughed.

"You've lost an arm, you stupid bastard." *Sigbin* pointed at the stump with the remains of her left arm.

“Just a flesh wo-” *Atlas* interrupted *Hades*, ripping his other arm off. *Hades* fell on his back, screaming.

Dick sighed. “If only you displayed such initiative when we were fighting our way to The Coliseum!” She said, exasperated.

Richard shrugged, tossing the hunk of meat and armor off to the side. “He makes me angry.”

“You need to get angry more often if we want our ratings to really kick off.” Dick pressed her boot onto *Hades*’ breastplate. “Hell-lo *Hades*! You come to terms with your missing arms?”

*Hades* let out a few tear-soaked moans.

“Good! I’m gonna give you a moment to come to terms with your death. While you’re doing that, mind telling me that interesting thing you were talking about?” Dick rested her claws against his helmet. “Bear in mind, I’ll kill you slowly if what you have to say isn’t very, very interesting.” Her voice was low and threatening.

“The Overseer rigs the Champs.” *Hades* spat out, getting red on Dick’s boot.

“What?” Dick said with disbelief.

“The Coliseum Overseer started The Crushing Trials. So when his particular brand of death became famous, he wanted to pump it for all it was worth.” *Hades* smiled. “He used Crushers that looked or sounded good. The ones that had a particularly ingenious brand. In return, The Overseer overlooked and covered up any bribes or hits the Champion made.”

“And yet we survive. Why would the Overseer allow us to kill his brand?”

*Hades* shook his head. “The Overseer isn’t stupid. He lets the Champs decide who to bribe or kill, and how. But if a challenger steps into the ring, it’s out of his hands. He doesn’t even change the Arena in the Champion’s favor. If I died in The Coliseum, whoever won would be Champ, and The Overseer would simply try to make something of it while waiting for a more marketable Champion.”

*Hades* smirked. “Your father was a threat to me. And as per my deal with The Overseer, I tried to bribe him. He refused. I tried to scare him. He didn’t run. So I killed him.” *Hades* looked Dick in the eye. “And I spawned two monsters to come kill me.”

*Hades* grit his teeth. “Then *Whip* came along. And he sure as shit would’ve killed me. *Whip* was exotic, new. The Overseer wanted him to be the next reigning Champ. So I made a deal. I’ll surrender, make myself disappear, come back and commentate the games. The Overseer was fine with that. After a good show, I land this cushy job, and here I’ve been since.”

Richard cracked his knuckles. “Thank you, *Hades*. May you find honor in your next life.” His arm slid into its cannon form.

*Hades* grunted. “You mind removing my helmet?”

Dick ripped it off, tossing it into the stands.

Freddy M. Hanks, Crusher Code *Hades*, smiled. He looked to the sky, and filled his lungs with cool, crisp air. He felt his blood leaking from his stumps. The dust beneath his hair. He looked at Richard. “Than-”

His head popped like a cherry.

Richard blew the smoke from his arm, and turned to leave. Dick followed.



Chapter Six:

Hillside Hms

*“Thank you Glynda, and thank you ‘Munchies’ for hosting us here at EEN. I can’t wait to visit and try some of your brownies. Moving on, rumblings in The Crushing Trials! The Championship was decided yesterday, as the world is aware, but it also came with some frightening news about the bloody sport.*

*“Around forty years ago, the UN sanctioned all types of Death Games after global pressure from fans, but only if registered Games operated with certain principles. That participation was voluntary, that burial was provided, and that death was only a risk, not a requirement. This also means that murder outside of the Arena is still very much illegal.*

*“But don’t tell that to The Coliseum Overseer! Apparently he’s been selecting Champions as his favorites and giving them an extra edge outside of the Arena, covering murders and bribes from the GBI using money made from marketing his Champions. So if anyone has a Beelzebub brand cup or t-shirt, congrats, you’ve just aided a mass-murdering felon get away.*

*“Fear not. The twins Atlas and Sigbin have told the press they’re going to ask the UN permission to hunt down The Coliseum Overseer. We’ll have more information on that as time goes on. In the meanwhile, who’s going to oversee The Coliseum? What will become of the Death Games? Is reform on the horizon? And is Sigbin really single?”*

“Tch.” Dick snorted, killing the app on her phone.

