



ORBIT

BY THOMAS PATRICK



HELLO THERE READER! WELCOME TO THE ORBIT PILOT READING BOOK CLUB. I AM RELYING ON YOU TO ADEQUATELY READ AND REVIEW ORBIT. ITS AN AMAZING BOOK (I hope...) AND I PUT MY HEART AND SOUL INTO IT. PLEASE REFRAIN FROM SHARING WITH OTHERS UNLESS RECEIVING CONSENT FROM ME FIRST. I AM VERY GLAD YOU ARE ABLE TO READ IT AND I THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE. HAVE FUN READING THE PLANET TO PLANET SPANNING ADVENTURE AND WAR STORY THAT FOLLOWS THE GREATEST EPICS IN HISTORY. SOME PARTS OF THE BOOK ARE IN A DIFFERENT COLOR. THERE MAY BE WRITING ERRORS, MISPELLED WORDS, THINGS THAT DON'T MAKE SENSE. HOPEFULLY MOST OF IT IS GOOD, BUT IF YOU FIND YOURSELF HAVING TROUBLE WITH THE TEXT IT IS PROBABLY SIMPLY AN ERROR ON MY PART. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, OR COMPLIMENTS I AM ALWAYS REACHABLE ON FACEBOOK OR THE PHONE. ENJOY

-Tom Scanlan

It's easy to go down into Hell; night and day, the gates of dark Death stand wide. The light of progress hindered like a fire depleted of its oxygen. But, to climb back again, to retrace one's steps to the upper airs of recovery and beyond – therein lies the problem, therein lies the task. For if done incorrectly, the fool will wander the catacombs of hell, believing they are in Valhalla.

Chapter 1

In the late 22nd century, after the colonization and terraformation of much of Mars, human technological achievement slowed to a halt. For every major breakthrough in technology throughout human history, there was always an equal or greater ability to power the inventions. As time went on, new inventions and technology needed greater power to work. Computers needed more electricity and rockets needed better fuel. Clean renewable energy was essential while innovation was dead. In the year 2193, a thick oily liquid with an orange red color resembling the old red dirt of Mars was discovered in large quantities in ancient Martian caverns. It was named Apla. At first, Apla was considered useless. Shortly after its discovery, a poor scientist named Chris Winterfield began testing the Apla in many conditions. He analyzed the makeup of the substance and found that the Apla was comprised of many of the same elements of organic life. Early biological tests on Apla concluded that it was not a living thing, but simply a natural liquid mixture. Despite its classification, Winterfield hypothesized the Apla to be drug for rejuvenation. He believed the chemical makeup would respond well when fused with wounds. Through years of trials he stumbled upon an unbelievable breakthrough. When Apla is fused with human blood inside of the body, it creates and temporarily sustains unbelievable amounts of energy. Merely one pint amount of Apla injected into the body would instantly fuse with an equal number of blood cells by volume. Once the fusion is complete, the body would have anywhere up to twenty megawatts available to expend. All of the energy would flow through the body while the person can comfortably sustain the energy. It seemed as though a powerful, renewable, and safe energy was found.

A week after the true power of Apla was discovered, trials were conducted on thousands of people. The Earth governments reached out to Winterfield and Martian leadership, claiming to back the trials with billions. Word spread quickly back to Earth and the Quad Earth Satellite (QES) colonies. Major contracts were being drawn up, Apla drill mines were being created, the Alpha trials of Apla were producing thousands of megawatts of clean energy, and all of this happened by the second week.

But something terrible happened in just two weeks following. All 1563 candidates for the Alpha testing died. Every single one of them died from radiation poisoning, deadly tumors, or cancer.

The majority of the candidates were sent to hospitals as soon as the first fatalities were reported, but they died regardless. At the start of the 22nd century, a way to fix the effects of radiation was found, but it was not a cure. Arcs (A.R.C. Anti Radiation Cells) could be injected into an area of the body where it was known to have radioactive parts, and be able to kill the radioactivity before its heated effects could kill parts of the body. In cases where cancer or tumors had already formed from radiation, the brilliant medical technology of the time could perform quick surgeries to remove the threats. However, in many cases, the illness, whatever it be, would have spread too much and there was no way to stop it once it enough time to damage important organs.

At first, it seemed like the new way of energy would crumble. But the risk of cancer and death of a few people was not enough to draw the government from a cheap and near infinite supply of energy. And anyone important to the government could easily stop use of Apla before the radiation spread too far. Hence, the drilling of Apla exploded all over Mars making trade between Earth and Mars great. However, because the planets are only close enough for space travel about every 2 years, trade and travel was not always possible. During the one month where space travel is economically possible, the two planets open up the orbital buildings in the major cities for easy landing and distributing of Apla to earth and goods and minerals to Mars. This month is the most important trade month over the course of the two years. Apla had immense power. There was nothing stopping the rapid expansion of its use. It would power the newest computer grids and the biggest space stations. It would power the QES colonies and the newest technological innovations. It would change everything from space and air travel, to ground fuel, to powering cities. But most importantly, it would change war.

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The thriving bright green plant life Ireland once had was now replaced by dead trees and crusted ground waiting to be re-fertilized. War was something the Irish knew well but had not been fought out of desperation from annihilation on their own land for over millennia.

Now the emerald island has been claimed by an opposing faction once again. The Curator army recently built a cleansing base on the island. It was a place where people to die were given large amounts of Apla as a death sentence so that way their death was worth something. It was the only energy plant needed in all of Western Europe. The Curator troops would impose Military Law upon the rubble streets of the peasant housing. Curators did whatever they wanted to the unarmed people of the villages. Every month a squadron of soldiers would go to the towns and gather up a specified number of peasants to be killed. They looked for the weak. Curator policy in the 23rd century was nearly the same in the 20th: kill the weak. The weak were those who were unsuccessful in life; not just a specific race. The people who had nothing to offer the world, according to law, were to be killed. Since Ireland's military, like the rest of the military

around the globe, was either destroyed or initiated into the Curator regime, there was nothing left of the countrymen but weak humans. When there were enough weak people shoved and piled into trucks, the Curators would send off the trucks to the energy plant, the only military base on the island.

Two S-5 Blitz Fighters, which are 45 foot wide air fighters with two turbo jet engines on the side, a twin blast engine in the back, and a loaded arsenal, blazed their burners as they came into contact with an officer's ship: F11 Hellion, a 35 foot long aircraft similar to a helicopter but without blades and propelled by air jet propulsion. The Hellion dropped altitude from the sky after deploying out of a Curator carrier. The Blitz Fighters fell back behind the Hellion in escort formation. The trio of ships sped over the beach divider between the raging oceans of the Atlantic and dingy green cliffs of Ireland. The sun was almost gone now as the night diluted the sky. As the ships closed in on what was left of the town of Cork, the Blitz Fighters gave clearance to the base and blasted off away from the Hellion which was slowing its speed. As the Hellion popped over a hill the base opened up a metal ground door between two watchtowers leading to a hanger underground. It twirled down through the opening and hovered preparing to land. As it touched down, four dozen Curator soldiers formed two lines heading from the opening of the Hellion, all of them wearing battle ready uniform of slick boots, shin and thigh armor, torso bullet-deflecting padding, a sling around the midsection for ammo, an SI-45 Short Rifle raised in each one's right arm, a round helmet with an orange visor shielding the eyes and nose, and a color scheme of black, gold, and red with a patch for the Curator emblem on the left shoulder. A scientist dressed in a white garment with a Curator insignia on his left peck and a nametag of "Dr. Richards" on the right walked in between the lines of soldiers to the front where the side door of the ship climbed open. The moment the door was higher than his head, a very corrupted and old Colonel by the name of Michael Lutz took a fast step off the Hellion and toward the scientist. Behind Lutz were two Covis.

Covis were the most elite soldiers in the Curator military. They were on another level when talking about special forces. Pronounced CO-VEES. They're name was an acronym for "Collective Operatives Victory (Class) Illuminators."

"Colonel Lutz, I didn't realize-," Richards tried speaking but Lutz blew past him and kept walking. Richards followed.

"Richards! I did not fly down from Command to hear your sympathy. I want to see the boy," Lutz spoke harshly.

"Sir, I realize and SWS call would alarm heads of state, but there is no real need to be here. The kid is nearly dead from constant Apla injection. Even if he is resisting it, his cells won't last

forever,” Richards claimed as the four of them moved from the dim hanger through a door to a long bright white hallway.

“No, the governors have no idea and I’d like to keep it that way. And you had better hope that boy isn’t dead, or you will be.”

Lutz was not playing around. His fists were clenched tight for an older man. His step was firm and angry. However, he had a slight bead of sweat running down his pale face. He kept removing his colonel top hat and coursing his hands through his light brown hair. From the distance Dr. Richards kept, Lutz was angry, but up close, he was nervous. They passed through the hall and up and elevator.

The doors to the third floor of the elevator opened. Dr. Richards was the first to step into the wide white room. The room had several large chambers with clear glass to see through from the outside but shaded to not see out. There were many people in the chambers. Many people from neighboring towns of Cork were locked up, and all of them waiting to be killed. In the center of the room was a generator with a large base that ran to the ceiling. All the power gathered from the Apla ran through this and was stored in power bases outside. Around the generator were more scientists and small labs and high tech computers for science. Clear screens that were easy to move around had information flowing all over them. Scientists were walking back and forth easily passing information to one another with a swipe of the finger. Near the lab, down a corridor, was a few stations specifically set up for injecting Apla into people. All the station consisted of was a chair with locks to lock one’s legs and arms onto and four small needles; one for each limb. Then two gloves and two boots with microscopic pricks would be placed on the victim to harness the energy.

The injection of the Apla was a slow process. The scientists would measure the amount of cancer in their body with a quick scan of the body. They would slowly inject the Apla into the body until the cancer became very prevalent from excessive radiation. At a certain point during the injections, the cancer would become too wide spread and multiply very quickly. It all depended on how much was injected and for how long, but after a certain threshold the cancer would have infected too much of the body, and there would be nothing a doctor could do. The Arcs, that saved people from cancer, are quite expensive, so it would not be cost effective to try to save every prisoner. It was much easier for the Curators to accelerate Apla injection after the threshold to try to get as much energy as possible. But due to the way in which Apla fuses with the blood, an injection that is too quick could be instantly fatal. Due to the extreme potential that someone could be instantly killed with an injection of Apla, all vital signs were measured to ensure maximum energy output.

“Bring me to him,” Lutz ordered.

"Lisa, has prisoner 2-1-6 died yet? If not, where is he?" Richards asked very quickly while walking towards her with his arms up.

"No, he is in room eight, vital signs are weak though. We were just about to pitch the next group." She responded.

"NO! I mean... No. Thank you. Get me medical in the room now. Damn it." Richards sped up his pace more and he headed to the direction of room eight. He brushed his blushed forehead with his forearm. A calm and ready Lutz followed with his two soldiers.

The four of them reached the room in a matter of seconds. Medical was on their way. Richards opened the door to the room. And there he was. Nearly dead from sheer dehydration and starvation the boy leaned into the chair that caused him so much grief.

"So this is him. He is just a boy." Lutz argued.

"Well that is what the message said wasn't it?" Richards said being a smartass.

"Yes, but I just had different images in my mind. This boy is still young and scrawny and weak." Lutz countered.

"His scrawniness is from the Apla. As we hooked him into monitoring machines, he seemed like any other boy. But when we put him on the Apla, we found something peculiar. Every time we injected Apla into his system, he would react very typical. Typical without Apla that is. He was calm with low dosage and nearly went into cardiac arrest with high dosage. But both ways we saw that his radiation percent stayed at zero or just over zero."

Lutz's jaw dropped. He knelt beside the chair and stared at the boy. "So we ran tests. His cells are trained at birth to shield themselves from the effects of radiation. His white blood cells are trained at birth to recognize radioactive cells and kill them. It is not like he is fighting a disease. It is an easy shutoff. The problem is that Apla injected over time puts pressure on his body. The more Apla that is pumped through his system, the harder it is for his cells to be resistant. He burns energy quickly. Some of his cells simply die before being affected. Therefore, he loses body mass; typically blood. That is why he is starved and dehydrated right now." Richards explained.

All of the sudden, Lutz's mood changed. He became angry and stood up. "And you didn't think this was important?"

"Well, we just thought it could have been an anomaly. Perhaps unrefined Apla. Excuse me, sir, but I don't know what you are asking." Dr. Richards did not understand.

"You didn't think this boy was an important discovery. You'd let him die. He is evolutions link and crown jewel. He is nature's answer. God's-" Lutz paused. His eyes shifted from wonder to anger again. He turned around and moved a ceiling hanging computer screen toward him.

"Smith, kill Richards." Lutz ordered. Before Richards could fully understand what was happening, Covi Team Six Lieutenant Frank Smith drew a handgun and shot Dr. Richards in the side of the head.

"Potocki, set charges across the base. Destroy everything and everyone. Overload the generators; make it look like an accident." Lutz ordered his other soldier.

"Smith, find this boys file. I want to know about him." Lutz crouched back near the boy. He pulled out a vitamin bar from his inner vest pocket. He tapped the boy to wake him up and went to grab a glass of water from the lab sink. Lt. Smith pulled the glass board toward him and began swiping and tapping his fingers against the glass tracking down information and bypassing security protocols.

"His name Charles Patrick Listowel. Born and lived in a nearby city. His entire family is dead. He was tagged by initial Curator inspection as being inferior because his parents were both unemployed and only the father passed basic education. He is seven years old, and had to-" Smith reread the statistics and took a in a breath.

"He has been here two weeks and had to watch his neighbors, friends, and family die before him. He survived a week of Apla... Additional notes. When a great amount of Apla is injected, his cells are kicked into overdrive to protect themselves. He almost loses consciousness, but apparently they never put him over the edge." Smith took off his helmet revealing his short dark hair.

Lutz handed Smith a cup of water who in return helped the boy drink.

"And to think these bimbos would have killed him with such a powerful natural augmentation..." Lutz said. He paused before continuing.

"Lieutenant Smith, you are relieved of Covi Six command." Lutz stated.

"Sir?" Lt. Smith was shocked and confused.

"Take this boy out of here and train him," Lutz said firmly.

"Put him in a Covi school. I don't care which one," Lutz shook his head looking at the ground while skimming through instructions.

"Train him every day," he said while poking his finger out at Smith.

“Don’t get too attached, but from now on, he’s sort of like your son.” Lutz said to a wide eyed Smith.

Lutz took a last look at the boy and gritted his teeth. “And send me reports on his progress every month. He has unbelievable potential for Six. But more importantly, he will be the key to my whole plan.”

“And I’m assuming you’re referring to Six.” Frank said.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way, Covi.” Lutz said.

In an instant Lutz dashed off to his helicopter. The charges were set and just a couple of minutes were left before they were going to blow. Smith shook up the boy and got him awake.

“Hey kid. My name’s Frank. I’m here to get you out of here.” Smith calmed his facial movements and talked in a soft voice.

“Here is some water and a chocolate bar, drink and eat up.” Smith handed him Lutz’s vitamin bar and tried to get water in to his system all while watching his time. One minute read on the clock on his wrist board computer; a computer that was built into the screen which was malleable and could be peeled up from his wrist.

“Ok Charlie, I gotta get you out of here now. Are you ready?” Smith said in a kind voice.

“My name’s not Charlie. It’s Pat.” The boy said in a childish Irish accent.

“Pat?” Smith turned his head and looked at the information board. He looked at his full name. “You mean your middle name?”

“I like it better. No one calls me Charlie.” Pat said.

“That’s quite an accent you got there buddy. I’m from the province of America, can you tell by my accent?” Watching his time, Smith helped stand Pat on his feet.

“Yeah, I know where that is. Where are you taking me? Where’s my family?” Pat confidently answered and requested.

“Uh... I can explain all of this later, Pat. We got to go now.”

Pat rubbed his eyes. “I want my family.”

“Listen, try and do your best to remember them. Remember them in your head and never forget. The greatest thing you can ever do for someone is remember them. Do you know why?” Frank asked. Pat shook his head. “Because then they’ll live forever. If you’ve got them in your

thoughts, how could they ever leave you?” Frank looked at the sad child. Pat dribbled his lips and tightened away his tears. He closed his eyes and took in a deep breath keeping the eyelids closed tightly.

“Ready?” Frank asked.

“Ready.” Pat said with his eyes still shut and his mind focused singularly on his loved ones.

Frank took his helmet and placed it on Pat’s head. Smith checked his time again and noticed that in fifteen seconds the bombs were going to go off.

With Pat securely under his wing, Smith began injecting Apla into his system through his torso armor. He used the power he was generating in his body to power the rest of his utilities all Covis have standard. He held Pat with his right arm and he raised his left straight in the air. He gathered energy to his left power glove on his hand. The power glove utilized this massive amount of energy and created a ball of it just centimeters off the palm of his hand. With a slight bend in the elbow and a charge of his hand upward, he fired to energy straight up in a beam destroying several layers of ceiling above him. Then, with the previous Apla having been injected, Frank blasted the energy into his power boots creating a fiery propulsion between him and the ground. He was now flying with ease from his boots. And with one last check to see that Pat was holding on, Frank launched out through the hole in the ceiling. As they flared up into the night sky, flashes and detonations went viral on the campus of the base.

Chapter Two

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The war only lasted for about a month out of every 26. The distance between Mars and Earth ranged from about 50 to 400 million miles away, and it was too difficult to fight wars very far away. It was called the Orbital War because it was mostly fought in space when both planets were close enough in orbit. Tens of thousands perished in space. Fleets were massacred. The people of Mars never managed to crack the blockade to get to Earth, but the Curators were close many times in getting to Mars. There were some battles fought on Mars’s moons. But the Curators could never get enough men and ships passed the Martian blockade to set up a secure foothold on the surface of Mars. But after each side couldn’t advance, the costs of war mounted over three decades. There were a few changes of hats and leadership roles that contributed to the end of the war. Five years ago, Seth Lenz became the Curator Imperator (inherited from his father who was assassinated) at age 25. He was a genius scholar. Although King Timothy Winterfield was still alive and ruling Mars, his two sons also came of age at this time and became powerful politicians. Prince Shane Winterfield was the older of the two sons. He was known to be psychotic and power hungry. His brother, Prince Gordon Winterfield, was

known to be overly peaceful and kind. Although some of the Martian consultants have urged the King to give Gordon the crown when he passes, the King wanted the rules to stay the same and have the older brother become king.

A couple of months ago, just before another meaningless battle in the trenches of space, a request for a peace meeting was sent from Seth Lenz to King Winterfield. With pressure from his people, soldiers, constituents, and two sons, Winterfield risked his own life to travel with minimal security to a remote neutral destination in space to see if he could find any peaceful terms with the Curators. To his surprise, Lenz offered the King a full peace agreement dropping all hostility with armed forces. Lenz offered for the trade routes to be open in a new more economically friendly agreement toward Mars. Billions of dollars were promised to build major infrastructure in Martian cities for better Apla mining and trade routes. Lenz offered for the next proximity month to not only be open to trade but for Earth to host the Olympic Games; something not seen in generations. For two weeks in the month, games would be held with the best of the best athletes from each planetary faction. Utterly shocked by this, Winterfield accepted the agreement and returned to tell Mars.

A month's time passed and the proximity of the planets neared 60 million miles. This was adequate for space trade and travel. The King, his sons, political acquaintances, and the best athletes comprised of soldiers Mars had to offer boarded several ships to travel to Earth. The newest Ion Engines on travel ships ousted the old chemical propulsion ships and did not rely on fuel and mass proportion, but rather how much electricity output could be produced. With the energy from Apla, powering Ion Engines became much easier and allowed for newer versions to increase speed. The newest Ion engines could propel a ship in space up to speeds nearing 640,000 kilometers per hour. At those speeds a ship could reach from Earth to Mars in about seven days during the proximity month. In just a week's time, the ships arrived in Earth's orbit and were intercepted by the super skyscrapers. They were all guests of the Curator city of Miami. The trade route opened up and shipments of Apla and other goods began flying at super speeds through space.

During the trade season before the King had landed on Earth. Seth sent a team of his elite operatives on a covert mission to Mars. There, they would obtain information on what was believed to be a detailed explanation of the Martian war effort and how they had succeeded in defending their world for so long.

65 million miles away from earth, a freighter scheduled to land in just a few minutes was supposed to be just one of many tradeoffs between Apla and rich resources. The two amateur pilots in the tight freighter cockpit were under the impression that their shipment was a routine drop off in Grand City: Mars's major trade city and unofficial capital. The ship would slow down its max speed until it reached orbit. Then, it would fly straight for one of the super skyscrapers.

It would fly at terminal velocity into the top of the skyscraper, only to be super decelerated by the landing magnets and hooks that would be deployed. Once stopped, the ship would be moved into a hanger bay and have all of the cargo taken off.

In the storage containers there were no goods at all. With the ship coming in to the atmosphere soon, it was time to make a move. One of the containers began unbuckling itself, and opened up.

Nathan Bryar Black moved out of the container and stepped over to the nearest container. Nathan was a Curator tech specialist with minimal military training who graduated at the top of his engineering school. He was assigned to Covi Six years ago and since served as the team tech man and medic.

“Alright, time to open you guys up.” Nathan said to himself. “Let’s do a headcount shall we.”

He whipped out his datapad and tapped a few buttons while he adjusted his glasses. The next container began to unlock and open up.

“Introducing our first contestant to the audience; standing at an impressive six feet, seven inches in the air, while weighing a massive 360 pounds, this Covi Six member is the biggest in the entire military.” Nathan said looking at his datapad. “And... oh wow. He’s as old as dirt for a Covi, 29 years old. He’s pretty cool, and also my favorite black friend.”

The first man came out of the cargo in the modified Covi attire: white jet boots, thin white thigh armor, grey polyester battle guard underneath the armor, a grey and white belt with reddish Apla canisters, white and yellow abdomen armor, very light shoulder and thin chest armor as a one piece that had a stylish white chrome finish to it. Underneath, grey polyester fabric was tightly wrapped around their entire bodies not leaving a bit of skin unmarked.

The red and white power gloves had a distinct tech look on the outside. They were fueled like the power boots, and the jetpack, by the Apla. An air mask helmet was worn with full coverage of the head and a slightly open neck where the sealed fabric was visible.

“Who are you talking to, Nathan?” Kyle Stevens said.

“I’m required to film for this mission and any time command gives me an assignment I don’t want to do I make a complete joke out of it or I do it half assed.” Nathan said. “I can’t wait until they hear that part.”

“I certainly hope that ‘massive’ comment wasn’t referring me being fat or something.” Stevens said.

“Never, my man.” Nathan said.

"And don't call me old." Kyle said.

"And for our next contender, probably the most pessimistic person to bring on this trip, Brian Parker." Nathan said. "Smart guy. Not as smart as me. Sorta tall. I'm taller. A tad overweight. Has nothing on Kyle." Parker stepped out of his unlocked box.

"Yeah, yeah. You're lucky I don't blast you through a wall." Parker said.

"And for one of my personal favorites. The oldest man I have ever met...." Nathan said.

"I'm not that old, you jackass. You'd be lucky if you were 43 and looked this good." Luke Potocki said.

"Shut up old man. I need to finish my headcount." Nathan said.

"I'll show you old man." Potocki mumbled.

"And who is next. Ah yes, Parker's polar opposites. Let's start with Bacon, formally Sid Cornell. Mr. Demolitionist is what I believe he would like to one day be called, but Bacon is a great name for now. He and Colin Wilson make the perfect duo in the squad combining their skills and companionship."

"Companionship? You make it sound like we are a little more than friends." Bacon said.

"That's because you are. You're best friends." Nathan said.

"Nathan, I swear you are the lamest person I know." Colin said.

"Pipe down, kiddies. I outrank you." Nathan said.

"Dude, you're not even a Covi." Colin said.

"I've got it where it counts." Nathan said. "And now ladies, I present you a fine specimen. He's tall, strong, and handsome. Kind of a creep, but he's a blonde, who could blame him. For a starting bid of one hundred bucks, I give you John Matthews." Nathan said while clapping at the end of his speech.

"You and your entrances. Can't we start a mission without you embarrassing me?" Matthews said.

"Or 'us'." Colin said.

"Yeah. Nathan, from now on just be silent." Bacon said.

“Not now. I’m almost finished. Speaking of silence, here is our mighty friend Ace whom I don’t believe I have ever heard a word of.... Mr. Silent but accurate.” Nathan said. Ace stepped out of his locked cabin and walked right past Nathan without saying a word.

“Coming out of the next corridor, this Covi ranges somewhere between short and short tempered. He--”Nathan said.

“No! No. You will keep your mouth shut for me or there will be no cameraman for this mission.” Andrew Banner said.

Nathan cringed with a bit of fear as he backed away from Banner’s space.

“All right then. Pat Listowel, you all know him, you all love him, folks. This leader of Covi Six is also the famed military member who can use infinite amounts of Apla. He is the best fighter in the entire army.” Nathan said.

Pat Listowel, the legendary leader of Covi Six appeared from the container.

“If only it were infinite.” Pat said.

“This best fighter you speak of, I’m pretty sure his first name is actually John.” Matthews said.

“Keep dreaming kid.” Banner said.

“Nathan, status. How much time do we got.” Pat asked.

“We are going to hit terminal velocity in the air any moment Pat.” Nathan responded.

“Alright boys, out of all Covi teams command could have picked, they got us. Let’s be clean. Let’s be thorough. We gotta start fast and finish on time.” Pat stated.

“We have the intel on the ground, correct?” Kyle responded.

“That’s right. For obvious reasons only one of us could be given the codes and workup of the operation.” Pat said.

“Let’s do this. Let’s get on the ground.” Matthews said.

The cargo ship fell cockpit-side face down into the planet as it started to enter the atmosphere. The cargo loader and unloading door was on the opposite end of the ship facing space.

“Everyone latch on to a cargo box. Nathan put on your oxygen mask now and when we reach pressurized air hit the doors. I’ll see you at the rendezvous after you’ve been broken out.” Pat commanded.

Nathan put on his air mask and then gave a thumb up. Each of the Covis latched on to a cargo box with a wire.

“Prepare smoke bombs.” Pat reminded.

Nathan used his personal computer arm pad to quickly hack the ships door and open it up. The door began opening up and the rushing sound of air filled the cargo area. The two pilots in the cockpit noticed the door opened. They panicked and tried to shut it, but there was no use, the door was completely open.

Using his internal helmet com, Pat spoke to Nathan and the team, “Nathan how much time do we got?” He yelled.

“15 seconds!” Nathan yelled back.

“Alright men, when we hit 1000 meters, Nathan will give us the three second count, pop the smoke and thrust out.” Pat yelled.

A few seconds went by and Nathan gave the hand count. Three. Two. One.

All nine of the Covis fired their smoke flares which blasted colorful smoke all around them. This made them nearly completely invisible in the air. Then, with the cords still latched to the boxes, they thrust their ion jet boots and changed the personal velocity of themselves and the boxes enough to leave the ship with the boxes attached. Nathan, who was still inside the cargo ship, held on to the ship as it cruised down toward the super skyscraper entrance.

From a distance, with the Covis cloaked in smoke, it looked as if there was a malfunction with the ship’s door and the cargo came flying out. That is exactly what the plan was. The Covis used a little more thrust to spread themselves out and away from the ship and the incoming building. When they were far enough away they detached the cables, and the boxes fell at pace to hit the side of super skyscraper.

Down on the ground, the Martian air traffic safety establishment was calling in to the air force and ground police warning them of falling objects that were identified as cargo shipment containers.

The Covis were falling at very quick speeds as they passed the top of the building. Using their jetpacks, they flew around the building at their initial falling positions and came to a point where they were all falling together. The smoke had stopped pouring from them. Together, they blasted their jets alongside the building. The Covis slowed their speed enough and dropped down onto the roof of a 600 foot tall building. They quickly jumped to lower levels off the rooftops.

The freighter they had left was now stopped in the super skyscraper and trade security locked down the ship and grabbed the pilots. The freighter was moved into the hanger and flipped down so the cockpit and unloading door was on the same level. The police arrived and searched the cargo hold only to find Nathan on the ground calmly sitting.

The Covis rushed as quickly as they could to the depths of the city. Underneath buildings and elevated highways was an underground slum city of itself. No sunlight passed through to the area to the poorer Martians but police and video monitoring were also not around. The Covis landed in a circle and gathered up. The dark space beneath the highway was filled with leaky water ducts and peasants living on gravel.

"Where are we?" Matthews asked.

"It looks like the Grand City slums. Apparently they're underground." Pat said.

"Filthy. These people should be eradicated." Banner said. "These people would be eradicated back home."

"Hey! Keep your voice down. Do you want them to know we're Curators?" Pat said.

"What does it matter? I'll kill anyone who hears." Banner said.

"No. No, you can't do that here. And that goes for everyone. Absolutely no killing." Pat said.

"What?" Banner said confused.

"We cannot draw any attention. I should have mentioned that earlier." Pat said.

"How are we supposed to do anything without killing anyone?" Banner said.

"Be creative." Pat said. "Alright now that we're on the ground, let me give you the briefing. What I am about to tell you, if it was heard by the wrong ears, could start this war back up again with us right in the middle of it." Pat claimed.

"What's our mission?" Stevens questioned.

"Surely it is not a simple assassination mission." Banner added.

"Our mission is to infiltrate Grand City's administrator offices in the JY building. We are to retrieve valuable information about the Martian war effort."

"But I thought the war was over." Colin said jokingly.

A few of the Covis laughed. "Yeah right, that was just a cover to get us into orbit. I can't even believe our army bought that blatant lie." Banner told him.

Pat smiled but continued "We will take the underground and sewers for our paths. Ace, I'll have you stay on the top of the building adjacent to the JY. Sniper coverage, use stun pellets. Once we are underground, two of us need to stay underground and disable the power to the building. Bacon, Colin, that's your job." Pat stated.

"I can do that." Bacon yelled.

"Easy stuff. Easy stuff." Colin added.

"This will shut down the power from the city Apla plant, but the backup generator will kick in. The backup generator will take a minute before it can charge up the building." Pat said.

"How do you know that?" Matthews asked.

"Because their buildings were built with the same technology and methods of those on Earth. It's like a glitch they never found." Pat said. "By this point, all the security in the building would have been shut off. They guards and managers will be scrambling to turn everything back on. That is where the rest of us come in. Assuming Nathan's been captured by now, they will have him contained on an interrogation level. But the guards watching him will be too preoccupied with getting the power and security back online. Kyle and John, securing Nathan is your job. He is our only way off this planet. Banner, Parker, and Potocki, you guys come with me; we are going to the Office of the City Overseer. The doors should be open under a power reset. We get inside and nab the intelligence on a memory stick. Whatever the information is, it is very important. Command made it very clear that Lenz wanted this in his hands by the 10th.

"Pat, if we want to get this mission over with quickly, why can't we at least use some firepower?" Parker asked.

"I agree with Parks, Charles. I don't see why things can't get a little messy. After all they are the enemy." Banner added.

"If we start killing soldiers, their government is going to research the cause a little more. With enough pressure from the friends and family of those killed, they might even try to blame us. Also, it's I believe those orders came with the intentions of making us pretend Martian rebels. That's why we got a suit change. Now let's get going." Pat said.

Ace had already run off in search of a hidden sniping spot. The rest of the Covis covertly made their way through the ground and into the sewers, but Parker and Pat were the last in the back.

"Look, I'm getting real tired of this explicit mission stuff." Parker said. "And I bet some of the others are too."

"As far as I see it, the only reason we're having a problem is because of your attitude." Pat said.

“My attitude?” Parker asked.

“Yeah, it’s drowning the team in negativity. Any you and I both know this isn’t square one.” Pat replied as he began to run off.

“Then fine. Let’s talk about a transfer.” Parker replied. Pat stopped.

“You wanna leave this team?” Pat said as he came back and got in Parker’s face. “Fine. When I complete this mission, we’ll have a talk.” He darted off.

Meanwhile, in the super skyscraper that intercepted the freighter, a squad of Martian soldiers led by a black man with fading hair color, a nice uniform, and an administrator hat, named Captain Max Connors. Connors was a Martian illuminator, which was one Mars’s fighting forces. He could use the powers of Apla energy just as Covis did, yet he did not have nearly as expensive technology. As he got older, now 42, he was forced to leave the frontlines. He was such a strategist however, that Martian military leadership put him at a high paying, high responsibility desk job. With today’s falling metal incident, the administration sent him in.

“Captain.” A soldier called out.

“What’s the status?” Connors asked.

“We took the pilots into custody. Both of them claimed they had nothing to do with the unlatching of the cargo. But we found a man in the freighter cargo bay. He was just sitting on the ground mischievously. He had a backpack and an air mask on him. Obviously, we have him pinned as the culprit.” The soldier replied.

“Did the guy have an ID, could you find out who he was?” Connors questioned.

“Negative sir, he had nothing on him except the backpack, which was quite frankly, impossible to open. And he won’t talk.” The soldier answered.

“Where is he now?” Connors asked.

“We have him detained here. You’re free to question him.” The soldier responded.

“That’s a negative kid. Sorry, but I outrank you by a bit. I’m taking him up to JY. He’ll be interrogated by my men, and my men only.” Connors ordered.

“Haha,” he chuckled. “Well, as much as I’d like to stay and argue with you captain, it’s getting late and I’m switching shifts. You’re the next guy’s problem.”

Connors and his men had Nathan flown out on Mars’s military transportation ship, the WindCutter, from the super skyscraper and over to JY offices.

The WindCutter was a large ship that could only fight in air. It moved slowly relative to a jet, but could move about a city in the air quickly. It had the ability to hover at any given point. It had a look of red camouflage for the color and looked like an oval with guns extruding from it. It had a cockpit big enough for several people and an internal space for prisoners, soldiers, cargo, etc. Two air jets propelled the ship from the back and the bottom of the ship had 6 separate propelling blades that kept it in the air and gave it maneuverability.

Down in the sewers, the Covis made it to the JY electrical circuit mainframe. The circuit to the tower was relatively clear. There was a box that allowed you to shut down the energy flowing to specific parts of the tower and there were two power wires running to that box. The top power wire was a bit bigger and was the central energy wire. The bottom one was smaller and was clearly a contingency wire if something happened to the main power wire.

“This is the power box. Colin and Bacon, you guys will stay here and guard the area. Try to create a distraction if someone comes down to check on the power. Whatever you do, don’t get caught.” Pat stated.

Colin and Bacon nodded in agreement. Without hesitation, Banner grabbed both power wires and ripped them from the wall and tore them in half by himself. Electrical haze and sparks blew off from the wires and everyone but Banner took a cautious step back.

Banner put his hands on his hips, “Oops.” He said sarcastically.

“I guess we should hurry now.” Pat said.

Pat, Banner, Matthews, Stevens, Potocki, and Parker flew around through the sewer tunnels to reach the area below the JY building.

Inside the building Connors and his men panicked when the power blew out. The backup power generator for the building clocked in and alert sirens and red lights lit up.

“Sir, the power has been cut from the building; we’re running on backup right now!” One of Connors’s men yelled.

“Get someone down to maintenance level to see what’s wrong with the power. Lewis, shut off that annoying alarm. You three, come with me and let’s get the security back on line. Get on your radios and have the rest of the men search the building. No one leaves.” Connors ordered running out the door.

“Captain, you think it’s an insurrection attack?” A soldier responded.

"I don't know what it is, but I would rather play it safe. We've got two random incidents back to back. It's definitely intentional. Have someone guard the prisoner. And alert the military police. Get the birds in the sky." Connors ordered.

The six Covis jumped around in the sewers until they found an area that led into an elevator shaft. Cracking the door open was easy when Stevens smashed it with his arm. The Covis stepped inside looking up.

"This should be a long way up. They are probably keeping Nathan somewhere on a center floor of the building. John and Kyle, you guys should stop somewhere in the middle and look for the room. Remember, everything is covert. Once you have Nathan, come right back down this shaft. Banner, Parker, and Potocki, the Overseer's office is on the top level." Pat said.

Once Pat gave the go, the Covis blasted off up the elevator shaft. The minimal gravity on the planet made flying a bit faster and easier for them. Stevens and Matthews stopped at the half way point and punched their way through the metal doors. Checking their surroundings the two got out of the shaft and went searching. Using a computer pad that was on John's wrist, he synced up with the tower's database and used premade code to hack into the buildings stored information.

"The computer is telling me that Nathan is just three flights above us in the north corridor." John told Kyle.

"Well what are we waiting for?" Kyle responded taking a light jog forward.

The other four Covis were still blasting their way up.

"There it is, there is the elevator." Luke yelled.

The Covis slowed their velocity. They saw the next available exit out of the shaft and took it. Banner blasted his way through the doors with a blast from his power glove and they all poured through.

"Wow, Banner. Excited, are you?" Parker joked.

"I haven't been able to use that in a while, lay off. Apla is my only drug as a Covi." Banner replied smirking.

On another floor, Captain Max Connors and his men heard an explosion.

"Sir, that came from above us!" A soldier yelled.

“Above us? But that prisoner isn’t.... Wait. I know where they’re headed! Follow me up the stairs, men!”

Connors and his men drew their guns and raced up the nearest flight of stairs.

On a lower level floor, Kyle and John crept around corners until they reached the north corridor. They got to the final hall where they were holding Nathan. John quickly took a peak around the corner noticing two guards and pulling his head back. He looked up at Kyle and used hand signs to indicate what was going on. He crossed his arms, meaning ‘enemy’, and used two fingers to indicate ‘two enemies’. John quickly whipped out his computer pad on his wrist and opened the messaging system. He wrote, “Two guards. My position. I need take out ASAP,” and sent it to Ace. A couple of seconds later two shots were fired breaking the glass of the north corridor window and hitting the guards in the neck.

The stun pellets from the sniper were made of glue and a chemical that stuck to the skin and forced the brain to shut down movement. Kyle was the first to jump around the corner and use his computer pad to slice the door security and try to open it. The door rejected his access so took a step back and charged leg into the door, and with a powerful force busted the door open cracking its lock. He took a step in the doorway which his gun up ready to fire and saw Nathan held hostage by one of the soldiers with a handgun.

“Don’t come any closer or I’ll kill him.” The soldier yelled out.

“Woah, Woah, hold on, I’m not here to fight. Here, I’ll prove it and put my gun down.” Kyle said. He threw his small pistol relative to his massive body and hand canon on the ground. The soldier simply looked at him like he was crazy.

“I mean it, not another step!” The soldier yelled out panicking.

Kyle took a step forward with his arms stretched out and the soldier pulled the gun away from Nathan’s head and shot the energy powered bullet at Kyle’s head. The bullet hit Kyle right in the glass of his helmet and he stumbled back and hit the wall. His body was frozen.

“.... Kyle?!” Nathan yelled.

Kyle popped back up from the wall with the bullet crushed glass on his helmet.

“Man are you serious. Damn it. Man, I really liked this helmet.” Kyle told him. The soldier looked terrified again, and in an instant the gun was knocked out of his hand and he was thrown head first into the wall and knocked unconscious by an sly John Matthews.

“Jeez, what took you so long?” Nathan asked jokingly as he grabbed his backpack and left the room. John walked up to Kyle and said, “You know, I really did like that helmet too.” Kyle raised his hands in the air and followed them out the door.

At the top of the building Pat, Banner, and Parker all rushed to the Overseer’s office; Luke stayed just outside the entrance. Upon reaching the glass doors, Luke bypassed the security admitter and used his shoulder to smash through the glass while the other three entered through the hole he made.

“Alright, we’re here Charles. What do we need?” Banner asked.

“This here. The computer mainframe. The overseer has all sorts of information about the entire planet. My personal orders are to find something called operation BROVA and save the information for Curator intelligence.” Pat said.

“But you can’t hack anything.” Parker said.

“I have a prepackaged virus from Nathan. It should give me a quick list of anything I need to find.” Pat said.

“What is on this file?” Parker asked.

“I think it has something to do with a power source.” Pat replied.

“Ugh... A power source? Like Apla?” Banner was intrigued.

“No. I don’t think this is about Apla. Even before we stopped trading years ago, Earth already had a big enough supply to hold us over for years.” Pat answered.

“So, whatever this is, is more powerful than Apla?” Parker questioned.

“Well I... Hold on.” Pat responded. He was searching through the computer. He found the BROVA file.

“What?” Banner inquired.

“I found it.... Wait... something’s not right here.” He said thinking. He skimmed through the computer again to make sure he had found the correct file and that there wasn’t a duplicate or decoy. “The Monk? What the hell is this?”

“What monk?” Parker asked.

“This isn’t right. They told me I was picking up something having to do with the Martian war effort. This is a bunch of mystical nonsense.” Pat said.

"Hmph, doesn't sound all too powerful to me." Banner told him.

"Same here." Pat said.

"Stop being so cryptic. What mystical nonsense?" Parker asked.

"Maximum accumulation of material and nonmaterial hist-- historical memory." Pat said.

"Anybody got an idea of what that means?"

"Like... in the past?" Parker fumbled with his words.

"And then there is just dozens of pages of gibberish." Pat said.

"Gibberish?" Banner wondered.

"Yeah, gibberish. Come take a look." Pat said.

Pat swung the screen in Parker's direction. He surveyed the paragraphs of information.

"This is like nothing I've ever seen." Parker said. "What is an... omni-bus?"

"Yeah. Atheneum clavigerum... I don't even know if I'm saying this right." Pat said.

"Do you think it's coded?" Parker said.

"Maybe. I think we should get this back home. Let them take a look at it." Pat said. "Hold it. What is this-?" Pat tried finishing his sentence but shots rang out in the hall.

"Hey guys! We got company!" Luke yelled.

Shots were continuously fired by Connors and his men. Luke fired warning shots back, not actually trying to hit anyone. The other three crept up to the door opening behind some cover. Pat quickly pulled all of the data from the computer and then injected a secondary virus into it to solidify their cover up. He then dashed toward the others. The hallway was loud with shots. Pat whipped out his computer pad and called Kyle through his helmet.

"Hello," Kyle answered.

"Kyle! Do you have Nathan!?" Pat yelled.

"Yes. Is everything all right?" Kyle asked.

"It is fine! We're just caught up! Get everyone together and get out of the sewers! Meet at the rendezvous point in tower 64A!" Pat yelled and hung up.

“Luke! I found something that resembles an item Frank once had.” Pat said as he took cover fire not too far from the other Covis. Pat pulled his datapad off his wrist and showed Potocki a picture. A circular cemented piece was on screen with a certain insignia and letters wrapped around the edges. Luke glanced at it and nodded with certainty.

“I do recognize that. I want to say he found something like that after a battle and kept it. It’s the only explanation for why it would be in those files.” Potocki said.

“We are going to have to talk about this later. I’m gonna draw their fire and pull them away. Here! Take the information stick! Nothing can fall into enemy hands.” Pat handed the information to Luke as he yelled.

Pat then grabbed his handgun from his side holster and began firing rapidly down the hall causing the Martian soldiers to duck for cover. He turned on his jet boots and jetpack and blasted off toward them while still firing the gun. He swooped around the corner away from the enemies still firing. The clip ran out of ammo just as he reached a safe distance from the shooting and he threw the gun while shutting off his jets and running on foot. The Martian soldiers chased him down the hall. All of them ran except for Connors who still hid in the cover. Luke looked over his covering and saw no shots being and no Martians still there. He signaled to Banner that the coast was clear and Banner jumped up followed by Parker and started running down the hall. Luke popped up and started chasing with them. Connors peaked up from his cover to see the two running down the hall.

With instinct taking over, he jumped up from his cover and chased after them. He dashed across the floor surface, barely toughing it to make as little of noise as possible. The oblivious Covis waltzed forward on their path to the elevator. The elevator doors were just to their right as the window facing the skyline was to their left. It didn’t take long for Connors to reach them, and once he was close enough, the Martian soldier retrieved his handgun from its holster and plotted it forward. He was directly behind Potocki with the others at Luke’s side forming a trio. Connors opened fire at Potocki’s back, firing two quick shots where his spine lay. The shots fully punctured the Covi at this range. Parker, on the left, was the first to react to the shots as he was already turning his head back to witness the encroaching enemy. Connors shot his left arm just under Potocki’s left arm and reached up grabbing the Curator’s left shoulder. He used this leverage to twist his torso clockwise, and with his right elbow having been cocked, he jabbed it into Parker’s defenseless chest, which launched him into the window.

Parker’s armor cracked the window a bit. Connors used the leverage he still had on Potocki’s body and continued to whip poor Luke toward the glass. He used all of his hip strength to throw him. Potocki’s body crashed into the window, this time shattering it. He began to fall.

Parker was slow to get up and was not immediately ready to save Luke. Banner darted up and swung at Connors face knocking him across the floor. He did this while turning on his jetpack and throwing himself out the window. He dove blasting through the air to save Luke Potocki. With seconds to spare from Luke slamming into the concrete ground down below, Banner swooped in and turned his accelerated fall upward. He fell into the darker streets below the buildings and highways.

While Banner was saving Luke, Parker seemed it was an apt time to clobber his aggressor. He jumped to his feet and raced at the Martian with fists high. Connors tensed up and hoped that he would be blessed with help. To both their surprise, Connor's wish came true, and seemingly out of nowhere, an invisible figure kicked Parker to the ground. Parker naturally rolled onto one knee several feet from his second aggressor.

Unfading out of camouflage was a soldier in thick armor which was similar to that of the Covis. However, it was clear his armor was not as professionally well kept, or scientifically advanced. His armor was very scratched up, but the colors were still very present. It was a mix of red, green, and white. Connors took special attention to his mysterious guardian. The colors didn't match Martian military, and he had never seen armor like it before. He began scanning the stranger with his eyes.

"So the two of you are working together, huh? Well, let's see what match you are for me." Parker told them.

Just after Parks said that, Connors noticed the emblem on the stranger's armor. A freshly painted round crest with strange symbol in the middle that had a green circle and three green loops was surrounded by writing wrapping around the circle. The writing was gibberish to any Martian, which read, "Patronus De Annalium Scriptor." Connors knew that this was no friend of his. He kicked his way away from both enemies and stood to his feet.

"I'm not with this rebel trash." Connors said.

"Shall we dance?" Parker said as all three of them wielded two handguns pointing each way.

