

The Madness of Aragon(name TBD)

- The Aragon. A species of anthropomorphic fox-like animals, advanced enough to enhance their bodies with mechanical upgrades that allowed them to perform greater than ever, they do not possess mouths, simply blank snouts; they speak via beeps made through a speaker either embedded in their snout or chest. To others they sound like beeps and noises, but to them they're perfect words.

Prologue

The once peaceful world of The Aragon, a place once prideful in their advances and culture, once a utopia, has been reduced to nothing but a war-torn world. This war has pushed the Aragon past what they previously thought to be their technological limit, only now to have developed more powerful tech than they could have ever imagined before. Their cybernetics got stronger; they developed counter weapons to counter the counter weapons. Despite all this, neither side managed to fully gain an upper hand over the other; the war began to stagnate, no one gained more land or territory, and they just died in the never-changing battlefield. This stalemate would be broken soon, as the volcanic region has devised a way to put an end to the pointless war.

Chapter 1

Necessity and War

They say *Necessity* is the mother of *invention*; similarly, *War* breeds *innovation*.

It strengthens those who are too weak, it rebuilds those who are broken, and it leaves behind those who are too slow to keep up. Necessity and War the two things that can shape any world to the will of whoever holds its reins, uncaring to who is crushed between the gears of its perpetual expansion. Necessity and War, the two things that will make any seemingly sane man do unthinkable things for the sake of ending either. Necessity and War, the fire that destroys everything it touches, leaving nothing but scrap and those strong enough to withstand its blaze.

Invention and Innovation create a better tomorrow. At least, that is what was taught to those involved in this whole operation, the two Aragons tasked with delivering the payload questioning the morality of this decision as they pushed the gurney with the small anesthetized child through the facility.

They questioned whether what they were doing was really worth it, taking the innocence of children for the chance at finally making a better tomorrow, but every question was met with the same response. "We are laying the bricks of a better tomorrow today; no price is too high for such a feat." Unable to protest further, they simply did what they were told, pushing the gurney into the operating room, not even being cleared to know what was inside. The two Aragons watched as four Aragons dressed in skin-tight white suits, wearing respirator masks, pulled the gurney into an airlocked room. They look at each other with concern before they are then escorted out of the facility. Neither spoke a word until they were out, and they went their separate ways.

Shouting erupts from the halls, waking everyone in their dorms. It was routine for everyone, however; they had done this every day for the past 9 years, and finally today was the last. At least for every Aragon who was turning eight-teen, they were being promoted, joining the active military rather than being students at the academy. Not needing to waste time getting ready, since she prepared the night before, Fuzzy Wuzzy III jumps from her bed, landing in the center of the room, shaking with excitement as she makes her way out of her dorm before anyone else inside had fully gotten out of bed. Not needing to get dressed, she sprints down the hall and to the exit, slowing down to a walk as she passes the director's office and then speeding up as she gets past it. Outside she runs across the academy lawn and to the presentation grounds; her excitement, however, diminishes almost immediately as she notices she wasn't the first to arrive. Standing alone in the sectioned-off field besides the several

general Aragons standing to greet arriving Aragon. There is a tall, ashy grey Aragon, standing at attention straight-faced; however, as Fuzzy approached, this other Aragon's face started to get more smug, seeing that she arrived before Fuzzy.

They both stand there, at attention, not sharing a word between them, knowing they are not to speak during this graduation process. Over the next 2 hours, more Aragon gather and get into formation around them. The crowd of 120-130 Aragon watched as the officials set up the stage and podium in front of them. A particularly decorated Aragon introduces himself as one General Olmer and begins the graduation speech, readying those graduating for the upcoming ceremony. Fuzzy stands in agonizing anxiety as she is impatient for the new personal dorm assignment, wanting to get away from the Aragon standing next to her, the one who got here before her, Ava. Ava Aricron, her own personal nemesis, the one who had made her time in military school a living hell, thanks to Ava, Fuzzy had to receive ten times the normal amount in detention, and thanks to her everyone thinks Fuzzy was the one who broke into the director's office to grab test answers. The only reason she is even still enrolled was the fact her family has a high seat within the military itself, and it wasn't just Ava and Fuzzy either; the Aricron family name has been feuding with the Wuzzy family for generations, it was a well known fact that they hated each other although no one knew how the feud began they just know they are constantly at each others necks. Lost in thought, Fuzzy is snapped back to the moment when her name is called.

"Fuzzy Wuzzy III, bunking with Janus Tenner, barracks 9 room 204."

Fuzzy quickly makes her way to the front of the stage, where she receives her room key and meets her new roommate. The two set off to where their new living quarters will be for the next few years.