“See, that’s why I watch DGNN.” Richard said. “At least they don’t speculate about my love life.” Richard sighed, the cool grass under his back refreshing in the heat of the day.

Dick turned her head, looking at her brother. “Say, I’ve been thinking.”

“Of course you have, you’ve been quiet this whole time.” Richard turned his head, meeting Dick’s eyes. “What have you been thinking about?”

“I want to change my name.” Dick said.

“Oh.” Richard looked at the sky. “Well it’s about time. What were you thinking?”

“Well, at first I really wanted to try Jared. But that was too frilly. Mark is an alright name. Little uptight, but gets the job done.”

Richard smiled at his sister’s antics. “Why not Brandon?” He asked.

“Ew. No.” Daisy wrinkled her nose. “That’s a horrible name.”

“Still better than Dick.” Richard remarked.

“Nothing’s better than Dick.” Dick retorted. “Well, one name is better.”

“Which is?” Richard prompted.

“Daisy.” Dick said softly.

“Daisy.”

“Yes.” Dick’s right hand strayed to her left arm. She felt the new model she’d attached last night. It was still a little stiff.

“Why?” Richard asked.

“Oh, you know. Pushing up daisies and all, nothing special.” Dick smiled. “It rolls off the tongue.”

“Okay. Daisy it is.” Richard smiled.

"Hey, maybe we can call you Dick, hm?" Di - Daisy said cheekily.

"Don't make it confusing." Richard sighed.

"Yeah, best not make it confusing. Call the lady Dick, no one will think twice." Daisy smirked. Her phone buzzed. She snatched it from the grass. "Huh." She swiped, answering the call. "Hello?" Daisy spoke.

"Hello." *Anansi* answered. "Is it a bad time?"

"Not at all!" Daisy leaned up on her hand. "What can I do you for?" Daisy went red. "I-I mean, what can I do for you?"

"Well, I distinctly remember telling you that I'd consider your proposal if you won the Championship and threw away all your money." *Anansi* remarked.

"Oh, you were serious?" Daisy asked.

"Well, not really. But you were. And. . . I can't ignore that." *Anansi* admitted.

"You know it was in the plan all along, right?" Daisy asked. "And we got like, 50 million from our bet."

"I'm aware. That doesn't change the fact that you burned 100 million on live television. So, what do you say to coffee tomorrow? At the Roasted Roach?" *Anansi* asked.

Daisy smiled, her eyes twinkling. "I say yes. Does two sound good?" Daisy suggested.

"Perfect. The Roach is on the second level of the Inner Ring. See you then, *Sigbin*." *Anansi* replied.

"It's. . . Actually, just call me Daisy."

"You're no longer going by Dick?" *Anansi* asked.

"I'm getting it changed." Daisy replied.

"It's lovely." *Anansi* said earnestly.

"And what do I call you?" Daisy chuckled nervously.

"Call me Lily." *Anansi* said warmly.

"Lily. I'll see you tomorrow Lily."

"Can't wait." Lily hung up.

Daisy smiled, clutching the phone to her chest. "Lily Loggins." She whispered.

Richard cleared his throat.

Daisy jumped, turning to her brother. She was beet red. "Did you hear that?" Daisy hissed.

"I heard your imagination running wild. She wouldn't take your name. You're too domestic." Richard smirked.

Daisy punched him in the arm, laying back in the grass.

The twins laid in silence, watching their world pass by.

"We're gonna kill him, right?" Daisy said quietly.

Richard nodded. "Of course. He destroyed the integrity of The Crushing Trials and brought shame to our trade. He killed many great warriors and bought off mediocre ones to push his own brand." Richard smirked. "We're gonna tear him to piece and hang them in The Coliseum. So none may forget the price of dishonor."

Daisy nodded. "Cool." She paused. "You wanna go get a burger?"

Richard sighed. "Sure. Let's go."

## **Crusher Global Division Concluded**

**Winners:  
ATLAS & SIGBIN**