The triple standoff was bound to be a deadly one. Several seconds went by of straight patience. Finally, the mystery man made the first move but it was a defensive one. He jumped back and then camouflaged himself very quickly. Parker, who was much more worried about the threat of this Covi-like agent, had his eye on him and was startled when he went invisible. Parker panicked and fired a shot into the area the agent was previously standing.

Connors, even though confronted with two enemies, never took his eye off Parker. As soon as Parker's attention was directed elsewhere, he unloaded his handgun on Parker. Two shots were

perfectly placed, with one landing in Parker's right shoulder, and the other piercing his right peck. The other three shots strayed from the recoil. It was in this instance that the third party agent dove at Connors, knocking him to the ground. The armored man landed on top of Connors. Connors reacted by punching upward. The agent brushed Connors's extended arm into his head and then folded over closer to Connors and locked his arm and neck with his own arm to form a triangular chokehold. The agent tightened down on the chokehold and put Connors into submission. Connors was knocked out.

Quickly the agent hopped off Connors's body and ran up to an injured Parker. Parker was reaching for a gun nearby and the agent kicked it out of the way. The agent peeled off Parker's helmet.

"If you're going to kill me, make it quick. I'm not a fan of the art of drama." Parker said oozing from his pain.

A few seconds went by as the agent looked over him. "Not yet, there still may be some use of you." He said, and with that, he punched Parker in the face knocking him out.

Banner coddled a limp and sprawled out Potocki on the street grounds far below the buildings in the under city. Several of the poorer citizens who lived in the dark deprived under city got up from their slum tents to watch this marvel.

"Luke. Luke. You're gonna be alright. I got you now." Banner said while Luke coughed blood.

Banner placed his hand on the armor puncture feeling the blood. He then wrapped his arm on the side of Potocki and felt running blood on his back armor.

"Oh, Luke. Luke, man." Banner said holding up his sadness. He pulled off Potocki's helmet and Potocki has blood drooling down his cheek as he coughed up some more.

"Wait here, I can get medical supplies." Banner said.

Just as Banner was getting up, Luke grabbed his arm. "No. I'm not going back this time." Potocki said.

"It's just a flesh wound. We can get Nathan to look at it." Banner said worried about his old friend.

"A soldier knows his place." Luke said. He ripped off his military ID from his neck and handed it to Banner. "This is no flesh wound." Banner inched in close grabbing his arm.

"No, no, no! You keep them, you won't die here." Banner said.

“Take the information, get it to Listowel. That’s an order.” Potocki said slowly dying while handing him the information stick.

Banner, still not accepting his friends fate, reacted to his soldier instincts and nodded and stood up about to leave.

“Banner!” Potocki yelled and he tugged onto Banner’s arm.

“Nothing. Nothing can be left in enemy hands.” Potocki finished.

Banner knew exactly what Luke meant, but he couldn’t take it. He couldn’t take the reality of what he was asking. Potocki was ordering Banner to kill him. And not just kill him, but destroy his entire body and armor. Banner blanked in disbelief, but came to his senses of limited time. Banner lifted his right hand and charged energy into his hand. The Apla coursed through his veins and melded with his blood creating much energy.

The energy was then harvested into the glove and outputted as controllable power in his hands. He had to use a lot of it to completely dissolve the armor. When enough miserable seconds had gone by and he had all the energy in the ball he needed, he pulled his right arm back and threw it forward releasing all of the energy at Luke’s perished body. The energy blast destroyed his body and blew through the ground creating a massive hole in the rock hard ground. With that, he ran and blasted his jets, propelling him into the air.

Banner rocketed himself up the building to where the hole was in the window. He flew inside and looked around.

“Parker?” He said loudly. “Park—.” He stopped suddenly noticing Parker’s helmet piece lying on the ground. He saw the knocked out Martian soldier on the ground farther in the distance. It couldn’t have been that Martian, but Parker was definitely missing. Banner’s fury enraged boiling like an ever hot caldron and he absorbed a great deal of Apla to blast away the helmet piece while screaming.

“Damn it!” He yelled.

Having destroyed a large chunk of infrastructure in front of him, he blasted off from the building in rage and down to the sewers below.

Pat ran into a small room with stairs and he started bounding up them. The Martian soldiers chased after him and up the stairs. He was very swift up the stairs jumped his way to the top. He kicked open the top door and ran out quickly realizing he was on the top of the roof. He looked both ways and ran as fast as he could to the edge of the roof. He took one large leap

and jumped off the side of the building while firing his jetpack to propel him downward. The Martian soldiers who had chased after him gathered at the ledge where Pat had jumped off.

After waking up from unconsciousness, Connors thought about what just happened. He felt around the parts of his body that were beat up and then looked to his side. Just next to him was a long golden gun with a message tagged to it that read “The responsibility of this new war is now yours, Max Connors.” He picked up the gun and stared at it unconvinced of what it read. Several Martian soldiers arrived at his position. He quickly turned to them.

“Hurry, get me in touch with General Daneland! This city is under attack.” Connors ordered.

In just a few short seconds after Pat flew away from the JY building, Martian military spotted him and attempted to capture him. As he descended through the city, two WindCutter ships turned away from the building and followed after him. Several TE (Tri-Engine) Bikes were launched from the JY tower and followed in pursuit.

The TE Bikes were small personal ships that could fly in the air very quickly and were powered by three air engines, two in the low front and one higher in the back. The cockpit was in the middle. The shaded glass covered the pilot so as not to see in, but on the inside the pilot had a full heads up display to help track enemies. The ship looked like a triangle and on the front side it had two openings. One was a single shot gun and the other was a special opening for an EMPT. It shot wires that folded out round like a circle with the intention of shutting off all electrical devices.

A few more ships from the Grand City Police were launched called Shell Flyers.

Shell Flyers looked like large turtle shells with a back. Underneath the ‘shell’ were two air engines on the side and a large rocket looking device in the middle for maximum speed. The pilot was open to the air and used the shell as a seat. His feet would rest on the front of the shell with two control pedals and his hands held on to two handle bars that ran up in front of him for stability and speed control. The pilots of these were typically police officers that wore a covered armored full body vest for protection against an accident injury or high speed wind.

Pat raced through the city. He had to keep the police and military off the rest of the Covis’ backs for a short time but now he was looking for an escape route. The WindCutters blazed their engines and flew up and around the buildings Pat flew between. TE Bikes quickly accelerated to Pat’s tail. Pat pressed on downward toward the city’s crowded streets.

The people were horrified when they saw the flying police chase skid right by them. Pat was so close to the street he was hovering inches above the cars on the integrated highway. Two TE Bikes swooped in from behind and open up fire of their taser guns.

The TE Bikes were at a slightly higher altitude than Pat, so every shot that missed hit the ground or one of the city's automatic transit cars. He could feel where the shot would be before it was even fired. Years of training and years of being a Covi had prepared him well enough to make a fool out of just about anyone. He tossed himself back and forth, swaying across the road dodging the oncoming attacks.

Every charged blast that hit a car smashed glass or damaged it in some way, and caused the city highway computer to redirect other cars in traffic. Pat dodged and weaved through traffic keeping away from the energy killing shots. Worried he would be stopped, Pat fired up into another gear thrusting himself upward and climbed the air near a massive building. Shell Flyers blitzed in from the side of the building nearly knocking into Pat.

The Flyer was so close, one arm grazed the shell, while the other clobbered the pilot. He managed to gather his pose once more and aimed to soar higher up the building as another Flyer chased after him from behind. At the height he was climbing, only the sleek Shell Flyers had the velocity and maneuverability to keep up while the TE Bikes fell behind. The WindCutters with their massive size stopped cutting small corners and searched to grab altitude.

Pat twirled as he took a hike in the air. The pilots drew handguns, and trying to use as little lethal force as possible, shot at his legs. Pat panicked from all the shots. He did not expect them to use such force in a crowded city. Improvising, he took another turn around a building and managed to spread his distance a bit.

He was already using a great deal of Apla, but put another large injection in to his body and used his left power glove to call for the energy. He stuck his hand out and pointed a few meters out and up along the building wall. Pat charged the power glove and brought energy to the palm of his hands. It gathered like a ball and he blasted the energy out at the wall. The concrete was crushed and burnt. The pressure and blast wave broke off more concrete and shattered resources from the building. He flew underneath the falling rubble, but the Shell Flyers that were moving at extremely high speeds connected perfectly with the debris. One Shell Flyer was completely toppled by the debris and crashed. Another Flyer's pilot was hit in the head which caused to fall off his seat. The last Flyer charged on after Pat. Pat had an idea and suddenly slowed his speed to zero as the Flyer closed in on him.

The Flyer was feet in front of Pat and, to the pilots surprise, Pat used his strength to close line the pilot by the neck with his arm. The pilot came off the Flyer and into Pat's hand. He clenched the thick spandex the pilot wore and used his other arm to blast a break in the window of the building near him. He held the pilot in the air in his hand and looked into his very soul. Pat smiled at the defenseless man. He then tossed the pilot into the building sparing his life. The

pilot leaned up in the broken glass and turned his head confused and fortunate. Another TE Biker engaged Pat's position.

The constant flying he was doing and the use of so many power blasts was killing his Aplafuel. Not only was he running out of the standard Covi Aplafuel allowance, but he was becoming exhausted from the injection. His body was having a difficult time adjusting to the radiation he was fighting and the heat effects Aplafuel presented in the blood. He noticed the fatigue setting in. This TE Biker tried to keep up with Pat's speeds, but the bulkiness of the ship kept it from weaving in and out. Pat whipped out the side of another building while being careless and looking behind for the Biker. He looked ahead and saw a WindCutter launch out from the side of another building blocking his path. Still being careless, he moved toward the WindCutter without checking where the Biker was. The Biker swooped in from behind and out of frustration and desperation fired several taser shots.

He tried flying up over the WindCutter and in the process got in the way of the path of the fired taser. The taser shot ringed around him and sent shockwaves all the way up to his knees. The shock took out his energy and restrained his movement. He flipped forward and landed face first into the metal of the top of the WindCutter. The remaining shots hit the WindCutter in several areas. The main cockpit and the engines were hit. The armor could take the shots. However, one of the random shots hit the spot where Pat was grabbing. It shocked his hand and he lost control momentarily. As he was falling back he accidentally fired a blast into the engine of the ship. The blown engine caused the ship to whip in circles. Pat was about to let go and fly away, but the spinning force of the ship would have caused him to possibly hit a building out of control. He held on tightly while he made a decision.

The ship spun in circles as it descended faster and faster. Pat slipped along the smooth metal as the centripetal force pulled him off. He pounded his arms continuously on the metal grasping for anything. The police, WindCutters, Shell Flyers, and TE Bikers followed the crashing ship down to the ground. As it neared the ground, the ship swung more rapidly. Pat ran out of room on the metal and was thrown off the ship. The power was so great at which he was thrown, he fell into a building and down to the ground. Luckily, he fell off the ship when it was close to the ground and only fell ten feet. Landing on his side, the thud of the ground pelted his skin leaving a long large bruise through the thin armor. The WindCutter crashed seconds after he hit the ground. It landed semi-gracefully without more damage than a bad landing.

The authorities swarmed the area. Pat got up to his feet and hobbled over to a short concrete wall around a building. WindCutters dropped in from the sky letting off police. Police vehicles similar to the transit cars arrived on the scene as well. They scoured the WindCutter looking for the hostile. Pat crept off into the shadows of the city streets. He jumped below the roads and

down to the under city. Pat was able to find a sewer in the depths of the under city and open the hatch. He jumped down and ran through the tunnels searching for his fellow Covis.

The under city of Grand City was similar to that of many major cities of Earth. It was comprised of many poor and essentially homeless people. People used whatever they could find to create light and heat. Martian temperatures dropped rapidly at night so having heat was necessary of survival. Garbage from the elite kept the fires burning and tent houses alive. Pat noticed these elements as he traveled in search of the meet up.

Banner had already rendezvoused with the other Covis under the 64A building and informed them of the death. Pat arrived underneath the building finally and joined his Covis.

“Hey guys! I’m a little later than expected, but at least I didn’t cost us our ride.” He said catching his breath.

None of the Covis laughed in response. They all had their helmets off.

“What happened?” He asked

No one answered again.

“Guys, what the hell is-” He said stopping.

“Where’s Potocki?” He asked sadly.

No one answered. Bacon covered his head up. Kyle sighed.

“Where is Parker?!” He exclaimed.

“Luke’s dead Pat. Parker’s missing.” Kyle told.

Pat stumbled back. He felt like his heart just broke. A sickening breeze rolled through his stomach. His hand shook as he brought it to his head and pulled off his helmet. He revealed his clean cut face. He had manly Irish skin that wrapped around his prominent jaw bone. His dark brown short hair edged up dripping with sweat as he pulled off his helmet, but the sweat served as his grievance.

“How?” He asked it like a statement.

“A Martian soldier shot him just after you left. Charles... I..” Banner answered.

“Where is his body? Why didn’t Parker do anything... Where is Brian Parker?” He looked around at their faces.

"We don't know. We've been listening to their scanners. The Martian's apparently didn't take him." Matthews said.

"Didn't take him, what does that even mean? Where is Luke's body? Someone answer me." Pat said louder and more aggressive.

"Charles, nothing could be left in enemy hands. Nothing. You said so yourself." Banner replied.

"You killed him!" Pat's heart raced with fury as his voice commanded the echo.

"Listowel, you know you gave that order." Kyle told.

"What were you thinking?!" Pat took a charging step forward and was held back by Kyle and Wilson.

"He ordered me to do it Charles." Banner yelled. "Damn it. You think I wanted to?"

"What about Parker, huh? It's like you wanted them gone. How does someone just disappear? We have to go after him." Pat said while powering up his boots.

"No, Pat. We don't know where he is. He knows the rendezvous point. He can get there if he is free. No matter what happened or where he is, there is nothing we can do." Kyle told him.

"Will he talk?" Pat asked questioning his own man, his own friend.

"Parker might joke around sometimes, but he isn't about to betray the imperator. He won't betray the cause. He won't betray us." Kyle reassured.

"Guys we need to get going. You can hold your quarrels till another day." John Matthews stated.

"Where is the information stick? I left it in Luke's hands." Pat asked.

Banner held the stick up in his hand showing it to the group. Pat nodded his head and stared into the ground. His eyes teared up. He pointed down the tunnel to their extraction point. The Covis followed in formation down the tunnel.

"I'm sorry buddy." Nathan said softly passing Pat and patting him on the head.

Hours later in the Senior City Defense Office, Connors confronted his boss. "What do you mean he got away?" General Joseph Daneland scolded Captain Connors.

"Sir, I am telling you, the technology he had surpassed everything our police were using. And it's not like I had elite soldiers tracking him; I had human dummies chasing a trained killer." Connors responded with his arms behind his back. He stood straight and stiff.

“Trained?” He said sarcastically. “The insurgents don’t have the money and they don’t have the innovation. They stay the same. So how could this ‘one’ be more trained than the police?”

“General, you saw the footage we had. He was fast and he knew what he was doing. I suspect Curator intelligence.” Connors told.

“Oh piss off. Curator intelligence. The Curators never made it sustained in orbit. They can’t. No one can penetrate our defenses or our security. You even saw the emblem on that other soldier yourself. The Curators don’t know about our rebel problems. And even if they did, would they really know their secret emblem? And according to Monarch command, we are at peace with them. For god sakes Connors, our King is over there.” The general yelled.

“Oh come on Joe. I can’t be the only one suspicious of this rapid peace agreement.” Connors said getting it off his chest.

“No. But you are the only one I know who would get mad and act against it.” He said staring at Connors.

“Do we know what they stole yet?” The general asked.

“No. The hacking method they used fried the crystal network. They erased everything down to deletion level three. There is no way to trace what was on the computer to begin with. It was overwritten several times.” Connors replied.

“Oh Max... We just made the peace; I’m not gonna be the one to stick my reputation on something to break it. Take a squad out west of Grand City, and gut the villages. That’s where the insurgents are still thriving.”

“Gut sir?” Connors said raising an eye brow.

“Yeah. Burn. Loot... kill? Whatever. Cut down the insurgents by cutting down their food source.” Joe filled in the details.

“Wow. The humanity, sir.” Connors said sarcastically as he felt the inhumanity just pour over him.

“Hey, they’ll learn not to attack the city. They want to act like animals, we will treat them like animals.” Joe ordered and headed out of the room.

2309 October 6th 6:56 PM EDT

Kayla Collier gazed out her window. The sun was just beginning to dip itself in the rocky wasteland out west of the city. Its mellow yellow haze fused with the barren bleak wasteland

gushed light colors across the lands. She could feel the heat the light created as it polished in its last glow before the next dawn.

To her the sunset was beautiful. She was too far tucked away in her building to see what was wrong with the picture. Around the sunset were scattered shacks which served as the homes to millions outside of the city. The poor as observed by the Curator military were merely an energy source. The Curators used a mind trick on themselves. An idea of not race supremacy, but species supremacy is what ruled their thought process. The Curators saw the poor as weak and useless to society, not weak because of a mere physical diversity. They dehumanized their enemies and their victims, and many of their victims were the poor. Kayla was also a member of this ideology. This is not intentional of her or most young people. No one is born with hatred, but her life lessons were built on the Curator ideology.

An outsider of the city could probably judge the wealth of an individual based on the height of their living space. They would see Kayla as part of a very wealthy family unit. Kayla's home was a lavish penthouse on the upper floors of a wealthy skyscraper in Miami. The expensive forged rock and hand sculpted architecture of the various rooms of the high up mansion gleamed with invisible blood. The blood of the poor and weak and the blood of brave soldiers who fought and died in battle with the Martians showed; and the blood of the Martians, for without continuous war, there would be no military contracting. To a modest individual, not corrupted, this would be a difficult life to live. How would one live knowing their entire fortune, everything they did and stood for in life, was at the benefit of the suffering and death of others. There is only one way to do it, they must lie to themselves and force others to lie to them. Often if the lie is said often enough it becomes truth.

Inside Kayla's room there was a large glass computer screen on the wall with tactical studies information from her Northern Covi Academy. A large Covi insignia carpet which lay in the center of the room with a couch facing it. On the walls of the room, you would find no flowers or colors of pink, no relationship quoted advertisements or hearts floating on around the faces of boy band cover albums. Instead, she had awards and plaques and trophies decorating the room all of great valor and or signed by someone important. None of them were even hung up by Kayla herself. On her bed was not a red polka dotted blanket with fluffy heart shaped pillows, but rather a brown blanket and white pillows very neatly tucked and situated.

Her desk was slightly out of order. For a much computerized world she lived in, she saved many papers. The amount of papers she had on her desk might even conflict with a Curator ordinance against saved information outside of a digital format, though she wouldn't face much hardship with law as a governor's daughter. The papers were mostly documents from the school she requested for training purposes. But some of the documents were illegally obtained. Even as a member of a Covi Academy, there are quite a few documents that were just out of her

jurisdiction of seeing; so she stole them. Each piece of stolen information linked to Covi operatives, but specifically Covi Six. It was well known and accepted by military personnel that the two best Covi teams were either Six or One. She had detailed figures on each member of the Covi Six team. She took a particular interest in Covi Six team leader Pat Listowel as she had ten different documents on him relating to mission assignments, tactical decisions he made, Covi school training, favorite attack patterns, Covi fighting tournament analysis, and even personal background. She believed she found everything the Curators had on him.

As she laid back on her sofa, she flipped through battle footage she had found and saved on her personal datapad from the school archives. Most of it was footage of her own war games sessions. She had her own team at the Covi Academy and was placed as their leader. The war games sessions were a regular routine for Covi Academy students and were fought with paint guns and objective based game types. Kayla was known, not to dominate the war games, but always come out on top objectively. She always found a way to strategically secure a hill or capture a base not necessarily thinking about the ratio of men saved to men lost. But clearing the objective was all the Curators wanted out of a leader. Some called out her humanity, and they had the right to do so, but to her, the war games were just games and did not reflect her actual appraisal of commanding on the battle field.

She scoured her film of herself in combat. She made appropriate critiques on herself and noted them closely. She did not feel like watching herself anymore and decided to flip around on her datapad. She came across highly classified footage of a battle deployment of Covi Six. Kayla flicked through much of the opening action to find Listowel fighting. Pat was her idol in many ways. She never was much of a girl in the sense that most people of earth would think. Women rarely held jobs. Some of them had rights, but not as many as any common man. While many her age would be preparing for a life of an arranged marriage or something along that degree, she was wrapping her mind around competitive nature.

That was part of the reason she joined the military at a young age. It didn't help having a father who was constantly involved in war. When Kayla joined the academy, she knew she had to be the best, but to be the best; she had to know and study the best. So she asked who the best was. Every kid on the playground has their own opinion on the status of strongest fighter in the world, but a grand majority of the military believed that Pat Listowel's skills shown in his Covi school tournaments and war videos awarded him the spot to be called 'the greatest.'

At first she sought to defeat Pat in a glorious swing and take the throne as the greatest soldier ever, but she soon realized that he was not much of an enemy or fierce competitor. She respected him.

Pat's spot in the footage was nothing too glorious. His specialty in this footage she saved was his ability to call commands. The camera recording she watched had its own heads-up-display which showed the communications of Covi Six. She learned all the best tactical decisions from Listowel. Kayla tended to draw on the film and leave herself notes about certain decisions. But was just coming up on something in the footage she had not seen before.

With squinting eyes and a judging smile, Kayla rewound the recording several times over the same ten seconds. In the scene, Pat fought a brave Martian soldier who was highly trained. Before his final blow was struck, Pat repeated the same finishing move twice, and right after, did it again. It was almost as if he had never learned how to finish a fight. If the guy wouldn't go down the first time, he would just keep landing the same, but devastating, moves. It was always 'left jab, left jab, right haymaker, left hook.' But his left hook was always slightly over extending, as if he didn't have faith in it and needed to strike harder. She hovered over several times and re-watched again and again. There was rarely a mistake made by Pat in the war film, but this was not a mistake, it was an error. It was a slight error that the enemy would never notice and never be able to exploit in time, but an error nonetheless. She marked up the datapad with her finger drawing many labels and explanations as to why he did wrong.

"Hey." Governor Collier said in the doorway.

Kayla was slightly startled and her eyes jumped at her father, "Hey, dad."

"I brought you some coffee." He said handing her a mug. He pulled an ottoman near the couch and sat down with his own mug of coffee. "I just got off a teleconference with Instructor Jake Roach; he said it's all squared away."

"Great. I'm glad." She said.

"Somehow I feel like you're mad at me." He said.

"I don't know. I get the feeling like the only reason I'm being transferred to his team is because... well, you're my dad." Kayla told him.

"I told him that I wanted you to be placed on a good team. That's it. That's all I said. He could have put you under Sharp's command." He responded.

Kayla's face didn't change. "Are you sure you want to do this?" The governor asked.

Kayla laughed a little staring at her screen, "Uh yeah dad, it's kind of been something I've been after since I was little."

Governor Collier put his arm around his daughter and pulled her close, "I think I'm more scared than you are kid." Kayla fought an emotional teardrop but then snapped it out of herself. The

governor let a tear stream down his face and he put his head over and kissed his daughter on the head. Then he pulled her closer, his hand intertwined with her dark brown hair.

“You’re all I’ve got left Kayla. After your mother...” He said. “This new war, you’re going to be deployed on Mars. On another planet. And the only reason I would consider this is because it is your dream. I voted against the war for a reason. They’re still not allowed the troops under my jurisdiction.” He said.

“I know.” She said in an annoyed way.

“But there’s something. Something you need to know. Something about this mission. It’s something no one else really knows, and I think it’s time I tell you before you go on this mission.” Governor Collier said.

“No. I don’t want any special assistance any more. Everywhere I go people think the only reason I am successful is because you’re my dad.” Kayla said hastily.

“This is different. This is very important.” He replied.

“Then I’ll learn it another way.” She replied.

He frowned after the last sentence and took a stare out the window before lunging slowly upward. He started to heat for the doorway and before he walked out he turned to her. “I’ve met him. He’s every bit as good as they say he is.” He said. Kayla was confused at his comment.

He walked out the doorway and she looked back at her screen which had imputed its screensaver. It was none other than Covi Six’s Pat Listowel in a battle scene leading the charge.

“I know.” She said softly to herself.

Chapter 3

Forward ‘six’ days from Mars (2309 October 8th 1:00 AM EDT)

The Martian rulers passed through space going home as the Covis did the same thin returning to the Curator Space Belt. The Curator Space Belt was the gathering of ships around the space station hub. It was the fleet yard of all Curator ships. It hid behind the moon from any view of Mars to keep out of site and keep the number of ships hidden. For months now, the fleet gathered more and more. As the stolen freighter from Mars veered off the original plotted course to Miami and to the CSB, the engines on the ship blue in reverse slowing the ships from its maximum ion powered speed. The freighter aimed toward the moons horizon as the speed slowed to slingshot a curve using the gravity.

“Unidentified aircraft, you are coming in to a no-fly zone. Send us your verification codes or you will be shot down.” A voice said to Kyle Stevens and Pat who were driving the vehicle. They sat strapped without gravity in the chairs while the rest of the crew stayed in the spinning cargo area.

“Bravo-Tengo-5-6-7-2-Alpha-Niner.” Pat said into the intercom.

“Copy that. Welcome home Covis.” The voice replied as two Minos that snuck up blasted away.

Minos are the Curator main one vehicle fighting force. They are small ships with a wingspan of ten feet and a length of nine feet. They have long wings and a small cockpit with a thick metallic glass in the front. To get in the Mino, one must climb in through the back and lie on your stomach inside the ship. Your hands and head control the steering and weapons. A wide heads up display gives almost all the details you could need. The Minos are built with one rocket and a single rapid shot spout in the front for attacking. The ship is not very strong with thin metal and a weak electric shield, but the speed and maneuverability is outstanding. It can fly in air or space.

Pat and Kyle’s helmets were off, but Pat wore sunglasses to shield his eyes which were red and tired. Kyle looked at him with soft eyes feeling bad for his loss. Pat reached into his torso pocket and pulled out something he had been toying with the entire trip. A tiny cloth with a worn out insignia similar to the one he found in the data on Mars. He rubbed it with his fingers and toyed with the loose worn out strings.

“You know, I was in the European Region a few months ago and saw some pretty crazy.” Kyle said making small talk.

“Crazy you say? Then by all means continue with your story.” Pat said sarcastically.

“Well I was on the lower levels of the city visiting family. Some distant members. I strolled past 103rd and Ally Way, when I saw an old man. He was a merchant selling a type of invention.” Kyle said and then stopped waiting for a response. Pat didn’t give one. “His idea was to sell small leather bags that opened up and had a paper mesh inside. His proposal was that you would write inside of this package your thoughts and feelings on the day and come back to it at a later time. I kept thinking that it was such a novel idea. It felt so traditional. So I bought one. I came back that same way later on and found him getting arrested.” Kyle said.

“Of course. He broke the law.” Pat said.

“Wow, I was just getting to that. How’d you know he used hemp for writing material?” Kyle asked.

"I didn't. I wouldn't have thought that would be the reason for arresting him. But he was selling untraceable information. That's illegal." Pat said.

"Damn. How'd you know that?" Kyle inquired.

"Because soldiers used to do the same thing." Pat responded.

"Oh. I was gonna say that was a great idea, but we should just use something besides hemp. I really think that would catch on. People writing their personal life stories down for all time. That's a corporate idea." Kyle said.

"Corporate? What? Become rich and stop being a Covi? Where is the glory in that?" Pat asked.

"It's not all about glory. Sometimes it's about living life." Kyle said back.

"I don't think I am here to 'live' life. If I was, I wouldn't be taking on every dangerous mission I could. The real point in my life is to become so glorified that people will remember me. You must become so glorified that the mere mention of your name resonances throughout the ages. That is how you never die. That is the key to eternal life." Pat said.

"Sounded pretty scripted." Kyle said jokingly.

"Someone great once told me that, but their name will never be remembered." Pat told.

"Do you want to talk about it at all?" Kyle asked subtly.

Staring straight ahead and in a calm voice Pat responded, "Please be quiet."

"It was just a question." Kyle told him.

"It was a bad question." Pat told him calmly.

"It was a complex question." Kyle countered.

"All complex questions have a simple answer." Pat affirmed.

"Then what is it?" Kyle asked.

"No." Pat responded sternly. He groaned trying to say something but ended up just looking dissatisfied.

They were silent for a few seconds.

Kyle finally spoke up, "This isn't just about Luke, is it? This isn't about Parker either."

Pat took in a deep breath. He rubbed his eyes then showed the redness in them. He turned his head a little bit for comfort. "He was Smith's best friend. I just wanted something, anything to keep his memory alive. And I made it Luke."

"Well what about that clothe there?" Kyle pointed out.

"It's just some material he had. Potocki was someone I could talk to. Frank was the only family I had. I wasn't with him when he died. I have no idea how he died. He didn't even receive a proper burial. I have nothing but memories of the only caretaker I can remember." Pat added.

"I know. But you need to let some things go, and I don't mean your memory of him. For instance, every application for Lt. Smith's position in Covi Six was shot down by you. Every suggestion Curator command has given you tore up. You can't even get Six back up to full personnel and it has been two years. And now Luke. You're putting everyone at risk by not choosing anyone." Kyle said.

Pat sighed ungratefully, "it's not that I can't fill his space; it's that no one was qualified to fill it."

Kyle chuckled at his response, "Top military graduates from the finest Curator academies, great athletes with healthy lifestyles, the finest bunch of characters, many of them were accepted into the other Covi squads." Kyle laughed again.

"I didn't find anyone more outstanding than me." Pat told him.

Kyle laughed even harder this time, "Right, because the qualification of joining Covi Six is beating out the greatest Curator fighter in the history of the world."

Pat smirked at the humorous chuckles Kyle gave out. "Well I don't know about the best." Pat said.

Kyle looked back at him and looked back out the window, "Yeah you are a cheater. But if you're not the best you're definitely up there." The two of them laughed simultaneously and Pat got out of his mood and into a lightheaded happy haze. The freighter was moving much slower now as it grazed overhead of the moon with the gravity whipping it around toward NSB. As they swooped around the horizon, the NSB began to come into visual. It looked like an active city. Millions of men made up the Curator army, and although they were not all in the Space Belt currently, it sure looked like it from all the bustling and ships.

Blitz Fighters blazed through the space in patrol form. Minos did the same. There were massive space stations where ships would dock for loading troops, Apla, and supplies. But the space stations paled in comparison to the size of some of the Curator frigate ships and especially the few capital ships. The frigate ships looked like long steel submarines with a more boxy shape.

There were giant ion engines in the back and a bridge control room on the top. There were also a few antennas and many scattered defense guns on the top, sides, and bottom. The frigates were about half a kilometer long and were about 300 meters wide at the back end of the ship and a little more compacted in the front. Aside from the antennas and the bridge, the ship was about 200 meters tall as well. In the front of the ship, there were a few ground vehicles and storage. Inside the wider part was a long spinning cylinder protected by the boxed metal shape on the outside. The cylinder was like any other artificial gravity creator where the spinning would create gravity for those on the inside. The frigates housed mostly troops.

The Curator capital ships were even bigger. The Martians had large ships, but nothing quite the size of a capital ship. The capital ships were five kilometers long and were the same, width and height, of two kilometers. The capital ships had flat panels running down the side of the top of the ship which extended out a bit giving the ship the impression that it had very short wings. The very top of the ship was lined with guns and command towers. The central bridge was at the front of the ship and it was very big and had a large metallic window. Turrets were everywhere on the side panels which stretched from the front to near the end of the ship. Underneath the metal panels were side openings for ships to fly out of several hangers. In the back of the ship were several major ion engines. Even if one ion engine happened to be destroyed, the ship could still maintain a good speed. The ships had a smooth bottom which looked like the top of a trapezoid leading up to the ship. Underneath the ship were more guns for protection. Inside this massive ship, many thousands of troops could live. The same technique was used for artificial gravity. A big rotating cylinder kept the troops healthy. The ship also carried many vehicles in the back in storage. Underneath the panels and the bottom of the ship, hundreds of air jets and air engines could propel the ship in the air for a short time if the ship chose to enter the atmosphere. The ship could last a couple hours in the atmosphere before needing to be lifted into space. The big ticket item on the capital ships however was the ship side cannons and their ability to harness massive amounts of energy from Apla storage and blast it in a barrage of beams at any target. The ships core room was simply Curator weak captives waiting to die, but instead of their death going to power a city, it would go to power the ship and the ship's super cannons.

The ship's hangers carried armies of aircraft. There were the standard ships like the Minos and the Blitz Fighters that were used a lot on patrol. There were also ships like the Curator Sonics, which were one seat small cockpit ships with zero glass and wings on each side that spiraled out and in front of the ship. The Sonics moved quickly and were versatile. They had no bullet firing guns. However, the wings fired off shots of light electromagnetic pulses. These shots were light enough to not render a vehicle unpowered but shut off its protective electrical shields. The Sonics also included spiraled missiles on the bottom end of the cockpit. These missiles would be used to fire out rapidly and attack a ship with no shields. The missiles did light damage, were

small, and died out after a couple seconds so a Sonic had to take the shields down and be in close range to capitalize an enemy. The Curator Firehawks were rarely used in battle because of the cost of the ships. They were round in the cabin and could fit multiple people in it to fly the ship. There were two long barrels in the front for firing bullets. The Firehawk also had two computer operated defense guns on the top and bottom of the round cabin. The two ion engines in the back gave the ship a quick boost whenever needed. The ship was equipped with computer target range seeking missiles and had two very long wings that came out from the side; giving the ship the appearance that it was longer than it actually was.

The freighter flew into the fleet. Pat and Kyle looked at all the ships in awe.

“No matter how many times I come here, I am always surprised at the number of ships.” Kyle said.

“Looks like there’s more than ever.” Pat said.

“What do you think they’re here for?” Kyle asked.

“War.” Pat told him. The freighter flew slowly into the military personnel space station hangers until it docked. This space station was different in that it only held soldiers and not supplies. The hanger was connected to many others which were connected to a large ring creating the artificial gravity. The opening in the hanger closed shut with a metallic glass. This allowed for those inside the hanger to see out and still keep protection and air compression. The Covis opened the back hatch and the doors to the freighter opened up. They poured out floating in the air and propelled themselves toward the doors at the back end of the hanger by pulling on anything they could.

“Well I am glad I never have to get in one of those boxes ever again. That felt like the longest ride ever. I mean a whole week...” Colin Wilson said arching his back.

“From now on, I think I will be taking the luxury rooms aboard a large ship.” Nathan chimed in.

“I thought this was the military. If you can’t cozy up for that, I don’t know what to tell you.” Banner scorned.

They all piled into the elevator. Once the elevator quickly brought them into the artificial gravity of the system, the Covis stepped out and headed to the briefing room.

This particular space station was reserved for Covi teams One, Four, and Six. It was believed that of the six Covi teams, One and Six were the top players with Four in the mix of being great. Teams Two, Three, and Five were still elite, but not nearly as legendary. During the war, Lt. Frank Smith made a name for Covi Six as their team leader. Upon his death, an all ready young

legend, Pat Listowel, became the team leader and dominated the Martians in battle because of his natural resistance to radiation. This perpetuated the gossip of Covi Six being the best. Although the Covis were kept mostly a secret from the public, nearly everyone knew of Pat.

They piled into the briefing room taking a seat around a steal table with a long strip of touch glass in the middle. The glass turned red as they entered with the Curator emblem positioned in the center. As the Covis slid into the comfortable semi-royal high chairs around the table, the Covi instructor, Jake Roach, entered the room. As instructor, he dealt with all Covi teams on mission assignments and reported directly to Curator command.

"Hello gents." The instructor said.

"Instructor Roach, good to see you again." Pat said.

"We will begin debriefing in a moment, but first; I was excited to see the green flag for the mission. Congratulations on another mission success. Where is it?"

"Here." Pat announced as he reached into his chest lock pocket and pulled out the memory stick displaying it to everyone in the room and handing it over to Instructor Jake Roach.

"Good work. Another mission complete?" Roach asked curiously.

Pat turned back and sat down shaking his head.

"We lost Potocki and Parker is MIA." Banner told.

"Damn it. Look, I'm sorry Pat. I know how much of a good friend he was to you, but Parker's absence may become a deep penalty. We had better hope that if he was captured, he either didn't talk or managed to escape." Instructor Roach told Pat angrily.

Pat nodded staring off while standing at the tinted wall windows of the room.

"Until then, I am going to mark this mission as 'Unstable and Unaccounted For'." Roach said. All of the Covis sighed depressingly.

"All of you need to start your debriefing. Except you." Roach said pointing to Pat.

Pat raised an eyebrow and pointed to himself. He mouthed silently 'me'.

"I need to speak to you privately in the hall." Roach told him.

Pat stood up still wearing a confused look on his face. He turned back and checked his Covis' faces as he walked into the hall. Roach followed out.

"We gotta talk about Pat." Kyle said the moment he left the room.

"Yeah, he seems like he is on the verge of collapse. I don't think anything has affected him this bad in a while." Colin added.

"I'm worried about his game play. I have a feeling he is going to slip up soon." Banner said.

"As much as I hate to admit it, I agree with Banner." Matthews said. "We all need to keep an eye on him."

"Hey calm down guys. This is Listowel we're talking about." Nathan said. "Ever since Frank left us he's been alright."

"I don't know about that. He still hasn't gotten us up to speed. Every Covi team needs their tenth. Every other squad finds a replacement in a month tops. It's been years." Kyle said.

"Maybe we don't need to do anything right now." Bacon added. "He hasn't shown anything lately except being a little sad. I say we play it out."

Meanwhile, in the hall, Pat and Roach had their own discussion.

"What's this about Instructor?" Pat asked.

"It isn't that I couldn't say this in front of everyone, but I would rather you save your complaints for the walls rather than your men." Roach told Pat. "It is time you added a member to the team."

"No. No, you are wrong. My team does not need it." Pat told him.

"Pat-" Roach tried to speak.

"I am fine with what I got." Pat said angrily pointing his finger in Roach's face.

"Pat-" Roach tried to speak again.

"Covi Six is covered on all sides:" Pat said.

"Pat-" Roach tried to speak again and was starting to lose his temper.

"Demolitions. Sniper. Leader. Tank. Pilot. Tech specialist." Pat wanted to continue naming his strengths.

"Listowel! You're right! You are covered. And this has nothing to do with Potocki's death, Parker's MIA, or Smith's death several years ago!" Roach yelled.

"What do you mean?" Pat questioned.

"It has nothing to do with-" Roach tried explaining.

"If we are completely covered Instructor then I don't see why we need another Covi. If this-" Pat asked.

"If you would let me explain..." Roach said lightly.

Pat raised his hand out and flipped it gesturing that the speaking floor was Roach's.

"I have a recruit, just came out the Northern Covi Academy. Her name is Kayla Collier." Roach said.

Pat's eyes blew up, "You want to give me a girl?"

"Yes. She is Governor Collier's daughter. I don't have to remind you he is a big time weapons contractor, and owns a significant piece of the army, and... wait..." He said as Pat was trying to stop him. "And wanted his daughter to be a part of the safest group of soldiers when she decided to run off and join the military." Roach told.

"Oh I get it. You want me to babysit so you can make a big time political connection. I refuse." Pat said.

"That's not it at all. It was an order from command. She will be your new Covi. Period. End of story." Roach told.

"That's not true. I can fight this. If she's not qualified enough she can't be on the team. Her inability to fight could jeopardize my team's safety. I've told you for years, they can't be on the team. She can't be on the team." Pat said smirking at his outsmarting response.

Roach's frown flipped to an evil looking smirk. He reached at his side and whipped up his glass computer with a document already on screen.

"And that is where you are wrong." Roach said. He handed Pat the screen and he took it in his hands confused. He began reading the information on screen. The document was the official test scores and transcripts of the accomplishments and success of Kayla Collier directly verified by the Northern Covi Academy and Curator command. The insignia and stamp of approval was undeniable. Pat's eyes blazed over the information.

Roach began speaking. "This twenty year old girl was salutatorian of the Northern Covi Academy. She was decorated by the top professors in her martial arts classes, physics classes, and war games analysis classes. She had a hand written and signed graduate diploma by Seth Lenz himself. She competed in the World Covi Martial Arts Championship between all four schools and dominated seven young adult men to finish third place in the tournament. She was

offered a position as the head of the Curator defense grid. But despite her father's best efforts to convince her, she turned it down to fight on the front lines amongst the Covi operatives."

Pat continued looking at the information as he examined this new operative. He laughed as he hummed, "Received an honorable mention in Apla Mining from Erik Holsen, Administrator of Apla technologies. Gosh, I can't wait to go on so many mining missions." Roach tried ignoring Pat's joke of a response.

"But quite possibly the most astounding accomplishment of hers, was the fact that she bested your Elite Skills Test."

"She what?" Pat said hearing Roach tell him and reading it at the same time.

"She broke your game." Roach said.

"No one could beat my EST. I broke Banner's record. That was it. She had to have cheated." Pat asked trying to reason.

"Nope. Just the same thing. The basic qualifications to get into the tourney test. Then she fought 49 other competitors in war simulation to be one of the last five standing. She totaled 23 downs." Roach said sternly.

"What were they running out in the open to get shot?" Pat asked.

"Apparently it was all fair. She beat you, Patrick. This means she is qualified, even qualified by your standards. It also means you have to take her. She's got it all. She's got the stats and even surpasses you in something." Roach said smiling while Pat's eyes judged the ground.

Pat's unwanted frown and perplexed face flopped to a slight smirk and a raised eyebrow. "Ok. You win."

Now Roach's sly smile faded, "Wait what?"

"You are right, I have to take her." Pat said as he turned around and started walking back to the briefing room door.

"That's it? No fight?" Roach said shocked.

"Just because she's on my team, doesn't mean I have to like her." Pat said smiling turning his head back to look at Roach.

Pat propped open the door and did not look back as he squeezed in to the room.

“Damn it.” Roach said smiling a little standing alone in the hallway. He did not expect Pat to be so quick to accept Kayla Collier onto his team.

Inside the briefing room, the Covis were at the mercy of medical doctors injecting Arcs and other medicines into them. On the trip back from Mars every Covi was given a capsule of the Arc sterilizer shot. The shot was to be put where radioactivity was most significant in the body. This shot was only a temporary neutralizer of the radiation for the trip until real doctors could take a closer look at the individual Covi. It was a typical method used on long term covert missions. Banner was under specific attention from the doctors as he was the one in the room who used the most Apla to fight on the mission.

“Pat, what did Roach want?” Kyle asked as soon as Pat came in.

“Oh. Uh, nothin’.” Pat said shaking his head.

“Yeah right.” Banner said.

“They were probably talking about kicking Banner off the team.” Colin said.

“As if. Talk about strategical suicide.” Banner said.

“But seriously, what did he want?” Matthews inquired.

“Charles, tell me what Roach said or Colin dies.” Banner said.

“Bring it on old man.” Colin said.

“Old?” Banner couldn’t understand the reference.

“You’re the new geyser on the team now.” Bacon said.

“Do you have any idea who you’re talking to?” Banner said.

“Hey... We are going to have a new member on the team.” Pat said.

“It’s about damn time.” Kyle said.

“I told you he was alright.” Nathan said quietly to Kyle.

“What’s his name?” Banner said.

“Um, don’t worry about anything right now. Besides, our newbie has to deal with some higher ups right now anyways. It will be better to meet them in person.” Pat said to them.

“Yeah, I’d probably get sick of the bureaucracy too.” Kyle said.

"I guess we can wait." Matthews said.

"Who's we?" Banner asked. "I prefer to know everything that's going on at all times."

"I know. Say Banner... how is Mrs. Banner?" Matthews asked.

"Probably missing Mr. Banner." Kyle added.

"I don't know. But it has been a while." Banner said looking away with his arms folded.

"At least you're married." Matthews said. "I haven't even seen any women since the last time we were off-duty."

"You know, I've been meaning to ask you. What do you think was on that information stick?" Kyle said.

"I'm not sure. I don't even know if they could crack that one." Pat said.

"I think the most amazing thing about this is how easily they believed we had just quit the war." Banner said. "They basically wheeled us into their planet."

"It had been years and years and years. I'm sure they were excited for the break." Kyle said.

"Yes, but we had an armada against their borders of any proximity month." Matthews said.

Pat groaned and looked concerned.

"What?" Kyle said.

"The more I think about that the more I wonder what was on that data stick." Pat said. "I feel as though I just gave away something of immense power."

"What do you mean?" Banner asked firmly.

"If they were willing to stop the war even temporarily, then whatever they sent us on a mission for was of far greater importance." Pat said.

"Command was willing to pay a very high price." Banner said.

"But that's just it." Nathan said calling attention to everyone. "It wasn't command who ordered the mission. It was Seth Lenz."

2309 October 11th 2:30 PM EDT

The beautiful city of Miami. It was once known for being a big city on the water, but now it was the capital of the world. The buildings no longer scraped the sky, but poked through it. Massive

buildings with widths ranging from several city blocks to several city miles stretched high into the sky. The heights of some of the larger buildings were anywhere from 6000 to 7000 feet high. All of the buildings were populated with people who worked in the trade. An out looker of the city could only describe the pure beauty between manmade building and the natural scenery of a blue ocean and green palm trees. The super skyscrapers were all built for the purpose of major trade between Mars and Earth. However, they had not been used for this in 31 years.

The eleventh of October was one of the last days of the trip for the Martian guests. The Martian athletes were slaughtered in the overall score of the Olympic Games. The mass difference between Mars and Earth made it difficult for Martian athletes to adjust. The average height and weight difference between the Curators and people of Mars made the difference David versus Goliath. In the massive super dome in Miami where the games were held, an aristocratic celebration of the end of the war was held in a large box seat looking down at the field and peasant people in the stands. The stadium was originally built for the Curator people's favorite game: Rugby. That was exactly the game that was played between the Curators and Martians today. The leaders in the box seats cheered for their opposing teams, but truly only cared to bask in peaceful company.

"I'd like to make a toast; a toast to King Winterfield for accepting my offer of peace after all these years; after all the casualties of war. After all the threats made by our prior generation and all the battles that were fought, he still graciously accepted my offer. May this peaceful union last many years..." Seth Lenz smiled at the pause while holding his expensive glass of wine.