Fuzzy and Janus arrive in their new abode, arms full of their freshly mandated living materials, along with the thirty-seven personal items they were allowed to bring. Without even needing to speak a word to her new roommate, they decided to split the room in two. They got to work unpacking everything, organizing their sides into their respective spaces. Fuzzy's side was finished first; she never really had anything for herself to begin with. All she had with her were her folded uniforms and a creased family photo of her parents. Finishing her side, she sprawls out on the bed, embracing the comfort of its freshly laid sheets, glad to finally have a real sleeping space rather than a dingy cot in a barracks.

Her roommate only finished decorating her an hour after Fuzzy had, falling asleep on her own bed before Fuzzy had the chance to start any real conversation, leaving her on her own for the night. Fuzzy didn't really need to sleep; her augmentations enabled her to go longer than usual without rest. She was hoping to learn her roommates' enhancements, but it seemed like that would have to wait until tomorrow. She sat in her bed, bored for over an hour, before she decided to do some info gathering. She looked across from her bed, gazing at Janus's side of the room. One of Fuzzy's eyes split down the middle, shifting to the side to reveal a highly

sophisticated camera underneath, its lens rotating and clicking. The camera's internal mechanisms hum as a red, grid-like light is projected across the room. The squares in the grid shrink and grow, resizing to fit objects within them as smaller grids within the squares project, angling themselves to perfectly fit the edges of every object within sight. As it did, it was creating a model of Janus's side of the room, building itself layer by layer with each passover with the scan.

It may have been a slight invasion of privacy, but they would be getting close soon enough, so it was justified to her; it was preemptive familiarity. Trust would come between them, and trust is best earned when there are no secrets, after all. The items in her possession were mostly to be expected: a few well-used books, a journal held shut by a leather strap, and a framed photo of her family—her, her mother, and her brother. Only the framed photo was odd, not because of what was in the photo but because of what was being detected within. There was a frequency emitting from it, one that wouldn't normally be found emitting from something like this. The scan lingers over the photo it gave, zoning in on it as it focuses fully onto the frame. Within it, a small black disk was detected, an analog storage system. She found she was unable to read its contents due to this, no matter what was on it, however—this was contraband, and given how this was using a technology long abandoned by modern standards, this was deliberate so that contents couldn't be read. Within the central computing node within Fuzzy's body, used to control her enhancements, she gets a ping, and a string of text reads across the MHUD within her eye.

">Contraband material detected

>No registered authentication of possession detected.

>Violation of code 919.3 Article 4"

This was odd to her, given she never used her internal computer for anything other than easier control of her limbs. She ignored this, deciding to not prod further, laying back down, and thinking to herself, 'I'll question her about this tomorrow,' feeling she has gathered sufficient data on her roommate. Fuzzy enters a power-saving mode, activating mental suppression software that allows her to become functionally asleep when it's not needed.

Fuzzy awoke the next morning to a knock at the dorm room door, her eye flicking open as the camera that replaced her other eye flickered on, showing the ceiling above. She sat up as she waited for all her systems to turn back on; hearing another knock at the door, she looked over, noticing how the other side of the room was empty. No Janus, no belongings, nothing but a neatly made blank bed. She got up confused, groaning to herself, the speaker on her chest letting out a few struggled beeping sounds, not fully recognizable as words. She straightened her fur as she approached the door, combing it down, hiding its light blue roots, and bringing out

the cotton candy-colored gradient of her fur. She opened the door, meeting face-to-face with General Olmer, who stood stoically, his uniform adorned with medals.

“Good morning, Fuzzy. How was your first night here at the base?” His stoic expression shifted to one of apologetic empathy.

“It was good?” Fuzzy was very confused at this meeting with the general. “What happened to Janus? Where are all her things?”

“That is precisely why I am here today. I regret to inform you that Janus has been discharged.” He paused, seeing the shock on Fuzzy's face. “She was discovered to have contraband within her belongings. A disc drive that went missing from our server room 2 weeks ago, holding confidential information. It was determined that she was planning to sell it to our enemy.”

“What? So... what happened to her? Is she in prison?” Fuzzy's mind raced, thinking back to when she first discovered the disk the night before.

“She will be tried, most likely jailed for the next few years, but this is not my only duty here. I am delivering your new roommate.” The general stepped aside for the new Aragon to walk into the room.

Just as quickly as her face lit up with glee about getting a new roommate, it dropped, her face going to dread. The Aragon in front of her being Ava. Ava Aricron. She could not believe her eyes. The person, of the hundreds of possible replacements, was her. It just had to be her.

“I will let her get settled; this is the first day, so no assigned duties today.” General Olmer gives Fuzzy a wave, turning away and making his way down the hall.