"And may we all get rich beyond our wildest dreams!" Seth shouted in a less serious voice before his pause. The whole room started cheering and clapping raising their wine glasses.

The aristocrats of both worlds basked in the party. Dozens of the richest leaders conversed with wine glasses, open buffet tables, and sports at disposal. The best and most delicious traditional food were offered along with servant waiters bringing food around. Hot savory meat in many forms of delicacy was offered. Slow roasted jerk chicken with bacon wrapped around it, pulled pork, tender loin, classic New York strip, hickory smoked ham, hickory smoked lamb, hickory smoked ribs, and hickory smoked everything were just a few of the unbelievable and expensive foods offered. The classiest wine was served. Succulent fruits and a salad bar were just footsteps away. Comfortable chairs up against the glass windows facing the sports arena were ready for those who were not already politicking.

The glass of course was tech glass with voice command answering AI, touch screen abilities anywhere with zoom in effects, second by second score on the glass and stat ready updates.

The latter comparison was the poor and underclass people in the stands below the skydeck. They were the people who stood out in the Miami heat cheering on their favorite team, most of them Curators.

The common man either lived in slums getting paid next to nothing working a labor job in agriculture or masonry or factory, or lived compacted in the crowded towers in the city making slightly more money in a white collar job. Of course, failure to work or work well resulted in being shipped to a Curator camp. And everyone secretly knew of how their death would occur, but never said a word, and always kept it out of their mind. So with that mindset, work and production were a must. The ultimate system of reward and punishment capitalism had been in play for generations.

The Martian King looked like an old man perched in his throne stroking his long white beard. The lighting in the room reflected his pale balding head. King Winterfield was sitting relaxing watching the game when Seth Lenz began walking towards to vacant seat next to him. Lenz used his left hand to help guide his body into the seat while he held a wine glass in the other. Seth looked like the cool calm person amongst his top decorated military advisors and governors who wore the official Curator clothing. Seth wore black pants and a dark purple dress shirt that seemed to match his long dark silky shiny hair and bangs.

"Sorry to see your team losing so badly your majesty." Lenz said sliding into the adjacent seat.

"But my guys came prepared." Lenz finished jokingly.

"You have the ultimate training ground I can't afford Lenz: Earth's natural gravity." The King said smiling back.

"Well, you Martians do something to withstand the gravity here don't you?" Lenz asked.

"Yes. GFT. Gravitational Force Therapeutics. The process takes usually two days of work in advance, and it's only temporary. We go through a series of injections all over the body." The King said moving his hands around his extremities.

"The whole point of the training is to make your muscles and bones withstand gravity change for a few weeks. It wears off and is a scarce resource; definitely a reason why we couldn't amass a long term invasion." The King said.

"Why don't you always use it then?" Lenz asked.

"It's expensive! And it doesn't make you a superhuman, but it makes your nerves and body as a whole withstand the pressure. Quite numbing as well." The King said as he took a swig of his wine.

"I can tell you taught your sons well. Ever since they got here, they haven't stopped budding up with the governors." Lenz noticed.

"Well I tried to teach them the basics at a young age. Shane picked up quite quickly, but Gordon was forced to learn it over the years; he isn't much of a politician. He always wanted to be a doctor. But who knows, they're both probably trying to set up arranged marriages for their kids some day." The King joked back.

"Ahahaha, I didn't know your sons were married?" Lenz said curiously.

"Gordon is, but Shane is still searching. I meant... for the future." The King said.

"I'm surprised you aren't married." The King said.

"I have someone I love dearly." Lenz said.

"Who is that?" The King asked.

"I'm sure you'll meet her someday." Lenz said.

The King nodded.

"It sure is a great day for a ball game though wouldn't you say?" Lenz said.

"Yes, it is far different than the shaded and often cold skies of Mars. And we have an eclipse coming up, I dread it. It is always such a miserable day for Martian beauty." The King said.

"Yes, I heard you have one coming up." Lenz responded.

"It's interesting how our planet's satellites orbit. Almost like it was engineered perfectly that way. Who did you hear that from?" The King asked.

"I overheard it from someone." Lenz said brushing it off.

The King nodded his head. "I had forgotten how beautiful the Earth's sky could look. This is where my ancestors were from you know. They were from the province of America. I believe so many generations ago, a relative Chris Winterfield lived here." The King said. Lenz stared at the King for a few seconds extruding an awkward silence.

"And how would you know that?" Lenz asked leaning toward the King.

The King felt the urge to change conversation.

"Uh, say... where is your fighter?" The King asked.

Lenz changed his attitude. "My fighter?"

"Yes. The one who had been turning the tide of the war. All of my soldiers and commanders have spoken of him as a legend. I have even heard a rumor about a special ability of his." The King said and paused. "Pat. He cannot be killed. Some say he might as well be immortal. And it goes on..." The King proclaimed.

"Hmph, merely rumors my friend. No one is immortal." Seth urged.

"He is one of your best is he not?" The King questioned.

"Well yes-" Seth was interrupted.

"Then where is he on the field?" The King asked.

"He is a great fighter. I wouldn't be so quick to say our best. However, he could not participate in any games because he had a death in the family and has been... preoccupied since." Seth told.

The King changed subject again to sports and Lenz continued chatting. Meanwhile, Gordon and Shane made their debuts with the 25 governors. On Curator Earth, the emperor (Seth Lenz) was supreme commander and had almost limitless power to do whatever he wanted. Although in the past some emperors abused this, they had been relatively favored by the public. The 25 governors were spread out over the world ruling certain parts of it. Every governor was extremely rich and had his or her own group of aristocrats to help lead their land.

Most governors were harsh toward their people. Typically they would impose heavy taxes for no reason, or cut budgets in random areas that fit their needs. They were always interested in political favors or increasing the land they ruled. Although it was illegal for the governors to attack each other, nothing stopped changing land zones after a political favor. In the event that the citizens became too outraged and tried to riot, a few things would take place. The usual way to end this is to have games thrown at the emperor's expense when he comes to the province.

He would come to the province and announce how troubled he was at how the governor acted, and attempt to fix things. This usually made the people happier, and it was also the reason why the emperor was typically favored over the governor. The governors would argue with the emperor, but at the end of the day neither of them could or would do anything to each other. It was always a cheap political game. However, if the people couldn't calm down when Seth arrived, the Curator military would step in and begin dismantling resistance. That only happened once.

“Governor Collier!” Prince Gordon shouted.

The governor turned around swiftly with wine glass in hand. He was in the middle of a conversation with Thorton Lenz, Seth’s brother and a fellow governor. Collier’s outward control demeanor easily allowed his conscience to end the conversation with Thorton and speak with Gordon without even batting an eyelash.

“Ah, Prince Gordon. It has been a long time since I have seen you. You have grown quite a bit.” Collier said.

“Nine years will do that. How are things?” Gordon inquired.

“I can’t complain much. Being governor in the trade capital of the world has its perks when trade goes up a few thousand percents.” Collier joked.

“How about your weapons contract though? Wouldn’t that take a cut into your budget? I knew you were a large supporter of war.” Gordon asked.

“Well, to tell you the truth I am quite glad to see the war over.” Collier sighed and spoke.

Gordon looked puzzled. “Really? But you were always the big war man. Hell, if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t have been captured out near Deimos. And the battle at North Quarter, wasn’t that your idea?”

“Yes, I know I was a war buff. I even wanted to be on the field with some of the troops.” Collier stated.

“But my daughter recently joined the Curator military, and I couldn’t stand to see her get hurt.” Collier finished.

Gordon was shocked by that statement. *A girl joining the military? How unreal!*

“As long as it motivates you to keep the peace. I certainly would not want another war.” Gordon added.

“Ah yes, you’ll be taking over as King won’t you?” Collier asked.

“Actually I believe the role is promised to my brother. He is older and father won’t change the rules for me.” Gordon replied.

“Ah yes, Shane the Warhawk. Where is he? I haven’t seen him in nearly an hour.” Collier told Gordon while turning his head looking around.

Thorton Lenz, who was drunk at this point, invaded the conversation and personal space of Gordon. "Aye yeah, where is that scrawny son of a bitch brother of yours. I saw him drinking hard alcohol earlier. Boy couldn't handle his liquor I tell ya!"

"It was nice seeing you Gordon." Collier said quietly as he slipped away from Thorton's nonsense.

"Perhaps that makes more than one of you." Gordon said before realizing this was going to be a long awkward conversation.

Meanwhile, in a super skyscraper outside of the stadium, Prince Shane and Rita Lenz shared a private guarded room together. For the last two weeks Rita, the wife of Thorton, and Shane were sharing a romantic affair. Both of them lay on the bed kissing each other until Shane stopped.

"Please Rita come with me back to Mars." Shane said.

She hovered over him and kissed him again. "Too much! I can't, you know I don't want to be with him, but I can't."

The only thing Rita saw in Shane was a dark handsome face and a body that wasn't overly fat and grotesque like Thorton's. Thorton's ginger hair and beard that puffed about his face was no incentive for Rita either. She believed she was a type of goddess; a goddess of beauty. She was beautiful. She stared at Shane's long dark hair. He grabbed and twirled Rita's golden blonde hair. It was very gold, it described her personality of digging for it in any man she could find. She was money and power hungry. Both Thorton and Shane were both rich and powerful enough to suit her fantasy, but Shane's face haunted her decision to marry Thorton at such a young age.

"Come back with me. He won't care and there is nothing he can do. He doesn't own you, and the war is over." Shane argued.

"But what if we're caught? What if he comes for me?" She asked in reply.

"I don't care about that. He means nothing to me. And he shouldn't mean anything to you either. You wouldn't even take his last name. Rita Atir-Lenz." Shane said picking at her senses.

Rita got up off the bed wearing only a red fabric robe and walked towards the window of the city. The sun was setting and the dark sky began coming up from the horizon of the ocean. The lights lit up the city springing from the clubs and streets of the poor down below, to the high and expensive lofts of the elite from above.

"But this is all I know. I couldn't do this. What if it started a war?" She asked Shane.

"It does not matter. They cannot stop us now! My army will be more powerful soon. I will be King soon; King of a planet. And I would wish you to be my queen." Shane said.

She turned around when she heard such an amazing proposition.

"I... I love you Rita. Come with me to Mars and we can rule all of Mars and someday Earth as well. It will all be ours." Shane promised.

She couldn't resist such an offer. She would not have to deal with Thorton any longer, and she could become a ruler of an entire planet, a step up from her position now.

"Yes. Yes, I will go with you my love." She said. She approached Shane as they kissed once more.

2309 October 16th 4:00 PM EDT

On Earth, King Winterfield was preparing to leave with his athletes. His two sons would take another ship. The King stood with Seth Lenz and several governors in the wide open room of the Curator capital super skyscraper. The room was the size of two city blocks and held many ships in it. Many freighter ships were stacked on top of each other and were being drawn out and prepared for departure. In the center of the court was a Martian Gold Ship. **The Gold Ship was a ship with silver and gold chrome on the outside to give it the appearance of a wealthy finish. In the back of the ship were three ion engines, and underneath were several smaller ion jets. The ship was fast in space and could reach the maximum ion speed.**

It was 75 feet long and looked like a sleek triangle with a circular middle area. The inside of the ship was like a small house. The luxury on the inside of the ship was wonderful with leather finishing on all the seats and the finest entertainment systems and touch interactive glass was everywhere. The bedroom area on the ship was in the circular part of the ship which, while in space, rotated at quick speeds to create artificial gravity. At the back of the ship was a mix of Martian and Curator guards standing in rows.

"... Well I'll have to tell you it another time. Thank you for the hospitality imperator." Winterfield said.

"Of course, I enjoyed your time at the Olympics your highness. Have a safe trip back." Seth said grinning as he stuck his hand out. The King grasped his hand and shook it sharing a more gracious smile back.

The King let go and swished his royal robe around while turning his body to his ship. His delegates followed in suit. Seth stared the King and his men down as he journeyed into his ship.

Seth leaned over toward his right shoulder and said very softly, "Is the tracking system installed on the ship?"

"Yes sir. It has enough power to remain hidden for days." An invisible voice said.

Seth Lenz nodded grinning as soldier in black armor stepped out from hiding.

"Hasn't Covi Six's data been promising?" Lenz asked.

"Greatly, my lord. But, I must ask, what would have happened if the information was not as promising? Would we have kept this peace?" The soldier asked.

"We would have killed him. What would the Martians have done? We would have exchanged a few billion economically for the heads of our adversaries. I would say we are winning either way." Seth concluded.

Back in the super skyscraper that also served as the luxury hotel for the Martian royal family Shane Winterfield prepared to leave with Rita Lenz. The two had just exited their room's door and were accompanied by Martian royal guards and servants holding luggage. The group quickly left the halls, and raced through the lobby of the hotel.

"We need to get out of here before someone sees us." Rita told Shane.

"I know I know, we just need to get to the city rail circuit and we will be fine. Put your hood up to hide your face." Shane told her.

The two were nearly dragging the servants and guards as they raced as fast as they could while they made their way to the rail circuit. The rail circuit was a major infrastructure innovation that most cities on both Earth and Mars had by the 23rd century. The rails ran through most super skyscrapers and the box cars made of steel and touch activation glass traveled at very high heights throughout the city. Typically only the very rich and elite used the railway because it was high amongst the buildings. The highway systems on the ground were used by more underclass people than the rich traditionally would. The highway systems, like on Mars, ran through the city's main computer and basically controlled the cars allowing quick and easy travel without accidents. Between the highway and railway systems, moving about a major city was a simple task. The rail car they jumped in flew through the circuit and brought them to the spaceport skyscraper where their royal Martian Gold Ship was waiting. The two made their way into the ship before anyone else and took off the hoods.

Meanwhile Gordon had just left his room with his wife Mary. They carried their own luggage with no guards. They walked into the lobby and Gordon noticed a familiar face. General Michael Lutz walked toward Gordon. Gordon knew who Lutz was from the wars: a colonel in

recent years promoted. But something was different about this Lutz. Gordon had not seen him in many years. Lutz was bald with pale white skin and had a thick metal around his chin and mouth along with other polished pieces of material on his face. It was like he had a severe war deformity.

“Prince Gordon! Where are you off to?” The general asked in a demanding way. His voice was much more firm and crunched than ever before.

Not stopping, Gordon pushed past the general and pulling his wife saying, “Home.” Gordon’s facial expression changed from his happier side to a more edgy irritated mesh. The general followed him at his side out toward the rail circuit.

“Prince, I’m here to let you know your brother is already at the royal ship. Did you see who he was with?” The general said still walking at a fast pace to keep up.

“I don’t know, his enormous self pride?” Gordon replied sarcastically.

Shocked at the response, Lutz’s laughed. “No, I believe I saw a blonde woman with him... looked like Rita Lenz.” He said calmly adding the last part in with a jab.

Now Gordon’s face was shocked. He slowed his walking. Lutz stopped. Gordon could not come up with anything to say back. He thought of how his brother acted. He knew that he would go and do something like take the wife of a senior Curator governor and try to bring her to Mars all while risking the fragile newborn peace amongst the two factions and manage this without any moral hesitation. But he prayed he hadn’t.

There was a good distance between the couple and Lutz now who was standing still. His eyes smiled for him.

Gordon ignored the comment but his wife turned her head back and gave him a long angry stare. The two made it to the circuit car and stepped in. They took a seat along the window walls away from the other passengers.

“Gordon, who was that man?” Mary asked.

“General Lutz, supreme Curator commander. He was a colonel during the war. He devastated many Martian ships in battle, but it wasn’t like most leaders. He did it like a crook. He was a numbers man. He didn’t care for his troops. When we fought on the satellite colonies, instead of risking a hostile takeover, his ships gassed the chambers of the entire ring killing everyone. Or at the battle of the polar cap just outside of Mars’s atmosphere, he ordered a 100 megaton nuclear strike from his capital ship into the heart of the battle killing our men, but killing his too.

That's what made him famous. That's what made him general. That's why I hate him." He replied.

"What a jerk. And he is so creepy looking!" She said jokingly to add humor. Gordon stared at her and smiled.

The car followed the same path on the rail to the spaceport. Gordon and his wife got off the railway and leisurely took their time getting to the ship while Gordon got his head in order. He kept thinking of the consequences if his brother was causing Rita Lenz to have an affair with the brother of the supreme Curator emperor. *It could mean the end of the treaty... the start of another war perhaps. Oh brother I hope you are not so foolish* he thought. Arriving at the ship, Gordon turned to look at one of the guards as he was walking by, "Soldier, is Prince Shane aboard the ship already?"

"Yes, your highness. He has been aboard for nearly an hour now." The guard said in response.

"Good, gather the other troops. We leave in minutes." Gordon ordered.

The soldier turned and addressed his fellow guards. Gordon and Mary hiked up the on ramp through the back of the ship and into the luxurious rooms.

"Mary, go to the pilots quarters and tell them to lift off at once." Gordon said.

Gordon split off from Mary and looked about the cabin for his brother. The soldiers began boarding the ship and entering their small quarters on the lower level. The on ramp closed up and the doors began to seal for space departure. He finally found Shane.

"Brother, what took you so long? We waited to depart for an hour?" Shane said to his brother.

"Just enjoying my stay." Gordon said calmly. He tried to work at his brother for information.

"Did you get your political schmoozing out of your system?"

"Oh. You better believe it." He said smiling.

Gordon didn't like the sound of that and pressed the situation. "Find any women you want to tell me about?" Shane turned his head at Gordon and looked puzzling but didn't say a word and an awkward silence filled the room.

The ship flew out of the hanger and had blasted up through the atmosphere and was accelerating to space. The three of them sat tightly as they were bolted to the chairs. Once in space the final angling toward Mars was complete and the ship fired up its ion engines and blasted the ship. The ion engines and the speed at which the ship was moving gently shook the cabin and made it difficult to hear or communicate. The engines fired until the ship was moving

at 640,000 kilometers per hour and shut off. The three were now free to float about the cabin as they were in space with no gravity. To prevent massive muscle loss, the rotating artificial gravity chamber of any ship was where someone would spend most of their time.

They floated to this chamber and opened the door. The first person they saw in the circular chamber was Rita Lenz. Her blonde hair spread out when she turned to look at them. Gordon was devastated. They entered the cabin not speaking and sat down and turned on the rotational accelerator. The side walls now became the ceiling and ground. Once they could stand easily, Gordon walked right up to Shane.

“Shane! What is she doing aboard the ship?” Gordon scolded. His teeth stuck together and his face scrunched up.

“Who? Rita? She wanted to come with.” He said playing it off.

“Shane! Damn it! You know that’s Thorton’s wife.” Gordon told.

“Was. Was Thorton’s wife. She doesn’t want any part of that war mongering slob anymore.” He said putting up his two index fingers to add emphasis.

Gordon’s mouth was wide open, “The hell she isn’t? That’s not her decision to make. And it’s certainly-”

“What do you mean? She has rights. She has options.” Shane countered.

“Sure she does. She can live with Thorton or perish among the weak.” Gordon said looking at his brother still in his face. “Do you not understand that you are killing the peace with your stupid... stupid action?” Gordon looked empathetic. “Damn.” Gordon stepped away from his silent brother and palmed his face with his hand. Gordon looked up at the ceiling with his hand still on his forehead.

“I love her.” Shane finally said breaking the silence.

Gordon turned around still empathetic and snapped out of it changing his face to shock. “You love her? Well damn it Shane why didn’t you say so? That makes perfect sense you love her. Have the pilot send transmission back to Earth, let them know that you have taken Rita Lenz aboard your ship without notice and tell them you love her. They will totally see that as rational and be open and accepting. Not like father just made a peace treaty with the Curators a month ago.” Gordon said all sarcastically with one hand waiving with gestures and the other on his hip.

Gordon looked at Rita. “Get out. Go in the other room.” She easily slipped away from the yelling into another room of the rotation chamber. “You don’t love her. You don’t love anyone. You can’t care for someone. You can’t put your life on the line for anyone. Mary! See Mary? I

love her. She is my wife. I could die for her life and not think twice about it. Do you understand?" Gordon asked squinting his eyes and turning his head demonstrating his anger. It was silent. Shane then thought about his actions. At first, he was worried Gordon was right, but then he countered.

"You will not talk to me like that brother. I am older and I am in line to be King." Shane said throwing a parade in his head because he felt he had the last avenging word of the argument.

"Really? You think I give a damn about the crown? No. I want safety and security for my family. Not a war on our turf. You will be the luckiest person that ever lived if this course of action does not launch tens of thousands of ships." With that, Gordon ended the conversation and took his wife into another room.

(2309 October 17th 3:00 AM EDT)

Seth Lenz stood in the center of his personal computer area with several glass screens propped hanging from the ceiling in front of him and he was directly in front of the back of his royal chair. The room he was in was his war room of his palace. It stretched from his chair with a low ceiling to a higher ceiling that stretch far back to an opening with two large doors. The room was beautiful sculpted and painted. His chair faced a massive computer glass screen which had schematics of every ship of every fleet in the Curator Space Belt. Readouts of the ships and personnel flowed on the screen, but Seth's attention was focused the opposite way on the screens surrounding him.

Five screens were lit with a member of high command on each. Commander Hydric was on the far left screen grinning with power. He was known for keeping Covi One at his right hand of authority. He was nothing short of a tyrant with a large fleet and specially assigned Covi group. General Lutz was on the screen beside Hydric laying down his typical unimpressed attitude. He was in charge of all of the armies in the Curator Space Belt, which made up nearly every soldier in the entire Curator army. Commander Astley was in the center screen and was known for holding the largest fleet in the belt.

Commander Packer was on the right of Astley. His specialty was controlling the majority of the fighter ships in the belt. Every ship that was smaller than a frigate ship was typically moving under the whim of his word. He was vicious. Commander Clark was the last in the small meeting on the far right. He was despised by the other members of high command for being too lenient. His age and tenure was the only thing keeping him around. High command members hoped his 83 years of age would end soon. They refused to fire him out of respect for being a once powerful and brilliant general, but they had limited his power so that he was no more than a face for the people who followed what was televised of the war. The meeting had been going on for several minutes now.

"Well imperator, if you want, we could have the forward squadron ready within the hour." General Lutz informed.

"Take your time general; no one is going anywhere yet. I want to make sure there is nothing exposing the capital ships of the main fleet." Seth told.

"Then if your device works, when must we have the troops ready, my lord?" Commander Packer jumped in with a question.

"It is called the Lux Inhibiter, commander. It will be ready in a couple hours and it will be powered up tomorrow at 600 hours." Seth answered.

"You said this device would keep us completely hidden but-" Commander Astley was saying.

"Yes, it will keep the entire fleet hidden in space with camouflage technology." Seth said.

"What I meant to ask about, sir, is what if one of the ships is stowing a spy? Couldn't they alert the enemy?" Astley asked curiously.

"No, the Lux technology bounces light. That is why we will remain hidden from sight. But it bounces more than one type of light. It also bounces light waves. They will have no way to communicate. I can't tell you enough how important this mission is. We need utmost security and precision. Precision attack, and security to bring home the Monk. We all know why it is important." Seth answered confidently with his arms folded behind his back.

"I am shocked at your faith in a considerably smaller fleet than usual though, my imperator. You must force Governor Collier to resign if he is going to hold out so many assets from the attack force." Clark said.

"Governor Collier is making a grave mistake by not adhering to me." Lenz said. "But he will pay a price far greater than anything he can imagine, and those plans have already been put into motion. This being a non public war and only at the discretion of the governors' vote puts me at a great advantage to control the public's perception on why the war will begin. And it is of no concern to me of the fleet size. So long as our artifact is ready aboard the Aries."

"It is, my lord." Lutz said confidently.

"I am sorry. It won't work. You can't get the people behind a war like this. We have no support. How are we supposed to get anyone to go along with this on such a short notice. Even if we waited a week until after landfall there is no telling what the people will think. After all, isn't that the only thing we are concerned about here?" Commander Clark interrupted.

A silence stopped the meeting.

"He does have a point general. We have just ended this long war. The people have accepted peace already. And the trade has been great for the provinces." Commander Packer added.

"That's true, and we will never get support from enough governors to wage war." Commander Clark pointed out again.

A loud crack sounded through the large war room and one of the massive doors swung open. Thorton Lenz came pounding through with slow harsh footsteps that scared the ground.

"And that is where you are wrong commander." Seth said as he switched off his screens and ended the meeting.

"Brother!" Thorton yelled out still pounding his heavy body into the ground.

Seth walked to the side of the screens and strolled out toward Thorton. "Yes Thorton?"

"Brother! They took her!" He cried out in half tears and anger and gasping.

"What? What Thorton? I don't understand." Seth asked turning his head and sounding sympathetic.

"Rita, she is gone. That... Prince! He took her." He yelled out crying.

"Oh well there must be some huge misunderstanding." Seth told him.

"It is not a misunderstanding. I have proof; proof from my guards, my loyal men. They told me she left with Shane. He stole her from me." Thorton called out.

"And how does that make you feel brother?" Seth asked changing his tone.

"Mad." Thorton grumbled. His breathing calmed from the gasping to a harsh wheeze for every sip of oxygen.

"Yes. What shall we do about this, this, treachery!? Such betrayal!" Seth said upping his voice.

Thorton stood staring off away from Seth panting. Tears dripped down his plump face. He thought about his next words carefully.

"I hate to do this to you Seth. I know you have staked your entire career on this, but brother, will you take us to war?" Thorton asked.

"For you Thorton, I will take our mighty fleet and march into Martian territory and burn down everything from its capital to its far open tundra!" Seth said commanding his voice through the war chamber.

“Thank you Seth, you won’t regret this.” Thorton told his brother.

“I know I won’t. I will ready the fleets, and you shall go to bed. Tomorrow you will tell the governors of the Martian’s traitorous actions and you will rally the people soon after.” Seth ordered.

Chapter 4

(2309 October 23rd 1400 hours SM:GCT)

The royal Martian gold ship soared in from the atmosphere and busted through the wind like a comet’s tail catching fire. As the speed of the royal ship slowed into the vertical hanger of building 64A of Grand City, a roaring cheer from crowds below marked the safe return of all of Mars’s citizens. The festivities began a day ago when transmission of the near safe return of the King was upon them. Everyone on Mars partied. The hard work and successful trade of workers and businessmen alike fueled the rising up and down of Mars’s distinct poor and rich classes into one mesh of joyful people. The secure return of the princes was the sure sign the peace agreement and trade was successful. People danced in the streets. They drank in the high rises. Bars gleamed with excitement with the poor scouring in taking what they wanted for once. Every so often a drunk partied old rich man would stumble into a bar crying out in joy, “The drinks are on me boys!” And he would dance arm in arm with them not caring how he acted. The war was over, and there was nothing to fear.

The royal gold ship locked into a standstill. The ship was rotated from vertical to horizontal by the massive metal arms of the machines that would catch the ships coming into orbit. Soldiers stood in lines outside of the ship with weapons firm against their chest waiting for the royal family members to exit. Many politicians, athletes, top traders, and even workers gathered around the King as he patiently waited for his family. The Martian government controlled media had all sorts of coverage of them stepping off the ship. People all over Grand City and all over Mars watched the only event aired on the public television. The ship exit ramp released and without hesitation the guards on the ship rushed out and lined in formation with the soldiers. Prince Gordon and his wife Mary were next to come off the plane. They knew what this day meant to Mars which is why they waved while nearly skipping off the boarding ramp. They smiled at the cameras and everyone cheered around them. The world seemed to cheer in unison as they welcomed their favorite celebrities. Mary stopped their walking and grabbed Gordon by the chest pulling his red royal jacket down to her level and gave him a big kiss on the cheek for the world to see. The crowd around laughed with the King as he stepped out and gave his son a tight hug and a pat on the back welcoming him home. He then reached over and planted a kiss on Mary’s cheek and hugged her. Amongst all the crowd’s loud cheering and joy

Gordon bent closer and tried to say something to his father loud enough so he could hear it and soft enough to be dampened by the noise around.

"Father something terrible has happened." Gordon said.

"What?" The King asked turning his head, bending closer, and exchanging his smile for a confused angry look.

Gordon looked around really quick to make sure no one else was paying attention to what he said. "Something bad happened."

The King heard that one as he lifted his head looking very concerned.

"Are you going to tell me?" The King asked.

Gordon turned and pointed toward the ship. As if perfectly timed at his point, Shane and Rita, joined in arms, galloped off the ship. Amongst the cheering, a few faces began to look back and around at other people. It was like if they did not know how to act and had to look at someone else to see what was right. Not many people knew this girl, so they still cheered. But the ones that did became slightly worried of what had happened and what could happen. The King gave Shane a harsh judging look as he stepped closer to the King. More eyes began to make their way to the King looking for guidance. They saw his worried face and became worried themselves. Like a sixth sense, he felt every eye ball rubbing up against his skin making him more and more self aware. But the King had not been a politician for so many years for nothing. He quickly whipped up a warming smile and stepped out to greet them which was considered an unbelievable honor, even for his sons. The crowd's faces and demeanor began to change back to calm and happy. He embraced his son Shane with another hug, and then turned his attention to Rita.

"And who might you be Miss?" The King asked even though he knew the answer.

"Rita. Rita Lenz." She said. "It is an honor to be in your presence." She got down on one knee in respect.

The King grabbed her hand and pulled it signaling to get back on her feet. He then got on his knee and, with her hand still in his grasp, kissed her hand saying, "No. The honor is mine."

"Father, I am glad you have accepted Rita." Shane told him. The King looked up from his knees in question. "I have asked for her hand in marriage and she has accepted. Meet your new soon to be daughter." Shane said with forceful words. "And she shall soon be your new Queen!" He announced to the crowd.

The King felt a little insulted. His son practically foretold his father's death. A crowd's surge and media attention buzzed and plowed their way toward Shane. This announcement was groundbreaking. The guards formed a protective wall around the royal family, but Shane loved the attention. Gordon was in awe of his brother's manner and thinking quickly he grabbed his father and pulled him away out from the crowd.

At a safe distance from any attention he pulled his father together and said, "Father, what will we do. He has surely crossed the line this time."

"If you speak of Rita, I do understand your fears, but that is not my concern. I'm more worried about his attitude." The King said.

"What? How could you say that? He just brought Rita Lenz to Mars! How is that not a concern? Are you not worried about the peace? This could start a war." Gordon said trying to find his father's angle.

"No. I talked to Seth. He gave me his word that we were at peace. Do you really think he would let a petty feud between his brother and his brother's wife ruin peace and prosperity? Think clearly. This would be such an insignificant thought on his list of important things to deal with. That would be like if Mary fell for Thorton." He responded.

"What?! I would be furious!" Gordon told him.

"Yes. I know. But that is a personal quarrel. It is not political." The King said.

"Yeah, let's see what those animals think of it. Then I can say I told you so." Gordon responded.

"Gordon, stop it! They are not animals. Don't say things like that. You are acting like a child. That is the last I am going to hear about this from you." The King ordered.

"Father-" Gordon said.

"No. Don't speak of this anymore." The King commanded stepping away from him toward the crowd.

Gordon stood shocked and empty as his father returned to the attention of the crowd and media. The King embraced his son again and began talking of the changes and of the crown. Mary wondered off from the crowd to come and stand by Gordon.

"What happened Gordon?" She asked in a sweet voice.

"Ignorance Mary. Ignorance happened, and it is going to be very bad." He told her.

"What will you do?" She asked.

“Whatever I can to alert my father of what has happened. And I am going to call an old friend. Maybe he can make sense of all of this. But for now, we should prepare for the worst.” He told his wife.

“And what is that?” She asked him.

“War.” He answered.

(2309 October 24th 4:30 AM EDT)

The Covi space station had just finished connecting an air lock clear safe tube from the station to the lead Curator capital ship. The safe tube was pressurized and filled with oxygen but it was a very long stretch from the station to the capital ship, making walking it very long and potentially hazardous because it extends for a long way through space. There was also no gravity in the tube, and wouldn't be inside the capital ship until they reached the inner spinning artificial gravity chamber. Long rip cords running at super speeds in a loop around the safe tube was the way to travel from one side to the other. One would simply, in their weightless state, float to the cord, grab it, and let it pull you at very quick speeds through the tube to the other side.

The group of Covis stood together at the station end of the tube and waited for clearance to come across on the rip cord.

“Alright Covi Six, you're all clear.” A man said on the intercom.

“You hear that boys let's do this.” Banner said as he was the first to push off floating to the rip cord. Flying weightless at super speeds was one of his favorite things to do. He grasped the cord at first chance and zipped into a speed of twenty meters per second. The tube stretched for a kilometer, so by the math he would be across in fifty seconds, but at the end the rip cord would bunch up to slow down so the person on the cord would not be hitting a metal wall at roughly forty miles per hour.

Banner's body swooped on the rip cord as he was whipped away from the Covis.

“C'mon guys jump on!” Kyle Stevens called out.

The Covis one by one jumped off to snatch the cord. Kyle's large frame and body looked like it clogged the tube even though the tube was quite a bit wider. All the Covis were holding on to the cord coming closer to the capital ship. The monstrous size of the capital ship awed the Covis.

“You know, I am always shocked at the sheer size of this thing. It is even more shocking so up close and personal like this.” Kyle Stevens said talking to Pat right behind him on the cord.

"I know what you mean. It's shocking that we can build something this big, this menacing." Pat told him.

As they neared the end of the tube, the front to the end of the ship stretched passed the peripherals. The cord slowed the speed of the Covis and their pulling strength switched direction so that their bodies faced the station. At the end of the rope was a sealed air lock door with several handle latches on it to grab. The Covis let go of the rip cord and floated slowly until they reached the leathery handles. They held the handles until the air lock door opened and then floated it. The door closed behind them and locked shut. The air tube was then disconnected from the station as they were the last Covis to depart from the Covi station. The opposite door opened and they swung themselves into the entrance of the ship while the door closed behind. They quickly floated down a corridor until they reached an elevator. The elevator was not so much an elevator but a box that would bring the Covis into the gravity area. They dragged themselves inside of the metal box, buckled themselves to the walls, and shoved off. The box spun in circles until it reached the spinning speed of the gravity chamber. Then it propelled itself into the chamber. The Covis were still weightless at this point because they had not been set into the rotational inertia. The box brought them into the chamber and then became a true elevator lowering itself to the circumference of the circular chamber. After a few seconds of feeling the rotational artificial gravity, the Covis unbuckled themselves and opened the metal door into the chamber. It was an unbelievable human creation. While in comparison to the ship, the inner chamber was spinning at a fast speed, the look on the inside was that nothing was spinning at all.

"Alright, where to Lieutenant Pat?" Stevens asked.

"We go to the Covi auditorium. We are about to be briefed on this little war situation." Pat answered.

As the Covis walked in unison through the main road to the auditorium, Colin and Bacon studied the surrounding area. When Bacon looked out as far as he could see, he could actually see the end. There was no horizon. He could actually see the end wall a long way down. Colin looked up. Above them was the elevator line that brought them into the chamber. The line was actually quite wide. On the inside of the line was where the metal elevators would go to bring people into the chamber. There was also an additional chamber within the line which was in constant rotation to simulate artificial gravity. The spin inside the line was greater than the spin of the massive cylinder they were in because it had a much smaller radius. Inside spinning section within the line were thousands and thousands of beds for sleeping areas of the common troops.

On the outside were hundreds of lights. The lights were all working in unison to create a more earth like structure. Natural oxygen was created by the luscious plant life kept alive around the chamber. A metallic pond with water was heavily decorated with plants in the center square of the Covi part of the chamber. The center square was surrounded by the auditorium, the Covi gym, the Covi dorms, the Covi cafeteria, and the Covi armory with a road leading back out of the area to where the rest of the troops lived. The Covis obviously received special attention.

The Covis quickly ran into the auditorium building. The doors opened and every single one of them felt the chilling presence of Covi One.

The Covis walked in confident and ready to deal with their bitter rivals. A Covi One member looked back and saw the Covi Six members. He tapped his leader on the shoulder and pointed back. The Covi One leader, Cal Sharp, who was a tall muscular man, who had a generous young face with blue eyes and red hair, stood up with his posse of Covi One specialists and raced over to Covi Six with antagonistic excitement. Covi One had the exact same number of operatives that was standard amongst teams; ten.

Banner whispered to Pat, "If Cal says anything provocative..."

"I'll handle this alone." Pat said quietly back.

They stopped their tracks right in front of Covi Six and stared. Covi Six stared hard back at them. It felt like the schoolyard all over again.

"What do you want Cal?" Pat asked.

Cal finally spoke up, "I heard your boy Luke took a dive and never came back. And Parker got lost."

"At least we still get missions." Pat said. "How does it feel watching from a distance?"

"Oh, how sweet. But don't be too humble, you're not that great." Cal responded smiling.

"Besides, we're gonna be the first on this mission."

"First?" Pat said surprised.

"Yeah, looks like this war is about to turn into a scavenger hunt in addition to wiping Martians out of existence." Cal said.

"Well you can play your game." Pat said. "We'll always be first in what counts."

Cal laughed as he backed off to the side and to his seat. Pat led his team to their seats as well.

The auditorium was circularly shaped. In the lower center was where Jake Roach stood and slightly above him were several screens that would outline the plan we was about to say. There were six sections of the auditorium separated by stair aisles and in the sections were chairs. The Covis gathered around and sat in the chairs. Covi One was to the left of them and Covi Four was on the right and Two, Three, and Five were across the way.

“Good morning Covis. I am sure you aren’t so eager to be up this early, but I am here to officially confirm we will be in for a war with the Martians. With the recent peace negotiations, the Martians will have calmed their defense and have no need to be worried about a threat. In fact, some sources say they are in a time of celebration. On top of that we are going to war after the proximity month is over, which means this is a 15 day trip gents. Even so on top of that, we have created something that has even the scientists that created it were shocked at what it can do. The Lux Inhibiter is a machine that will detonate in about an hour from now which, in unison with markers positioned around the fleet, will create a bubble of ‘light deflecting capabilities’ around the fleet to travel to Mars completely undetected. No signals can alert the Martians because they bounce back in and the Martian sensors and watchful eyes will never see through the invisibility the bubble puts the fleet under.” Roach told. The screens were lit up during the presentation with moving diagrams and illustrations on how everything would work.

“Question, instructor.” A member of Covi Four asked. “We had been at war with the Martians for years and the most difficult part of fighting them was their atmospheric defenses. How are we supposed to beat them now?”

“An excellent question and my next point. The moon of Phobos will be in line with our incoming ships on the day of our arrival. It was well timed actually. Upon arriving within Mars one hour prior, we will begin to fuel the capital ships super turrets with Apla power. Once they are fully charged we will take the Lux Inhibiter offline and the capital ships will release hell upon the close Martian moon base on Phobos. With their lunar defenses wiped out, and with our ships safely hidden behind the moon, we can send our troops and small fighters in to combat resistance and break into the atmosphere of the major trade cities along the equator. That is where-” Jake Roach was saying until he was suddenly interrupted by a loud opening of the front door.

Two guards walked in. The guards escorted Kayla Collier. She wore the same Covi casual outfit as the rest of them which black and red mixing in the uniform with the Curator emblem on the left arm patch and the Covi Six insignia on the right. She had a serious look on her face that meshed with a confident step and the swing of her hips read swagger. To many, she would seem like a confident young woman, to the Covis she seemed like a joke, and to Listowel she was a controlled problem that suddenly was unleashed without his knowing.

“Miss Collier, Take a seat.” Jake Roach said calmly.

Pat sat in his seat gasping. He now knew who she was. *No special treatment my ass. Instructor Roach would never let anyone into a meeting late.* Pat thought. She walked down a couple steps and stopped checking for an open seat. In the center of the front row of the Covi Six seating there was an open seat next to Banner and Bacon. She climbed across the people in the front seat saying ‘excuse me’ each time and then sat down. Banner had not taken his confused angry eyes off her since she entered the room. His face was now boiling red with embarrassment. He had his whole body turned at her looking directly at her face. She stared ahead at Jake Roach.

He couldn’t take it anymore. “Who are you?” He yelled out.

“I am Kayla Collier. I have been reassigned to Covi Six. You are Andrew Banner I presume.” She said calmly.

Andrew scraped his head through the air to look at Roach. His facial expression still that of disbelief. He leaned back in his chair to get a look at the plan on screen in front of him, but also to keep an eye on Kayla Collier and uncover who she was. He studied closely and noticed that her uniform was in order. He detected the Curator emblem and even a Covi Six insignia that matched his. He pieced together the puzzle and came to the conclusion that this must be the replacement for Luke.

“Back to the plan. Our small fighters will breach their air defenses and cause an air battle. This will allow for our infantry ships to break their lines and fall through the air. We have three targets we are intending to hit. Covi Four will come down in Minos and Firehawks. Their destination is the trade city of Subtle Hills. Subtle Hills appears to be a simple trade city, however, thanks to new intelligence from Covi Six, we have realized that this is actually an air defense base. Their fiercest ships and fighters are hidden here in case of emergency. Without hesitation, Covi Four will breach their anti air defenses and fire fifteen tactical strike nuclear missiles into the lower levels of the city and surrounding, wiping out any underground shipyards they make have.” Roach said explaining the plan.

More diagrams flashed on the screen showing exactly how the plan was to be carried out. Covi Four gleamed as they knew this was an important and worthy task. Covi Six was glad to get the shout out for the information retrieval.

“As many of you may know, Grand City is ‘grand’ because it sits on the hanger of two deadly forces. The city is actually a long strip of flat land with a wild ocean to its south and an open deep canyon to its north. We will surround the city and we will do this in several ways. We understand that crashing into the heart of the city is suicide. Their air defenses will be online, and the infantry in the city will already have positions set up in the buildings. The key is to

position troops on the sides of the city and slowly trap and strangle the city until we have it captured. The first thing to do is send some troops down in our Hellions. The Hellions that land will be our typical infantry troops attempting to flood the front lines. Covi One will come down on the east side of the city. They will secure a defensive position to set up camp for the night. Covi Four will join them after their run. Their job is to strangle the exit of the city. Covi Six will come down on the west side in decoys and prepare to take down defenses to get our ships into orbit. Covi teams Two, Three, and Five will wait in the command ships waiting to be deployed orbitally in Cyclops Suits. You will be used to drop down out of the sky and face off in the inevitable confrontation with the Martian Knights.” Roach explained.

“Instructor, I am trying to figure out why capturing Grand City is so important. There are dozens of trade cities.” Cal Sharp said aloud.

“That is the Covis’ special mission. By way of a tracker we placed on the royal ships, we know that the King and his sons and much of Martian royal leadership is inside the city.” Roach said.

“Exactly. We secure the escape by shooting down anything that leaves the city and order a nuclear strike inside the city. The leaders are dead. The war is over.” Cal simplified.

“The answer isn’t always a nuke. We need the Martian leaders alive and the public reason for war currently is the kidnapping of Rita Lenz. We must retrieve her alive.” Roach responded.

“We’ve never been able to launch a war outside of trade season.” Cal said. “How could we possibly launch one now.”

“Well, we’ll be shielded-” Roach said.

“I understand that.” Cal said. “But we won’t have enough energy to get us home, much less fight a war on their surface. Our Apla carriers can’t carry that much.”

“This time will be unique. Assuming all goes according to plan, once we obtain the city we will have our power supply.” Roach said. He paused. “Their own people.”

Some of the Covis looked around in amazement. They were shocked at the brilliant, yet corrupted, plan.

“Fair enough. But, I’m still not sold on this idea.” Pat said.

“There is something you aren’t telling us. Isn’t there?” Kyle Stevens said aloud.

“I was just getting to your important mission. The Monk.” Roach told. A picture of what the Monk was believed to look like flashed on the screens. It was a large thick boxy item with a

clear circle through the middle. "The Monk is the key to everything. According to high command it is a source of unbelievable power."

Banner's eyes lit up.

"Thanks to Covi Six, the doors to something we've been trying to crack for years have been unlocked from the inside. The Monk is more powerful than any amount of Apla, and that is all you really need to know. The problem is we do not know where it is, only that we have confirmed its existence, and we believe it is inside Grand City. You must find a way to retrieve the Monk and bring it safely to the capital ship so it can be returned to Earth." Roach ordered. Banner's attention was focused on the Monk. He found it difficult to believe something so significant could be hiding just inside the city.

"There are obviously a few things you need to keep in mind on this mission. Mars is not like Earth. It is going to be colder than what you are used to, and the planet's gravity will be much less. You will need to recalibrate your boot jets or jet packs if you use them. As usual, you will be bigger and stronger than any Martian. The Martians are smaller human beings on average. Their body muscle and bone structure has been acclimated to the gravity since birth. But do not underestimate them. They are quick and nimble especially on their own turf. They are smart too. You have to be smarter." His last words rang out with silence. "Are there any questions?" Roach asked.

Banner snapped out of his dreams of grandeur and glory and fixated his eyes on Pat.

Banner turned and saw Pat's regret and how he wouldn't look over. Roach waved his finger in a circle above his head signaling the end of the meeting and walked up the stairs and out of the auditorium. The other Covi teams stood up and started leaving. Kayla blushed with embarrassment realizing no one knew who she was. Some of the Covi Six members stood up and started leaving.

Kayla Collier reached the top of the steps and she put on a polite happy smile that still shook with panic while awaiting the remaining members. The Covi Six members that walked past her said nothing and looked at the ground until Pat walked up to the top stair. Kayla's face calmed from happily excited to a nervous look. She patiently awaited his next move like prey would a predator. Pat stopped startled at the top stair. He looked at her and she looked at him. His face was that of nonchalant disbelief that she was standing in front of his path.

She cracked back to a smile showing her teeth and said, "Hi, we have not officially met. I am Kayla Collier. I was assigned to your team by Instructor Roach himself. It is amazing to finally meet a legend like you, I am a huge fan. I promise I will not disappoint." She still smiled as she quickly stuck out her hand expecting to shake his. Pat's expression had not changed the entire

time she was speaking and he sidestepped her block in his path and walked towards the exit without saying a word.

Kayla's eyes lit up as she was stunned at what just happened. Her eyebrows melted and her body folded over like she was just crushed. Sometimes it is not physical pain that is the most damaging. Her dream was to be an elite fighter, and with Pat Listowel leading that ideology, he became her idol, and she was his biggest fan. Had he only known that, maybe he would have chosen a different action. But instead of letting this mental battery kill her, Kayla bounced back and crunched her facial expression eyeing down Pat.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" Kayla yelled out fumbling her words. "What an ass." She said to herself.

A couple more Covis noticed the fiery reaction and slipped by around Kayla unnoticed. Kayla popped back around to a lonesome Banner coming up the stairway. His facial expression was more casual to his personality. She stared angrily at him with her teeth grinning.

"And you, what was that back there? Were you trying to get us both in trouble?" She asked harshly.

"Pat didn't say anything to you, what makes you think I'll say something to you?" Banner said proudly as he passed her on his way out.

"But Banner, you just said something to her." Bacon said cheerfully in front of Banner.

"Shut up Bacon." Banner said comfortably.

Kyle Stevens was the last Covi up the stairs and as he passes a fuming Kayla he nodded his head saying, "Ma'am."

"I placed him on your team by way of order. He did not accept your application." Roach told her strolling over.

"Why Jake? Why would you do that? I have worked my whole life for this moment. I passed up every job in the Curator army to come work for him. That is all I wanted to do. And... When I finally got word that I was being transferred under his command, I thought he actually felt me to be worthy of his team." She said still fired up.

"I know but..." Roach was saying.

"No buts', I'll handle this. If he doesn't want me because I'm some girl, I'll show him that a girl can kick his ass." She said as she sprinted off out the exit.

Kayla darted out of the auditorium and to the Covi housing. She ran with only one thing on her mind: prove that she was worthy.

Kayla slowed her pace as she came to the Covi housing door and she swiped her armband against the outside door lock computer. The stiff hard, fully tinted, glass brushed open and she stepped inside. The Covi housing she walked into was for Covi Six alone. The first room was open wide in a circle. It had a screen in the front of the room for entertainment and fancy white couches in a circle. Covi Six was huddled in the center of room. Doors to dorm rooms were all along the walls of the circular room.

"Alright guys gather around." He said. Pat took a step to the side and continued talking.

"Everyone, I have forgotten to introduce Kayla Collier." Pat said raising his hand and pointing with his arm. She loved the new attention. Each Covi turned around to look at her. Some stared with gracious acceptance and others peaked at her with a stuck up nose and let lose a fume of undeserved presence. The moment Pat started speaking, their head swiveled forward. As Kayla stared back, she noticed all of the familiar faces. She knew every name of the Covi Six members, but at this point felt it was better to wait for introductions.

"She is Governor Collier's daughter, a fantastic athlete, and most importantly, the rumors are true. She broke my record on the Covi test." Pat said truthfully and straightforward.

"We obviously have some time until war. I suggest everyone get some peaceful rest. Relax aboard the ship for now. I want no mistakes on this mission. Make sure you are ready on the day when we take their city." Pat said.

Pat walked out of the room with Nathan while the other Covis sat down in the center of the lounge.

"I'm so glad we got a break for once." Kyle said. "15 days to relax."

"I don't think we should be relaxing." Banner said. "15 days is plenty of time for training. Any extra minute could be that edge that beats the Martians."

"Down to the minute?" Kayla asked. "I don't think minutes are going to save us."

Banner darted his eye at her curiously and furiously. Before he could say a word to her, Stevens spoke up.

"Anyone know how Pat is taking this whole thing?" He asked.

"He seems alright, but I would watch him." Colin replied. "He's always been under the wing of someone else. When Smith died, he had a hard time taking over the team."

"Yeah it's like he didn't have any leadership skills. Always bossing everyone around." Matthews added. "I'm glad Potocki was around to keep him in order."

"I'm not so sure it was being kept in order as much as it was a comforting person to lean on. He also could get any advice he needed for any situation. Luke saw it all." Stevens put in. "But I am wondering what it will be like long term. He seemed stressed out when I was talking to him recently."

"Well, I just got here and he's already pissed off at me." Kayla said.

"Actually, I think he would be generally pissed off at you." Matthews said.

"Why?" Kayla asked.

"Because women don't fight in the military." Colin replied. "Having you with us is kind of... humiliating."

"Probably more humiliating for Pat." Bacon added.

"That's ridiculous." She said.

"I don't happen to have a problem with you." Stevens said. As he said that, several Covis in the group shuttered in disagreement. Kayla noticed.

"What?" She said to them. "I'm serious. I'm just as good as some of you. I passed everything the Covi schools could throw at me. What would make someone think I am any less than even Banner?"

"Who do you think you are, girl?" Banner furiously questioned.

"Uh... Miss..." Kyle said.

"Collier." Kayla replied.

"Have you met my friend Andrew here before?" Kyle said worried that Banner was about to blow his lid.

"I think the only introduction needed would be mine." Kayla said. "I know all about all of you. I know Banner is high strung."

"High strung?" Banner clenched his fists. "Collier as in wealthy Collier, right?" Banner asked without receiving an answer. "I can only imagine the price tag the governor consented to when he paid everybody off."

"My father did not pay anyone off." Kayla said with an offended high pitched tone.

“Do you know how many other Covis are women?” Banner asked harshly. “Zero. The fact that you are standing in this room shows a complete lack of understanding inferiority by this administrative regime.”

Kayla’s mouth hung wide open while her eyebrows fell down.

“I can’t believe that is even in question. I was dominant in Covi school. Famous even.” Kayla said.

“Famous in school?” Banner said loudly. “Welcome to the real world honey.” He paused and faced the Covis. “How did Charles pick her? Faith in Covi Six just went from shy of invincible to indefinitely fragile. Are we already the laughing stock of the military?”

“Okay okay. Settle down there. It doesn’t matter who she is. If someone is qualified, they are qualified. Let’s not hang anyone up because of what they can’t control.” Matthews said.

Back in the Covi armory, Nathan had just opened the door to his own tech room. He had parts lying all around and a desk with messy scraps all over the expensive touch glass. He was still in design of something as Pat saw a sketch of weapons still unfinished on the touch glass.

“I have been working on this for about seven months now. I got the idea back when Stevens got shot in the kneecap on that one mission a couple years ago but hadn’t actually started designing.” Nathan said as he logged into his computer.

“You mean when we took out the Martians on the moon?” Pat asked.

“Exactly.” Nathan said as he opened a few files on his computer and then a door behind him began opening.

Pat frowned showing not sadness, but curiosity. “I don’t understand. We aren’t actively engaged in moon battles. What did it inspire you to create?” Pat asked.

“This.” Nathan answered proudly pointing to brand new Covi armor hung up in casing. The secret room Nathan had opened was merely another workshop, but the new armor showed very unusual promise. “I could not make this in my shop on the Covi station, or down in Miami. Ever since I had that one break in, I have been afraid to make anything but here.”

“No one knows I have a lab here, so no one would bother breaking in.” Nathan said nonchalantly.

“Well what is it? Where is the invention?” Pat asked.

“It’s right there. I just pointed to it.” Nathan told him forcefully pointing at the armor.

"This thing?" Pat picked up a device near the armor.

"No. Don't touch that. That's my quantum teleporter." Nathan replied.

"Teleporter? Then I do want it." Pat said.

"No, not like that. Well, yes like that. But not you. This thing teleports much smaller things, like electrons or light waves. If I tried to send you through here it would probably spit you out as the Listowel sequence. I was referring to this." Nathan said as he pulled the device out of Pat's hands and pointed to the armor.

"What? The torso armor? So what?" Pat said.

"So what? That took me a long time, that's what." Nathan answered jokingly.

"What? The paint job? Personally I liked the black." Pat told him observing the very similar standard looking Covi armor with nothing more than a red paint job on the outside plating.

"No. It is essentially the same except it has one new feature." Nathan said. "I only added a touch of red to give it a cool new look. I had been working on a new idea for quite some time now. What I have created is not a weapon but shield. Currently the standard Covi armor protects against some bullets as long as it hits the metal, and extreme heat energy from energy blasts caused by Apla can be partially deflected from the Aurora Shield which creates that colorful defense. Now, I have created a second shield producer within the armor that you can activate. It is a Block Shield."

"Which is?" Pat wondered.

"I could have never done this with someone who would have to worry about the amount of Apla they would use. The shield uses a disgusting amount of energy to be honest. You will have the ability to create an energy shield that can be centered in a particular area. Negative energy will act as an absorbent when it is in this shield form." Nathan said explaining.

"Which means..." Pat stretched out his words.

"You will be able to create a wall of shield that can stop energy blasts without any blast of a force against you." Nathan said.

"How is this different than what is used by our capital ships?" Pat asked.

"I'll start with Auroras. Designing ship shields is easier because we aren't concerned with damage to the metal hull outside. Since the only thing between you and the shield will be some thin sheets of metal, carbyne, and palladium micro-alloy, the design process... costs more to put

it simply. Now that is the difference of Aurora Shields.” Nathan said. “These negative shields I have created absorb Apla energy shockwaves. You won’t even notice a pushback like you would with your standard shields.”

“Let’s try this thing out.” Pat said grabbing at the armor.

Pat put on the forearm and glove armor and injected Apla into his skin quickly.

“Wow. I can actually feel the difference in how much energy this thing needs.” Pat said as the Apla energy was quickly sapped.

“Well, it’s a good thing you can use so much Apla. Negative energy is very hard to create.” Nathan said.

“How do I work this thing?” Pat asked.

“Turn the glove on, give it a ton of juice, and you’ll be able to feel what to do next.” Nathan told him.

Pat put all the energy he could into the glove and quickly twitched his hand and an energy shield shot out the top of his wrist. A perfect circle was formed and it covered a good portion of Pat’s body. It was partially clear and partially colored. A red glow was given off by the energy shield that had been created. Pat looked at it in awe. Nothing in the army had even closely resembled it. He put his hand near the shield and touched it. The shield only felt like a slight hum in the air. He pushed his hand through the shield completely. He looked back up at Nathan with a surprised smile and back down at the shield.

“And this will absorb a blast?” Pat asked.

“It’ll absorb the blasts, most heated particles... I don’t really know because I haven’t tested everything.” Nathan said.

“That’s.... so much energy though.” Pat said. “I don’t know if I could pump that much in for in oncoming attack.”

“I know. I built it on a taxing system.” Nathan replied. “When you start up for the first time in your suit, the shield technology will slowly tax bits of Apla at a time until it’s up to full power. It should only take about an hour in one instance. That way the shield will be on demand in dangerous situations.”

“Can I take it now?” Pat asked.

"I'd rather you not right now, as it is still in testing. I wouldn't want you getting injured and have to explain to someone like Lutz that a Covi got wounded screwing around before battle." Nathan responded.

"Well what about another time." Pat said.

"Technically, I could have it ready in a few days. I'm not sure about the time you get your boots on Martian turf." Nathan said.

"Then hurry up. I really want to use this." Pat said.

Banner shook his head and shrugged his shoulders at Kayla. "If daddy paid for you to become a Covi, I wonder what else he could buy. Did he buy your teachers too? Or maybe he bought the judges in your martial arts tournaments. Probably had to buy some of the players too." Banner said teasing trying to break Kayla's anger barrier.

Her attitude was on the verge of severe aggression, and her voice cracked into a tougher accent. "Shut up Banner!" She yelled.

"Andrew, sit down." Matthews said. Several Covis were now standing to keep Kayla and Banner out of a direct line of sight the best they could.

"I never had things given to me. Daddy never bought me anything. Mommy never hugged me." Banner said trying to edge into her even more. He was close to pushing her over the edge and he knew it.

"Then that makes two of us." She said.

"What do you mean?" Banner asked cautiously.

"My mother died in the war, she didn't hug me either. I worked my way here whether you like it or not." She said back.

Banner heard Kayla's comment about her mother and felt remorse. He actually touched his emotional side for a moment as he realized how far he had been extending his insults. But as the split seconds ticked on that itched him for another crushing slur, he decided to bring it to the next level. "Then to all of your family, good riddance."

"What." She said as a statement because of her complete loss communication skills from such an un-thoughtful comment.

Banner stared her down.

“Banner, that’s crossing the line!” Kyle said. “I don’t care who you’re talking to. That’s messed up.”

“That is it Andrew. You have gone too far.” Kayla said gesturing her arms in a downward motion. A fired up passion energized her body.

“That’s come on!” Banner said. “I dare you. Come on!”

Other Covis clamored with their thoughts on Banner’s comment and angled their words at Banner. Banner totally disregarded them and stared on at Kayla.

“You want a fight?” Kayla asked. “You want a fight!”

Kayla stormed Banner. She noticed him motion into a defensive stance, but she had the edge. She gripped one of his wrists and kept it down with her left hand while her right fist bashed into Banner’s defenseless face. Banner slammed into the ground after that whopper of a punch. Blood swelled out the left side of his cheek. Banner nudged his lip with his hand checking for the present blood. Knowing it was there he angrily popped up to his feet.

She lunged at Banner again with wide eyes and, when she was within striking range, she lowered her center of gravity and used her strong hips to swing her right leg up and at Banner’s head. Banner knew the strike was coming and lowered his head while shooting his hands at her calf and grabbing. He grabbed her leg and pushed causing Kayla to tumble backwards. She caught her balance and tumbled from her hands back to her feet a few spaces from Banner.

“That’s it, keep fighting.” Banner said under his breath.

Kayla came back at Banner. This time she had both fists up with a left foot lead. She had a true boxing stance. Banner kept his arms comfortably at his side as they inched closer to each other. All of the Covis were crowding around the fight. Kayla chose to strike again and she threw a left jab at Banner. He was again expecting her strike and simply turned his shoulders along her hit to graze across his chest. She threw the same punch again, and again he turned his shoulders. She threw the jab one more time in a little angrier throw. This extra fury caused her to lose focus and aim toward the middle where he was turning. It also caused her to be slightly off balance.

Banner took his left arm from his side and swiped away her arm at the wrist. As he swayed it from her aim, he grasped onto her wrist and gained arm control. He centered himself and turned his body and moved closer so his back was facing her front. He did this swiftly and with arm control, only to finish it off with a bang to send Kayla flying and tumbling to the ground. Banner bounced his feet backward as he moved away from Kayla on the ground. Kayla got up off the ground in a ferocious manner. She mentally called upon her body for additional

strength. She raced toward Banner and began throwing fists one after another in a disciplined manner. She would not let her emotion get in her way this time. Banner continued to dodge the attacks or take a light skimming blow.

Kayla might have actually made forceful contact with Banner's body, but his quick bouncing back reflexes and turns allowed for him to feel nothing. Kayla landed a right hook into Banner's cheek. Banner turned his face trying to keep the plundering to a minimum. He kept his cheek limp, refusing to tense up which kept the pain from affecting his mind and kept his fighting flowing. Kayla waited the split second for Banner to turn his head back, only so she could throw an uppercut at his chin. Banner instinctively arched his back and dropped low to his knees while Kayla punched at nothing. He was far lower than her, and turned his body on a dime at his knee to the back of Kayla's body. He gripped her foot that had the most weight on it and pulled and twisted back and to the side ripping her body to the floor. The sweeping force that Banner caused threw himself up to his feet.

Kayla powered up again and raced at Banner. She threw a lunging haymaker with the right, but still kept an upright pose. Banner shifted his head to his left allowing for a scrape across his face. He stuck his right arm out and it his arm fell in line underneath her right arm and his hand reached her neck. In the same motion, he landed his left arm at the middle of her lower back. He pushed at her neck and back, and thrust his hips. This torque motion flipped Kayla to the ground forcefully. Banner had let go far before the back of her head hit the ground. Banner laughed turning around and looking at his fellow Covis who also shared laughter in amusement. Kayla still had energy and jumped back up light on her feet. She sprinted up and bashed an unsuspecting Banner in the back of the head.

"Now wait a minute Andrew." Kyle said.

Ignoring his partner, Banner lit up with rage and charged Kayla. She stood her ground with arms raised. As Banner closed in she threw a rocket right jab. Banner swiped his arm from inside to out pulling her jab away from her body. He assumed wrist control and kept her arm out wide forcing her off balance. He then plunged his right knee at her abdomen causing her to double over coughing in pain. Banner, who still had wrist control, slung his right arm around her neck from the front and continued a quick burst forwards. The motion flung Kayla to the ground and caused her body to slide across the ground away from Banner. His punishing knee to the stomach was enough to keep Kayla down this time. But all of this happened in seconds, and Banner was not finished. He darted for Kayla who was motionless on the ground. He got to one knee in a hurry right in front of her body. He extended his left arm out and grabbed her shirt by the collar and took his right arm and was about to swing.

"Banner!" Listowel yelled.

Banner still gripped Kayla but his head was slanted looking at Pat. "Let her go, Andrew." Pat ordered.

Banner let go of Kayla's shirt and stood up walking toward Pat. He smirked showing strong teeth at Pat. "Get out." Pat said quietly aiming at his words at Banner.

"You always like to kill my fun." Banner said under his breath walking away.

Pat was about to lay into Banner, but instead turned to Stevens and said quietly and rhetorically, "Why didn't you stop this?"

Kayla struggled on her way to her feet. Pat had a livid look on his face. He said nothing, waiting for her to speak.

"For what it's worth, thanks." She said with a dim face.

"I didn't come to save you. I came to stop one of my men from making a huge mistake." Pat said harshly. "And you wanna know what? I am still not happy to have you on the team. You never showed your worth to me and I'm in charge, not Roach." He spoke with punishing words.

"I am worth it to be a part of this team." She said.

"Don't talk it, walk it." Pat said turning his back on her and walking away.

(2309 October 24th 2300 hours SM:GCT)

"Max Connors. It has been too long." Gordon said.

"How are you Gordon?" Max said giving him handshake and then crossing over into a hug.

"Mary, it has been too long." Max said hugging her as well. Mary acknowledged Connors with a nod. He knew Gordon wanted to meet with him, but Connors was not expecting the two who had just entered his military office late at night.

"What is this plan you had?" Max asked.

"Well, currently my father doesn't believe that the Curators are going to retaliate for Shane stealing Rita Lenz. I am also aware that your leaders in the Grand City Police Department are hassling you for believing that the cargo incident a week or so ago was Curator involvement and not some rebellion group." Gordon told.

"Yep, that's for sure. No one believes anything I pin on the Curators. I feel like I am the only one to have spoken out about this whole peace treaty on the entire planet. I will probably be reprimanded of my badge if I keep it up." Max spoke.

"So we are obviously on the same page then. The peace, the cargo incident, and Rita all are too suspicious to be coincidental." Gordon wondered.

"Absolutely. I can smell a Curator plan a mile away. Lutz has a stench on his hands that is very noticeable when he rubs it where he shouldn't be." Max added.

"You really think Lutz is heading this? I would have thought Lenz, but I too noticed something a bit too ominous about Lutz as we were leaving Earth." Gordon claimed.

"How so?" Connors asked.

"He told us someone looking like Rita was boarding our ship home. He couldn't be more obvious about it. But that injury he sustained to his face was probably the best thing that ever happened to him. I can't tell what he meant to display with his comment." Gordon said.

"I see. Lenz is the boss and has the final say. Hell, he probably was in the planning. But Lutz knows Mars well enough that whatever the plan was needed his ideas and his influence would prevail. It makes you wonder who is really running the Curators." Max said giving his thoughts on the situation.

"Then we both realize how serious this could become. I checked our defenses. We still have our lunar orbit defense, but sky patrol has been terminated because of the end of the war. It would take hours to scramble fighters if there was an attack. And if what you say is true, and Lutz had his suggestions in line with Lenz, then they know exactly where to strike first." Gordon figured.

"We need to find a way to alert certain officials without disturbing the King." Max said.

"Maybe not. Maybe I could convince my father. But for safety I think we should split up roles." Gordon said.

"What did you have in mind?" Mary asked.

"I say we wait a few days. We know that it will take longer than seven days to reach Mars because it is after proximity month. We will wait." Gordon said.

"Max, I am going to need you to start sleeping a lot less. I can grant you a royal military pass that can get you on the top secret channels and get you into any base. It will be a couple of weeks before they try and take that pass away from you. I need you to keep your eyes wide. Find anything suspicious or out of the ordinary and alert the lunar defenses as soon as possible. Lie to them, and tell them anything that will make them believe they are under attack, because chances are, they will be. I will wait for you to give me the signal and I will inform my father we are under attack and that we need to mobilize our defenses. Hopefully, when they attack, we will be out of the city and on our way north." Gordon alleged.

“Why not leave now?” Max said.

“I can’t leave anyone here. If this is the trap we fear, I can’t leave these people. I can’t leave my family.” Gordon said.

“Then it is settled. We should probably split up until the time comes.” Max said.

“Do you think they will bring a bigger fleet than last time?” Gordon asked.

“I would count on it. In fact, because they feel as though they have the element of surprise and have probably been planning this for a long time, I wouldn’t be surprised if they sent the biggest space fleet ever assembled.” Max responded in an epic tone.

“Then I hope we really are crazy.” Gordon replied.

(2309 November 2nd 1000 hours SM:GCT)

“Cooling thrusters for four hours straight sir!” A lower level soldier said to General Lutz who stood higher on a platform than any of the other military men. Lutz was in prime control of his capital ship. He had men scrambling the floor to prepare for the invasion. They communicated with the other ships in the fleet on readiness and attack patterns. Unfathomable amounts of information was thrown from screen to screen on the monitors in the bridge and across space to other leaders. Lutz was in direct connection with the other commanders. They all prepared as the engines were now slowing the ships to a near stop and the fleets firepower was now heating for just under an hour. Within minutes, Lutz’s plan would be in full force.

“Good. How are the cannons?” Lutz asked staring at a screen flowing with information knowing that his question would be answered.

“Sir, the Aries will be ready in ten minutes.” One voice said citing the name of the main capital ship which was in Lutz’s command.

“I have confirmation from Commander Astley that the Infernum is on schedule to powering their cannons.” Another soldier said citing Commander Astley and Clark’s ship; The Infernum.

“Hydric said the Interfectorem will be ready as well.” A third voice announced.

“Good, alert all forces we will open cover in exactly ten minutes!” Lutz said. He smiled at what he believed was to soon be his greatest achievement. The workers scrambled to their stations and worked to get a time clock and spread the word to every ship. Lutz looked off at the large screen of the bridge which had Mars in its whole centered on the screen. “Finally, I will make your walls crumble.” Lutz said to himself.

Max Connors waited anxiously in the base of the Martian moon of Deimos. He rested his back on the corner of the command room of the base. It was a small metallic room modeled years ago. It had an aged look to it. Three rows of computers were the only lights in the room. One soldier with his attention on his computer screen raised his hand frantically.

"Sir... sir, come see this." The soldier said. His superior officer made his way to the computer screen. Max widened his tired eyes.

"What is it?" The middle aged officer said.

"It's the heat signatures from this region. They're off the charts and it's right outside of Phobos." The soldier said.

"It's probably a heat wave or a solar flare that extended too far." The officer said blowing it off.

"Not these heats sir. I'm getting readings hotter than nuclear charges." The young soldier said in response.

The word 'nuclear' spiked Max's attention. He jumped up, and knew it was time.

"Then the damn thing is broken." The officer said.

"No, it is not." Max said speed walking to the screen.

"Excuse me? Connors, I know you have some sort of executive privilege this week, but I am not about to make this base a laughing stock because of your theories." The officer said ready for Max's suggestions.

"Evacuate the base." Max said.

"No." The officer said.

"I am now the superior officer. Now you can either listen to my orders or be relieved of your command. How do you think that would look on a discharge resume?" Max said calmly and firmly.

The officer looked at Max with half closed eyes and then hunched over turning to the young soldier. "Evacuate the base. If anyone asks, it's his fault." He said quietly. "Evacuate the base." He then yelled to everyone. The troops began preparing for evacuation by making calls and texts to troops all over the moon for emergency mass departure. "I'll just blame it on you." He said, and then walked away.

"Let me examine these signatures up close." Max said.

"Here sir. Right outside of Phobos." The soldier pointed at the screen showing the rising heat temperatures in a massive blob behind the moon.

"Wait. What is today? Is today the Lunar eclipse?" Max asked.

"Yes. Why?" He asked.

Max thought about the lunar orbital patterns. If the Curators were behind the moon today, they would be able to annihilate the base without any retaliation from space forces. Planet-side bases would not have any direct sight of the base. The moon was covering up the sunlight, almost like a genuine eclipse.

"I can't believe I didn't see this coming. Get me online with the Senior Officer on Phobos. Now!" Max ordered.

On the moon of Phobos, Senior Officer Oakley sipped his early morning coffee.

"Sir! We have an emergency call for you from Deimos. They say it is urgent."

"Ugh, always in the morning." He said picking up his headpiece. "This is Senior Officer Oakley of the Martian Moon Base of Phobos. Who am I speaking to?" He said professionally.

"This is Captain Max Connors, current superior officer of Deimos. I have just ordered an evacuation of the base! You are about to be attacked by Curator forces, you need to do the same!" He urged.

"Of course it is Connors. This is an emergency line, Max. Don't call me with your nonsense, especially in the morning." He said.

"I am serious! Oakley don't do this! You are about to be hit with something. Look at your heat sig's." Max said.

Oakley's face changed slightly from irritated to curious. He leaned over at one of his soldier's screens and noticed the impressively high heat signatures. He shrugged off his suspicion and took another sip of coffee. "It is probably because of the eclipse. The solar radiation is reflecting everywhere." He responded.

"What the hell does the eclipse have to do with nuclear high heat sig's you moron?" Connors said yelling over the communication line.

"Goodbye, Connors." Oakley said hanging up the phone.

“Damn it!” Connors said to himself as he threw down the headset and tugged on the young soldiers arm pulling him away. He took him out of the room and headed for a ship to get off the moon.

Listowel and his team prepared for battle inside of a decoy ship waiting to depart. The decoy ship was prepared to fly to the city along with other decoys to be shot down while letting off troops. The Covis buckled their last buckles and tightened every strap before powering their suits on.

All of Covi Six, including Kayla, were geared up and ready. They all wore the standard Covi armor adjusted to their body type. A mix of the strongest elements the Curators had ever created gave a durable, yet light, intermediate sized coat of armor. The helmet was sleek and stylish with artistic ridges along expensive protective chrome. A wide arrow stretched from the top to the visor with its pointy edges sticking out at the sides of the helmet. A dark glass visor that stretched across the eyes and nose ending at the mouth provided a powerful heads up display. And, of course there was a Curator symbol resting as a patch on the left shoulder and a team designator that read Covi Six on the left chest peck. The upper body armor coating was very thick and rounded for extra durability. Sleek armor designs combined with very high tech machinery gave the armor leggings a smooth, yet powerful look. But although the armor was very strong, it had a somewhat rubbery and thin chrome look to it. Finished off with a mostly black color with grays and reds mixed in, the Covi outfits were the best looking and most powerful in the entire Curator military.

“Ok men, this is it. Today is the day we lay our final siege on Mars, but this time, it will be on their grounds and on our terms.” Pat said. “Once our birds light up the hills, we are going in. So get ready, be patient, and prepare for battle.”

In the royal palace in a major skyscraper in the center of Grand City, the King walked with a proud step speaking with his son Shane about Rita. They hid in the building from the eclipse. The King thought it was an eye sore and wanted nothing to do with it.

Gordon had just received word from Connors of the probably incoming attack. He raced down the corridor yelling, “Father!” The King and his son turned to face him.

“Father, the Curators are here.” Gordon said.

“What are you talking about?” The King slightly panicked but also skeptical.

“They are here. They are going to attack.” Gordon announced.

“That’s ridiculous. We are at peace with Earth.” Shane told him.

"You stay out of this you!" Gordon told Shane eyeing him down.

"Shane is right, Gordon. There is nothing to fear, we are at peace. Why would you be here and not my guards." The King said.

"Father, I am sure of it. I would stake anything on it!" Gordon said looking at his father.

"Like you have anything." Shane said under his breath. Gordon turned his attention to his brother and stared him down again.

The King laughed. "And what is this attack? An attack of gift baskets filled with political prestige and money? We haven't been this prosperous in years!" He said laughing some more and looking at his polished son Shane.

"No, it's an attack on the bright side of the moon of Phobos on its eclipse today!" Gordon said very straightforward.

The King's mind rambled and thought about the eclipse. His suspicions arose. "We have a base there. We have forces everywhere. They would have seen them."

"Well.... I don't... I don't know. But it has to be something. Maybe not ships, but Max Connors evacuated the moon of Deimos and he saw heat signatures higher than nuclear strikes." Gordon told him.

"Ugh, of course, you see, it's Max Connors and his anti Curator sentiment at work again. He is worse than the rebels." Shane said.

"Please, father." Gordon pleaded.

"Shane is right, Gordon. You should not be playing around with that Max fellow, he is a bad influence." The King said.

Gordon stormed off in anger toward the doors in the back of the corridor. A royal guard broke through the doors before Gordon could reach them however and started running to the King. Gordon followed slowly.

"Your highness!" The guard said.

"What is the meaning of this interruption?" The King said.

"King Winterfield, please forgive me. We believed it was urgent to bring this to your attention." The guard said raising a beacon about two feet in length.

"What is this?" The King asked.

"It's a Curator tracker that was secretly stowed away on your royal ship, sir." The guard said.

The King's eyes glowed as they set on his son Gordon. He had now realized the errors in his foolish faith. "Gordon! Send word to Oakley on Phobos, immediately!" The King said in a panic.

"Father!" Shane said. "You don't know that they are about to attack. Just from a tracker."

"Even if this tracker was some sort of mistake, there are far too many coincidences to not do anything." The King said.

In the command room aboard Aries, Lutz awaited the final seconds before his fleet was ready to attack.

"Sir, I just received word from the Infernum. All ship's cannons are ready to fire." A higher ranking officer said to General Lutz.

"Unleash hell." Lutz said as the countdown had just grazed into the final seconds.

On Phobos, Oakley was walking down the steps slurping the last of his coffee.

"Sir! I have received a royal message! It says to evacuate right now! We are about to be under attack!" A soldier said.

"What?" Oakley said confused and almost sarcastically with his coffee in his right and his left on his hip.

He then turned his focus through the windows above and looked at the sun. At that second, the Lux Inhibiter broke up its invisibility and uncovered the massive Curator fleet with three primed capital ships. The number and size of the ships was so large, it literally blocked out the view of the sun. Oakley dropped his coffee.

Chapter 5

(2309 November 2nd 1010 hours SM:GCT)

Beams of crimson heat blasted upon the brighter side of the Martian moon. The fire and blaze of the exploding laser-like energy ripped into the lunar soil tearing the rock in waves of intensely hot power like a ripple effect. The charges fired from the super cannons rained down one after another from the many cannons of the three massive ships. The metal of the bases that had stood just moments ago melted into a swamp of molten rock. The attack from the super cannons was excessive. A simple surprise nuke would have sufficed the full and clear destruction of the Phobos moon base. But the sheer elimination of any standing building and

reduction of lunar land to resembling its own core was a message that rang out throughout the solar system, and even the very fabric of time, that Curator power was real power.

With the moon base in shambles and the Martians still in disarray, the proud mob fighting force of the Curator army was then unleashed. The Aries, Infernum, and Interfectorem, along with their many frigate ships surrounding each capital ship in a defensive swarm, launched their small fighters from the hangers in squadrons toward the burning hull of the moon. Hundreds of smaller ships like the Curator Minos, Sonics, Air Demons, Firehawks, and Phenoms raced in patterns following their squadron leaders. The ships circled into their positions. They left the ship and blasted through space. The fighters flowed around the moon's curve systematically.

There was no Martian resistance on the moon. While the majority of the ships were attacking the lunar bases, several small squadrons slipped off at the command of Covi Four. Arthur Armstrong, the Covi Four leader, led several Minos and Sonics in groups under the command of his Curator Firehawk. The ships snuck through the atmosphere and were immediately tracked by Martian orbital defenses. The Martians without royal order, began doing everything in their power to get every pilot to a ship and that ship in the air. In the mean time, air defense grids that were systematically set up in every major Martian city, did what they could to fire missiles into the air. However, even the lowest common denominator top speed of the Minos, Sonics, and Firehawks in a group was enough to evade the small tracking missiles.

"Command, this is Arthur Armstrong of Covi Team Four. We are receiving heavy artillery coming from air defense grids down below. We will be fine, but recommend immediate disabling of the grids for a safe orbital entry of the capital ships." Arthur said beating his chest.

"Roger that Covi Leader. We'll put our troops on the ground once those nukes are lit." Command replied.

As the Covi Four team beamed past Chiyoko City, a major Martian trade city, several Martian Class Delta Angel Ships were sent off from the military buildings to follow the suspicious voyaging Curator ships. As the Angel's tailed the Curator squads, they began firing bullets and missiles. One missile was tracked for the Firehawk Arthur was in piloting. The missile zipped past the Minos and tailed right up behind the Firehawk. As the missile pulled in from behind, the shield triggered the missile to blow up just before it crunched into the metal. The result of the explosion caused the ship to shake and the fiery burst punched into the metal in the hull. The explosion was so large it flared up against the other ships in the air pushing them outward. One Mino ship behind the main Firehawk was engulfed in the flames. It tore the ship apart and caused it to lose altitude and fall.

"Damn it!" Arthur yelled. He swiveled his chair to his right making his chest face the wide open cabin inside the ship.

“Corporal! Have our wingmen turn around and give em’ hell. The Firehawks stay the plotted course.” Arthur ordered.

“Yes sir! Wingbirds, you have clearance to engage the enemy.” The Corporal said through a head microphone.

The Minos immediately used their slim and simple aerodynamics to their advantage and back flipped around to combat the enemy. The Sonics stopped their engines and attempted to get behind the enemy as well. Most of the Angels changed their course and tried to battle the enemy in a traditional looping and swerving and shooting dogfight. The five Firehawks stayed the course to the trade city of Subtle Hills. After shooting down its tailing enemy, one Angel tried to reroute and chase down the Firehawks.

“The city will be annihilated in moments, General Lutz. You may start your attack.” Arthur said formally under com to General Lutz.

The Firehawks prepared their nuclear missiles. Fifteen fifty-megaton nuclear bombs, three in each Firehawk, were prepared to fire. The peaceful city of Subtle Hills and the neighboring towns stretching far outside the city limits were all in danger. The nukes would create a decimating line of nuclear winter for miles. It would obstruct any Martian emergency backup from traveling by air or ground.

“Ready your triggers Covi Four. Three. Two. One. Fire!” Arthur commanded.

The three missiles of each ship dropped out and, with a half second of being dropped, burst the engine and flew off faster than the Firehawks and on their way to Subtle Hills and the surrounding area. The Firehawks turned their wings and began turning around.

However, the comeback Angel had just caught up to the Firehawk’s position. The Martian pilot, knowing the bombs had been fired, did not have much time to react. He quickly recognized it to be a nuclear missile and saw the many high buildings of Subtle Hills in the distance. As fast as he could, he targeted the closest missile and fired a missile of his own at it. His missile was called a Detaunt Rocket.

The Detaunt Rocket was a weapon used by both the Martian and Curator militaries. The Rocket was like a smart robot that would track a given missile, particularly nuclear, and catch up to it. The missile would then quickly latch on to the Nuke and begin drilling and or pumping electromagnetic pulses into the system of the smart missile. In rare cases, depending on how the nuke was developed, the smart technologies of the Detaunt AI would hack the missile and disable it, or dig into the core of the Nuke and pull out the nuclear energies waiting to blow. If this happens, there may be a minor explosion, but not a full blast.

The rocket burst with precision and power to the destructive prey. The Detaunt Rocket was fast enough to catch up with a missile, and in addition to the timing nuclear detonation, the center missile was in perfect alignment to be disabled. The Detaunt caught up and popped open clawing metal into metal. While it tore open nuclear devices to shut down the detonation, the time ticked down to the final seconds of obliteration. Covi Four had realized a Detaunt was fired and began turning around to intercept the enemy Angel.

With almost perfect in-sync timing, the Detaunt shut down the nuke, with no hiccup explosion. The pilot of the Angel ship exhaled with comfort and grief. He knew he stopped one nuke, but countless others flew to their ground zeroes. The Curator ships locked on and fired small impact missiles to take out the Angel. The Martian pilot knew his fate.

As the Curators flew in the opposite direction fourteen warheads lit up Mars and the deadly clouds bloomed into the sky. The force of the air being pushed away by the explosion was immensely great. The ground shook and the air trembled. The buildings inside the blast radius were completely wiped out. Many of the buildings inside the nucleus of the city rose higher in the air from the detonations before crashing down. The neighborhoods surrounding and Subtle Hills itself were either crushed by falling debris, wiped out in the blast radius, or were now suffering from an inhabitable living space. Soldier barracks, training grounds, weapons and machinery factories, and an underground air base were stuffed underneath the city of Subtle Hills.

The Martians had a brilliantly structured base underground that was free from orbital attacks and had the ability to send troops and air ships into battle quickly and effectively. However, the base was previously top secret and the Martians never expected a nuke igniting in the core of the city. The base had a thick sheet of land for the city to be built over, but the nuke dug up most of the ground and the tumbling super skyscrapers crumbled the ground below them ripping open the cover of the hidden Martian base.

The nukes were a total success for the Curators. Subtle Hills was completely destroyed and the massive defense base under the city was crushed to bits. The nuclear winter left where the city once stood created a wall many kilometers long. It did not cut off all paths for reinforcing Grand City, but chaos the terror created was enough to slow down the Martians and cause them to regroup on the other half of the planet. This would give the Curators plenty of time to set up home around Grand City.

As the heat of success swelled the confidence of the Aries command deck, General Lutz tapped his hands together acknowledging that everything was going according to plan.

“Begin the ground assault.” General Lutz ordered flashing the go ahead sign with his hand to the workers on the deck.

The Aries remained hidden behind the moon while most of the fleet detached and swarmed the Martian atmosphere. The Infernum and Interfectorem led thousands of small ships including nearly a hundred frigate or Apla ships. Several decoy frigates entered the atmosphere with the carriers of Covi Six and One stealthily humming close by to avoid attention. The decoy frigates were going to be shot down first. The air defense grid the Martians had created around Grand City was deeply intertwined and disguised in the residential areas.

The outer suburb of the city was all slums. The poor lived under the rich in the city or lived on the outskirts in shacks. The military paid no attention to the well being of the poor in an attack, so the slums were the perfect place for the Martians to organize an air defense grid of missile and gun turrets.

The carriers holding Covi teams Six and One broke off. Covi One went east to set up a sniper lookout to catch and take down anything trying to flee out that side of the city. It was also a lookout to make sure no reinforcements would be approaching from the east. Covi Four would also join them after the completion of their bombing run.

Covi Six took a nose dive in their ships through the atmosphere. The clouds covered them for the time being and they were out of range of the Martian defenses. As the decent into combat dwindled its final minutes, Listowel called together for one last check up with the Covi Six team.

“Men, we are approaching the air defenses and are going to have to be prepared to make the jump out of this bird. Make sure you fasten up tightly and check to make sure you got the weapons you want. Don’t forget, we are coming down here to disable this grid first, shoot the bad guys, but remember the mission. The quicker we get these turrets down, the quicker our capital ships can enter orbit. We can use Apla, but we don’t know how long we’ll be down here. If we miss our mark, the capital ships will have to return to the moon and wait a couple days before launching another assault. We could be down here days without treatment.” Listowel said.

“Well, you would be alright.” Kyle said.

“Same difference. A team’s a team. But if we do fail, not only are we not going to get medical attention, it could destroy the entire mission.” Pat said.

“Shoot the bad guys, blow up the grid, and don’t fail.” Matthews said.

“Couldn’t be easier.” Banner said.

The ship began shaking from bombs lighting off in the sky. The decoy frigate and the Covi Six ship plunged out of the clouds and into a sight they were convinced Mars had never seen. The mighty Grand City was under attack and light from bullets fired gave the ground a feverish

glow. Missiles blazed and let off smoke which added to the beauty of the chaos. The Covis took a last glimpse at the sight and huddled at an opening to the bottom of the ship preparing to depart. The city was at war and the Covis loved every bit of it. War was their job. It was what they lived to do. Each one was handcrafted by the finest Curator instructors and handpicked by the top generals to fight every day and defend the interests of the Curator empire.

In addition to the armor and weapons all the Covis carried, for this mission they had large metal backpacks which rested along the back armor. The backpack was called the Sky Hoist. The Sky Hoist was a device used by both Curator and Martian militaries to drop troops in to a precise location quickly without being an open target like they would be with a parachute.

“Sky Hoists, ready. Armor and helmets, secure. Weapons and ammo, check. Apla off and available, good to go! On my mark.” Pat said.

The Covis huddled around the opening of the decoy ship to descend into hell. Pat waited for the ship’s shaking to become more aggressive. The Martians were firing everything they had into the sky. Bombs blew up near the ship, hitting other vehicles or slightly missing the decoy. The turrets were bit more accurate and after a few short seconds, bullets began pummeling the armor shell of the vehicle.

“Mark!” Pat yelled.

At that moment the Covi Six squad rolled out the exit of the ship. All eight Covis joined in unison.

The Covis allowed gravity to do its work propelling them to the surface of Mars. When they jumped from the ship they were nearly 2000 meters in the air. Just over 20 seconds after they jumped, the decoy ship was barraged with heavy artillery as the ship flew closer to the city and near major skyscrapers. The defense grid had a much more powerful authority inside the city than it did on the outskirts, the grid had the ability to annihilate anything heading into the city with its attack systems, even a flyer as small as a Covi. At this time the Covis were moving 80 meters per second, or 180 miles per hour. The defense grid was firing all sorts of bombs and long range shots, but the Covis size made them elusive and their plummeting speed was difficult to target. With only 500 meters to spare and their speed still accelerating, the Sky Hoists activated and the devices detached themselves from the Covis while a long metal cord still held them together. The Sky Hoists enabled their thrusters and blasted away from the surface. The net acceleration change pulled the Covis, slowing them down as well. The Covis went under 75 meters which was the threshold of the anti air defense turrets to shoot them. At this time their acceleration was so small they eased into the Martian planes and detached from the Sky Hoists.

“Command, this is Covi Six, we have arrived on the surface. Engaging the enemy defense grid now.” Pat said into his mic helmet.

“Copy that Covi Six, you have 45 minutes to get that grid down or we are going to have a rough landing.” Command replied.

“Got it, Six out.” Pat affirmed.

Pat checked his surroundings. There were slum houses everywhere, but no sign of enemies in the immediate area. “Six, we are going to have to split up. One group will lead ahead and create havoc, the other will fight more close quarters battles through the slums. I’ll take Kyle and Banner. We’ll give them hell on the front lines; heavy weapons and explosives. We won’t get backup for a couple of hours, so the best course of action would be to refrain from using much Apla. Try not to fly through here.” The Covis nodded their heads in agreement.

“Matthews, take the twins and the girl.” Pat said. Kayla’s face tightened up but no one noticed it under her helmet.

“Watch the name calling.” Bacon said.

“You must get to the defense mainframe before our time is up. It’s in the western military base outside the city. We’ll create a big enough diversion for you to get in the base. Colin, once in the base I need you to crack their tech. Shut down everything. Bacon, blow their generators to pieces, then you can worry about blowing the guns. Matthews, do not fail me.” Pat ordered.

“Aye aye, sir.” Matthews said and then ran off with his squad through the slums.

“Ace!” Pat said.

Ace was already perched on top of a higher slum.

“Do work, but don’t get caught.” Pat ordered.

Ace nodded in agreement and began focusing his sleek shooting York Sniper.

The Martian ground was not fertile and was very crusty and sandy. Pat prepared himself for battle. He swung around his rapid one-shot Tamiami Rifle sprinted forward down the dirt road east toward the base. Kyle followed wielding his large rapid firing Chicago Battalion gun. Banner ran with his favorite rapid firing dual wielded weapons, the Smoking Acers. Together, the three presented an arsenal of Martian beating.

Royal guards came trotting down the majestic hallway of the King's penthouse estate high up in a super skyscraper. "Your highness! Your highness! We must get you to the air pad immediately! The city is under attack!"

"Hold on a second trooper. We're not going anywhere." Gordon told them.

"What?!" Shane yelled.

"Gordon?!" King Winterfield said.

"We are not about to give up Grand City. And if we are outmatched there is no way I am going to leave the people and the armies without command." Gordon replied.

"My son, you were right, and you are right now. But there is also something to be said about living to fight another day." The King said.

"Father, think of your people here. Think of what they will say if you leave. They might even join the Curators." Gordon answered.

"Don't, listen to Gordon, father. He is going to get us all killed because of his bravery." Shane said.

"My lord, if we are to leave, the time is now." The trooper said unbiased of the situation.

The King looked curiously at Gordon with one eyebrow stacked higher than the other, and then he peaked at Shane, who was exposing a pleading look.

"Sorry Gordon. Royal guard, take me to my ship at once!" The King ordered. Rita Lenz had just rushed down the hall after the King said that flailing her arms like she had missed something important. She embraced Shane at first sight.

Gordon was not satisfied with the Kings answer, but accepted it and said, "If you won't stay then—."

Right then, a vast crushing noise echoed through the halls and the building. The floor shook, and the level seemed to tilt to the side. They royal family and guards threw out their arms like a balancing trick. The unstableness of the building kept them all still and ready to run.

The screeching halted for a moment. They all looked at each other until the King shouted what everyone was thinking.

"Run!" He called out.

The squad of troops led the way sprinting down the hall, with the royal family in a life threatening jog not far behind. The air platform had a small transport ship waiting on it. The guards and family had just skipped down a flight of steps and were in view of the air pad just down the hall. They kept their running at pace knowing they were close.

The building was disturbed again, but this time it jerked to the side and began accelerating its tilt. There was no way the royal family would make it to the ship now as the level was too lopsided and caused everyone to fall and crash into the wall nearby as if it was the floor.

Having smashed into the wall, they let out some soft complains, but their real pain came from the fear that they were about to die. The whole building felt like it was toppling over and their hopes of getting to the evacuation ship were thwarted. Holding on to the wall decorations for dear life, they prayed that they would survive this encounter.

Still hugging the wall ornaments, they sensed and heeded the crushing infrastructure as it seemed to fall upon them. The lights blacked out and shuttered them into nearly complete darkness. Only the colorful glow from the guard armor shed light on them. Once the lights were out, the building erupted in motion again, this time downwards. The falling sensation thumped their hearts and when the short fall had stopped they suffered the pressure of the wall at their backs as it forced their bodies to stop accelerating.