Fuzzy backed up silently, watching Ava, who mirrored her same expression, walk in, both staring at each other in collective disbelief. Fuzzy backed up so far she tripped backwards onto her bed, she watched Ava walk in and set her things down on the vacant bed, not taking her eyes off of her the entire time.

“You can stop staring at me now, we get it.” Ava said all of a sudden. “I didn't want this either.” Her voice is full of clear disdain of this situation.

Fuzzy simply looked away in defiant silence, looking around for anything to distract herself with. She really didn't want to engage with her new roommate; she couldn't find anything within her immediate area, the dark grey walls offered little to take her away from the moment.

The air between the two Aragon was getting heavier with every moment they sat in silence together. Ava turned around, facing Fuzzy for the first time since she got into the room. She had the same annoyed glare that Fuzzy had, clearly giving off a similar level of hatred for the fellow Aragon in the room. They sat there staring at each other for what felt like forever.

Ava eventually spoke up, "So...What the fuck are you staring at?". She crossed her arms at this point.

"I don't know, What are you staring at? You're staring too." Fuzzy snapped back almost instantly.

"Really? You were staring first. " She turned back to her stuff to finish unpacking, giving Fuzzy a side eye when she heard her scoff. "I assumed you would have left your childish nature back in Education camp.. Guess i was wrong"

Fuzzy could hear the smug tone in her voice. This set her off, the atmosphere was too much for Fuzzy to handle. She decided she needed to get out of here. Fuzzy pushes herself up and off the bed, walking to the room's exit, and stepping out, leaving Ava in the room alone, the loud slamming of the door being the only response Fuzzy had for Ava. She could not stay inside that room with her any longer. She wandered aimlessly down the hall, the buzz of the lights above her filling her ears, passing the rows of dorms until she reached the end of the hall, pushing her way through the double doors with a bit more force than she really needed.

The first sun was still barely rising over the distant mountains, she made her way across the base's grounds, the barely creeping rays of light from the sun illuminating the familiar structures on the base. She sees the only buildings sticking out from the rest, the library. She diverts her path and makes a beeline for the on-base library, the desire for a book, something to let herself forget the morning she just had. The library is one of the only buildings on the base that was left to be designed not on a strict structure preset, this let it have a stark beauty compared to the rest of the base. A large silver structure with angled tinted glass spiking to the heavens, the two stone statues of the founding Volcanic Aragon shaking hands at the entrance. Its edges gilded with gold shining in the rising sun, the stairs leading up to the front entrance, covered in silver patterns and shapes. Its presence was unable to be ignored as it stood out to everything else.

She walked through the large double doors, the scent of morning dew being replaced by paper as she flashed her ID card, doubling as a library card, and meandered through the isles of old books. Most of the books looked like they hadn't been taken off the shelves in years. Especially the fiction section of the library, which is where she enjoyed spending her time the most, running her hand along the dust covered spines of thick books, most have been forgotten, laid to rest here for no one to read, but not to her. She found comfort in them, their solid, nonjudgmental presence. She walked down the aisle before landing on one particular one near the back of the aisle. She swipes away the layered on dust, revealing the brightly colored red and yellow striped spine, no title. 'The one she was looking for' she thought to herself as she pulled it off the shelf, dusting off the cover revealing the colors of the spine, spilling onto the cover. It leads to shifting jagged shapes of gears and springs intertwined into a larger

mechanism. Despite how thick it was, it was relatively light. The words "The Clockwork Observatory" across the front in spiraling font.

She has always liked this book, read it all throughout her childhood; or at least she thought she did. Her memory from back then wasn't very sharp, she couldn't quite remember when she picked up this book, only that she knew she liked it and had read it a dozen times. Flipping it over, she read the description on the back, seeing the familiar font she had seen before.

"The tale of a young girl who has been trapped in an observatory, desperately trying find her way out, only leading her deeper than she ever would have wanted to be. In a place where not everything seems to line up, she must figure out how to make sense of the ever changing observatory, hoping to make her way back to the real world."

It was definitely an odd book, not one you would find in a library on a military base, it wasn't really fantastic, or science fiction, it was somewhere in between, where it didn't go anywhere fast but every detail was important. She glanced out the window to her side, both of the sun had fully risen above the horizon, starting to take its place in the sky. She turned away from the window walking through the open reading space, it was still too early for there to be too many other Aragon so it was a perfect place to read. She set it down on a table as she sat in front of it. Her hands rested on it as she looked around, and then carefully opening it, its pages had a yellow tint to them really showing their age. The ink is still somehow holding together after years of wear. Her finger traced the margin until it came upon the first word, and she began to read.

Chapter 2

Hate Relationship