Still they held on for dear life, and again the building wall seemed to escape their clutches as they again felt the falling sensation. This time, when they smacked against the wall again, they knew it was over. The final crushing sound of the building combined with a crashing sound of outside elements was like a supernatural beast being cracked in half howling as its bones shattered and allowing friction to generate the rest of the noise when it united with the tough ground.

Some time went by before they all began standing up. There was smoke and dust particles all throughout the air and it made breathing difficult.

Coughing hard, Rita was the first to speak. "What the hell was that?! Guard, get us out of here at once!"

Gordon was in no mood for Rita's antics, and pushed her out of the way to help up the head guard who was still on the ground struggling to get up. "Are you alright?" He asked.

"Ah! I think my leg is broken." He said still in pain.

Gordon instinctively helped the man to one foot and said to the other guards, "Help me get his leg up. Pick his whole body up."

“What is this? Gordon the philanthropist? Put him down, we must get out of here alive.” Shane said.

Gordon let go of the man knowing the others had him supported. He turned to face his brother, took a step toward him and jacked him with both arms in this chest sending Shane to the ground. It was like a defibrillator was just pounded into his chest.

“How dare y—.” Shane was telling his brother while standing back up tall.

“No! Brother, how dare you. I am sick of you and your damn dame.” He said ferociously pointing his powerful finger at Shane and then at Rita. “I am calling the shots now.”

“You can’t do that, that responsibility is mine.” Shane said snarling, illustrating his angry teeth.

“Oh is it? What do you know about responsibility?” Gordon questioned.

“About as much as you. I am responsible for those who love me.” He said looking at Rita.

“These men, their job is to protect us. Mine is not to worry about their safety. What caretaker are you? Where is your wife? Your responsibility?” Shane said daringly.

Gordon latched onto Shane’s royal coat and hip tossed him to the ground like a rag doll.

“Hey! Is anyone back there?!” A voice called out from down the dark hall.

All looked out to where the voice had come from with a sigh of relief.

Pat and his two Covis dashed through the slum road. Aside from the few people too old and feeble to evade the crossfire and flee into the city, the entire slum town was evacuated. All of the poor inhabitants had been herded into the lower levels of the city packed away with the rest of them like cattle in an overcrowded barn. The cleared streets made a light jog even easier as they approached their objective. The Covis slowed their run as they became cautious of their surroundings. They were now several hundred meters from the city’s western military base, and just outside of that was their place of diversion. But even though there was a stretch of land still to go, Pat, as well as the other Covis, felt they should have seen some resistance.

A few more steps in and the abstract feeling became a concrete sense. The sound levels skyrocketed and dropped dramatically and the wait between was like the ominous wait between thunder and lightning. A bullet of immense abnormity sniped Kyle Stevens’ upper half of his right shoulder.

“Get down!” Pat instinctively yelled.

Banner reacted as well as he punched into the weak slum wall to their left. The Covis all piled into the cover as shots rang out multiple times loud and obnoxiously through the alley.

Kyle rushed the room and sat up against the wall grasping his shoulder checking for damage. Pat and Banner knelt behind the cover.

“Are you alright?” Pat yelled to Stevens as bullets still called them out.

Stevens raised the shot arm and gave a thumbs up signaling his health was in no danger.

“Banner, give them some crossfire. Don’t let ‘em get comfortable.” Pat said.

Banner pulled out his Smoking Acers and began unloading on the unsuspecting Martians.

Pat ran up behind Banner and got low to the ground. He duck walked as he made his way under some cover that was on the road where the battle was.

Two snipers were on far off rooftops, that part he could already tell. There were several more Martians that continually unloaded their guns. Dust and loud crossfire was enough to haze the senses. Pat made sure his Tamiami Rifle was locked in ready to fire. He jumped up from the cover and began shooting down the road. At first he aimed for the snipers. He fired several single rounds that were loud and powerful up at the enemy, but the bullets were used in vain. The snipers grabbed some cover momentarily. Pat then went back to his cover as he expected shots from the Martians on the ground with automatic assault weapons.

Sure enough, he was right. Several Martians appeared from their hiding places to rain down bullets where they believed Pat was. Banner immediately moved and shot out of his corner. His sprayed bullets were weaker, but the sheer amount was enough to kill an enemy soldier. As soon as Banner came out, he hit the first soldier he saw with several bullets. All he needed to do was pull down the triggers on his automatics, and the Smoking Acers fired a zip line of rapid bullets. The first soldier went down. Banner went to change his angle, but noticed another soldier looking his way. He tucked himself back away in his corner while the enemy shot.

Pat took advantage of this enemy’s change of aim and jumped out from the cover again to fire three crisp bullets perfectly aimed as kill shots right to the man’s abdomen. Pat’s bullets were a bit more piercing and deadly than Banner’s, but Pat’s gunshot far less bullets in a short time span.

The two of them played this hide and shoot technique for another minute or so until the snipers began taking over and Martian infantry reinforcements arrived.

Pat dove back in to the building where Stevens was so he could grab some cover.

“Jesus, there’s too many of them.” Pat said.

Pat, still kneeling down, attempted to tune in his intercom with Matthews. To keep the Martians from intercepting the transmission, the wireless Curator communication lines typically were turned off until needed and then had to take time to scramble the signal.

Matthews led his team through the Martian slums slowly. They aimed to keep noise levels down and keep out of sight of Martian soldiers deployed on the ground.

They were getting closer to the base as well and passed through house to house. Guns were held high and tight to the chest of every Covi. They knew if there was to be conflict, it would be close quarters. The four Covis huddled around the exit door of the slum house. Colin hovered over the door handle as he wrenched it open and allowed the door to creek open. There was what looked to be a slum alleyway right outside the door as it was filled with trash and only held space for four feet between each slum house. Colin led the way out of the house first, followed by Bacon and Matthews, and Kayla held the rear.

Static mumbled in John Matthews’s helmet. Pat’s transmitter had just finished scrambling the connection.

“Matthews, we got ambushed by snipers down the road. Can’t say it surprised me, I figured they’d have something planned.” Pat said.

“Anyone hurt?” John asked.

“Nothing at all. These bullets can’t puncture our armor. Watch your six. They’re probably on you too.” Pat said.

Just as Pat finished the sentence, a sudden explosion in front of Colin halted the Covis and had them diving in all directions. The explosive didn’t harm Colin, but he was definitely dazed. Matthews immediately identified the source of the explosion. A Martian soldier had fired a rocket on top of a taller slum building not too far from their position. The soldier and several other Martians stood up from behind a short barrier on the rooftop. They all held powerful rapid firing guns and aimed them at the grounded Covis.

Without hesitation, the enemy soldiers began firing relentlessly at the Covis. Kayla, Matthews, Bacon, and Colin all scurried in different directions to get to cover.

Kayla ran until she found herself in a slum room alone. She was out of the crossfire for the moment. Her back pressed up against the wall. She was near the doorway she entered to get out of the crossfire and she eyed it down while scanning the room. Her heart thumped intensely. The loud shots rang outside and her adrenaline had never been spiked so high. She

nearly died. She kept trying to wrap her mind around the situation. The panic that was setting in was throwing her into a mess.

"This is real life, stupid." She told herself while hitting her helmet. "Wake up! Wake up! You've gotta focus."

As she waited a few seconds, the rushed feeling started fading from the unconscious' hands and reality set back in. As if it took time for her nerves to recalibrate themselves, they were just warning her now of what had happened. Two bullet holes were pumped into her armor at the left side of her abdomen. She took two fingers and tapped them into the piercing. Nothing. No blood or damage, but it was clear the armor took a hit. Shaking, she crouched against the wall and put her gun on the ground.

Colin and Bacon found themselves in an adjacent room of a slum house that Matthews was in.

"John! John! Matthews, answer me!" Pat said.

"I'm here Pat." Matthews said.

"What happened, do you need backup?" Pat asked.

"We've been ambushed." He said. "I can't..." He said shell-shocked. "We'll be alright, but might be a little late to the party."

"Hey! We need you." Pat yelled over the intercom frantically. "If you don't get to the base in time, the entire fleet will be falling on us out of the sky."

Matthews knew his duties were calling, but as he tried to focus his thoughts.

"Just give us a little more time." Matthews said.

"Hurry up Covi." Pat said.

Back in the area where Listowel's squad was temporarily pinned down, Banner was just coming back in to the slum building from unloading his clips outside.

"Charles, we've got trouble. They're bringing more men. I must have shot about a dozen of them, but they keep coming. And now, they've got a tank." Banner said.

"What? A tank?" Pat said.

"See for yourself. Unless we start using Apla, we aren't getting to that base in time." Banner said.

"Looks like it's time to show the Martians who the Covis are again." Pat said.

Pat and Banner fired up their jet packs and blasted through the walls into the open. Pat flew upward to scout the enemy. Banner flew out until he spotted a sniper on top of a building and then he fired his jets even more until he tackled the gunman to the ground atop the building. He pummeled him knocking him out cold and immediately fought the next few soldiers on top of the building before they could even think of resistance.

Pat surveyed the area and targeted all of the enemy soldiers and enemy vehicles with his heads up display technology. The information was then sent to the other two Covis who responded with haste.

Banner leapt up to the ledge of the building he was just fighting on. Recognizing the enemies from Pat's targeting, he fired an Apla blast in the area of a combatant. A Martian Sloth Tank had been rolling into the area and now prepared to fire upon Pat. Just as it was locking on him, Stevens came running and jumping his way out of the rubble of the building with a very powerful energy ball waiting in his hand. He jumped and threw all he had at the tank which melted through the metal and obliterated the hull causing an explosion.

A few soldiers ran on to the rooftop where Banner was. They attacked Banner with odds of five to one, and the Covi confidently pressed on. They aimed their guns and started shooting, but the Covi's closing speed was unmatchable and he rapidly dismantled weapons and disabled soldiers. His strength as a Covi was impressively more than them which allowed him to toss them like rag dolls.

Kyle ran into the heart of the battle and began punching the Martians, who were amateurs in comparison, into and through building walls effortlessly under his superior size and assistance from lighter gravity.

Pat sat in the air still above the buildings making note of where enemies were and occasionally raining down a blast upon them.

While Matthews was still down, and Bacon and Colin were fending for their lives in a firefight, Kayla was lying against the wall feeling for the bullets that thumped her armor. She maneuvered her fingers around the metal, in awe of everything that was going on. She felt the bullets. They were large. They were 10 mm rounds. While trying to regain her thoughts, she decided to get back on her feet.

Kayla stood tall and grabbed the handle of her Tamiami Rifle which rested against the wall. Heart beating and the metal of the weapon squeezing tight against her breast plate, she called upon her inner strength to not only stand and move but give her the courage she believed she had.

Rounds still fired outside, but until she reached the door, she heard none of them. There was still a group of Martian's up on top the building across from Kayla's. They were not firing directly in Kayla's direction, but she knew if she made a break for it, she would be caught in their line of sight. Looking around the slum house, there was only one other way to get out. She found herself positioning her body to look at both points of entrance in case someone was to go looking for her. Her strategy, contrary to her personality, was to wait out the firefight. For once after many years of confidence during training, she was troubled and did not know what to do.

The Martian King extended his hand upward toward a royal guard while he climbed up the final meter along the slanted wall of the building. The guard grabbed his hand and pulled him up and then began helping the others.

"Your majesty, I apologize for our latency of the rescue." Another guard said.

"No need to apologize, we should be thanking you." He replied.

"Soldier, what happened? Why did the building collapse?" Gordon asked as he was pulled up.

"A Curator aircraft, sir. We were doing our best to keep the Curators out of the city, but the ship tried flying past our defense grid. The targeting and missile systems ripped it to shreds. We couldn't control the crash, however, and it ripped into another building before slamming into this one." The guard answered.

"And it took out the whole building?" Gordon asked.

"It was a big ship." He replied gesturing his hands out.

"What of their armies?" The King asked.

"The capital ships still hang in orbit. They know better than to come through the atmosphere, but our entire space navy has been wiped out." He said.

"Wiped out?" Gordon asked.

"They caught us off guard. We had no way to assemble our forces." The guard said.

"Chiyoko City and all of its surroundings have been totally obliterated by nuclear weapons." The guard said.

"Chi... Chiyoko is gone?" The King asked.

"I'm sorry, sir." The guard replied.

"What about the rest of the planet? What about Grand City? Why haven't the Curators nuked everything yet? Or have they tried?" Shane asked as he waltzed over with Rita around his arm.

"That's all they've fired upon." The guard answered.

"They won't nuke. They're coming for us." The King said.

"What of Daneland's fleet?" Gordon asked.

"General Daneland has been promoted to Fleet Admiral in the midst of the attack by default. His fleet was never in the air." The guard said.

"Good to know the royal fleet is still alive." Shane said.

"Send word to Fleet Admiral Daneland to come from the west side of the city when he arrives." Gordon said.

"The west side?" Shane said. "But that is where Chiyoko was nuked. Do you know nothing about the hazards of radiation?" Shane said.

"That's not the point. They can go around it for all I care." Gordon said.

"You are just delaying the city's liberation, our rescue." Shane said.

"The Curators have put us in this position. We are gridlocked into it. It was brilliantly planned. They knew to nuke the west to prolong help's arrival, and bombing the base we have there was a two for one. They also knew that we would not attack from the east which would make Grand City a battleground. There are too many people living here. And unlike those Curator scum, I'm not about to endanger civilian lives." Gordon said.

"Maybe not you, but I will make that order." Shane said.

Gordon shook his head staring into his brother's soul.

"Where is the fleet now?" The King asked.

"The fleet is currently docked in the shipyards of Emerald City." The guard said.

"Across the planet? How are they ever going to get here in time?" Shane asked.

"They won't. We fight on our own until they do." The guard said.

"Fight? Soldier, have you lost your mind? We are the royal family. Take us to Defense City at once!" Shane ordered.

“Defense City?” Rita asked.

“Our last defense against the Curator army. The greatest threat to the Curator empire.” Shane answered.

Rita’s eyes lit up. “Where is this place? We must go there at once.” She said.

“I wouldn’t think about going anywhere just yet.” Captain Max Connors said as he strolled into the building hall.

He wore his military combat suit that he didn’t have on before, but now was the time for war. It was reminiscent of traditional bland Martian armor, with the same color scheme of red and purple. There were a few upgrades, however. Connors was a once great Special Forces soldier for the Martian military. There were Apla capsules just like the Curator Covis had. The armor was not as strong and as safe, and it made it difficult to move at times. It did have a jetpack for getting around, but it lacked the all important jet boots that added acceleration when needed. The power gloves were still equipped, but lacked control like the expensive Curator gear.

“There’s quite a few million people trapped under the city right now. We’re not going anywhere until they are safe above all.”

“Who the hell is this?” Shane asked.

“Somebody remind this fool that I’m the best shot you got at survival.” Connors answered.

“Watch who you’re talking to...” Shane said.

The King stepped in front of Shane blocking him from Connors. He looked at Connors and then at his younger son. “Gordon, I trust in you now.” He said.

The group looked shocked. Rita took Shane away in disgust.

“We need to stay and fight. Even if we can’t do the physical work that needs to be done, we can lead from here.” Gordon said.

“Not me. I belong on the ground.” Connors said.

“Are you sure, Captain?” The King asked. “You have more than proven your worth to be promoted.”

“I am a soldier, I’ll die killing Curators.” Connors affirmed.

The head guard had his hand up to his hear pressing down on his intercom.

"Captain, you had better get going then. It seems the Curator ground forces are trying to take to take out the western base." The guard said.

"Already? How did they get through the defense grid?" Gordon asked.

"Preliminary reports suggest special forces." The guard said.

"Covis." Connors growled.

"Connors, we might have to send in the city's knight." Gordon said.

"I'll see what I can do first." Connors said.

"The Knight?" The King said. "I don't understand. How serious is this situation that would warrant the Knight?"

"If the western base gets captured, we will lose that grid. I don't know about you but I don't like it when Curators rain from the sky." Connors said.

"Yes, but the Knights are mindless. If the city's only Knight got near the civilians on the lower level... Well, I don't know what we would do." The King said.

"And that's why we only keep one here." Connors said. "Your highness, we aren't dealing with your average Curator here."

"Very well, I wash my hands of this." The King said. "Son, the power to lead is now in your hands."

Gordon blushed with pride and was glad to have control of the situation.

"Guard, I need you to notify Fleet Admiral Daneland that the royal fleet must come from the west, and find out an ETA. Also, find my wife and get her out of the city. Tell her I'll be on my way." Gordon said.

"Yes, sir." The guard said.

"Father, I want you to come with me to the city's military headquarters. I need your input." Gordon said.

"I will do what I need to for my people." The King said.

"And Max... Max?" Gordon said.

Not to Gordon's surprise, Max Connors was long gone.

“Hahaha! You must admire his energy at his age. But then again, those born into the war love to fight. All real Martians love the sting of battle.” The King said.

As Pat hovered in the air, he kept his display running and he tracked enemies on a map of the city. All of the sudden he heard a strange static signal blaring into his helmet. His display screen fried and lines grazed across it. He couldn't see anything that was in front of him. He fidgeted with his helmet while he was in the air. He was in a panic as nothing like this had ever happened to him. Worried that he might get bested blind and deaf sitting in the air, he took control of his jets and lowered himself closer to the ground. Suddenly it stopped.

Banner and Kyle were now looking at him wondering what strange activity was going on with a Covi who always looked so calm, cool, and collective. On his display, a large signal beamed on his map and lit up a specific location within the slums. And a quick flash of the mysterious symbol he had seen several times now appeared on the screen and then vanished with the signal. The cemented emblem with the encrusted words.

“What's wrong?” Kyle asked. The area was cleared of soldiers for the time being.

“You didn't hear or see that?” Pat asked.

“Hear what?” Kyle asked.

“I have to go right now.” Pat told them.

“Go where?” Banner asked. “What is going on?” He yelled in a firm tone.

“Clear the area. I need to go.” Pat said as he fired up his jets and flew away from them. He rushed through the air down the slum road towards the signal which was also the way of the base.

He missed the first wave of Martian snipers. The moment he flew past them they stood up in awe to adjust their weapons and begin firing. Quickly aimed preliminary shots that were fired at Pat were easily avoidable and not a threat. But up ahead was a Martian Sloth Tank.

The Sloth is a Martian ground vehicle that has four tracks with two road wheels each to move the tank. It is quick moving for its heavy metallic look. The tank fit usually three people and had only one weapon: a two cannon tubes sit mounted together on the top. The cannon fired a mix of a 100 mm sonic shells and a slight burst of energy. Together, the tank can do considerable damage.

The Sloth's pilots used the targeting computer to lock on to Pat and fire the tank's missiles. Pat had fought these tanks before and didn't see it as much of a threat. He knew that Martian

command trains the pilots of heavy, expensive vehicles to act in absolute accordance with Martian policy. These tanks always acted the same and never changed their game plan.

Once Pat was close enough, the tank opened fire. The missiles were barely two feet out of the firing tube when Pat blasted energy from his power glove at it. The missiles went off right in front of the tank causing a major explosion. The Martian soldiers around the tank went down. The tank itself was still up and running, but the pilots were shaken up from the blast. Pat still kept his flying at pace as he breezed over the tank while throwing one more energy shot at the front end of it causing a track and its wheels to bust open. The tank was dismantled.

Listowel streamed through the air. The speed of his jets were even faster flying over Mars because his jets were less concerned with the gravity. He cut through the air. The Martians he passed shot at him, but the bullets they fired had a small chance of hitting Pat.

Pat was very close to the base at this point and he shut off his boot jets and swung his legs forward so they were underneath him. He picked a building not too far from the base and slowed his forward momentum as he lowered himself on to the building. He tip toed his landing and intentionally stumbled forward to slide to one knee. On top of this street corner three story slum building, he scanned all of his surroundings. There were some other two story buildings across the street from where he was. And across the other street was the base. The building he was eyeing down had to be it. He had just tracked the signal's location as best he could. He knew it was in this general direction, but couldn't know for sure.

The base was about a hundred meters across from Pat's point of view. It had a very high wall around it with guard towers all around it. There was one entrance gate to the base and it was solid steel. No doubt this base was used to fight off and put down slum revolts. There were no guards in the towers and the base was mostly sheltered so Pat couldn't see any enemy troops inside. There were no giant cords or power lines leading out from the base to the turrets. The power had to come from somewhere, so Pat theorized that they were underground.

The stone cold silence bothered Pat's senses and he could smell a trap. He didn't know exactly what to expect. This was where the signal originated from, yet there was no substantial military presence that he could see. He scouted out his surroundings a little bit longer and still couldn't find any enemies. Pat then stood up and began injecting more Apla into his blood stream. He extracted the energy from his body and pumped it into his right glove. The energy swelled as it began pouring out into a dense clump in his palm. He held his open palm up as the energy still gathered. He was extracting a great deal of energy and he could feel it eroding from his body. A few seconds went by before he felt he had enough. The dense particle looked like he was holding a ball of light, a miniature dense star. With a small jump and a skip in his step forward, he hurled the energy at the gate like throwing a ball overhand. The movement of the energy

was almost instantaneously fast from the time he let go of it and the time is smashed the steel gate.

The energy crushed the gate making the metal dissipate and fold upon itself. A loud roar shocked the area and Pat fell to the ground on the rooftop. Just to his expectation, Martian soldiers from all around began popping out of their hidden sniper nests and firing all they had at Pat. Spraying and praying, the Martians unloaded rounds everywhere in the hopes that one would snag the legendary Covi. The Martians fired more bullets increasing the echoes to cover up their own sense of insecurity that, although silent, seemed to be the loudest mania in the vicinity.

Pat lay still on the roof. Getting shot was not something he intended on happening. He reached down to his waist near where his Apla and ammunition was stashed. From there he unclipped a small black device and brought it up to his face. He then clicked down on the device and threw it over the roof down to the middle of the road. The device acted as a super sonar radar. It sent out multiple types of signals all around which bounced back at it. The software in the device then mapped out the entire area in a full three dimensional, colored, detailed world that was put on Pat's helmet display screen. The software then scanned for heat signatures and was able to identify Martian soldiers inside the buildings and target their weapons.

As Pat scanned his virtual world, he tried to remember the positions of the shooting enemies. After counting his opponents in the opposite building, he shut off the display in his helmet. Having injected another small dose of Apla, he quickly blasted off from the roof and then plunged downward at an angle to the nesting Martians in the slum homes. His acceleration was so quick, he breezed by any bullets that had him marked. Just before he hit the building, he extended his arms and shot off a small energy blast that weakened the wall before his body armor made it cave in. Pat skillfully tumbled out of the wall debris, inside the building, to his feet. He was face to face with a Martian soldier who was more than shocked to see Pat.

The soldier lifted up his rifle to shoot Pat, and Pat hilariously swatted it away with his left arm while twisting his hips. He then used his hips spinning momentum on the way back to power his right arm, which was extended, to back fist the enemy in the head like cracking a whip. The furious blow to the end sent the Martian to the ground unconscious. Another Martian quickly came to the aid of his fallen comrade as a soldier clearly half a foot shorter came loping into the room with a handgun firmly grasped.

He raced Listowel with a killing determination in his eyes unlike his predecessor. When the Martian was close enough, Listowel pulled his body slightly to the right, and shot his right hand open and outside the Martian's left arm where he held the gun. Pat's hand was placed perfectly at the center of the Martians forearm. Immediately after, Pat cupped his left hand and shoved

his palm side from right to left across the gun. The hand trick loosened the Martians grip on the gun before he could pull the trigger and the gun was pointed outward. With the gun awkwardly pointing away, Pat took a hard step with his right foot close to the soldier and swung his right elbow at the enemy. The Martian dropped his gun and fumbled backward from the hit. The soldier regained his footing and charged Pat. Pat stood in his position with open hips and a lowered center of gravity, his spine was straight and tough but also relaxed. The Martian closed his fists and tightened his elbows.

He closed in and through a right haymaker. Pat allowed the punch to hit his right peck, and instead of tightening his muscles, went loose folding his chest backwards, turning, absorbing the punch. This created overextension in the Martians attack and Pat used his off balance throw to quickly snag his wrist and compress it against his chest. The Martian was now off balance and lost control of his arm. Pat held the soldiers arm tight and pulled back and to the right. He then lifted up his leg and began kicking the Martian in the stomach and in the knees. The Martian tried to back up, but his arm was locked in tight, causing him to be even more off balance. After a few good weakening kicks, Pat then flipped his body hard to the left forcing the Martian fly to the ground. While the Martian lay on the ground and with Pat still holding his arm, Listowel kicked the Martians arm at the elbow causing it to buckle and break.

Martians from all over the building and the one next to it were struggling to get into the room Pat was in. Another Martian charged the room and Pat instantly reached for his gun, pulled it out, and shot him. The soldier went down. Another soldier rushed to the opposite doorway and Pat jumped to the wall and immediately swung around and pulled the trigger as the Martian was just getting his first shot off which missed Pat. His bullet snagged the Martian and sent the soldier flying to the ground.

As Pat leaned up against the building wall, he scanned the room and entrances for other enemies. As he was looking, something snagged his eye. The image he thought he saw sent shockwaves through him which impulsively made him swivel his head around to find the image. It was like seeing an old childhood landmark and having blood rush through the veins simply out of familiarity as the senses became clouded because they were sensing too much. His eyes twitched all over the room to find what he thought he found. And then, there it was. His eyes widened. He looked closely at the object. It was the circular piece of cement with a familiar design on it. Pat leaned off the wall and took a step toward it.

Another soldier got to the doorway, and this time it was before Pat had a chance to recognize a nearby enemy. The soldier fired his sniper several times, two of the shots hit Pat in the thigh armor. The bullets hit Pat in such a way that he stumbled off balance.

Without consciously noticing it, Apla was streamlined into him, and he fired all he has into both of his hands and blasted the Martian into the next room. Again, yet another Martian charged the room with a rifle in hand. Pat swished around on his one good leg and fired another blast sending the Martian flying. Two more Martians came running up the building stairs and Pat dropped to the floor. Even though the two Martians were behind a wall, he saw them run up the stairs from the angle he looked at through the door. He immediately blasted at the wall, doing anything to keep the enemy away. The wall was crushed and the blast followed sending those Martians flying.

He could sense more Martian soldiers coming for him. He managed to fight his way to his feet, and fired up his jetpack. He could tell his Apla usage was off the charts as his display lit up with a "three containers left" message on screen. Using his jetpack, he sent himself flying out the window and on to the sand street below. He wound up his arms and fired several more energy blasts into the building at random. With his blood already being ripped away from the Apla and the obvious radioactive effects he was going through with the Apla usage, he plunged into a nauseating and weary state.

Still, Pat kept his hands up and fired into the building with his Apla blasts. He punctured walls very easily, exploding them, and causing infrastructure to crack and fall. After a few more seconds of complete pulverization of the building, he stopped firing and collapsed to a knee with eyes still locked on the building.

After a couple of seconds of panting hard, he noticed movement in some of the rubble. He picked his arm up and fired again into the rubble. Having burnt it to a crisp, he folded his arm close to his chest out of stress and continued to breathe hard. He saw some more movement coming out of the rubble. Several Martian soldiers appeared and approached him with their guns held high.

All the sudden, shots rang out taking Martians down one by one. They shot back, but did not know exactly where to shoot. Pat swung around looking for his companion, but saw nothing. Two more shots took down the enemy troops. Pat looked out at the horizon searching for the person responsible for saving him. In the distance he saw Kyle and Banner running down the road, but their guns were either hooked on their back or hoisted in a way that was not intended to get a shot off.

They didn't look surprised to see the Martians go down though, so Pat kept looking. Finally he saw movement on a nearby rooftop. He squinted and his display adjusted to zoom in on the unidentified person. The person jumped up from the roof and began heading toward the street. Covi armor, Curator weapon, it was Ace. With that, Pat lowered himself to the ground and took

in a large breath. He waited extremely tired for the others to gather with him. In the meantime Pat called Matthews.

"Matthews, you there?" Pat said over the intercom.

"I'm here Pat." He said in pain.

"John, is there any way for you guys to get here or are you still pinned down?" Pat said.

"We're gonna be stuck here a little longer. They're pouring in from all over, and I haven't seen Kayla in a couple minutes." Matthews said.

"Alright, look, we have to get inside that base and shut down the grid for the fleet. Just hold out for now and get here ASAP." Pat said.

"Just hurry up and shut the damn thing off." Matthews said. He turned off the intercom before Pat could respond.

Kyle and Banner arrived in front of Pat with Ace climbing down from a building.

"Alright, looks like the area's clear." Pat said. "The base door is open and we only got a few minutes left to shut down that grid."

"Wait." Kyle said. "Patchy, are you okay?"

"Just a couple shots to the leg, but the armor knocked them off course. The bullets aren't even there anymore, nothing but scratches and..." Pat said.

Pat stopped dead in his words. Under his helmet his eyes lit up. His eyes were glued to a broken piece of rock on the ground behind Kyle. He dashed past the group and dove on the Martian turf. In the wreckage, lied a perfect circular piece of gray cement broken in two. It was thin, and easily the reason why it broke. In the center was a design. Three looped pointed ovals in a triangle formation, a large circle, and three other circles. On the rounded edge of the cement an inscription read "PATRONUS DE ANNALIUM SCRIPTOR."

"I meant all the Apla you've been using." Kyle said.

Pat's eyes were still glued to the image. He used his helmet to take several snapshots of the broken piece.

"Pat?" Kyle said.

"It's... It's nothing, c'mon. We have to go now." Pat said.

The Covis then dashed off toward the base.

The firefight standoff between Matthews's group and the Martians still was on, but the shots were less often. Both sides were running out of ammo, and both sides were hoping for backup, or for the other to cave in. However, it appeared the Covis' luck ran out first as more Martian soldiers joined the rooftops with new ammo supplies. Colin and Bacon fought patiently with ducking and covering and saving their ammo supply.

"Bacon, we're running out of time to get that grid off." Colin said.

"I know, but what are we supposed to do?" Bacon said.

"Something crazy." Colin said.

"You lead, I'll follow." Bacon said.

The two Covis ditched their cover and moved in closer to the enemy. They moved along walls of the houses to find a good angle on the Martians and ambush them. While they walked around one side, the Martians paid attention to the other.

Kayla remained in the room with her eyes set on the doors. She focused in on the shadows. Then she saw it. Two sly Martian assassins, dressed just like soldiers, crept near the doorway which entered into the room Matthews was downed in.

Kayla got up from the wall she was leaning against. She knew they were up to something. She acted just as sly as the assassins creeping behind them. She got near a second doorway and peaked her head around. She saw the two assassins waiting and deciding. Finally, one of them moved into the room slowly while the other waited outside the door. Acting quickly, Kayla moved out of the house and into the alleyway. She had a sly sense of her own.

The assassin who went inside stepped through another doorway before he saw Matthews. When the Martian laid his eyes on Matthews he smiled, his teeth visible. Matthews was looking in the complete opposite direction with no clue he was behind.

"It's not every day you get to kill a legendary Covi." The Martian said under his breath.

He pulled out a large powered knife from his side and slipped closer to Matthews who was firing out of the room.

The assassin waiting outside had no idea she was coming. As she neared she observed him trying to find a weakness, a way to kill him without making much noise. As she neared she noticed a black holster sticking out from his chest and slightly above the shoulder. Usually that meant only one thing; that there was a knife in its front holster. She closed in on the Martian. Kayla was right behind the man when she through her left hand around his mouth and her right

arm under his right shoulder. She reached with the right and grabbed the handle of the stashed knife and pulled it out. The blade was very large, very thick, and very sharp.

All in one quick motion, Kayla plunged the blade hard into the Martian's chest. It cut through his armor and tore through his organs. The man trembled for a couple seconds before the pain was too much. Kayla made sure to dig the knife in rough and shake it. When Kayla felt he was dead enough, she ripped the knife out of him and through him on the ground. She flipped the knife in her hand so the blade now stuck out under her and lined up with her forearm.

The Martian was lining up his pliers when Kayla threw a knife at the wall. She didn't intend to hit him, but only to make him aware of her presence. The assassin whipped his body around to see Kayla.

Matthews turned to see all of the excitement. He raised his gun at the assassin, but Kayla put her hand up signaling him to stand down. Matthews respected her wishes and watched the interesting scenario unfold.

"Well, look what we have here." He said. "Another Covi." He observed her armor which was slightly different than Matthews' to pander to her female physique. "But a female, if I am not mistaken. Didn't know the Curators had girl Covis. Too weak I suppose. Well, this won't be much of a challenge."

He stepped toward Kayla. She didn't say a word. She had something more in her this time. She had something more than adrenaline. She had mean moxie. She had want-to. He pulled out a knife. She put up her fists. He took a great lunging stab at her, and instead of redirecting it, she caught his hand mid air. He was startled. Her grip was so tight, so strong. Her left hand held his wrist. She raised her knee and extended her leg hard, blasting him into the wall with a ferocious kick knocking the knife out of his hand.

He coughed hard and stumbled to his feet to charge her again. He picked up his knife, and with a bounce in his step came at her again. He prepared to lunge his knife as he got close, but before he could, Kayla through a vicious blow to the head knocking him back. But she didn't stop there. She punched again and again hitting him in the head and stomach. The brutal blows rattled the Martian. And she still didn't stop. After a few more crushing hits, the Martian dropped the knife and was simply trying to stand. She kept swinging, each hit under control and in sync even more than the last. Finally, Kayla wrapped her arms around his head and shoulder and swung her hips to throw his body off from her. She launched him at the drywall and his head cut right through it with such force that it literally jammed in the wall. His head was on one side of the wall, while his body was on the other.

Outside the slum building, the Martians on the several rooftops were looking for the Covis. Afraid to go down and leaving that job to the assassins, they all huddled around in their nests afraid to come down like birds in their tree nest during a storm. Without warning, a sudden, almost silent, bursting flash lit up all Martian occupied buildings. And like eroding sand castles, the buildings all lost their support from beneath and began crumbling to pieces with the Martians still aboard. They didn't know what was happening. All the buildings crumbled simultaneously.

Out from the dust came Colin and Bacon with energy ready to fire, and fire they did.

"Whatever that was, can't be good." Matthews said after hearing the detonation.

"Should I go check?" Kayla said.

"No, let me acquire a signal with Colin and Bacon." Matthews said.

He let the technology do its work after he started the process with his display screen on his wrist. The signal triangulated itself and then began scrambling.

"Colin, what happened?" Matthews said.

"We took out the Martian buildings. Put detonation devices in every building." Colin said.

"Any survivors?" Matthews said.

"Bacon's going around cleaning up now." Colin said.

As Colin said that, Bacon unloaded two rounds into the head of a Martian who was still alive and extending an arm up to Bacon. Blood raining down it, he supplicated, but was rejected.

"Once you're finished, get to the rendezvous point. We're late enough as it is." Matthews said.

Colin hung up without an answer. He went with Bacon to kill any survivors. Sometimes the Covis were caring and took prisoners, other times they were angry that they had to be there in the first place.

"Nice work there." Matthews said.

"Thanks." She responded.

"If you didn't kill that guy, I would have been a dead man." Matthews said back.

"Actually, 'guys' as in plural." She said pointing behind her. "It's worth a lot considering you're my first friend on this team."

Matthews held himself by the wall.

“Woah, not friend.” He said as he snagged his gun away from Kayla. “Not yet.”

“Since you’re the first to talk to me, would you mind telling me what will get me accepted as a part of the team?” Kayla said.

“Just be a man.” He said as he walked to the doorway.

She sighed at the remark and went to get her gun.

Chapter 6

(2309 November 2nd 1130 hours SM:GCT)

Pat and the four other Covis had entered the base and shot their way through any defenders to reach the power control mainframe. There were only a few attackers inside the base that waited out the Covis to try and trap them. They were quickly defeated by the Curator trained elite soldiers. The power control room was cold, dark, and industrious. The engines let off a red hue from the Apla usage.

“We’re here, Pat. What’s the plan?” Kyle said.

“Well, that’s the thing. I was expecting the others to be able to do this. But of course I forgot to take in to account that my highly skilled and fully prepped Covi team was powerful enough to stop a typical Martian squad.” Pat said.

“They’re must have been a lot of Martians.” Kyle said.

“Still isn’t an excuse.” Pat said.

“I bet it was that girl.” Banner said.

“Why is everyone picking on her so much?” Kyle said. “Did I miss something?”

“Nope, she’s just a chick.” Pat said. “A political game by some guys who think they’re our boss.”

“And she’s weak.” Banner said.

“Is she weak because she’s a girl or weak because she’s physically incapable of doing heavy lifting?” Kyle asked.

“Ha, both.” Banner said with a slight laugh.

Pat observed the large power room. It was easily the largest room in the base.

"No computer mainframe, which means the grid is operated synergistically. It looks like there are 18 generators total in these three rows. Let's hope there aren't any more. We're practically out of time as it is." Pat said. "Kyle, I'll leave you to demolitions. Plant and run. Get on it now."

"I'm on it." Kyle said.

"Banner, run around slicing up the power cables and get out before the blast. I'll head outside." Pat said.

"Oh no, I'm not going anywhere without you Pat. You aren't leaving me alone in here." Banner said.

"Fine. We'll both slice and dice and then come with me." Pat said.

"Ace, check the base for any more generators just in case we missed any. And then get the hell out of here before the charges go." Pat said.

Ace nodded.

Kyle set the charges, and Pat and Banner raced through the halls blowing up anything important on their way to the outside of the base. Each grabbed their weapons from their back holsters and crouched by the doorway.

"You see anything on the scanners?" Pat said.

"No, throw a sonar." Banner said.

"Can't, used up my only one." Pat said.

"Well that's just dandy." Banner said.

He immediately dropped his guns near his waist and exited the doorway. Pat's hand motions were that of disbelief of his stupidity. He suspected snipers. Banner looked far and wide. He was still inside the walls of the base, but out in the exterior where he was susceptible to a good sniper. After seeing nothing, he turned around and said to Pat, "There's nobody out here. Now let's get going so we can get some cover."

"Not so fast." Connors said approaching Banner.

Pat jumped out of his cover with his gun up ready to fire. His stance had a slight bend at the knees as he huddled over to Banner.

"Curators. I knew it all along. Better yet, Covis. The supreme fighting force of your evil army." Connors said.

"You... You're a Martian Illuminator." Pat said.

"One of the last of my kind." Connors said.

"Good, I'll be glad to officially put your class in the dirt." Banner said.

"Shall we dance?" Connors said.

"Your move." Pat said.

Connors lunged forward with his right arm shooting out. He had a small pocket blast of energy waiting to throw. His arm, once fully extended, fired the blast. It shot directly between the two Covis and flew by hitting the base behind them. The blast was small, but still strong enough to crumble the cemented wall. Pat and Banner split up diving in opposite directions. They each were able to summersault out of the dive and run away. Each ran for cover around small buildings in the base courtyard.

"Don't use any more Apla." Pat said to Banner. "You've already been using a lot."

Connors started up his jetpack and flew up in the air. He began raining down energy blasts. He knew he couldn't do it forever. Some shots landed on the building Pat was hiding behind. The building began crumbling and the rock threw Pat to the ground. Banner came out from his corner to shoot off his Smoking Acers. Connors avoided the shots and a few skimmed off his Aurora shield. The bullets activated the light shield and heavenly magnetic colors temporarily skewed from Connors. He quickly took another energy charge and threw it at Banner. The blast was instantaneously fast and hammered the ground as Banner quickly grabbed cover. The pelted ground shot smoke and dirt chunks in the air.

Ace had just begun running outside after he heard the commotion. He saw the enemy combatant flying high in the air and hoped he had not seen him. He noticed Banner pinned down, and Pat slowly climbing out of the rubble. Ace quickly whipped out his York Sniper. The sleek weapon aimed at the Martian. Connors was a mess. He flew zig zags all throughout the three dimensional plane. Ace had a hard time finding a good shot. Normally Ace would be able to just line up and get the shot off, but this time he carefully lined up his scope. He knew that if he fired and missed, he would have hell raining down on him.

Meanwhile, Banner recovered from the blast and began running out into the open to draw Connors's fire. Connors threw multiple energy blasts that lit up the ground until one of the shots got lucky and hammered the ground sending Banner flying back.

"Screw it!" Banner said loud and quickly.

Connors used the small amount of time Banner was on the ground to charge up his gloves and prepare to fire. With one large sum of energy charged up and ready to fire, Connors plopped both of his arms together with them fully extended and wrist to wrist and used more energy to fire, the already massive amount of energy he had collected, at Banner. A very wide and powerful blue hazed blast erupted from the hands of Max Connors. The blast flowed toward Banner. Banner noticed the shockwave of energy plowing toward him and immediately fired his own blast at the Martian.

The blast did not stop flowing from Connors's hands. But Banner pressed on as well. Apla drained from the both of them. The blasts met in the middle and created a bubble of enormous energy before collapsing in on itself and exploding in the air. It caused a shockwave that sent both Banner and Connors backward.

Ace locked in on his target. He had a perfect shot at the head, a kill shot. It was terrible timing from when Ace had decided to pull the trigger to when Connors flew higher. Ace fired the shot. The large bullet snagged Connors's back and punctured the engine portion of his jetpack. The lighter illuminator armor of the Martian was weak enough to blow from the bullet.

Connors felt the sudden jolt of the Martian gravity and plummeted to the ground. He flipped himself in the air and as he landed, he extended one leg out and kept one leg close to his body. The leg farther away added balance and the leg closer acted as a spring that braced his impact. As he hit, he felt his joints ache, but it was mostly due to his age, not the fall.

Before Ace could readjust and get the second, kill shot off, Connors identified the hiding Covi and through an Apla blast that was right on the money. The ball of energy was smaller, but quicker and right after he let it off, it creamed Ace's crop. The pulverized Ace was flown backward into the wall. The blast fried his suit. The front of his armor was now sketched and burnt. Ace felt the smoldering effects of the hot radiated armor. The immediate effect of the pain was shock that tumbled his consciousness. Awake, he clawed his way away from the wall, but his muscles were weakened. He was now regretting not sacrificing a small amount of Apla to project his Aurora Shield for extra protection. As an excellent sniper and typically not the one for up front combat, the Covi tried using Apla as little as possible.

Banner had just seen Connors go down. With the Smoking Acers locked and loaded in his hands he opened fire on the unsuspecting Martian. Connors's armor caught some of the bullets, some of the bullets missed, but several were powerful enough to break his armor and hit him at multiple points in the body. Connors stuck out a hand and unleashes a barrage of energy in Banner's direction. Banner quickly rushed for cover. He checked his heads up display screen in front of him and found that the sensors inside the suit were picking up possible radiation signatures.

“Well, I won’t be using any more Apla.” He said to himself.

While Connors’s attention was on Banner, Stevens and Akio had just rushed out of a side exit of the base. Hearing the battle noises, they spared no time to rush over and help.

As Stevens got around the corner he saw the fight going on with Banner and Connors. Then he saw Ace on the ground. Concerned for everyone’s safety he did what he could without using much Apla.

Kyle then jogged over to the electrical pipes on the exterior of the base. With a powerful ripping force, he tore the metal tube from the wall and gripped it easily in his hands. The metal was thick, and weighed quite a few pounds, but the combination of Kyle’s massively muscular physique and the lesser gravity of Mars allowed him to hold it with ease. He chucked the metal tube hard.

The large pipe breezed through the air and struck Connors right in the chest. His armor took most of the pounding, but the hit sent him flying on to his back.

Pat finally made his way completely out of the rubble. He was extremely tired. The amount of Apla he used drained his blood which made him weak, and the building that toppled over him took even more adrenaline out of him. He fell to the ground and looked up. Seeing Stevens he wondered if the charges had been planted.

Kyle looked back at Pat after he threw the tube. Kyle nodded taking a step forward. It was an inquisitive body movement. Pat, on one knee, signaled his right hand with his middle and index fingers pointed toward Kyle, he then raised his right hand and clenched it like a fist and pulled downward like an engineer on a train whistle. The Covi code was clear and Kyle nodded.

Ace did what he could to crawl out of the area and get safety behind a building. Kyle was right behind him. As Kyle ran to the cover, he popped open a datapad on his wrist and began moving chemicals virtually on his screen. He activated the detonation sequence once the bombs were complete processing the order. At one simultaneous moment, all the planted bombs on the Apla energy tanks inside the base exploded. The massive explosion super heated and melted all of the equipment inside the energy room and destroyed most of the infrastructure throughout the base as fire ravaged through the hallways.

The blast blew the covering off the base sending charred chunks of the roof flying into the air. A hot fiery explosion erupted from the base and was high enough to be seen by people inside the city. Loud enough too.

“NO!” Connors yelled. He had not realized the Covis had already infiltrated the base and planted bombs. To his surprise, the massive explosion signaled his failure. He was lying partially

on the ground as he cried out. He could feel the extreme heat coming through his armor. It was nothing painful, but to a person standing where Connors was sitting, without armor on, would have suffered some burns.

Kayla looked up into the sky from a distance.

“Woah.” She said.

Matthews, Bacon, and Colin looked in the direction Kayla pointed her finger. They heard a blast, but the echo distorted their ability to locate it. Within a few short seconds the smoke rose high enough for the other Covis to notice.

“What do you think happened?” Colin said.

“I think it came from the base.” Matthews said.

“So... Mission accomplished?” Bacon said.

“Maybe. But I think we’re missing something important. C’mon.” Matthews said as he sprinted along with the Covis.

Pat stabilized himself and patched in a signal to The Aries.

“This is Covi Six. Their defenses are offline. You are all clear to enter Grand City airspace. I repeat: you are all clear.” Pat said.

“Copy that Covi Six. You just made the deadline.” Commander Clark said aboard the ship.

Gordon, some advisors, and the King watched the ensuing battle from the available cameras they had inside a war room in a military base inside the city. The base was well fortified, and has massive buildings as the best protection of them all.

“Wow.” An advisor said reacting to the destruction of the base.

“Damn it!” Gordon yelled.

“Where was the Captain’s backup?” The King asked.

“Still en route sir.” Another advisor said.

“Well why didn’t they get there when Connors got there?” The King said.

“It wouldn’t have mattered. The charges were already set.” Gordon said.

“Get those men over there as quick as possible. Maybe a repair team to put up temporary power tanks.” The King said.

“No. Call them back. No ordinary soldiers will be able to withstand these Curators. Send in the Knight.” Gordon said.

“Again with the Knight. I still think it’s an ill planned idea.” The King said. There must be another way to stop the Curators from entering the city’s airspace.

“We theorized firing nukes into the atmosphere with a few jets we have up and running currently above the city. But the fallout would be catastrophic. Not to mention it could kill us.” An advisor said.

“We have an underground tunnel beneath this base!” The King said.

“As true as that is your highness, if we did nuke them, and they’re ships lost flight control, the tunnels are not nearly deep enough to be safe from those falling monsters.” The same advisor said.

“Plus they would detonate their ship’s Apla power reactor which would incinerate everything in the city. And after all that, that’s only one ship.” A different advisor said.

“We can have a backup crew waiting to repair the power. I’m sure the lines leading out from underground are still intact. If we give ourselves the chance to get time, we can stop the Curators from getting through the atmosphere. But there is nothing that is going to move those Covis. They are the concept of an immovable object. Nothing except...” Gordon said.

“Nothing except an unstoppable force.” The King said.

“I guess we’ll find out the answer to the age old question today then.” An advisor said.

“It’s the only way. Send in the city’s Knight.” Gordon said.

Kayla and the three other Covis crept up on the exterior of the base. They grabbed some cover inside one of the buildings outside the base. From here, they could see Connors lying on the ground, and had a great view of the smoke from the explosion.

“Should we move in?” Bacon asked.

“Yeah, all I see is that downed Martian.” Colin said.

“I think so.” Kayla said.

“No... Wait.” Matthews said.

"What's wrong Johnny boy?" Bacon said.

"We should stay back, wait for more Martians and flank them." Matthews said.

"Really?" Colin said.

"We can't just leave them out to dry, we already did that." Bacon said.

"Alright. I'll stay here. I'll camp out in the building. If you three want to go in, fine. But I feel it would be better if I waited." Matthews said.

"Colin, Bacon, you two on me." Kayla said.

"Yeah right sister. We both outrank you. You're new. You follow us." Bacon said.

"Let Kayla lead." Matthews said.

"What?" They said simultaneously.

"Just do it. To be less complicating." Matthews said.

"Let's get moving then." Kayla said smiling at them.

Pat and Banner closed in on Connors with Kyle not too far behind. Connors was still on the ground.

"Freeze, put your hands above your head and face them toward the ground." Pat said with his arms raised.

Connors jumped to his feet. His hands still faced backwards.

"Soldier, make another move and you will be fired upon." Banner said.

Connors kept his hands back and kept them still. He signaled his suit using his own brain waves to begin injecting more Apla.

All the sudden, both the Covis and Connors halted their actions to take a quick peak up in the sky as they thought they heard a jet flying away overhead. Within seconds a large black chunk on metal. Fell from the sky and hit the ground behind the Covis with extreme speed.

Connors stopped injecting Apla and left his hands at his side as they went limp.

"No." He said under his breath.

The Covis turned to their new threat. They didn't quite know yet what it was and all pointed their guns at it. Two smaller black shields blew off the main chunk as if they were supposed to.

The pieces that left were like locks that kept this thing in place. Then, the metal chunk extended upward until it no longer looked like just a metal chunk.

A 17 foot tall black armored figure, with a total weight description of six and a half tons, stood before the Covis. The creature's helmet was black like its armor with two horns extending from the top. The armor resembled that of a super massive human with shoulder padding that had spikes jutting out from it. Ice cold chains wrapped around the beast which made it look like a prisoner. If the 12th century knight armor was expanded, it would be an excellent blue print of this beast's protective covering. The Martian Knight held a giant weapon that was almost the same height as the beast itself. The weapon was a long metal staff with a hammer axe at the end. The axe was ruthlessly sharp. On the other side of the axe was a hammer. The hammer side was thick.

Also latched to the knight was a large custom fitted shotgun on its back and two long swords that crossed on his back.

The beast wielded his giant axe hammer. The Covis held their guns tight to their chest. They knew what they were up against. Connors crouched and backed away slowly still with his eye on the beast. Kayla, Bacon, and Colin appeared at the entrance. Connors turned and to his surprise saw the three Covis. He immediately moved to a fighting stance and faced them. They held their guns pointed at him.

The Knight stepped forth and, with his weapon held with both hands, he took a lunging step and roared. The bellow of the Knight was like a shockwave to the Covis. It was an extremely loud and powerful sound wave that was characterized by the Knight's especially deep voice and spittle that spewed from the mouth of his helmet.

Pat was especially frantic. He kept his gun close, and his body searched for more energy. Shockingly, his Apla batteries were out. He was exhausted, to say the least. But this new threat, this huge threat, caused him to reach deep down for adrenaline that powers every soldier, but without any additional Apla, he cringed at his options.

Banner held his weapons high and tight and didn't bat an eyelash at the beast. As the Knight growled, Banner's confidence grew with it.

Kyle Stevens envied the creature's size. He always thought of himself as a big man, but this thing dwarfed him.

It was not like the Covis had never seen a Knight before, but each one had their own way of dealing with it, and dealing with it at the situation.

Kayla kept her gun pointed at Connors, as did Bacon and Colin. But, she continually glanced at Knight. She had never seen one, and no matter how much briefing she had received, or research she had done, Kayla did not know Knights existed.

“Are we gonna make the first move.” Banner said after the Knight stopped its roar.

“Covis.... Fire!” Pat said.

On that moment, Pat, Banner, and Kyle began shooting at the Knight. Kayla, knowing if she missed her shot it would hit one of her fellow Covis behind Connors, so she charged the Martian illuminator. Connors instinctively put his hand up to blast away Kayla. She swooped in and sunk low to the ground. She then forced her right leg to shoot up crossing her body and kick Connors’s hand before he could fire. With his hand having been kicked away, the veteran Martian throttled backward and flipped to a handstand. He then pushed off with his hands away to his feet. He anticipated Kayla’s next move which was a powerful kick with the left. Kayla reversed her footing after kicking Connors and spun to kick with her left. She kicked nothing but air.

The Knight charged the Covis with a bounce in its step. It treated its axe like a club and began swinging it wildly at the Covis. Pat broke off left with Kyle Stevens and Banner broke right. The Knight just wanted a kill; it was not looking for anything specific. It held its axe high and swung it at the first thing that caught its eye.

Connors was about to fire at Kayla, when he sensed the Knight’s presence upon him. He dove to his right as the axe slammed into the ground, cutting it and punching up chunks of soil. Kayla was eye to eye with the beast and its axe. She sprinted to the beast’s left and it looked for its next victim. Colin and Bacon had already run in different directions. The beast swung its axe wildly behind it as it made a 180 degree spin. The Covis were all spread out in a circular formation giving the beast plenty of room. Each one of them held their guns high and prepared to fire. Connors moved behind one of the base exterior buildings to plan out his attack.

The Covis fired at will at the Knight. It charged them randomly and they swarmed it strategically like bees around a bear. The Knight swung its axe at the Covis who played a game of chicken with it. One Covi would run in and dodge an attack while another snuck up from behind.

“Shoot its midsection!” Pat said.

The Covis continued to taunt the Knight to get it to expose its body. Kayla ran in at the Knight and waited for the axe to be swung. As the pointed metal came swirling at her, she crouched low to the ground and avoided the slicing as the metal tip swung by. She then bounded upward and stretched her arms out to grab hold of the plating on the Knight. She forcibly climbed her

way up its armor and got near its head. Quickly, she pulled out her sidearm and began firing bullets at minimal range. The Knight certainly did not like this as it began squirming causing Kayla to rock around its head. After a few seconds of yelling and blindly whipping around its axe, the Knight dropped its heavy metal weapon on the ground in an attempt to pull Kayla off.

The axe fell to the ground and Kyle rushed over to grab it.

"Kyle can you move it?" Pat said.

"I'm trying!" Kyle said.

Kyle wrapped his arms around the crafted metal weapon and began slowly pulling it away. Even with the lighter Martian gravity, he had a difficult time pulling away the metal.

Finally, the Knight grabbed hold of Kayla. It gripped Kayla like a ragdoll and hurled her away as fast as it could with both arms. The Knight looked like an ape thrusting its arms over its head whipping an acorn at a tree. Kayla whizzed through the air much faster than she would like to have been handled. She hit a thin wall on a shelter on the exterior of the base, and her momentum caused her to break right through the paneling and crash into the building.

The Knight was disoriented for a quick second before it locked its eyes on Kyle Stevens dragging away its weapon. The beast charged Kyle Stevens like a gorilla with arms nearly touching the ground as it bounded after the Covi. With a lowering of its shoulder and a whipping of its arm, the Knight sent a blow to Kyle Stevens that had him flying a few meters along the ground. The Knight grabbed its giant axe swiftly with the intention of chopping Stevens to pieces, but Listowel and Banner had already found themselves positioned behind the brute and began unloading their weapons. Any Covi who could began firing small bursts of energy at the Knight. The Knight's quick movements made it very difficult to get a well charged Apla blast fired off though and most of the Covis were trying to conserve their energy.

"Pat, you are the one that has to end this!" Colin said. "I can't use much more Apla."

"I'm all out." Pat replied. "Throw me some more."

Colin and Bacon both heard that message and when the Knight wasn't looking, they unlocked their Apla belt and discharged their last canisters and tossed them to Pat. Pat extended his arms as they flowed through the air toward him. But just as they were passing the Knight, it turned around and smashed them to pieces sending the Martian mineral back into the Martian soil. With a very weak decision making process, the Knight attacked next what was most bothersome at the time. It swung itself around with axe held high and tight toward Colin and Bacon.

"Keep it busy." Pat said to Banner.

Pat dashed back from the group and ran for the base armory.

Banner stayed loose as the brute charged him with ferocious intensity. The Knight swung its battle axe viciously at Banner's chest section. Banner, a small aerobic man, felt the energy the lighter gravity gave him as he fluidly jumped the height needed to clear the axe. He did so in a way that his back and legs just cleared the death scythe and his arms loosely flowed with the midair flip.

The Knight swung again, this time the edge came from the opposite direction. Banner landed on the ground after his flip and his legs seemed to melt with the soil as his body sunk very low to the ground allowing the axe to, again, just barely clear over his head. The Knight followed through with his swing this time and spun with the axe. It spun closer to Banner this time with the Axe bar on trajectory to swipe his waist away. Banner jumped after high up in the air and flipped his orientation so that his head was below his legs. In this short amount of time as Banner hovered over and past the beast, he pulled out one Smoking Acer gun and shot rapid bullets at the Knights helmet.

The Knight became disoriented again as it dropped its axe and stumbled a few steps back while quickly swiping at its eyes. Banner had now landed on the ground behind the Knight and awaited the beast's next move in small amount of time he was given. The Knight spun and felt Banner's presence.

It punched at Banner with a great deal of power. One punch, if landed, had the force of nearly 3000 Newtons which would crumble Banner's bones if the armor didn't protect him.

The first punch Banner dodged with ease. It was slightly overextended as he predicted. The second came flying in wildly as well and Banner moved to the outside of the arm after the punch was thrown. He quickly grabbed on as the Knight pulled its arm back. Banner was thrust forward onto the Knight and again took out his Smoking Acers and began unloading.

"Banner!" Bacon said.

Banner peaked up and saw Colin holding a gun with a grenade launcher attached. He stopped firing his dual wielded weapons and hitched them away at his side. Banner took one more solid punch at the metal helmet before jumping high up off the beast back and flipping away. Once he landed on the ground clear from the Knight, Colin fired the grenades one at a time. The first grenade smashed the Knight as it was just trying to reorient itself. The explosion sent it back a couple steps. The heat given off was a bit worse than that of the small Apla blasts and cooked some of the armor enraging the beast.

The Knight raced forward, but Colin had already fired his second shot which blew up in the Knight's face. Its helmet had been taking severe hits from the Covis, and although it was pelted with bullets and burnt up, it still sheltered the Knight's face. The Knight pressed on much quicker than Colin anticipated as it was filled with frenzied rage. The Knight pounced forward and Colin scrambled to get the next round ready. His hands trembled because of an increased heart rate and the vibrations of the ground the Knight created while moving. Finally, he got the next grenade canister in the gun sleeve and punched it to lock it in. The Knight was already meters in front of him, and out of a last ditch effort Colin fired the shot. The grenade hammered the Knight's midsection and exploded causing a wild fireball to spew about the beast.

Both Colin and Bacon were too close to the blast and felt the repercussions of the immense heat. The Knight bypassed the detonation absorbing the blow, and swiped his hand which clashed with the two Covis. Colin and Bacon took a thwacking as they were thrown to the side.

Kayla stumbled to her feet inside the building she was thrown through. The heat of the battle kept her fluid and flowing before, but having been blown through a wall and lying on the ground for a minute; the adrenaline rushed away and let loose the pain of war. She picked up her gun and situated it in her hands. She stood tall and fought through the pain.

Just as Kayla was about to go back out and face the main threat, she heard footsteps behind her. She lashed around only to see Connors in her face. She tried to fire her gun, but he had already planned the motion of knocking it aside and he did so. He pushed the gun away and she fired anyway. The bullet hit the ground and Connors swung at Kayla's face. He got a hard hit off with his fist and knocked the Covi to the ground. Her helmet was tough and took the blow, but nonetheless, it was like an aggravated smack on the head. Connors kicked away the gun. As soon as he let his attention of Kayla to kick the gun away, she used her impressive hip power to thrust one leg into the back of the Martian's, putting him off balance.

He was sent to the ground and Kayla sprung her way to her feet. She quickly mounted Connors trapping his ability to move. She whipped out a knife from the side of her armor and threw her hand downwards to stab him. Connors caught her wrist before the knife punctured him. He and Kayla struggled with the knife. She pressed downward out of remuneration; he pushed upwards out of continuity. She pressed down with one arm; he used two. Tiring of the struggle, Kayla used her other arm to punch Connors. Her tough clout battered Connors several times before he attempted to react. He moved his head side to side to avoid the blows, but Kayla still managed to annoy him enough for him to try another strategy.

He thrust his hips upward and kicked his legs. His motion tossed Kayla over board and she tumbled on the floor behind him. Both the soldiers situated themselves upright. Kayla had lost

her knife in the process and it was now in thrown into the dirt outside the room, neither had seen it fly out. The two stared down each other.

“Little tall for a Martian, aren’t you?” Kayla said.

Connors was a noticeably tall Martian. Compared to Kayla, he had her by a few inches.

“Trust not too much to appearances.” Connors said.

“Likewise.” Kayla said.

“You’re bold, Curator.” Connors said. “They say fortune favors the bold.”

Kayla let out a confident smirking laugh.

Connors gave responded with a one syllabled laugh. “Do you people not believe in good fortune?” He said.

“We don’t play with fables.” Kayla said.

“Then it’s your move first, pragmatist.” Connors said.

Kayla engaged.

Banner wielded his weapons and began firing back at the beast. The Knight was going to finish off Colin and Bacon, but Banner managed to get its attention. The Knight had the persisting urge to be reunited with its axe. Regardless of the bullets Banner fired, the Knight located its axe hammer and began running after it.

Kyle Stevens still lied on the ground, although he managed to pull himself away from the axe a bit. After taking the hit from the Knight, he was having a difficult time reenergizing himself.

“Kyle, move out of the way.” Banner yelled out.

The Knight turned to see an enraged Banner screaming his comrade’s name and chased after him. Pat appeared far back behind Banner. Banner had not noticed him yet, but Pat saw the charging walking-tank. Pat had just exited the Martian armory, and with him, he held, two Apla canisters.

“Banner, lead it in.” Pat told his Covi partner.

Pat then clicked in the two Apla containers. He gathered up all the energy he could in his body. Saving a good deal still, he absorbed energy and powered his gloves. He put both gloves together and gathered the heated particles into a ball in front of him. The Knight charged Banner and as soon as it came close enough, the Covi jumped out of the way and let the beast

run forward toward Pat. After a few more steps, Pat released all of the power he had stored up in the ball in front of him and it soared at great speeds to the Knight. The Knight experienced a plethora of pain from the combination of the blast and the heat. It ripped right through the armor of the Knight, piercing through its skin, and still had enough energy to puncture out the back and continue on into the air.

The Knight cried out from the amazingly powerful Covi blast. It had never experienced this pain before. Banner, who moved out of the way as much as he could before the shot, darted back into position to antagonize it more.

The Knight collapsed on the ground after taking the shot. It was still alive and ferocious, but the wound caused it to fall to the ground and wait before attacking again. The bullet cut through in the upper right abdomen. But it was tighter to the chest guaranteeing the loss of some vital organ. It twitched and flopped on the ground, still very alive but in pain.

Connors threw another left jab, which was deflected by Kayla. She kicked with her right leg high up aiming for his head. Connors ducked and twisted his hips sending his leg out like a whip. He kicked Kayla's lone standing leg ripping the balance out from under her. She hit the ground with her back first. Connors moved toward her with haste. She quickly rolled backwards to her feet. Still slightly crouched and regaining her balance, Kayla received a full forced blow from Connors kick to her abdomen. It sent her stumbling back to her back again. She lay still for a second more than she wanted to from the increased pain.

Connors leaped on top of her. He rested on his knees over her abdomen and kept her from moving. Very quickly like it was in a single motion, he punched at Kayla's head with his left. She slid her head away and caught his punch with her right hand. She locked his hand in place by grasping tightly and pressing it up against her helmet. Practically simultaneously, he positioned his right hand in the air slightly away from her helmet and charged up a quick blast to fire. The Energy charged quickly. It was ready to fire in the split second he wanted it to. Kayla launched her left hand up to meet his right forearm and brush it away. The blast was released and put a hole in the ground next to Kayla's head.

Still holding his left arm tight, Kayla popped her hips up and pushed with her left hand against his right hip. The hip popping thrust him up and off balanced, and the left push knocked him off. Kayla then wrapped her left leg around his escaping right knee. Connors had fallen on to his back now, and Kayla locked up his legs and began to assume full control. Before she could get all the way on top of him, Connors used his leg and core strength to pull her over the top, using the lock Kayla put on him as his advantage.

Kayla was launched away from Connors. Connors rolled out from the ground away from Kayla. Kayla indecently did the same. However, Connors rolled out sooner and, at a distance, began

powering his gloves. Kayla popped up and turned to face Connors who had his gloves locked and loaded with energy. She gasped as she knew he had her beaten. Connors was clever in his maneuver and had the Covi off guard. He easily had her in a bind now. If she was closer, she could attempt to attack him. If she was farther, she could attempt to avoid the blast and grab some cover. Even if she had a couple more seconds to spare, she could have charged up her own Apla blasts. But he had the energy ready and she was at the right distance to be caught in the action. Her heart sunk as she knew she was beaten. Death probably wasn't coming, and she didn't accept a total defeat. Yet, she knew the payload was about to send her through a few notches of pain.

Right before Connors fired the blast, a shot rang out and Connors flew backwards. The energy in his hands self absorbed itself and dissipated. A sniper bullet crossed Kayla's field of vision and struck Connors in the right peck thrusting him to the ground with considerable damage. Kayla turned back to observe where the shot came from. To her surprise, Ace held a sniper as he was pinned down on the ground and wall in pain.

"Thanks." She said.

Ace stared at her. With no facial expressions because of the helmet, Kayla was amazed at how much she read from Ace's body language. His nonchalant relaxed look in his arms and chest sent out a signal of pain and lack of enthusiasm from the battles ensued today. He dropped the sniper on the ground and allowed his forearms to look up to the sky while moving his head to angle straight ahead and lean back on a wall at an angle. This was a sign of collective failure. And she knew it.

The Knight climbed to its feet despite the suppressive fire from all the surrounding Covis.

The Knight was fully awake now and grabbed its battle axe off from the ground. Colin and Bacon entertained it while Banner and Pat took strategic shots at it. Colin jumped and was dodging the Knight's axe as much as he could, but the Knight took one more swing at him which ended up clipping the armor on Colin's suit. The clip tipped Colin out of balance and sent him tumbling across the ground. He immediately jumped to his feet, but the Knight had already moved in front of him. With a solid jumping kick, the Knight sent Colin flying and skidding across the ground.

"We're getting thrown like rag dolls. Blow this thing to smithereens!" Banner yelled to Pat.

The Knight was just on its way to pounce on Colin when Pat jumped out from his cover and fired a quick Apla blast at the beast's back. The discharge made the Knight stop in its tracks and arch its back upwards and its chin up. The small blast was enough to smolder the surface of the back armor. The Knight turned quickly and raced after Pat with axe in hand. Pat fired a more

powerful blast; this time aimed at its chest. The Knight tried to press on, but was shaken by the discharge.

Kayla now ran out from her fight scene with Connors and jumped to the ground right beside Stevens. The two made movements in sync while powering up their suits with Apla to fire. The Knight turned to see their movement. Before it could do anything, the two Covis fired their energy and hammered the Knight with small collectively charged blasts. The Knight was still standing, but a solid and heavy chunk of its armor tore off from its body. The burnt armor was cooking the Knight alive inside. It was beginning to crack in some parts.

The Knight cried out and grabbed its axe and began swinging at the air. Kyle, Kayla, Banner, and Pat turned on their jetpacks and began flying around it while, as a team, blasting it with energy. The sandy soil inside the base began erupting into the air creating a small dust cloud. The Knight was shot all over as energy beams and energy blasts rained down from all around it. The Covis flew in unison with the circulating dust. Each blast that they fired pushed the Knight closer to the ground as it cried out.

Finally, they stopped the shooting and settled down to the ground. The dust settled a few seconds after and the Covis held their hands up ready to face their foe. When their vision was clear, Pat was the first to notice that the Knight had been slain. It lay dead on the ground with its thick red blood showing on the exterior metal. The helmet of the beast remained on it, but armor was cracked and missing all over the rest of it. The Covis stared at the dead carcass and let out a sigh of relief.

Just after the beast's death, help had finally arrived. The first capital ship entered the skyline and the other two followed. The smaller frigate vessels dropped in from everywhere as well, and smaller attack ships swarmed the Martian skies like wasps at a roadside nest. Two small Martian aircraft flew under the capital ships. The two soared high and tried to get a lock on the capital ships to damage something. Anything. Before they could get authorization to fire, or to even get the shot off, they were obliterated by Curator aircraft's weaponry. There were so many Curator aircraft breezing through city airspace, it was difficult to tell which one fired upon them. Some frigates began touching down on the ground setting up more permanent bases on the outside of the city, near the slums.

Pat stared silently at his kill. He came to his senses and realized he was still on the clock.

"Colin, go grab Ace and help him over here." Pat said. "Bacon and Colin, are you two alright?"

"We'll be fine." Colin said. Bacon gave a thumbs up.

He looked at Kayla sternly. "Where is Matthews?" Pat asked just noticing his absence from the battle.

"I'm here." Matthews said while limping over to join his teammates. "And she does have a name. At least, I believe she's earned it. Kayla Collier." He paused.

"Where the hell were you?" Pat asked. He looked down at Matthews' belt which was full of Apla. "We could have really used that Apla."

"There were still soldiers heading toward the base." Matthews responded. "I couldn't come in and help yet."

He took off his helmet. Pat then took off his, and Kayla followed right after.

"How'd you guys fare?" Matthews said.

"Not well." Pat said. "And again, thanks for all that sincere help back there."

"What was this thing?" Kayla said. "I've never heard of one in all my training."

"The Martian Knight." Pat said.

"Is it an animal native to Mars?" Kayla said.

"Well, so to speak. It's actually a human." Matthews said.

"What?" Kayla said.

"It was a Martian war experiment gone wrong. Many years ago, during the Orbital Wars, the Martians were suffering major casualties against Curator illuminators. So they began investing all their money into genetic enhancement rather than funding their own illuminators. They actually succeeded in their goal of creating bigger humans, but..." Matthews said.

"But, the humans they 'enhanced' lost all critical thinking power and were uncontrollable." Pat said.

"Then how come I was never told about these things. I mean, someone at the academies had to have known." Kayla said.

"They do know. However, the truth is often too scary for cadets. It could scare the best and brightest away from war. There's actually a lot of stuff they don't tell you in Covi school." Pat said.

"Then the true war hawks might have to pick up a gun." Matthews said.

"There's a time and a place for that." Pat said.

"You mean my father." Kayla said.

"To be fair, I'd like to see him try and put a suit on." Pat answered back.

"He's old. How would you expect him to fight?" Kayla said back in an offended tone.

"You're not getting the point." Pat said.

"Then what is the point?" Kayla said.

"Why don't you stop asking questions? Nobody wants you here anyway." Pat said.

"Lieutenant." Colin said.

Pat, Kayla, and Matthews all looked over to see Colin helping Ace over while also aiming his gun at Connors who had his hands cuffed behind his back. Colin allowed Ace the space to move away and then kicked the back of Connors's knee which sent him to the ground.

Connors stood on his knees with his hands cuffed. He looked up at Pat.

"Well, what do we have here?" Pat said. "A Martian illuminator, no doubt, but... he was captured."

Pat walked past Connors. He paused, then spun around and looked at Kayla.

"Your work?" Pat said while pointing at Connors.

Kayla nodded and then tightened the hold on her rifle to look confident. Pat turned to look back at Connors.

"What's your name soldier?" Pat said.

Connors didn't respond.

Banner walked back to the group with his hand around his waist putting his guns away. Pat heard his steps and turned to look at him.

"It's pretty rude not to answer someone. But especially me, I can kill you." Pat said.

Connors moved his head slightly in the direction of Pat while still looking at the ground. He still said nothing.

"Who is under that helmet?" Pat said. "I wonder if I want to know."

Banner watched attentively.

Pat touched the Martian helmet and grazed his fingers across it checking the battle scars.

"Where is the Monk?" Pat said.

Connors shifted his head to look closer in Pat's direction. He still said nothing.

"You know. You have to know. What else could be keeping you in the war this long? Why else would you be in Grand City. Tell me and I'll spare your life." Pat said.

"I have no idea what you're talking about." Connors said.

"You don't? Well damn. Pack your things men; I guess this whole show was for nothing. We're going home." Pat said.

Connors didn't respond. Pat leaned in close to him.

"We will burn your planet to the ground, pillaging everything we can, because we can." Pat said. "Now look, I'm not here to ruin your life. I'm here to ruin theirs. Your King's. Your greedy politicians. I'm here to take them out of power so you can have a better life."

Connors turned his head and looked directly at Pat.

"Stand up." Pat said.

Connors didn't move.

"The games you're trying to play on me are humiliating to someone of my service record." Connors said. "Suck every last drop of energy from my blood, or shoot me in the back of the head right now. But give me the dignity I earned as a soldier. I damn well earned it killing your people."

"Stand up, damn it." Pat said.

Connors stood.

"Covis, ready your weapons." Pat said.

Instantly, the surrounding Covis raised their weapons and pointed them at Connors waiting for the cadence to fire.

Pat stepped behind Connors. He grasped the cuffs and unbuckled them.

Connors jumped away and stood in the circle between all the Covis.

"Get the hell out of here." Pat said.

Connors slowly eased out of the circle. He was careful not to be fired upon and eyed down the Covis as he stepped away. Once he was several meters outside the circle, he eyed down Pat one more time before sprinting off toward the city. The Covis lowered their weapons.

"Charles, what the hell was that?" Banner said.

"There'll be plenty of blood to spill tomorrow. Don't you worry." Pat said. "But... I don't know. Something told me not to kill him."

"No shit, Sherlock." Kayla said.

"Go ahead; make your feminist point on why I'm wrong." Pat said.

"We're gonna kick their ass tomorrow, but now that's one more guy we'll have to take down. And an illuminator no doubt." Kayla said.

"A soldier's bravery knows no bounds." Pat said while motioning his finger across his eyelid.

Kyle started laughing. "You assclown." He said.

"Real soldiers are man enough to finish the job when the job's not done." Kayla said.

"Real soldiers fight for a purpose. They fight for legacy. What's one more guy on their team mean? We're about to fight a hundred thousand tomorrow, probably more." Pat said.

"Real soldiers have a virtue called courage. And you're supposed to use that courage in your moral situations right here. Courage." Kayla said. "Something I haven't seen from you at all, but that's definitely all I ever heard. You're a jerk to everyone on this team. You're singular and only out for yourself."

"Actually, the first virtue in a soldier is endurance of fatigue; courage is only the second virtue, but nice try though." Pat said.

Kayla threw her gun around her back and began walking out of the base toward the new Curator camp. The other Covis soon followed.

(2309 November 2nd 1515 hours SM:GCT)

The three capital ships hung in the sky over the city. They were strategically placed there so the Martians knew not to go nuclear. Nearly one hundred frigates hung around the city. Some frigates were beginning to land on the outskirts of the city attempting to create ground bases and strongholds. Frigates, when landed, had the ability to be transformed into standard bases.

They also released hundreds of soldiers along with guns, ammunition, defense turrets, food supplies, and war vehicles. Mino fighters flew around the city perimeter scouting for enemy fighters. The Martian skies over Grand City were now in Curator control.

The citizens of Grand City that lived in the slums were now packed in tight in the streets below the city. Residents that previously lived in the tall buildings of the city were now hiding in the lower levels of buildings. The vacancy in the towers was replaced by a few Martian soldiers and the local police. They were heavily outnumbered and outgunned, but remained inside the higher-ups of buildings to snipe and scout the enemy.

Pat marched his way through the Curator camp. His orders were to check in with Curator command after having completed his mission, along with the other Covi leaders. He saw loads of soldiers getting off ships and unpacking supplies. Many large Curator war vehicles were being lowered from ships in the air. Some vehicles already scoured the perimeter of the base.

“Hey, Pat!” Matthews said.

Pat turned around. “Yes, Matthews?” Pat said.

“Where you goin’?” Matthews said.

“I’ve got check in, you take the others to our part of the camp I’ll be there in a minute.” Pat said.

“Alright.” Matthews said turning. He stopped and ran back at Pat. “Hey, wait.” He said, and Pat turned.

“Why do you gotta be so hard on Kayla?” Matthews said.

“Because she’s not one of us.” Pat said.

“Why?” Matthews said. “Because she’s a girl? Man, can’t you give it up already? I think it’s cool having a chick around.”

“It’s not because she’s a girl. I mean... yeah, who wants a feminist on the team. Look, if command wants to spy on us, let em’. But putting a chick in the group who is clearly has insider connections is not my idea of being funny.” Pat said.

“Alright, well why are you angry at me? Want to talk about this a little more. Maybe I could help you straighten some things out.” Matthews said.

“Listen if I wanted anyone’s help I would ask. But I don’t and I never do.” Pat said.

He turned and walked away.

The ground was of true Martian sand. It was as if vegetation had not been available to the area for quite some time. In the distance, he could cloud formations that indicated the nuclear blast in the west. The fallout would not come anywhere near them however. Near the clouds was also a patch of mountains, and to the south was a blue ocean. Out in the distance, before the mountains, there was a small village. The village was a minor town compared to the city of Grand, but it was still big enough to have several buildings that were smaller than a skyscraper.

He stepped on to a metal platform which led him to the entrance of fortified metal tent which blocked out the light. On the inside, men were hard at work preparing the base and tightening security. Glass computer screens hung on walls and were being consistently used by intelligent military officials. However, the big brains still sat in their war chairs in the heavily armored capital ships.

The acting heads of Covi teams One, Four, and Six were to report to the generals inside the tent. Pat strolled in through the tent. Each step of his jet boots clinking with the metal floor sent waves of importance to the soldiers working their stations. They knew he was a Covi just by the sheer awesomeness of his battle armor. He saw Cal Sharp and Arthur Armstrong, the Covi One and Four leaders, standing facing a large wall computer screen speaking with the commanders and General Lutz. He hurried up to the meeting which had already started.

"All I'm saying, commander, is we did the best we could." Cal said.

Pat swooped in right next to Arthur. Arthur glanced at him and then turned his head forward.

"Lieutenant Listowel, you're late." Commander Hydric said.

"Only you would be the one to point that out, commander." Pat said.

"What was that, Covi?" Hydric said.

"Nothing, sir. I am ready to brief you on the status of Six." Pat said.

"Wait your turn, Listowel." General Lutz said. "Continue, Major Sharp."

"As I was saying, my team's losses were... unavoidable." Cal said.

"Explain yourself." Commander Clark said.

"We were coming in out of the sky while the defense grid was still active. If it had been deactivated sooner, as we had hoped..." Cal stopped and stared at Pat. "...We would have secured our side of the city without any casualties." Cal said.

"And exactly how many men did you lose?" Commander Packer said.

"5, sir." Cal said.

"Son, do you have any idea the amount of money you just cost the Curator military?" Commander Astley said. "Those suits aren't cheap."

"That's nearly half your team." Pat said shyly in awe.

"As penalty for your failures, I am reassigning your duties for tomorrow's battle." Lutz said.

"What?" Cal said.

"And as penalty for your failure, Arthur, I am dividing your team to spare men to Covi One." Lutz said.

"This is outrageous, general! We missed one nuke." Arthur said.

"And that one nuke could cost us the war! Every detail counts and I am not one for respecting any failure. Nothing but the best can be allowed. One Martian survivor, given room to expand, can move earth by his numbers. You know not the power of one man's fate!" Lutz said.

"But, sir..." Arthur said.

"No! Enough of this. Lieutenant Listowel, give us your report." Lutz said.

Lutz had a very commanding voice. It sounded old and scratchy, but loud and powerful. When he spoke at Pat, Pat felt like he was being choked. Every word spoken required more energy, more blood flow, and more air to utter. His metallic breathing system clearly being the reason.

"We finished the job under the 45 minute mark and completed the mission." Pat said.

"And losses?" Hydric asked.

"None. A few bumps and bruises, but this was a successful mission yet again." Pat said.

"Good. Then I will give you a special prize." Lutz said. "Tomorrow, you will lead the attack. Stick with the forward battalions the entire time. You might just have your ultimate glory." Lutz said. A couple of the other commanders laughed.

"This is good news as far as I understand." Pat said.

"And tomorrow, One and Four will be positioned on the flanks." Lutz said.

"Who will be on the signal?" Arthur said.

"What signal?" Pat asked curiously.

Pat stared at Arthur and Arthur stared back before Cal shot his elbow against Arthur's side and quietly whispered, "Shut up."

"Enough of this." Lutz said.

"What signal? What signal is he talking about." Pat said.

"Do not talk back to me soldier." Lutz said.

"But general, this isn't fair here. I completed this mission. I am always the front runner. Why can't I at least know what this is?" Pat said in a confused panic.

"The other two teams will be on the flanks for support. Any signal they would receive would be to catch escaping foes."

Pat nodded with eyes of disbelief. He focused on Lutz.

"That will be all for today Covis." Lutz said.

"Yes, general." Pat said with the others. He quickly stormed off out of the tent.

All of Covi Six had just gotten back from medical services getting checked for radiation poisoning and using advanced medical technologies to quickly heal and injuries. Covi Six, like other teams, had its own personal area at the campsite.

The camp site reserved for the Covis was atop a Curator Fortress Tank. The Curator Fortress Tank was one of many of the ground vehicles at the Curators' disposal. The tank was very large at about 45 meters in length, 30 in width, and 25 in height. It was packed with missiles on top along with all sorts of gun towers. It could carry many troops, small vehicles, and plenty of ammunition. It was a mobile miniature base. The Covis entered the tank from the bottom and had to climb a set of stairs to the roof of the Fortress to join the other group.

Pat was heading back to his team's camp when he noticed Nathan coming towards him.

"Hey, I think I can have the suit ready soon."

"Where did that come from?" Pat said.

"I found a way to get the energy intelligence working better with the suit." Nathan said. "How'd it go today."

"Alright I guess. Another successful mission. No one can stop us." Pat said walking away.

They both headed in opposite directions.

As Pat was heading to the camp, Banner appeared before him. He stood in his path like he had something to stop him for.

"We've got to kick this girl off the team." Banner said.

"Why?" Pat asked.

"She's a girl. As far as I've heard we're becoming a joke of a team." Banner said.

"I'm becoming a joke. This is my image command is going after. Lutz is acting really strange. Everything is centered around this girl being on the team." Pat said.

Pat climbed the stairs to the top of the Fortress to see his Covis chatting along in groups. Banner followed.

"Command is wasting our time." Pat said.

"What's out job for tomorrow?" Stevens asked.

"We still have front lines, leading the attack, but I think we got short changed." Pat said.

"With what?" Colin asked.

"It appears One and Four have some additional responsibilities." Pat responded. Just as Pat finished his sentence, Nathan arrived in the group.

"What responsibilities might that be?" Nathan asked.

"I thought being at the front of the line was a good thing." Stevens said.

"I thought we were here for this Monk device." Banner replied.

"Wasn't the population told this was a dispute about Thorton's wife Rita?" Matthews chimed in.

"I'm not sure what it's about anymore." Pat said. "Nathan, tomorrow, I want you all over Curator networks."

"Like hack them?" Nathan said.

"Yeah, get in and find out what's going on." Pat said.

"I'm pretty sure that's a felony." Kayla said.

"Nathan's a high ranking officer with access to almost any Curator database. And no one asked for your opinion." Pat said.

Kayla stopped dead in her words.

"What's the game plan for tomorrow?" Stevens added to cut short an awkward silence.

"It looks like it might finally be endgame." Pat said.

"What do you mean?" Matthews asked as he and everyone in the group had a curiosity spike.

"The Martians are moving their forces closer to the city. We have already made landfall, and we control the Martian leaders inside their own city. This has never happened before." Pat responded.

"Wow, the end of the war." Stevens responded. "It's hard to grasp even the most basic idea of that. There has never been another war. All my life, all we did was fight the Martians. Always Earth versus Mars."

"That's all it's ever been forever. We are finally the first generation to be able to stop this insanity." Matthews said. "Just sitting here on Martian dirt gives me the creeps."

"I bet we'll be able to go home too." Banner said.

"I miss Earth a lot too." Matthews said.

"You don't get to go back to Earth?" Kayla asked inquisitively.

"It's usually very rare." Matthews responded. "If anything it's for a mission. But often times we're just out in various space belts."

"Not that you would know." Banner told her.

"Yeah, I am new. So when are you going to get around to accepting me into this group?" She asked.

"Never." Pat responded. Kayla clenched her fists and bit her tongue. "If you don't like it, feel free to walk right down to the heart of camp and apply for a transfer. I'm sure Bart Sharpton would love to have you since he loses men every time he fights."

"Hey Pat, what's the big deal here. She's part of the team now." Matthews said back.

"Don't ever talk back to me. This is my team and we'll play by my rules. And I don't think you should be talking right now." Pat said pointing his finger in the Covi's face.

"Last time I checked there weren't no 'I' in 'team'." Matthews responded.

"Then get out of the group." Pat said. "I mean it, you can sit alone."

Matthews stood out of his seat both shocked and angry staring down Pat while walking to the other side of the tank.

“You’re supposed to be the team leader.” Kayla said. “Leaders shouldn’t be bossing everyone around.”

“Why don’t you join him then? You know, let’s get something straight here. I am the Curator army’s dark knight in bloody armor. You are a child that I have been assigned to babysit. Your opinion is not a valid one and it is because you are in fact a woman. War is a match played by men. Strong men. Men who are champions, never falter, and never fail. And after the battle we live, without stress, and in order. Women break easily. That’s why they stay at home and we go to war. I go to war. Now I don’t play politics. But I am willing to sit this one out and play the game so long as you shut your mouth from now on.” Pat said sternly. Kayla stormed out of her seat to join Matthews. “Tonight is going to be a long night to be awake for. Don’t go dosing off.”

Pat sat in an awkwardly quiet Covi group. No one moved for several minutes.

Far beneath the ground in the Martian base of Grand City, the King, Gordon, Shane, Rita, and his associates spoke of the coming war.

“How did we not see them coming sooner?” The King said.

“Well, sire, we now know that the Curators have the ability cloak their ships. Even our spies couldn’t contact us.” An advisor said.

“What we should be focusing on is what we can do now.” Gordon said. “Father, tomorrow I ordered the fleets to mobilize and attack the city from the West. The Curators control both sides of the city, but they’ve forgotten about one weak point. The city is also by a body of water.”

“You don’t think the Curators will attack us before we can get to the water?” The King said.

“Not at all. We have a massive Martian fleet coming to the city. They’ll have their hands tied. And unless they have some trick up their sleeve, we should outnumber them.” Gordon said.

“Okay, but say we lose and need to get to defense city as fast as possible. We’ll be trapped.” The King said.

“Another thing the Curators didn’t plan for, the ancient Martian caverns. We have submarines traveling under us as we speak. There is an underground cavern tunnel that connects the Southern and Northern oceans. We will use that for our escape. As soon as we make it to a sub, it will be a straight shot to the city of North Calumet.” Gordon said.

“Interesting theory, Gordon.” Shane said.

“Yes, I had no idea there were underground caverns here.” Rita said.

“There’s something important I need to say before we call it a night.” Connors said. “During my capture, the Covi who I know I have fought before, referred to a device they were looking for.”

“What device?” Gordon asked.

“I have no idea. They called it the Monk. And it seemed as though it was of utmost importance to them. It was like it was the only reason they were here.” Connors replied.

The King darted his eyes and quietly gasped after the Monk was mentioned.

“I’ve never heard of this Monk.” Shane said.

“Neither have I.” Gordon replied. He looked at his father for the first time and noticed a slight frantic look.

“Do you know what they are looking for?” Gordon said directly to the King with which all eyes at the table instantly flowed to.

“Me?” The King asked surprised. “No. Heavens, no. I have no idea what the Monk is.”

“Alright then. It must be misinformation. But I wonder if we could use that to our advantage.” Connors said.

“Excellent. Well, the war generals will work on this. We fight in the morning. For now, I suggest we all get some rest.” Gordon said.

Chapter 7

(Insert time and date here)

Martian Sloth Tank- the Sloth is a Martian ground vehicle that has four tracks with two road wheels each to move the tank. It is quick moving for its heavy metallic look. The tank fit usually three people and had only one weapon: a two cannon tubes sit mounted together on the top. The cannon fired a mix of a 100 mm sonic shells and a slight burst of energy. Together, the tank can do considerable damage.

Martian Wasp- a small Martian vehicle that floats above the ground using air propulsion. Its metallic polygonal base has edges with the ability to cut into things if rammed. The vehicle is armed with two side guns and a main cannon on top. The main cannon is not huge, but easily

more powerful than the two side weapons. The vehicle is quick and is usually piloted by one or two men.

Curator Rage Tank- the Rage tank is like the smaller brother of the Fortress Tank. A floating, yet slow moving vehicle, the Rage is very massive with parameters of 20 meters in length, 15 meters in width, and 15 meters in height. It is piloted by two men, and can hold up to ten other soldiers inside the heavy armor of the tank. Patches of guns are all over the tank firing mostly conventional bullets. On the top of the tank is a cabin for one more pilot. The cabin is on a swivel and can turn 360 degrees to shoot enemies with powerful double cannons.

Curator Crusader Tank- the Crusader is like the smaller brother of the Rage. A floating vehicle, the Crusader can move around at incredible speeds. It is fairly large and can hold up to six soldiers at one time. It has four small turrets in the front, one large manned turret on top, and a swivel cannon in the middle that fires 100 mm sonic shells.

Martian Capital Ship- a large ship, but still dwarfed by the Curator Capital ship. Measuring just over a kilometer in length, the capital ship is the largest ship in the Royal navy. The ship is round and thin to easily support an on board rotating artificial gravity system. It has plenty of external weapons systems and can mount a solid attack; however it lacks the extreme firepower the Curators have on their ships. It can house mainly men and weapons.

The distant sun had just risen. The usual feeling of the sun's balmy rays was absent on the Martian surface. Although warmer than the rest of the planet, the surface, while at the equator, was a chilling temperature. The air was still not freezing, but enough to make any bare skin shiver. The Covis had already belted themselves up. Every boot and glove tightened for war, and Apla ready to be flushed into their system.

The Covis were buckled in on their Fortress Tank. Colin and Bacon were the two copilots of the massive tank. The rest of the Covis were positioned all over. Some worked on the tank's power cannon on the top level; others were working side and front hatches that were covered all over. The hatches of the tank could open on the Covi's command and they could fire Apla blasts at the enemy. The Covis were given extra Apla containers for this major battle, and although a fair and typical amount of conservation of energy was in play, the Covis planned to use as much as possible without bringing deadly radiation upon them.

"Covi Six prepped and ready for combat." Pat said.

"Covi One armed and ready." Bart said over the comm.

"Covi Four on the ground and rolling." Arthur said.

“Good,” Lutz said from his control deck. He stood above his men who all scrambled at computer support screens for the battle. His groups of minions were war brains swiping coordinates across the screens fixating the Curator troops and vehicles. They planned out the war strategy together so carefully, afraid to seem like they weren’t hard at work. Not one of them looked up at their general. Not one of them sat down in the many seats that were available. They all stood, huddled around a screen, and chattered back and forth; competing and calling the other ones fools for choosing a tactical strategy. Even in the purposely kept cold room, some of the men drenched themselves in sweat and anxiety.

Lutz turned after rechecking the battle statistics. “Commander, come here.” He said.

A confident Commander Clark stepped forth. Lutz dwarfed him. The old commander was frail and bony compared to Lutz who was tall, lean, with wide shoulders.

“Yes, my lord.” Clark said.

“How are our external frigates doing?” Lutz said.

“Several have made it to farther cities. With the Martian fleet centralized and moving to our location, the other trade cities are, and will remain, utterly defenseless.” Clark said.

“Good.” Lutz said. “See to it that the Aries is functioning at full power. Expend as many prisoners as you need.”

“Sir?” Clark said.

“I want the ship to have enough energy to use the weapon.” Lutz said.

“General, you don’t actually anticipate on using the gun do you?” Clark said.

“I do.” Lutz said.

“Sir, I don’t have to remind you of its power.” Clark said. “They’ll see it coming. They’ll fire nukes obliterating all of us.” Clark said.

“They don’t even know what ‘it’ is. Much less would they dare fire nukes inside their own airspace, and even then what good would it do for them.” Lutz said.

“Aye, sir. I’ll send word to the energy chambers.” Clark said.

Miles from the massive Curator army, the Martian fleet gathered near a small suburb of Grand City. The entire fleet faced Grand City now, and was collectively moving in for battle. Nearly the entire planet’s military forces were poured into this battle for the Martians. Having never been

able to make landfall and secure a city, the Curators were now at an advantage, and an even bigger one having trapped the royal family inside a major trade city.

There was one large Martian capital ship, and dozens of smaller Martian frigates that surrounded it. Hundreds of Martian fighter jets cruised alongside the fleet. Locked and loaded for battle, countless infantry men and vehicles drove just ahead of the fleet. Sloth's, Wasps, Tri Bikes, and Shell Flyers breezed against the ground in their formations. Windcutters flew just a few stories off the ground following the entourage of ground forces. The army from above looked as though it was a spear culminating itself as one singular, unified deadly weapon.

Inside the Martian capital ship, the fleet admiral spoke with the king and Gordon on a secure signal.

"My lord, the sub system is waiting for you at the edge of the city. When ready, proceed with caution to the extraction point. The fleet has just arrived and we are preparing for attack. I will see this battle to the end for better or worse." Daneland said.

"For the both of us, let's hope this all goes smoothly." The king said.

"We expect to sir. They have many advantages in this battle, yet the fleet that attacked us in the battles before us were at least double this size." Daneland said.

"Just by judging their numbers, this feels more like a strike force than an actual war." Gordon said.

"Which is why we will crush it like one, sire." Daneland said.

"The best of luck to you, Daneland." The king said. And with that, the transmission ended.

"Sir!" A Martian soldier appeared before Daneland.

"Yes, soldier?" Daneland said.

"The Curator ships are considerably higher than our own, should we try to raise and meet them?" The soldier said.

"No, that's a complete strategical disadvantage to them. We will obliterate their ground forces from above." Daneland said.

"Is it a trap?" The soldier said.

"I don't think so. They wouldn't be up there if they didn't have something planned, but there is nothing in the vicinity to corner us. If they fly ahead, open up our cannons." Daneland said.

"You don't think they'd try to bombard us with missiles?" He said.

"If they do, they would suffer a nuclear attack." Daneland said. "Keep Detaunts and rockets on standby."

"Aye, sir." He said.

The final minute drew between the fleets clashing. They were in clear sight of the other and the tensions grew high. The Covis plowed forward in their tank.

"It's here men. This is the battle we've been waiting for." Pat said.

"The battle I've been waiting for..." Pat said under his breath.

"There's a whole field of them. Today will be a killing day." Banner said.

"Yeah, for me, not you." Matthews said.

"Easy now, kiddo. The harvest today will be my reaping." Banner said.

"You think Lux knows what we're getting into? The fleet is too far to assist us." Kyle said.

"If there is one thing that man knows, it's violence. We'll be alright." Banner said.

"Time to cover my head in war." Matthews said.

"Hey Pat, what is that old war saying you used to get really into?" Kyle said.

Pat quickly got into an act, "Bent at the knees and exhausted of blood, sweat, and tears, the warrior's aches are merely a calling card for the good to come. While no one is watching his battle, his vision for glory only grows stronger." Pat said.

"It's like you're quoting the anthem to my life." Banner said.

"Really? I always felt I was quoting mine." Pat said.

Banner turned and eyed Pat down after his sly remark, then focused back at his station.

The forces moved explicitly quicker toward each other. Air forces blazed their engines faster than before to catch up with the lead ground forces. All guns, rockets, cannons, and beams were ready to fire. All engines blazed, yet the battlefield seemed so silent. Two joined masses approaching each other at immense haste were silent before the moment of impact.

Lutz stood on his balcony of the command deck, arms folded.

"Fire." Lutz said.

The command deck of the Martian Capital Ship was frenzied before the word was given.

“All battalions, fire! Engage! All ships, obliterate the enemy combatants.” Daneland said.

Ground forces clashed as tanks breezed by the other side, firing all guns, missiles, and blasts. Chaos ensued as explosions lit up all around the battlefield. Tossed dirt from misfired projectiles spewed everywhere. The Martian ground looked like it was gushing blood. Soldiers from both sides were exiting carrier vehicles and clashing on the ground. Some took cover in the already trenched out terrain or found other newly created debris to hide behind; others took their chances storming the open terrain firing anywhere.

Air forces quarreled as well. Blazing fast ships cruised over the battlefield paying little attention to the ground and focused on other air vehicles. Martian Windcutters were dropping off men and at other times hovering over a part of the battlefield trying to shoot Curators from above. Curator aircraft darted around the Martian Capital Ship firing what they could to damage the outer hull. Martian aircraft swooped around, tailing the Curators to defend the main fleet.

The Martian fleet, consisting of the capital ship and many frigate ships, hovered just behind the main ground forces. Not over the ground battle, but close enough to give supplemental support. The Martian fleet was handling the hundreds of Curator invaders well. Creepily, the Curator fleet, which was far superior in size, hovered closer to the city away from the battlefield; supplying no support to the ground forces, and giving an advantage to the Martians.

As the battle continued, the Covis plowed ahead in the Fortress Tank blasting their way through Martian forces. The Covis on the hatches opened up to fire at infantrymen with their guns. Attack rifles and heavy powered machine guns being the types of guns used. For larger vehicles the Covis switched to their Apla blasts being careful of how much they expended. The tank rolled forward. Martian forces moved tanks into position to puncture the hull of the Fortress Tank, but the Covis were well prepared.

“We got a Sloth incoming, about 40 meters out, northwest.” Kyle said.

“I see it.” Banner said. He charged up his gloves. “Firing!” Banner said.

Banner popped open his hatch on the Tank and stuck his arms out quickly. He then released his energy and shut the metal door as fast as he could. The blast rockets out from the Fortress and hit the Sloth before it could even lock on to the tank. The blast creamed the Sloth, breaking its armor and sending it back and on fire.

“Add another one to the scoreboard.” Banner said.

“Two Wasps, Kayla. They’re coming around the other side.” Matthews said.

"I see it." She said.

Kayla watched as the Wasps circled around the plains in their attack formation; not an immediate threat of the Fortress, but not entirely oblivious. Kayla popped the door open and fired two weedy blasts. One missed and the other struck the target, but failed to destroy it.

"Firing again." Kayla said.

She knocked the hatch open. The Wasps were now aware of the Covis and blew towards the tank. Kayla powered up her gloves with the hatch open.

"Collier, take the shot!" Pat said.

Kayla waited. The Wasps converged quickly on the tank. She kept powering up her energy. The Wasps fired upon the Fortress, hitting the siding panels. Minor damage was caused but nothing that weakened the infrastructure. The shots rumbled the tank. Banner rushed over to Kayla's station to take the shot for her. His eager pouncing step spoke for his frustration. The Wasps were now very close to the tank. Finally, Kayla unleashed her energy as he forced her hands toward the Martian vehicles. The blast was very powerful. The single discharge did not even hit the vehicles, but the ground between them. The shockwave was enough to puncture the armor of the Wasps and send the vehicles to the ground. However, the shockwave was also enough to shake the Fortress.

Banner went to grab Kayla by the shoulder and remove her from the firing station. The moment he put his hand on her, she reached over with her left and trapped his right hand on her muscle. She then torqued her hips and cracked Banner in the ribs with a forceful right kick. Banner was launched to the metal surface of the tank. In shock, he paused on the ground as Kayla stared him down. Banner was about to get up, and he was ready to charge his gloves, when Pat stepped in.

"Enough!" Pat said. "I won't have insubordination inside my own tank. Get back to work and win this war."

Banner stood up and turned his back to Kayla as he headed to his station. Kayla went back to hers. Matthews snuck over to Kayla's station while Banner wasn't looking. He tapped Kayla on shoulder and she swung around ready for another fight. As she assumed a fighting stance, she was only greeted by Matthews sticking out his fist. She looked at him curiously. He shook it once. She then caught on and stuck out her fist to pound his.

"Nice work." Matthews said.

The King awaited the signal along with his royal family. His Martian honor guards stuck close to the pack inside the ground level building that served as the Martian protection for the night. The signal was to come from more Martians soldiers outside the building as they surveyed the area for Curator scout ships.

“Any word yet, captain?” The King said over a communication channel.

“Negative, sir. There are no scouts in the area, but I am still worried about the Curator fleet being so close to the city.” The soldier said. “It hasn’t even engaged our fleet.”

“That could be a good thing. They may be wary about acting at all.” The King said.

“I am still cautious—” The soldier said.

“Captain, clear us to go now. We’ve waited long enough.” Connors said. “I’ll give us all the protection we need to get to the extraction.”

“Very well, I’m giving the signal now.” The Soldier said.

“Soldier, my wife Mary is safe and good to go?” Gordon asked.

“As far as I know, from her location she was ready to be flown out of the city from the northeast side of the city. They should be alright there.” He replied.

With that, the Martian royal family rushed out of the building and ran through the streets quickly surrounded by their own guards. The streets were totally empty with the exception of a few civilians tucked away in corners.

The Covis continued to plow forward. The entire battlefield was roughly 20 square kilometers in size. Yet the Covis were still able to make a noticeable difference in the battle as they pushed the lines back. They blasted away more tanks and fired upon ground soldiers. Broken armor and crashed rubble and bloody bodies began to pile up on the tracks of the Covis’ tank. The Covis pressed the Martian battle border to the point where they reached a few civilian building that were taken over by Martian forces. The buildings were clearly being used as an outpost as Martians were seen firing out of the windows. A Windcutter flew in near the building to let off more ground forces shipped from a frigate.

“You see it?” Stevens said.

“Yeah, I see it.” Pat said. “All forward personal, prepare to fire upon the Windcutter.”

Covis at their stations reached for the nearby fixed panels and grasped them firmly. They then fired up the Apla in their bloodstream to pour energy into the tank. After a couple of seconds of receiving energy, the tank was fully powered.

"That's enough, prepare the cannon." Pat said. As Pat gave the order, the large cannon atop the Fortress aimed at the Windcutter.

"Ready to fire." Colin said.

Pat pointed his fingers through the window at the Martian ship and said, "Fire!"

The cannon took no time to charge up the energy, and in one quick burst released all of the energy through the weapon's shaft propelling the power at the Windcutter. The Windcutter seemed to move up and away from the building, but the blast was too fast. It hit with immense power and ruptured the back engines. The ship swung in the air as it lost control of its propelling floatation. It whipped itself downward and headed uncontrollably for the building. It smacked into the side of the thick structure creaming the windows and liquefying the infrastructure. An explosion in the building added to the crucial minor victory of the Covis. The team pressed on.

Up in the command deck of the Martian capital ship, Daneland looked firmly at the computers of the war room. He knew his side was losing the ground fight, and he could pinpoint exactly where it was coming from.

"Sir, the front lines are crumbling." A soldier said.

"I know." Daneland said. "It must be Covis."

"What are we to do?" The soldier said.

"If we have to, we will move the fleet closer to the battle. We can give our men some support and also another target for the enemy. But I am shy of doing that because of the Curator fleet. If we engage the ground forces, their entire fleet will try to swoop in around us and outnumber us in the air." Daneland said.

"There is always a Knight attack, sir." The soldier said.

"Aye, release the Knights." Daneland said.

The Covis' tank pressed on with the charge. The Fortress Tank had spews of energetic blasts erupting from all sides of it. Martian air vehicles breezed by the tank only to get a clump full of energy ripping through the engine and wings. One Martian Angel ship that flew by fired off a missile. The attack was mapped out from the start by the Covis inside the tank and before the

rocket could get too far from the ship, it was destroyed causing an explosion of fire to thrust upon the vessel.

“Pat!” Bacon said. “I got something you should see!”

Pat rushed over to the screen Bacon was operating at. “What is it?” He said. “More troops? Knights?”

“Something disturbingly worse.” Bacon said. He pointed at the screen which showed the field of the battle. Several beacons representing the entirety of Covi One were leaving the battlefield in a hurry. The formation looked as though the group was fleeing their point in the attack and heading southeast towards the city.

“Where could they be going?” Pat said.

Banner noticed the two huddled around the screen and left his station to join the conversation. He took a quick look at what was going on.

“Probably can’t handle the heat.” Banner said.

“Are you crazy? They’d never flee the battle.” Pat said.

“Realistically, they probably got called away for a more important job.” Colin said.

“I’m still having a hard time imagining what could be a more important task than...” Pat stopped speaking. Again he heard a faint buzzing signal in his helmet. Then it became louder and louder interrupting his thinking until he was only focused on that. Then his screen went blank again with a fuzz of a weak signal. And again, he saw the symbol appear in his helmet. And after a few short seconds, it stopped. The Covis were alarmed at Pat’s odd response.

“Pat?” Stevens said. “Is there something wrong?”

“It’s that damn signal again.” Pat said angrily. He ripped off his helmet in a rage.

“What signal?” Banner asked.

“I know where they’re going. I think.” Pat stated. His hair spiked up with bits of sweat in it. He frantically passed his hand through it and slapped his helmet back on. Then he prepared an encrypted call to the Aries.

Aboard the Aries, Nathan remained at his work desk. He was working on the mechanics of the Covi armor while also taking a peak at the battle occasionally. His work desk signaled to him that Pat was trying to reach him. After swiping his hand for confirmation the line went through.

"Yes, Pat." Nathan said.

"Nathan, Covi One is leaving the battlefield. I need you to drop what you're doing and find out where they are going." Pat said.

"I'm on it." Nathan said.

Pat ended the call and stood back up to chat with the Covis. He put his hand near the chin of his helmet.

"I'm convinced they're just too scared." Banner said.

"They're elite soldiers fighting in a war." Colin said. "That's an absurd claim."

"I think they're going for the Monk." Pat said.

Banner's arms went limp at his sides as his fear mixed with his temper. "For the sake Lutz's life, that had better not be true. If they find the Monk, not only will they have whatever power this thing brings, they will have the entire military at their whim as if they were great icons." He said.

"I know, that's what I am deeply afraid of." Pat said.

"Why would they have Covi One go?" Bacon wondered. "We've always been the team to go on highest priority missions."

"Unless they no longer think the Monk is the highest priority." Banner said.

"Of course it is. What could be greater? This was the mission, wasn't it?" Pat said.

"Capture the family, be the hero of the people. Capture the Monk, be the savior of the military and the people." Stevens responded.

"To hell with that, I want both." Banner said. "There is no reason why we can't have both. I suggest we make a move now."

"Alright, I've kept my mouth shut about this thing for a while, but listen. I am going to find the Monk. You can hunt the King." Pat said.

"That's outrageous." Banner said firmly biting his words at Pat. He ripped off his helmet and gritted his teeth.

"Don't talk back to me, Covi." Pat said.

"Now you're just completely out of line, Pat." Stevens said.

The Covis stepped in closer to the screen discussing their next actions. Kayla stayed at her station and kept to the task. Just at that moment, she noticed something coming from the Martian fleet. Martian ships moved out of the capital ship as it pushed a bit forward. She tried to keep to her business, but couldn't help but watch peculiarity of the ships movement. It wasn't in attack speed and was not directly hurdling toward them. Out from the top of the ship jettisoned many large dark metallic pieces. It looked like a spray of broken scraps just erupted in the air and was now beginning to settle its upward velocity in preparation for descent. One piece's fall was aimed directly at the Covis.

Kayla tipped away from her station and scurried towards the conversation.

"We've got a bit of a problem outside." Kayla said.

"Make a move." Pat said. "I dare you, Andrew."

"I don't want to have to kick your ass today, sir." Banner said.

"That's enough both of you." Colin said.

"Hey we're a team guys." Bacon added.

"Tell it to our natural born leader over here." Banner said. "Whose side are you on anyway?"

Kayla, angered that her voice was not even noticed, ran back to the station and checked out the window. The piece was falling faster towards them now. She looked at the battle's canvas and saw some of the pieces falling down behind Curator lines. It was now clear to her what they were. Knights. She ran back to the Covis with her hands in the air.

"Lieutenant Listowel!" Kayla said.

Pat pulled off his helmet. He pointed to his chin in fury and said, "C'mon, pop one right here, tough guy." He eyed down his Covi subordinate with hateful eyes. His taller stature helped the intimidation factor as well, though Banner didn't respond to it.

"Knock it off, Pat!" Stevens said partially getting in the middle of them but still not in position to stop a fight.

"Pat!" Kayla yelled ferociously.

The Covis turned their heads at the last scream. Pat leaned against the control deck with his arms folded. He was not amused at her interrupting.

"What!" Pat yelled back.

Before Kayla had a chance to say a word, a massive Knight came crashing through the roof of the Fortress Tank. The Knight's significant mass and sheer speed made the crack through the hull easy from the pure outrageous momentum it had collected. The Knight was ready after the landing. It had just torn through multiple sealed layers of super fibers and metal, completely fractured the infrastructure of the tank, and put a hole in the bottom floor, but it was prepared to fight. Wielding its battleaxe and up on its feet, it was the only animal in the room prepared to fight. The Covis were thrown to the side from the impact. The upper half of the tank peeled off after being broken. The Covis inside the tank were still trapped with the beast.

The Knight whipped its battleaxe around its body and swung at the first person it saw, which happened to be Pat. Pat was just regaining his feet when he saw the axe heading toward him. He leapt to the side while the axe smashed the computer control board. He managed to get his hands on a hanging piece of metal to hold on to after his jump. The walkway that was made inside the tank was no longer there, so Pat was hanging on to not fall.

The Knight looked just to the right of its axe where some of the other Covis stood. It jerked its axe over and attempted to hit one of the Covis. Kayla was nudged by the bar of the axe and instead of falling back or getting away, she held on. The axe was thrown around rapidly and aggressively tearing through the remaining intact metal of the vessel. The Knight noticed Kayla holding on and tried to whip her off. She held tightly, but the Knight propelled its axe fast enough to whip her off. Her arms slipped off and her body rocketed toward the metal walls. Having Apla already waiting in her system, she stopped her motion using her jetpack and jet boots. Before the Knight could react to her stopping, she blasted off up in the air while firing a few quick lights blasts at the beast.

Pat used the time Kayla was fighting to tap into his Apla storage. He gained enough energy to fly and quickly blew right past the Knight and out of the roof of the tank. Several other Covis followed right after. Banner, who was tossed to the very bottom of the tank, was just beginning to stand up. As Banner was the last one in the tank, the Knight promptly took notice. It launched the head of its axe right for Banner. Banner, shocked at what just happened, did his best to react quickly. He dove to his side as the axe punctured the spot he was previously standing at. The Knight ripped its axe back out of the bottom and tried hammering Banner again, this time from the side. Banner recognized the attack and flipped over the swing. Landing upright, the Covi swiftly charged up his energy and locked out one of his hands so it was pointing at the Knight. The beast threw its axe at him again, this time from above. Banner aimed at the hurdling chunk of metal. He fired his blast at the weapon and blew the trajectory back up slightly. All the force the Knight was swinging with was stopped in an instant by Banner's blast.

Next Banner whipped his body around so most of his back was facing the Knight. The Knight was recovering its control of the axe. Before the Knight could swing again, Banner gathered his time to create a ball of energy in his hands. He warped together the Apla power and created a sphere of compressed enraged fire. As the Knight gathered to smash the Covi, Banner spun slowly and lowly around revealing the orb of energy he had collected. And with one big oomph, Banner pushed his arms outward and released it all together. The energy burst into the Knight and was an act of force so strong it plunged the Knight into the front of the tank. The smack against the infrastructure was so much it caused the front half of the tank to collapse as the Knight rolled back and onto the Martian surface. Banner flew out of the wreckage and joined the Covis who managed to jump out before the tank was totally dismantled.

Spiraling in an organized fashion the Covis blasted their jets close to the ground and centered their circle on the weakened Knight. They fired taunting blasts all around the beast. It cried out in confusion as the Covis completely outnumbered and outclassed it. Finally, it fell to its knees from being under fire and died. The Covis landed and collectively took a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad that went quick." Pat said.

"I can't believe they sent Knights in." Stevens added.

"It looks like they've been spread out all throughout the warzone." Bacon stated.

"Someone must be getting desperate." Banner said.

"Which is why command won't care much when we leave." Pat said. Just then Pat's arm computer started flaring up. A couple flickering lights and a small ringing sound meant he was getting a call. He flipped open his wrist armor.

"Yes, Nathan?" Pat said.

"Pat, I got something for ya." Nathan said.

"Let's hear it." Pat said.

"Command issued Covi One to go after where they believed the Monk to be." Nathan said. "Did it pretty covertly too."

"Was it in the city center?" Pat said.

"Yeah, how'd you know?" Nathan asked.

"A guess." Pat said nonchalantly and half sarcastically.

"I can't crack this file code 'Atir'. But that's where command got their info from." Nathan added.

"So it wasn't a signal they picked up on?" Pat asked.

"No, this file has been here for a while. Just about as long as our return from Mars."

"It must be a spy they aren't telling us about." Pat said.

"It could be a mission they gave to Covi One unbeknown to us." Nathan added.

"I certainly hope not." Pat told.

"You still have time; they're signals show that they're still on their way." Nathan said.

"Alright, we're on our way now." Pat said. "Pat out."

"Were going?" Matthews asked excited.

"Banner, Stevens, Colin, Bacon, Matthews, and Ace. You're on me." Pat said. "We're going after this now."

"You can't just leave me out of this." Kayla said.

"Actually we can. I need someone to stay here and keep the teams' transponders fighting in this location so command doesn't think we left. We're going dark." Pat told her.

"Now hold on a minute, Pat. I vote to take Kayla in." Matthews said. "You're being unfair with your picks."

Pat turned quickly and swiped at Matthews' chest sending him slamming to the ground. "Don't open your mouth in defiance against me again. I'm the head of this team. I make the decisions. If you don't like it, you can return to base." Pat ordered with a commanding yell.

Matthews remained speechless.

"If you don't put me in the squad, you'll be making a big mistake." Kayla said.

"And why's that?" Pat asked.

"Because you can't trust me." She said. "And if you give me all these transponders, there is only one place I'm going to drop them. And that is the command deck of the Aries."

Pat was furious, but knowing his time was short he compromised.

"Bacon, you and Kayla switch." Pat said.

"Now 'that' is unfair." Colin said. "We are always together."

"If you don't like it you can stay, but if I'm going to have Kayla threatening me over here... Look, just do it." Pat ordered.

"But—" Colin said scratching for words.

"It's alright, bro." Bacon said. "I'll take this one for the team."

"Bacon, lead the attack on. Do what I would do." Pat said.

"Honestly, I think I should stay put." Colin said.

"Why?" Pat said. "Is the storm coming? Too much heat to handle?" Pat said.

"No, but there is no reason at this point." Bacon said.

"A fair claim." Pat said. He reached as his thigh and removed a holstered pistol. He then tossed it at Bacon. Bacon caught the gun with both hands. "But I don't care. Keep out transponders at the heart of the battle. Make me look good."

With that, Pat and the team blasted off to the city. Their jets took them through the air as quick speeds. They approached the vast city quickly. The buildings they were flying towards stood high above them. Pat angled their movement south towards the waters of the city. The coastline they flew over was filled with exotic Martian plant life. Much of it was a variant of plant life on earth, but the patches of grassy vegetation near the waters seemed to have a sparkle of red Martian rust underneath giving the view a contrast of the two colors. The water had the same contrast. The ocean was blue but dark with a hint of orange and red. The highways that ran through the city were empty of people but had countless idle public transportation vehicles.

"We sure put the scare in the city." Kyle said.

"I think we put the scare in the entire planet." Banner said. "And this isn't even our biggest fleet. We should have tried this peace thing a long time ago."

"Enough chit chat, stick to the plan. When we reach Covi One I want—" Pat said.

As Pat was speaking another man with rocket jetpack and jet boots came out of the ocean sky and clobbered him. The other illuminator hit Pat and drove him into the nearest building, smashing through the glass and causing both of them to tumble on the ground. The enemy combatant was able to roll upward and regain his footing once entering the building. Pat, on the other hand, had too much uncontrollable momentum and was tossed against the floor of

the building and skidding before a complete stop. The enemy resumed his fighting stance. Pat was slow to get up after a hit like that. Once up, he eyed down his opponent.

“Wait a second. You’re that Martian from the other day.” Pat said.

“Makes you wish you killed me, doesn’t it?” A now revealed Connors said.

The Covi Six members quickly rushed over to see what the problem was only to find Pat stumbling upward and the enemy prepared to fight. Then Pat noticed them creeping up from behind.

“Banner! Get out of here!” Pat said. “Take the team and complete the objective.” Banner quickly led the Covis onward.

Connors unlocked a couple of cables from his neck and pulled off his helmet showing his face.

“Max Connors. What a surprise this is.” Pat said.

“And the Covi Six leader Pat Listowel I presume.” Connors said.

“So this is what you’ve been up to all these years.” Pat said. “Protecting this sad excuse for a faction.”

“At least we’ve gotten away from mass genocide.” Connors said. “I’m glad I left the Curators. I saw the truth.”

“The truth of what? You are weak. That’s why you joined the weak.” Pat said.

“How can you sit back and let them kill so many—” Connors said.

“Because they’re not people.” Pat said. “They don’t have worth. They are better off helping the cause. We push for a grander society, but the Martians... The Martians want war.”

“If we want war, what are you doing here?” Connors said. “They have you puppets so warped. With their techniques of neutralization. You dehumanize your victim.”

“You’re so much against power, yet you sit around and take orders from an absolute King.” Pat said.

“I can’t have it perfect. I honor my King. But I at least recognize the duopoly of the situation.” Connors said.

Pat began thrusting Apla into his bloodstream. “I’m going to give you one last chance, Connors.” Pat said. “Tell me where the Monk is and I will let you go.”

"I still don't know what you're referring to. They've got you all hopped up on a conspiracy." Connors said. "But if it's a fight you want..."

The two began to dance around a circle with hands forward.

"I'm going to make you regret your betrayal." Pat said.

"Take the first shot, buddy." Connors said.

Pat fired a short blast of Apla at Connors. The blast quickly dodged by Connors as he spun around low and fired one at Pat. Pat managed to dance around the blast as well. The Martian fired two more quickly after Pat reached the ground. Pat jumped to miss the first one and bent over backwards away from the next. He only used the awkward position to his advantage when he jumped backwards and shot at Connors with both hands. Connors allowed the first to just graze him but couldn't escape the second which smacked him right in the chest and forced him through the glass out the window. Pat stood tall knowing the Martian wasn't done yet. Sure enough, having been tossed out the window, Connors slowly rose to the level the floor was with his jets and stared Pat down.

Banner and the rest of Covi Six flew until they were just outside of Bart Sharpton's signal. Kyle flew up beside Banner and gave him a concerning nod.

"In here." Banner said pointing to an adjacent building. He flew up and punched the glass of the upper level and lowered himself to the ground inside. The other Covis did the same right after.

"This is exhausting." Banner said with his hands on his knees.

"I don't think we've had to fight this long with Apla in a long time." Kyle said.

Kayla leaned against the window and slouched to the ground. Colin followed suit right after. Matthews leaned over on himself breathing hard and trying to stretch and stand tall. Ace stood by the window with his sniper in hand tired from the battle, but not showing it.

"What's the plan now?" Kayla said.

"Whatever it is, let's make sure it doesn't involve much more Apla." Matthews said.

"We're going to take the prize right out of One's hands." Banner said. "They're signal was still a bit farther up ahead. Another mile or so."

Ace kept looking out the window at the shore. Seeing movement he picked up his sniper and looked down his scope. He could see several Martian troops leading the way for the royal family. He watched as they covered the surrounding area and waited at the pier. Ace saw every

bit of it. He panned the room the Covis were in and looked for someone to tell. He then nudged Matthews standing next to him. Matthews straightened himself out and looked out the window where Ace was searching.

"Oh man. Hey guys." Matthews said. The Covis stood up slowly and made their way to Matthews. "You'll never believe what Ace just found."

The royal family was making their way down the open pier to the end.

"Oh man. I don't know what to do here." Banner said.

"At least you haven't lost your cool yet." Colin told him.

Kyle had now moved over and saw the situation on the ground. "Listowel's orders were to go after the Monk."

"I know. But this is so close." Banner said with a tone of grandeur. "How many battles have we fought for that man's head? And his family too. And now it's so close."

"But what about the orders?" Stevens asked.

"To hell with the orders." Colin said. "Pat's out of his mind all of the sudden. That selfish prick split up me and my best friend."

"The war is right there too." Matthews added. "That's the King, the royal family, and the governor's wife, Rita."

"As important as the Monk may be, and as much as I desired it, we have a great shot at grabbing the royal family here." Banner said. "Everyone on me. Ace, you stay here. Keep an eye out for us."

Silence was about to break between Pat and Connors.

"That was a fun little game." Connors said.

"Gearing up for round two?" Pat said.

"Not even close." Connors said.

Connors got to solid ground several meters in front of Pat and turned off his jets. Both assumed a serious stance with arms locked out at each other. Both of them knew the exact moment to attack. There was no talking, and almost no sign to give away the start. They just knew. They both started firing all they had with both hands. The tiny shots of energy darted back and forth in the floor of the building. Each illuminator dodged the attacks. There were an incredible

amount of blasts fired. Some energy blasts connected mid air causing a small burst of force that shook the ground. Both the Curator and the Martian let out about a blast every second. They circled around the room still firing and dodging. After nearly a minute of constant firing, the two wound, round and round, closer to each other before being so close a fist fight was imminent.

Down on the battlefield, Bacon struggled to fight into the center. He joined up with a squadron of Curator soldiers and fought alongside them. Several Knights were smashing apart tanks and tossing soldiers aside like they were dolls. Their hammers were doing massive damage no matter what the object was. But once the Bacon arrived to help, there was little more they could do. Curator soldiers cheered on as the Covi began ridding the battlefield of the Knights, slowly, one by one.

Up in the control deck of the Martian capital ship, Daneland stood with his advisor as they watch the battle ensue.

"The Curator army still presses further." The advisor said.

"The Knights only seemed to slow them down." Daneland said. "Damn, I didn't want to have to do this, but we're bringing the fleet in."

"And the Curator fleet?" The advisor said.

"This is actually to our advantage." Daneland said. "If we provide support for our troops, we can save the ground battle." He scratched his beard. "Not if, but when the Curator fleet engages us, we'll open up and fire upon their smaller vessels."

"And what about those capital ships?" The advisor said.

"We'll let our cruisers take them down. Smaller attack ships will engage their support systems while the bigger ships find a way to board their ships. We'll try and create a battle inside their own craft." Daneland said.

"I'll give word now, sir." The advisor said.

"Oh, and one more thing son." Daneland said. "If they open up their cannons, fire nukes, or have any kind of high heat signatures... a radiation flare... anything, you alert me. We'll fire all nukes and Detaunts, and hope our shields will hold up the impact."

"Aye, sir." He said and ran off.

The Martian Capital ship dove into battle. Its small fighters lead the charge, and the frigates surrounded it for protection. Immediately it opened fire on the Curator ground forces. Small

guns aboard the ships let their bullets roll as they creamed Curator forces. All tanks, small aircraft, and high powered infantry opened up on the Martians.

Pat threw the first punch and then the first haymaker. One Connors missed and the other he absorbed. Connors started swinging for Pat's head. Pat got hit a couple times but managed to deflect many of his throws. Connors, lunging at the Covi, came too close and Pat swung his elbow in clocking Connors in the head and forcing him back. Pat took advantage of the strike and rushed in to deliver a blow. Connors who had his hands on his head and his eyes pointing mostly downward seemed like he had no idea the attack was coming. Pat jumped out and threw his fist at Connors' skull. The Martian moved his head just out of the way for Pat's hand to miss, and used the positioning of his hands to quickly suck Pat's whole arm in past his body. Pat was totally overextended and Connors made him pay by locking his whole right arm in an arm bar. Using the leverage and pressure point of Pat's elbow, Connors swung him around. Pat tried to fight it, but his efforts were in vain as any more tugging could severely damage his arm.

After a short twirl to show Pat he had control, Connors reversed his hip movement and jerked his right shoulder against Pat's chest and whipped him to the ground. Connors wrestled his way into a mount and started punching Pat directly in the head. The Covi helmet was designed to protect him, but the power at which Connors hit was enough to shake through and hurt. Pat blasted his jets and tried to escape Connors, but Connors held on. The jets sent both of them riding across the floor and crashing out the window. In free fall from the massive building, Pat clobbered Connors and tried to push him off. Finally he gave up trying and charged his hands. He aimed his hand at Connors and let loose his energy. But Connors saw this coming, and just as Pat was firing, Connors jumped off. Pat not only missed Connors, but his blast hit his own boot.

"Damn it!" Pat yelled.

His boot sparked and shut off. A small burst of fire popped out of it and then it went dead. Pat lost his air balance and tumbled around before fixating his other boot around his leg and recharging his jetpack. He flew off as fast as his impairment would allow him.

Quickly, Connors turned his jets back on and stopped his free fall. Pat was already in full speed flying away from the Martian to regain his control. Connors was not about to stop there. He fired up his jets and blasted off toward Pat. Pat was beginning to slow down as he rounded the corner of a building, but having checked his surroundings he noticed the distance between him and the Martian quickly decreasing. He fired up what he could and headed west through the city.

Aboard the Aries, Lutz stood at his computer screens on the pad above his minions. He watched as his troops were mercilessly beaten down by the Martian fleet. Commander Clark walked up directly behind him with a tablet as he checked the status report.

"Sir, it has been minutes since the Martian fleet has invaded our ground forces and we have done nothing to help them." Commander Clark said.

"I know. And soon it will become quite eventful." Lutz said in his cold rough voice. "Soon I will revive an old war tactic I have long been waiting to use."

"I don't believe I know what you mean, sir." Clark said.

"You will, commander. Bring the Aries' jump engines online and prepare to move the ship above the warzone." Lutz said.

"And what of the rest of the fleet?" Clark said.

"Nothing. They will stay the course. Move in the Aries now." Lutz said.

"The Aries will be totally unprotected. How can you even suggest such an informality?" Clark said.

"The Aries will be fine, commander. Move in the ship." Lutz said.

"But above the attack? Alone? We'll completely miss the battle. Our guns won't be in range to attack a single ground vessel and aid the attack." Clark said.

"One will. Move in." Lutz said.

"You can't possibly suggest...." Clark said.

"I am ordering the ship into battle immediately. Follow my orders, commander, or be reprimanded." Lutz said.

"Aye, sir. Moving the ship into battle. Jump coordinates ready." Clark said.

Within seconds, the Aries fired up its accelerators and blasted the air behind it. It rocketed abnormally fast out from the position of the fleet. The air shook as the ship moved forward so quickly. Almost in an instant it flashed into position above the warzone. A screeching sound associated with the ships movement filled the air. The Aries was loud and large enough for everyone on the battlefield to know of its movement, but it flew into the battle so quickly that neither side was ready for its arrival.

"Admiral! The Curator capital ship just breezed right into battle. Its sitting above us now!" A troop said at a console in the command deck of the Martian capital ship.

"Are they about to attack? What are the heat signatures?" Daneland said. "Status! I need a status!"

"Negative, sir. Side guns are locked up tight." A troop said.

"Heat sig's are next to nothing. They're drifting. Stopped, just sitting right above us." Another troop said.

"Should we be worried, admiral?" An advisor said.

"No. Apparently not. If there are no heat signatures, there is no power. They're side guns are locked up too.... Ugh. What are they doing up there?" Daneland said.

"Could it be a trap?" The advisor said.

"It very well could be. But it could also be a bluff." Daneland said. "Do they have any systems online? Any outer turrets?"

"Just core and mainframe. No military power as far as I can see." A troop said.

"And how high are they sitting?" Daneland said.

"About four kilometers up, sir." He responded.

"That's too high for a direct assault. And Lutz is not about to fire a nuke at us. Not while we have Detaunts online. I'm not falling for that one again." Daneland said to the advisor quieter. He turned his cheek a bit closer and said something a little more discreetly. "Listen up son, you either learn from your past or old times bites you in the ass."

"Yes, sir." The advisor said.

"Watch for missiles coming from their fleet, and keep an eye on the heat signatures. Other than that, continue with the assault." Daneland said.

Connors was about 30 meters behind him when he started firing multiple Apla blasts at Pat. Pat maneuvered about in the air as he grazed the upper highway system in the city. Blasts that missed him crashed into the roadway.

Connors was gaining on him quickly, and Pat knew it. Soon he would be right on top of him, and without a properly operating jet boot he couldn't outrace Connors. Then Pat saw a transit bridge between two buildings up in the distance and had an idea. He raised his flight pattern

slightly higher. Connors was so close, if Pat waited any longer, he'd be touching his boots. Pat fired two blasts with his hands at the bridge. The bridge was easily weakened as it had not had much infrastructure to begin with. It began peeling from its connected wires and within seconds it was in freefall. Pat saw this as his only opportunity and he blasted what he could to plunge him underneath the building. Connors tried to catch up in time to avoid the falling pieces and grab Pat, but at the last second he pulled his legs underneath him and slowed his momentum to a stop. Pat let loose a sigh of relief as he blasted away. That small amount of time where Connors stopped moving was enough to get Pat considerably farther away. Pat was still in range of sight of Connors, but too far for an accurate blast and too far to catch up before Pat got out of the city. Then he turned to something a little bit more conventional for an illuminator. Connors lowered himself on to the rubble of the road which was not too far below him. He moved his right hand down and withdrew a long, gold, oddly shaped pistol from his hip. He pointed the barrel of the gun at Pat with one arm holding on. He charged up Apla and took a couple of seconds exerting his energy into the gun. The gun clearly had an electrical charge to it as the long barrel had sparks zapping on it.

"I'm not done with you yet." Connors said. He eye balled the shot without a sight, gripped the gun tensely, waited patiently, and fired the shot from the gun. The bullet zipped in the air and sure enough stuck Pat right in the back; a direct hit right in the left side of the jetpack.

Pat's jetpack lost all stability and twirled him into the nearest building window where he smashed through collapsed on the floor before shutting down his jets. A smoke trail was left from the damaged jet that Connors was happy to follow. Inside the building, which was under construction, Pat lied on the ground feeling intense pain. The bullet was so strong it cracked his armor and pushed through into the back. A far more painful and severe injury than anything he had received the day before. Pat could feel sweaty oozing blood run between the crease of his skin padding and armor. He popped his helmet notches and threw his helmet off. Blood that had just come up from his throat was in his mouth and he quickly spit it out. He crawled his way to a standing building pipe and pulled himself up it.

"Covi." Connors said.

Pat turned and saw Connors standing calmly at the unfinished edge of the building. Once Pat took a second looking, Connors raised his hand and blasted Pat sending him to the ground. He skidded across the floor before slowing near the edge of the building. Connors strolled up to him slowly with one arm confidently raised. Lying on the ground, Pat was in a state of dismay. He had scuff marks on his face from just hitting the ground. Dirt and construction ashes glued to his face from his dripping sweat.

“Why? What in the world did you hit me with?” Pat said. “How... How am I bleeding?” His left lung having been punctured caused simple breathing to become a daunting task.

“This gun? I am not entirely sure to be quite honest with you. All I know is it was given to me and it is damn powerful.” Connors said.

“Are you gonna kill me?” Pat said.

“Yeah. Yeah I’m gonna kill you.” Connors said. “I’m gonna kill you because you can’t tell right from wrong. And I’m not sure I can help you with that.”

Before Connors could speak, his armband clicked on and a rolling message was being transmitted to him aloud. “Captain! We’re under attack! Get to the extraction—”

Connors stuck his hand at Pat and charged up his energy. Pat looked at him defeated. He then turned his hand and fired the charged energy away from Pat.

“I could have killed you. But I didn’t. That makes us even now.” Connors said. Once he finished his sentence, he powered on and put himself in the air. Before leaving, he noticed Pat’s helmet lying on the ground. He turned off his jets and walked over to the helmet. He picked it up and observed it carefully. He batted his eye at Pat. Pat was still and not moving. Connors put the helmet slightly away from his body with one hand and loaded his fist with the next. He punched the helmet in the face. He then did it again. This time, there was a slight cracking sound. He did it again. The black shade over his visor was knocked off. He did it again. Some of the glass of his visor cracked. And again. More cracks filled up the visor and the helmet ticked with another crack. He then dropped the helmet on the ground and with one final hop, he plunged his foot down on the helmet. The helmet cracked all the way through. It was still mostly physically intact, but the inside casing, visor, and anything that allowed the helmet to function smoothly was completely broken. Connors left the helmet on the ground and blasted away through the city.

Pat grabbed the ground and scooted himself a little more upward. His body was in shock from the sharp pain in his back. He couldn’t move his body as well as he would have liked to but managed to pull his arm up over his stomach. He had to take a breath and a seconds rest to calm the pain after any basic movement. He then managed to get his other arm up on top of his body. Moving only his fingers, he flipped on his wrist controls and accessed his computer. After a couple button pushes, he activated his personal distress signal.

“Sir, we’re doing quite well.” The advisor said to Daneland. “The enemy has suffered major casualties and we are pushing back the battle line.”

“I can see that, and now it is time to double our efforts and our winnings.” Daneland said.

“Sir?” He said.

“I want our cruisers to engage the Curator capital ship.” Daneland said. His advisor looked surprised.

“The entire fleet?” He said.

“No. Send in our air vehicles and have some of our frigates rise to meet them. We are calling out that bluff.” Daneland said.

“Aye, sir.” He said.

As the Martian fleet spread out and more ships climbed into the atmosphere to fight missiles were fired at the Curator ship.

On the bridge of the capital ship, Lutz awaited word from the battle from his commanders. Commander Clark came before him and told him. “Sir, we are being dominated on the ground. I still don’t know why we have yet to move in and assist our forces. We could have also attacked the Martian fleet.”

“Do not question my decisions commander.” Lutz said.

Beacons aboard the bridge lit up. “Sir, Martian ships are flying closer to our airspace. They’re firing missiles!” A minion of Lutz’s said from below.

“Hahahaha! Firing missiles? Hahahaha!” Lutz cried out in laughter. “It is finally time to unveil my weapon. No one will dare oppose this cruiser.”

“General, are you out of your mind?” Clark said. “We haven’t even given evacuation warnings. They’ll see it coming.”

“Which is precisely why there will be no evacuation warning, Commander.” Lutz said.

“No. No I will not sit for this one. Not this time.” Clark said.

Lutz swung his body around and punished Clark in the face, sending the older man to the ground.

“Take the Commander off my bridge! I don’t want to see him in my sight. It’s to the Apla chambers for you old man.” Lutz said as Commander Clark was dragged out of the command room.

“Fire the Caelum Fulmen.” Lutz said in his angry scratchy, yet proud and pleased voice.

The Aries, which still sat directly over the battlefield and the Martian capital ship, opened up one large metal hatch from the ship. The metal doors slid open quickly in a manner that presented no threat and no concern. The sky began to pull itself in. The clouds that were out that day seemed to bend inwards towards the Aries. The air slowed and with one giant pulse a massive shockwave rumbled out through the air. It sounded like the sky had just cracked. No visual signs of damage appeared, but the sound was so powerful it shook the air.

“What was that?” Daneland said.

A large beam plunged out of the hole and blasted right through the air and the center of the Martian capital ship and all the way to the ground. The beam remained firing as constant energy was pumped from the ship. It looked as though it was endless. Sparks spontaneously went off in the skies above the Aries. The Martian ship continued to be pelted by this large beam. It punctured the center of the ship and simply destroyed that one area.

“Status!” Daneland said picking himself up off the ground. He still didn’t know what happened. The hit from the beam moved the ship downward a couple of feet in an instant, which caused all of the crew to collapse as if there was an earthquake. One crewmember managed to get to his feet and attend his station quickly.

“Radiation spike.” He said. “It’s super massive.”

“I thought I said to keep an eye on heat signatures!” Daneland said.

“This spiked one million percent in five seconds, sir!” He said.

“Fire! Fire all nukes now! Get our shields up and prepare for the blast!” Daneland said.

The Martian capital ship fired every nuclear missile it had. Dozens of rockets jettisoned from the ship and the frigates. The nukes accelerated upward toward the Curator capital ship.

“My Lord, they’ve fired their nuclear missiles.” A soldier said.

“Finish the sequence.” Lutz said.

A thin wave of light rippled cylindrically from the massive energy beam shooting from the Aries. It expanded rapidly and without warning all technology began to stop. The nukes that were flying toward the Aries suddenly stopped their movement and began falling lifelessly down to the surface. The battlefield was in chaos. Crushingly loud echoes rattled the air to the point where it was in no way calm. The frigates went lifeless immediately after the nukes. The engines stopped and the jets went out the ships fell forward as their front ends toppled downward. The Martian capital ship went out as well, tipping towards the planet. As the ship

tipped, the giant beam crushed other surface areas of the ship cutting right through it like it was butter.

The troops inside the capital ship slipped along the floors from the loss of gravity as everything was in freefall.

“Get us out of here!” Daneland said as the ship toppled and lost power. All of the controls and lights on the command deck went dark and the only light coming through was through the glass lookout on the ship bridge. Screams and shouts were the only thing being communicated onboard the capital ship.

Pat heard a sound like nothing he had ever heard before. It vibrated the air around him, so powerful but at the same time very faint. It was like a screeching howling wind that shook the air molecules around him. He knew he shouldn't move. Any wrong movement would not only be extremely painful but could also damage his insides even further. But his curiosity was just as painful so he pressed on anyway, arching his back and then using his hips to twist himself over onto his side and then all the way to his stomach. In the distance he saw the fight was still going on. He checked quickly for the source of the sound, but also searched the skies for a medical ship coming to his distress beacon. But something peculiar caught his eye. One Curator capital ship stood over the battle, while the rest of the fleet was away. Then he squinted to see farther and he noticed the capital ship firing upon the warzone. Dazed and drowsy his eyes collapsed and he passed out.

“Hahahaha!” Lutz laughed. “Wipe it out now. All of it.” He continued to laugh.

The Aries let out a roaring bang as it accelerated the power of its weapon. The weapon spun its gathered energy and lit up so bright it looked like a star inside the atmosphere of the planet. And with a final thrust, the power of the beam branched off and expanded more powerful than before. The entire massive battlefield was covered with densely, immensely hot, violet colored lightning strikes. The lightning melted metal and caused explosions. It tore right through the magnetic shield the Martian capital ship tried to create and blew up the entire mainframe sending an explosion hurtling through the bridge killing everyone. The lightning covered the entire battlefield including every ship, vehicle, and all infantryman. Tens of thousands of volts covered everywhere in an extremely short period of time. After many seconds of a constant barrage, everything on the battlefield had died.

Finally the lightning stopped. Thick black smoke erupted from the ground and swelled in the air. Little sparks of lightning still snapped occasionally in the air, but as a whole, the lightning attack was over. The smoke raised high into the air and began covering the sky giving everything a dark shade. Compounds like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen were everywhere making the area around the smoke uninhabitable. A massive crater was left in the ground of the original strike.

Outside of that, the entire battlefield was black with ash or crusty remains. With the smoke blowing up higher in the air, the sunlight was soon blacked out and darkness was the only thing around. Any vegetation that covered the field was burned to a crisp. All armor and buildings were flattened as they were melted or crumbled. There was nothing left; nothing except the Aries.

“Take the ship back to the fleet.” Lutz said with a proud gleam in his eyes.

Covi Six, led by Banner, was running by foot after flying down from the building. They were close enough to the pier that flying was no longer necessary. They were not too far behind an unsuspecting royal family when they heard a loud shockwave from the sky. They all slowed their running and looked down the coast to see where it was coming from, but the tall buildings covered up most of the battlefield. All they saw left were swirling dark clouds. The shockwave had grabbed the attention of the royal family as well as they all looked over. The royal guards looked back and noticed the Covis running from a distance. Hardly at all hesitant, they yelled to the King and the others that the time to run was now.

“They’ve spotted us!” Kayla said.

The family had just reached the end of the pier and a large submarine quickly surfaced from the water. Two hatches on it opened up and allowed Martian soldiers armed and ready to pour out and add resistance to their threat.

“They’re getting away.” Stevens said.

“Time to sprint, Covis.” Banner called out. The Covis began dashing as fast as they could down the long pier. They were fast and managed to cut their distance by a large fraction in no time. The Martian forces at the end of the pier noticed the fast Covis approaching quickly. They locked their guns close to their chests and began firing streams of bullets at the Curators.

The Covis broke off from each other and avoided the bullets by making very large leaps and bounds through the air and changing direction when they could. Bullets that made contact did little but create a forceful impact against the Covis. Most bullets didn’t make a solid piercing. The royal family was climbing the various ladders on the side of the aquatic machine. They were almost to the hatches when Banner decided to take control.

“I’m exhausted and don’t know how more Apla I can use, but here goes nothing.” He said. As soon as he got a chance to slow down and avoid some bullets, he powered up what he could in both hands and created a forceful ball of energy. He then quickly released it over the heads of his running comrades in front of him and forced the blow to smack the side of the sub which caused it to rock in the water violently. A fiery smoldering hole was left in the side of the hull

from the impact. The King managed to fall into the doorway of the sub and so did Rita. But Shane and Gordon were both rocked from such a shake beneath their feet. They both lost their footing and fell front first into the hard metal of the sub.

The Covis closed in too close to the Martians and began tearing them apart. Kyle ran up and punched the first soldier he could in the face. The soldier was whipped into the metal siding of the sub behind him from the simple punch the large Covi gave. Kayla grabbed two soldiers at the same time, dismantled their weapons with one hand each, and then whipped them overboard into the water. Both Colin and Matthews ran up the siding of the sub and punished any Martian who was guarding the entrances. Any other soldiers that they didn't touch were sniped by Ace from a distance.

Shane managed to get a hold of his footing and climb up the metal siding of the large sub. Once he got far enough up he turned to see his brother also trying to climb up. Gordon stuck his hand out, but Shane ignored it. He dashed away as if he hadn't seen him and ran for cover at the door of the sub where more Martian soldiers were pouring out to try and contain the Covis. Gordon helplessly tried to grab the smooth surface above him, but this time he lost his grip and plummeted a great height from the top of the submarine and into the water.

Just as the Martian guards seemed helpless, Max Connors came blazing in from the side of the pier while flying his jets and made a forceful kick into an unsuspecting Banner. Banner flew right off the pier and into the water from the blow to the head.

Max had a moment before the Covis were going to enclose him, and he yelled to the Martians, "Get out of here! Take the King and go, I will protect you." He turned around only to see Kayla's fist in his face. She battered him to the ground. Max flipped back up only to see Stevens charging him and shouldering him back on to the ground very forcefully. Max was definitely rattled this time and as he popped himself up to his shaky legs, Colin blazed in with his jets firing and plowed Connors into the cement. The Covis still fought with the Martian soldiers who were there, but quickly put the finished touches on eliminating their group.

Aboard the sub, the King looked around at the soldiers and his family feeling something wrong. His eyes widened and he dove for the hatch as he cried out, "Gordon! Gordon, my son!" He yelled as the soldiers grabbed him tightly and pulled him back. "We need to go back for my son!"

"It's too dangerous, sir!" They told him as they pulled him away.

Rita hugged and held Shane tightly as he smiled deceptively with his father being pulled away.

The sub had everyone but Gordon aboard and sunk quickly into the water. The Covis turned to see their rouge mission going to waste and frantically began blasting laser after laser into the water. All Apla blasts they could conjure rocked the boat and damaged the siding.

When they realized the sub was secure and moving too quickly in the depths of the water to catch up, they turned to a downed Connors.

"Hello Martian." Stevens said. "You just cost us a big price."

Connors was in pain after those hits. Part of his armor was cracked. He was too weak to fire an Apla blast and even if he did, there were multiple Covis staring at him.

"What happened to Pat?" Kayla asked.

"I'll tell you where his body is if you let me go." Connors bargained.

"You did not kill Pat Listowel." Stevens said firmly.

"Of course not, I let him live." Connors said very tired and gulping for air. "But by my estimates, he doesn't have much time left."

The Covis looked at each other concerned. Since the commotion had ended, Ace dropped from the building and began running down the pier to his Covi allies. "I don't believe he beat Pat." Stevens said.

"If I didn't how would I be standing here right now?" Connors replied.

"Kayla, check the airwaves. If Pat is still conscious, he would have put out a distress signal." Stevens said to her. He then looked at Connors. "And you. You're gonna tell me where Pat is, and I'm still gonna drag your ass to jail."

"If a criminal is how I will be treated, a criminal is how I will act." Connors replied. Connors quickly revealed his golden gun that he was secretly charging and fired the loaded bullet at Stevens. The sheer shockwave of the bullet rattled the Covis who were not being scoped out. But the bullet blasted Kyle across his chest armor and into his left shoulder. The big Covi went down and the other Covis around him reacted to his fall. Connors was already firing his jets away before the Covis even figured out what happened. Matthews was the first to see Connors escaping and fired what energy he had left at the Martian. Connors dodged the first two blasts and the third skimmed him causing him to fly off down the shoreline and toward the high rises. Ace just realized Connors was the one flying away and pulled out his sniper. He got a perfect lock on Connors and fired several shots into the air. He fired six shots and all six hit. Four managed to put dents in his armor and two pierced through the damaged section in the

abdomen causing the illuminator extreme pain. Before Ace could get off the possible killer shot, Connors was behind a building.

"Kyle, are you alright?" Matthews asked.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Just a flesh wound in the shoulder. I can feel it." He replied. "It's a good thing I have a lot of extra upper body armor. Sometimes it pays to be the big man, because I can't even imagine how bad this would be without it."

"That's how he downed Listowel." Kayla said. "That gun he had."

"Yeah what was that thing?" Colin asked.

"I can't even begin to imagine." Matthews replied. "Maybe it has something to do with the Monk."

"I think we need to find Pat." Colin said. Ace rejoined the group.

"Ugh. This was a total failure. I could have chased after that Martian too, but I'm out of Apla." Matthews said.

"Same here." Kayla said.

"I'm just about out." Colin added.

"I can't believe we got nothing out of this. Kyle goes down. I have no idea where to find Listowel." Matthews told.

"Actually, a distress signal went out earlier, I think it might have been him." She answered.

"Don't count this as a total failure yet." Banner said climbing out of the water. On his back he carried Gordon. "I managed to catch this guy before he was fish food." Gordon was unconscious and Banner laid him flat on the ground.

"Guys. Let's get to Pat now." Colin said.

The Covis split what Apla canisters they had left equally amongst each other and ran and flew as fast as they could to the last location of the distress signal. Far on the west side of the city, in a tower still in construction, Pat Listowel laid on the ground near death. His blood sprawled out alongside him on the top flood pavement. The Covis had just reached his position and quickly dashed toward him as they could tell he was in bad shape.

"Someone, quick call a Hellion in." Stevens said.

"How are you feeling?" Banner asked quietly directly to Stevens.

"I'll be fine." He replied. "I'm in a much better shape than him."

Kayla and Matthews both knelt beside Pat who was unconscious from all the blood loss. They were doing scans and checking to see if he had a chance with his low vital signs. They found the punctured hole from the gun and also damage done to his boot and tried to put the story together.

"Hey Colin, come help me tap into Pat's computer system." Matthews said.

Colin remained silent. He stared off into the battlefield that no one had yet noticed. Then he took his helmet off. Next Banner noticed. He dropped his usually folded arms and let them float at his sides as he pondered what just happened in disbelief. Stevens knelt on one knee in shock from the devastation. Ace put away his sniper. All of them took their helmets off.

"Colin?" Matthews said looking back up at him. He saw Colin's blank expression. Then he looked at the battlefield while tapping Kayla on the arm. They both took their helmets off.

The only thing left was smoldering ash in a wide open field that spread for as far as the eye could see. The Curator fleet remained stationed above the city. A hellion drop ship was on its way out of the scattered ships in the region. Colin turned to his friends. Unstable and almost broken with sweat pouring down his face, he grabbed air.

He asked them, "Where's Bacon?"

Chapter 8

(Insert time and date here not too shortly after the battle.)

Lutz waited patiently in his private quarters sitting at his desk viewing battle schematics. He reviewed everything that had just happened carefully. The door in front of him was partially propped open. And after minutes of waiting, finally the man he was expecting arrived. Arthur Armstrong grabbed the sliding door firmly and shoved it back against the wall and poured himself into the room. He was still armored up in his large Covi suit. He stood at the doorway with his hands stretched out. Blood rushing through his veins he ferociously ripped off his helmet and threw it into the wall beside him cracking the wall and making the helmet stick in a large divot. His face was that of supreme anger, sweaty and dirty. His head tilted down and his eyes pinned on Lutz; his armor scratched and partially smoked from battle. Lutz kept his eyes on the Covi and confidently sat upright in his chair, his hands folded comfortably in front of him.

"My entire team... is dead." Arthur said with immense anger. "You bastard."

"I am a man of perfection and utmost success." Lutz said as he stood up slowly from his seat. "You know this."

"What does that have to do with my team?" Arthur said.

Lutz stayed silent for a moment. "The Monk was not where you said it would be!" Lutz screamed at the Covi in his powerful broken voice.

"What are you talking about?" Arthur said. "My information was not wrong. That was a mission you assigned me."

"And you failed it. You were supposed to find its location definitively. Covi One went to the base in the city and found nothing." Lutz said. "And for that, you paid a high price. I can't believe you managed to escape the battle."

"I know what the Caelum Fulmen is. I still want to be part of this program." Arthur said. "I still want his cells."

"I'm actually glad you made it out of the battle alive. I get to see the face of a Covi in death once again. Of a failure." Lutz said. Arthur stared at him intensely and began to flare up his energy gloves. But before he got very far with the charge, he was stabbed through the back and to the front with long knife of liquid plasma. It cut right through his armor very easily. Behind him was Cal Sharp holding the knife through Arthur. Cal reached down to Arthur's hands and absorbed and dissipated the energy he was collecting. He then shattered the Apla tanks Arthur had, all while pulling the plasma from his chest. Arthur dropped to his knees and spit up blood.

"I can't allow such a failure to go on, Arthur." Lutz said. "Now I have no choice but to scour this entire planet until the Monk is mine. And you won't be joining us on this hunt." Lutz walked to his desk and picked up a glove that resembled that of the Covis. "It's such a shame too. Because after many years we finally were able to decode the DNA. Finally we were able to find out how it all worked." He said. Arthur was near death but still conscious. He was on the ground grasping at air as his lungs filled with blood. "I was the first and only test subject. And it worked." He had placed the glove fully on at this point and walked back toward the dying Covi. "Poor Arthur, allow me to demonstrate." Lutz activated the glove and fired pure lightning out of his hand into the Covi which super cooked his body and killed him instantly.

Lutz eyed his new glove with pride after he had just taken the life of Arthur Armstrong. He looked at Cal Sharp who stared back at him. "We'll slowly search this entire planet burning and harvesting everything until we find the Monk. If it is safely allocated before we get there first, there will be nothing to stop it. I would rather have it destroyed, honestly." Lutz told.

"I understand, which brings me to my good and bad news." Cal said.

“Please me first.” Lutz said pulling the glove off and placing it on his desk.

“We managed to capture Prince Gordon of Mars and he may know something.” Cal said. “But all but one of Covi Six is alive. Including Listowel.”

Lutz strengthened his fists.

“Should we have them killed?” Cal asked.

“No. They were supposed to die in the attack. Killing seven Covis is not a task that can be done without significant damage to the ship. Not to mention the mutiny they would try and cause.” Lutz said.

“It could be done by my team, my lord.” Cal said. “We can defeat them.”

“I don’t doubt your abilities, Cal. But you also underestimate them in this circumstance.” Lutz told. “I will speak to them and tell them why they have failed. They can remain here in the city to round up Martians for our Apla camps. Our fleet must be leaving soon to capture the Monk.”

“Won’t Listowel be angry that you tried to kill his whole team?” Cal asked.

“No. He will deal with failure much more seriously. My real orders were to kill Collier, but even that will become pointless soon.” Lutz told.

(insert time and date. 3 days?)

Three days of smoke haunted the city. Small fires still bloomed everywhere. A light acid rain was bestowed upon the entire district that washed away the common colors of the city. A city that was once very grand was undergoing a completely new transformation. The fleet had dispersed from the city except for a few frigates and the capital ships. It was a dark and gloomy morning for Grand City.

Curator soldiers combed the city underground and buildings clean of all people. They searched effortlessly for anything that could give them a clue on the location of the Monk, brutally abusing citizens in rough interrogation techniques to see if they knew anything. Both the rich and the poor of the Martian city were meshed together while being forced into Apla camps the Curators had set up near their ground base. No difference could be spotted between the people as impoverished war beaten clothes were the only clothing for all. One by one they were rounded up and expunged of their lives to fuel the ever growing Curator military. Every building that was searched thoroughly and cleared of all information and people was then destroyed by Curator ships. Frigates would blow out the base of the buildings allowing them to fall to the ground and bust into millions of shredded pieces. More smoke and fires erupted

from this and within just the few days since the Curators controlled the city, the skyline was devastated in their inevitable attempt to make it back into a landscape.

Pat awoke in a haze in a medical bay inside of the Curator camp right outside Grand City. The lights were dim enough for his eyes to quickly adjust to being open for the first time in days. He was sprawled out on his bed. Medical lines were attached to his body for fluids, nutrients, and medical data. An air mask was on his face supplying his body with clean oxygen. He felt a slight pain in his back to his stomach that only became fractionally more intense as he flexed his muscles to feel around his body. He was just now regaining his memories and thoughts before he passed out days ago. He realized his failure in the battle and had now understood that he was in a Curator controlled medical room.

He looked around the room. Immediately he spotted a man in front of him. General Lutz stood at the end of his bed looking down on him. Lutz gave no sympathy to Pat's quietly toned ears and used his commanding voice to control the energy in the room.

"You are a failure, Covi." He said with a firm piercing voice. "And not only that but you have disobeyed direct orders. My orders."

Pat was starting to regain his strength now. He moved his arm up to his mask and pulled it off allowing him to breathe the real air. He cleared his throat and felt a pain from days of dryness.

"You nearly killed my team." Pat said.

"Sacrifices must be made sometimes, Lieutenant." Lutz told. "Even you know the price of war. Had the Martians seen you and Covi One fleeing the battlefield, it could have been catastrophic. Instead of wiping out their entire fleet, we could have suffered massive casualties, even lost the battle."

"Then you should have put yourself in the heart of the battle." Pat said with what voice he had. "Then we'll see what kind of choice you make."

"And this is precisely the kind of attitude I won't be missing." Lutz said.

"Missing?" Pat wondered.

"You are officially off the mission." Lutz said. "You will not join us on the hunt for the Monk. You will stay here and watch the city. This mission's glory, Covi, is not yours."

Lutz walked out of the room. Pat wanted to speak. He wanted to say something back, anything. But he was speechless. He was beginning to choke up at what had just happened. Forcing his head back at his pillow, Pat stared at the ceiling.

"You'll be alright in a little while." Stevens said. He was standing beside Pat's bed. Pat hadn't noticed him until just then. He had no armor on and was not combat ready. "The medicine they've got you on is there to speed up your recovery. But you'll feel numb to almost everything for a little while. Almost."

"How long have I been out?" Pat asked.

"Three days. You know, you're pretty lucky. I was the only one on the team willing to donate blood for you. You lost a lot of it. It's not like they keep a surplus of that stuff here." Stevens said.

"Why? Where is everyone?" Pat asked.

"Oh they're around. Except Bacon." Stevens said condescendingly. "He was at the heart of the battlefield when Lutz decided to torch the whole thing. Kinda makes you wish you rethought that jerkass order you gave him. I'm sure." Stevens sat down at a chair and stared blankly with a heartfelt gleam. "I sure am gonna miss that punk kid. Probably not as much as Colin, but it'll be a tough memory. But that's why I'm the only one here, Patrick. Because as much of a bastard you've been to all of us in Covi Six, as much as you bossed everyone around as an incompetent leader, and even with that unbelievably stupid order you gave to Bacon that got him killed, I know that you didn't mean it. Lutz killed everybody. That's why it's interesting he was just here. A despot bossing around a slightly smaller despot."

"I am not a despot." Pat replied still confident of his old ways.

"Oh really? That's why the rest of the team is here right now beside you." Stevens said sarcastically. "If you don't believe me then there is nothing more I can do. Bacon's dead. One of Covi Six is gone for good. Colin is not taking it well, and you are the person to blame. Kayla is finally getting accepted by the team a little bit, and you went from being her childhood hero to the biggest disappointment she ever met in her life. You've been hammering Matthews' self esteem for weeks now and he's gotten to the point where he wants nothing to do with you. Banner I thought is unchangeable, but after pushing his buttons you've managed to get even him pissed off at you. And Ace, my Ace. He hasn't said a word about the whole situation. I figure if you ever want their faith in your hands ever again, it will take a ton of change in you. You can't just demand their respect, you've got to earn it. And earn it back. You have got to stop your attitude. Your selfish attitude. Bring that charismatic Pat Listowel out that we had for so very long when you were with Frank and Luke. The guy who aspired to be the best and not just assume he was. Your military status will read Lieutenant until Lutz bashes you back down to some lower ranking, but if you ever want to be the real and respected leader of Covi Six again, you've got some work to do." Stevens said. He paused. "And if you want me to be okay with you, all I'm looking for is a little sincerity."

Pat leaned back on his pillow with his elbow and thought about everything his friend had just said to him. He looked down at the ground. He was beginning to feel his physical side again. He then began to shake his head.

“Just... leave me alone.” Pat said.

Stevens did not know what to expect and once he heard Pat’s request, he nodded his head and tightened his lips while standing up and walking away. He opened up the sliding door and left the room walking down the hallway. Pat laid in his bed for a few more minutes thinking about all his choices he had made and the things he had said.

When he felt his body was strong enough from the yielding of the drugs, he climbed out of his medical bed while pulling off medical cables. Beside his bed on a table, Stevens had left some Covi-casual clothing wrapped for him. He put it on as fast as he could. His mind was fully awake now and spinning as he tried to put ideas together. The numbness of his body faded bit by bit and he began regaining his original physical strength. The area where his bullet wound was had been patched up and sealed. The powerful therapeutic technologies of the Curator military had his body healthy at a much faster rate. Scars from burns on his chest muscles were already healed. Once he was suited up, he walked out of the medical bay and traveled through the base.

Aboard the Aries command deck, Lutz yet again began passing his orders down to his men below.

“How are we doing on energy?” Lutz asked impatiently.

“We are far beyond full capacity, sir.” An officer said. “The added expendables from the city have recharged us with amazing results.”

Lutz turned to Commander Hydric who stood near him on the deck. “Any word from our informant on the new location?” Lutz asked.

“It appears North Calumet is our newest venturing point.” Hydric responded. “It’s a large city, just like this one.”

“Then it is best we get moving.” Lutz responded. He echoed to everyone, “Fire up the engines and the Lux Inhibiter. Take the Aries and the rest of the fleet to North Calumet.”

Pat had just stepped outside of the base into the acidic rain and cold smoggy skies. He looked out into the city and saw the crumbling buildings and infrastructure. Destroyed buildings and smoke were the city’s most prominent assets now, very different from the last time Pat was in the buildings. The fleet was still in its standby position near the city but it was just beginning to

power on its engines. A slight humming roar was given off by the capital ships as they sped away into the distance while the Lux Inhibiter was fired up causing them to fade into invisibility.

Pat felt terrible and sighed at the ship blasting away. His dreams of being a one man army and being truly known as the best were slipping away from him. Across the camp he noticed thousands of people being herded into the Apla camps. Pat made his way to the other side of the base and stepped inside the Curator entrances. While walking down the halls, he noticed the various windows of the process by which these people were being killed. Down the hall, Nathan was attentively copying down notes near prison holding cells. Not sure of his long term friend's feelings towards him, Pat approached slowly. When he got close, he spoke.

"What have they got you doing?" Pat asked.

"It's nice to see you up and moving after those surgeries. But I don't know if it's necessarily good to see you." Nathan told him while only looking up once and going back to his work.

Pat frowned at his response. Nathan had been such a long time friend, he could hardly believe he didn't want to speak to him.

"I don't know Patchy. I don't think I could be angry at you." Nathan said while he stopped what he was doing and looked at Pat briefly. "And I'm copying down a couple of prison cell numbers. Like this one, that's Prince Gordon Winterfield in there."

"What? What is he doing in there?" Pat asked. "How did we capture him?"

"What do you mean how did we capture him?" Nathan asked. "Covi Six got him."

"So they weren't following my orders then, huh." Pat said. Nathan looked at him inquisitively. He tried to determine whether Pat meant they were disobedient, or he was wrong. "I think they made the right move. Has he been interrogated yet?"

"They tried. But it got nowhere. He won't talk so they sent him here to die." Nathan said.

"I want another look at him." Pat said.

Within minutes Pat had gotten Gordon out of his cell and had guards bring him to an interrogation room. Gordon was placed in a seat across from Pat with two guards still standing in the room. The Martian Prince was chained up to his seat.

"Are you gonna talk?" Pat said. Gordon didn't answer. He didn't flinch. "At all?"

Still no answer.

"You know, I've had a rough couple of days. I've been completely unconscious. I was shot in the back by one of your men." Pat said stopping between sentences. "A tough guy, an illuminator. Max Connors was his name. I knew him before he joined the Martian side. I still have no idea what he hit me with. At first I thought it might have been the Monk. Or at least something created by the Monk. I still don't know what it was. But I do know that it took me off my game for several days. That defeat might have been the greatest defeat of my life." Pat spoke slowly. "I lost everything. My mission, my pride, my team's respect. I guess the best thing about all this right now is that I recognize that. I don't really know, but something tells me that the fact... the fact that I realize this, is the most important thing right now. I realize my defeat. It doesn't make me feel bad, feel inferior."

Pat stopped talking. There was a small awkward silence before Pat took a look at Gordon's tablet again. "So, you wanted to be a doctor, huh?" Pat said making small talk. Gordon still remained silent. "Wow. You were schooled in Chemical Theory at Owen-Hartford Academy. Even I've heard of Owen."

Pat stopped talking. The door behind him slid open and Commander Packer said, "Listowel, come here." Pat walked outside the room and the door shut behind him.

"He's still not talking, I assume." Packer said.

"That's right." Pat replied.

"Well listen, I was reassigned here to make sure the downfall of the city goes smoothly, but I managed to pick up on some useful information." Packer said while handing Pat a tablet. "His wife Mary Winterfield is here. We have her captured. She's nearly dead from all the Apla we've given her. We didn't know who she was until after she was dosed. But this could be an excellent bargaining chip for information."

"That's pretty diabolical." Pat said. "I'll see what I can do."

Pat stepped back into the room with the tablet tucked under his arm. He sat down and slid it over to Gordon.

"We have your wife captured here." Pat said. He slid a tablet across the table with the images of his wife in captivity and other prisoner related information.

Gordon's heart fell. He was given assurance that Mary would be alright, but it appeared his confidence in the Martian efforts were of vein.

"I'm listening now." Gordon said slowly.

"Good. If you cooperate, I'll see to it that both of you make it out of here alive." Pat said.

"Am I going to see that in writing?" Gordon asked.

"That's not how we operate here." Pat responded.

Gordon sighed and leaned forward in his chair. "Very well, what do you want to know?"

"Our utmost importance of being here." Pat said. "Where is the Monk?"

"This was brought to my attention before, and I assure you I don't know what that is." Gordon replied.

"How is it that all of our intelligence including information that I personally stole from your planet myself could be wrong about the Monk?" Pat asked.

Gordon sighed. "From what I understand, Earth has a very protective and systematic design of your political factions. Basically meaning you only have one. Lenz keeps everyone under control with a long chain of command. Here on Mars, even with my father as King, we can hardly keep the people in peace. Part of it might be our limited access to resources from the colonies. We have a very large rebel faction that has only been growing with time. We know little to nothing about them, and it appears it's the same for you, but probably even less. Whatever this Monk thing is has been apparently bugging both sides ever since your side started asking for it." He paused and looked at Pat. Pat didn't change a facial expression and still stared blankly at the Prince. "Or it could just be me. You could beat me and torture me all day and you'll never get anything out of me, because I have nothing to offer you on the subject." Gordon said.

"I believe you." Pat said sincerely. "I probably shouldn't, but for now I do. Then let me ask you this, where is your father going other than North Cal?"

"And why is that important?" Gordon asked teasing.

"Oh you mean other than him being the King?" Pat said in sarcasm. "I am willing to bet he knows."

"How would he know?" Gordon asked.

"Your dad is King because he's a politician. And politicians talk. They know everyone and everything that's going on especially at his stature. There isn't jar of secrets on the planet he hasn't dipped his fingers in, I'm sure. If the planet is supposedly his domain as his title would read, it sure as hell is in his jurisdiction. I can almost guarantee he knows the rebels a lot better than you think." Pat told.

"I'm the prince of the whole planet, yet you believed me when I told you I knew nothing." Gordon said.

"You're no politician." Pat replied. "So where's he heading?"

"I can't tell you only because I don't know." Gordon replied. "But I can give you some other vital information for Mary's safety and mine as well."

"Let's hear it." Pat said.

"The first place I would check for this Monk is with my father. When I was with him, I probably should have pressed him further for information on it. Because you're right, I think he knows too. Now obviously you already have a general idea on where he is, yet I'm surprised you haven't already left. The second place you should probably check is Olympus Mons. That's right, the Olympus Mons. It's where, from what I've heard, the biggest collection of rebels hide out. The answer to the question as to why we haven't sent out military into that area may very well be resting with my father." Gordon told.

"It sounds like your father is the safest bet here." Pat said. "That sounds like all the evidence I need." Pat stood up and walked outside the door. Packer came to him.

"That sounded like all the evidence I needed as well." Packer said. "I'm going to report this to Lutz. He will probably split up the fleet to cover both possibilities. Good work, Listowel."

"What should I do with the prince?" Pat asked.

"Dispose of him. We have already gotten plenty from him, and he could only cause us trouble if we put him back with the Apla groups. The last thing we need is a small revolt. We need each body for energy. I'd rather not shoot them." Packer responded.

"But he gave us what we asked for. That was a fair bargain." Pat claimed.

"Are you actually suggesting giving him, the prince of Mars, his wife and letting him walk out the door?" Packer asked in disbelief. "Drag him outside near the people and shoot him in the back of the head."

"But sir..." Pat said.

"But what?" Packer said stepping back toward Pat. His arms waved in the air with confusion. "You're a Covi. Don't tell me you're feeling any empathy. And hurry it up. These people need to see their defeat." He walked away.

Pat had the soldiers in the room walk Gordon out handcuffed in the front. They followed the Covi to the end of the base and he told them to stay put while he brought Gordon outside while also taking one of their pistols with him. He holstered the gun without Gordon seeing and acted casual while bringing the Covi outside past the gate and into an area where the Martian

prisoners of war were held. He walked Gordon past the Martian people and behind one of the many buildings surrounding the camp. Disobeying the orders of his superior officer, he kept Gordon out of sight of the people to spare him his pride and spare them the horror.

Once Pat was around the building out of sight of both Martian people and Curator occupancy, he stopped his walking and allowed Gordon to walk a few steps in front of him. Pat then clicked the gun and raised it to meet Gordon's head. Gordon heard the horrifying sound and slowly spun his way around to face Pat.

"I have a feeling I'm not going to be seeing my wife." Gordon said to lighten the mood. Pat remained silent. "How could you do this? We made a deal."

"I was expecting to make a fair trade, but apparently my superior had a different idea." Pat said.

"You don't have to do this." Gordon told.

"I don't think you understand my pressures." Pat said. "Turn around and get on your knees."

Gordon looked at Pat and felt the firm command he had just issued and turned down to his knees away from Pat. "Damn it." He said while kneeling. "Just listen to me for a second. Before you go through with this... Just know that I've never been a bad guy. I have a wife. A lovely wife." He said. Pat fidgeted with the gun in his hand. His expression kept changing from concerned to unsure. "She's the most precious thing in the world to me. Whatever you do to me is war, I understand that. It's your job. Just leave her out of it. Please, don't let her die too."

Pat strangled the gun. His body was tense and shaking. His palms filled with sweat. He let out a frustrated sigh and lowered the gun to his side and holstered it properly. "Alright, get up." He told. The prince stood and spun around. Pat grabbed onto his handcuffs and realizing he did not have a key to them grabbed each edge and ripped the metal apart in frustration. "I can't do this anymore. I'm not going to kill you."

"But, why?" Gordon asked.

"I think under normal situations after given an order to kill you, I would. But I'm doing something for the first time in my life. I'm going to learn and change from my errors. Hurry up and get out of here."

"I'm not leaving without my wife." Gordon said.

"Fine. Take my gun. Here..." Pat took off his Covi vest he had on revealing a shirt he wore underneath. He handed it to the Martian. "That vest will get you through any door in the base.

Keep your head low, and don't use the gun. It's just there to make you look real. Your wife is in a cell. I've seen her. I would start looking there first."

"Thank you. I think there is still time to find that Monk you're looking for." Gordon told.

"Yeah, a little. But first I've gotta find some people." Pat said as he ran off from Gordon.

Gordon made sure the vest looked good enough on him to pass as a Curator. His height was below average for a Curator, so he stood as tall as he could and made his way around the building and back to the base. As he passed the camps of Martian people, he couldn't help but feel totally helpless for his people.

As he reached the base entrance, he passed through the guarded doorway unnoticed. His vest allowed him to enter the computer clearance system, and his height abnormality did not raise a red flag. He kept walking past different hallways for different Apla corridors. The system the Curators had down for energy harvesting was inhumane. Gordon passed the same walls and windows Pat did while watching the devastation of his Martian people, the gore of people dying from radiation poisoning or mostly cancer. The people of Mars were given an even less humane way of injection than those of Earth while they were stabbed ruthlessly with large injection modules. Energy was so plentiful; there was no concern as to whether or not it was completely harvested from those already injected.

Gordon felt ill. The injection centers worried him as to what had happened to his wife. Finally he made his way down to the prisoner cells. As he passed Curators he tried to make himself look as tall as possible while never making eye contact. He began searching the prison cells one by one. Taking only a fraction of a second to glance at the room, he knew he would know his wife when he saw her. He saw a man up ahead in the hallway taking down notes. Tall and thin unlike the others, Gordon felt that approaching him would be the fastest way to finding his wife. Gordon did not know it, but the man in the hall was Nathan.

"Excuse me, sir." Gordon said. "I'm looking for a prisoner."

"You got a name?" Nathan asked not looking up from his datapad.

"Mary Winterfield. She... uh, needs to be questioned." Gordon told.

"Yeah she and others were brought into the fallout camp just down the hall there." Nathan said. "Who asked?"

"Pat Listowel." Gordon said hoping it would stick.

"Oh, really. Thought they were interrogating her husband." Nathan said. Gordon began tip toeing away. "Just make sure you put on a suit before going in there."

Gordon dashed silently down the hall. Nathan looked over curiously at the disguised Martian running away and shrugged his shoulders and returned his attention to his datapad.

Gordon approached the bay area where his wife was being held and slipped on an air mask helmet while forcing his way through the sliding doors as fast as possible. He darted his eyes all over the large contaminated room filled with prisoners of war. He walked with an upbeat pace. Frantically his eyes began to shake from his reactive nerves. He spent just under a minute reading every last inch and corner of the holding bay while stepping over dying and dead people until he finally found her. He laid his eyes on his wife and didn't second guess himself. He darted over to her past the suffering Martians.

He knelt beside Mary and helped sit her upright. He seized her tightly in his arms.

"Gordon?" She said softly and weakly. "Gordon. You found me."

"Mary, I'm here Mary. I'm with you now." Gordon said. "What happened to you? Why didn't they get you out of the city?"

"Oh Gordon, you found me." Mary said.

Gordon's attitude of happiness swiftly slipped from him. He looked at her concerned and explored her body. He found several large bruises covering her body. She was soaked in partial blood, some of hers, some from others. Her skin was red and tender and bits of strands of her hair were on her clothes. There were many open sores and bubbled skin in her abdomen. Her demeanor was so unlike her normal sweet happy tone. She was tired, weak, and fragile. And Gordon knew.

"You're okay; I can get you out of this." He told her softly.

She regained some of her senses. "You found me. Now go."

"No! No. I won't leave you. I can't." Gordon said crying.

"Goodbye... my love." She said softly before giving out.

Her body fell limp.

Gordon sobbed to himself for a stretch of time before laying her body softly on the ground. He cringed at his inability to save her. He could hardly breathe. He was devastated that he couldn't even give his wife a proper burial. He was deeply heartbroken at her death and suffering around him. When he brought himself under control he left the room quietly and got outside the base.

He ran his eyes across the base. The pain of his inactive response to everything was at its peak. He had to do something. He clenched his fists out of anger and declared vengeance to himself for the Curator actions. He devised a plan in his head and given the tools he had on him supplied by the Curator who had spared his life, he Gordon knew he had a chance.

Pat had run off to the section of the camp the Covis were located. They were still left to live in a Fortress Tank set up near the base. He darted through the side doors of the large tank and found himself standing in the middle of the bottom half of the tank. Kyle and Ace were both sitting down relaxing and eating before Pat came in. But once he stood in the room, they stopped and stared him down.

"You were right." Pat said.

"What?" Stevens said.

"I was a jerk, and I've learned from it." Pat said. Kyle gave him an angled look not believing his attitude. Pat stuck his hands out in defense. "Learning... Haven't gotten there all the way. But I get it now. This is a learning experience."

"Look, I already said you just gotta show some sincerity and you've got me back." Stevens said. As he finished his sentence he took a bite of a sandwich.

"Where are the others?" Pat asked.

"Matthews and Kayla are probably up on the roof. Banner is elsewhere. And Colin still won't speak to anyone." Stevens said.

"Then I gotta get running." Pat said as he started up the stairway. He then stopped and came back down. He pointed at Ace. "I almost forgot, Ace I'm getting the team back together. Are you in?" He asked.

Ace, whose mouth was full of a sandwich, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head yes.

"Sniper, I love you. And I owe you." Pat said while racing up the stairs. Stevens laughed a bit and Ace smiled. They both stood up from their seats and ran after Pat.

Pat reached the top of the steps and he saw Matthews and Kayla sitting together on the deck on the other side of the tank. He marched over. They were both talking and smiling before Pat arrived. Before he was in front of them, Matthews was the first to notice his oncoming presence. He frowned at Pat. But Pat's excitement shot a gleam of hope back at Matthews. Stevens and Ace were just trolling in behind Pat.

"Guys, I'm getting the team back together." Pat said enthusiastically.

Matthews had a look of frustration in his eyes and before he could speak Pat put his finger up and stopped him.

“Wait. Wait. Before you go. Let me just explain how much of a total imbecile I was.” Pat said as Matthews shut his mouth. Kayla eyed him down and remained skeptical. “John, I swear if there was a time better than now to say how much I really admire your commitment and element that you bring to the team, I would probably wait. But I can’t. I promise I’ll let you shove me as hard as I did to you, but only after we find this monk. There’s so many more things I’d like to shake off to you, but I’m a little short on time, so I’m hoping that will stick.” Pat said. He darted his eyes and direction to Kayla. “Kayla, I can’t even begin to explain how unbelievably stupid I was. If there is anyone I gave the hardest time to it would be you. I just wanted to say that I am going to officially shake your hand as a sign of my trust and acceptance of you to Covi Six. To hell with Roach and to hell with politics, no one would ever dare to mess with my brothers on this team, and I’ll be damned if anyone messes with my sister.” Pat told her as he stuck out his hands and grabbed hers and shook it. “So with little time to sacrifice, I’m just going to be outright. Please come back to the team.”

“Alright Patches.” Matthews said. “I’ll give you another shot.”

“Of course I’ll stand behind you; this is the guy I’ve been waiting for all this time.” Kayla said.

Pat dashed off behind them. Kayla was stunned at the circumstance and jumped up from her seat with Matthews. The two followed right behind the light jog of Ace and Stevens.

Pat ran to another set of stairs and chopped his feet all the way down the steps. Banner was walking in the opposite direction of Pat. Pat immediately stopped in front of him and before he opened his mouth, Banner spoke first.

“Yeah, I’m in. Don’t get all love-y on me.” Banner said nonchalantly.

Pat picked up his step and walked past Banner smiling. The others rushed past Banner as well. Pat slowed his step as he entered the Covi corridors. He immediately saw Colin sitting alone at his bed. Pat took a few steps in closer. Colin didn’t look up but he knew Pat was there. Trying to make things easy, Pat took a seat in a chair near Colin’s bed. There was silence in the partially darkened room. They sat together alone.

“You know, when you split us up, I knew something bad was gonna happen.” Colin said. He was staring at a tablet with old battle footage of the two of them. “I knew... because we were never split up. Always together, man. He was my best friend for years.”

"I was wrong. I was wrong to send him in like that." Pat said. "I was wrong to try and send anyone in for that matter." Pat tried making eye contact with Colin, but Colin never picked his head up. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Yeah." Colin said stiffly.

"Do you blame me for what happened?" Pat asked.

"I don't know how to answer that question." Colin replied.

"Because... if you feel at all that I should give up the lead role in Covi Six, I understand." Pat said.

"I don't know how to answer it, because it's not a valid one." Colin raised his head. Pat tried to figure out Colin's words. His face was in awe. "You didn't kill Bacon, I know you weren't at fault. And if you weren't horribly sorry for what happened, you wouldn't bare the awkward tension right here, right now. It's just... I didn't know how I could go on after I saw the smoldering field. I immediately knew what happened. I knew Lutz, and I knew his history. But that was such an extreme betrayal. And that... Is why I've made my decision." Colin stood up and walked to the door. "I don't want to have anything to do with being a Covi anymore, but I will finish this mission, for me and for my friend. I have so much anger and fury in me for one last bout with another foe that I would stand in the face of danger just to let it all out. When we get home, whether there is an ongoing war or not, I am retiring from the military. And before this is all over, you are gonna help me put Lutz in jail."

Pat thought about Colin's proposal. He nodded once. "That's fair." Pat said as he followed up behind Colin. Colin turned through the doorway to find Covi Six gathered together ready for anything. Pat walked past Colin while patting him on the shoulder. He stood in the center of the Covis.

Pat began to speak. "I've been a horrible person to all of you, and I know nothing I say right now will mean anything, because actions speak louder than words. But I will say this; we are going to break any command given to us that keeps us from our goal, because it is the right thing to do. We are going to scourge across this planet, we're going to find the Monk, and we're gonna kick-ass and kick-ass with class if anybody stands in our way. And when this is all over, I don't care if I have to drag Lutz by the collar to court, we all will see it through as he is brought to justice and reprimanded of everything he has ever earned unjustly."

"I'll be joining you on that." Colin said.

"Me too." Stevens said.

"We all will. Because if there is one thing I've learned from all this, Covi Six is a team and it's the best team. It's not a 'me' thing, it's a 'we' thing. Now let's find Nathan." Pat said.

The Covis ran off through the camp until they reached the base hangar. Inside the hangar there were dozens and dozens of Curator ships including one landed frigate. Most Curator personal were devoted to the Apla camps, but the hangar was still overrun with pilots. The Covis ran right past the pilots in the hangar and made their way into the Covi armory connected to the hangar. All of them casually wearing their uniforms were about to put on their suits.

One by one each Covi stepped onto a metal platform and placed their hand on a screen marking them for their suit. They waited as robotic arms rolled out to each platform and began applying the lightweight armor and bolting the knots so they were sealed tight. Pat stepped onto his platform last and was surprised when he had forgotten his armor had been destroyed in his fight with Connors.

"Storage failed. No suit detected." The computer said overhead.

"I can't believe I forgot I don't have a suit." Pat said disappointed. The Covis were also disappointed after all the hype of a mission.

"What now?" Banner asked.

"I'll tell you what now." Nathan said as he entered the room. He walked over to Pat's station and placed his palm on the screen. "You needed my touch."

Pat's brand new Covi armor Nathan had been working on swung down into him and began assembling piece by piece. Aside from the new color scheme, Pat had the same look as his old Covi suit. As the finished touches were put to each Covi suit, the Apla canisters were administered and an extra charge of energy was supplied to the suit to start it up.

The Covis all stepped off the pads and exited the armory with Nathan and entered the hangar.

"We've got to hunt down the King first. I had a chance to talk to Gordon Winterfield and he told me that's where we should start." Pat said.

"Great idea. Follow the advice of the Martian prince on how to capture the Monk." Banner said antagonistically.

"Let's just say we made a fair trade." Pat said.

"How are we going to get there in time?" Matthews asked.

"Yeah, isn't the fleet tracking them down in North Calumet?" Colin added.

"Nathan, a ship please." Pat said.

"I've got us a Firehawk on standby." Nathan said as he leaped off the platform and headed to the ship.

"A Firehawk?" Banner questioned. "We need more firepower than that. Can't we just take that frigate docked here?"

"Can't. They're unloading some electronegativity device to get ready for the lockdown for the Caelum Fulmen." Nathan said.

"Caelum Fulmen?" Pat said inquisitively.

"You missed the briefing." Stevens told. "It's Lutz's new death ray."

"I can take a full briefing later. Let's get aboard that Firehawk." Pat said.

The Covis raced aboard the Firehawk and Nathan piloted the ship. Once everyone was strapped in, the ship hovered out of its landing area and blew through the air out of the Hangar. Once it got high enough above the city, it soared to its top speeds and fractured the air. The Covis were on their hunt for the Monk once more, but with a bigger purpose. One bigger than they could yet realize.

Chapter 9

(three hours since departure.)

The King and his family had just arrived in North Calumet. The sub system of the ancient Martian caverns was the safest route for their escape, but also took the longest. Nearly three days had passed since the King had lost contact with one of his sons during the greatest war he or the planet had ever seen. And it was heartbreaking to him. As the family entered the local royal palace, they passed through Calumet's vast industries. Calumet was one of the most coveted cities on Mars for its port main export was Apla. The largest Apla gorge on Mars was just off to the city's west, and the trade that naturally bloomed from it boomed the economic status of North Calumet.

The city was slightly different than that of Grand City's old beauty. There were still tall buildings, but not designed for atmospheric trading. A similar system of rich versus poor was used in which the rich lived on the upper half of the city buildings, leaving the rest of the people the bottom. The difference was the shorter size of Calumet's buildings and the fact that poorer residents lived completely under the buildings instead of living in slums around the metropolis. Being much farther north of Grand City and the equator, North Calumet was always cold and always snowing. The city was covered with gorgeous aged architecture averaging a bluish white

mixture of color and it blended well with the cloudy grey skies of the eternal winter season. Aside from the lower temperatures than that of Grand City, Calumet's rural surroundings were filled with majestic frozen jungles. Plant life that learned to adapt in frigid temperatures and grow and thrive during very short warm seasons was scattered around the city. It was a very surreal experience to the warmer empty tundra red sands all over the surrounding area of Grand City.

As the King and his family raced into the city center they passed dozens and dozens of royal guards. They were dressed in more authentic royal uniforms than those of the Grand City guards who were more worried about protecting the King than preparing for a battle. Ships blazed over the city as they were preparing for an attack. The family was already on an upper deck of the city walking. One of the lead guards approached the royal family who was already walking with a swift step. He followed them.

"My lord, all counties have been alerted to the Curator presence. Since the destruction of the main fleet we've done our best to gather together a force to stop them." The guard said.

"How long until we can leave to Defense City?" The King asked.

"We weren't planning on taking you there until the Curators are in range of the city." The guard told. "We have enough men and ships to ward off an oncoming threat while you take a ship out. If you leave now, we risk the Curator fleet spotting and following you."

"Are you insane?" Shane asked. "We are leaving right now!"

"I'm sorry, Shane." The King said. "But he is right. Defense City our final battleground, and the longer we can slow the Curator attack, the better."

"But father..." Shane said.

"No!" The King replied quickly. "We've lost Gordon, we've lost Grand City, and we've lost nearly all of our assets. We are going to wait here and do as this man says." He turned to the Guard.

"Are you prepared for their attack? Where is their fleet?"

"We don't have satellite feeds or direct communication with most of the other major counties. But we do estimate their fleet will be here in a day or two. It's important for you to now get some rest." The guard informed.

Out of the sky, a man in armor came fumbling down at great speeds. He popped his jets as best he could to slow his descent. As he came down to the lower deck, one of his knees slammed into the platform denting the metal. He rolled on the walkway and finally managed to get to his feet, but he still stumbled. The King then recognized that the man in armor was Max Connors

and before he could say his name, Max ripped off his helmet and threw it aside while falling to one knee and shouting as loud as he could.

"I need Arcs!" Connors said. "And medical attention."

The guards were quick to raise their weapons at Connors. The King quickly motioned his hands for them to lower their weapons. "Get this man the attention he needs." The King said. "Max, what happened?"

"Where is Gordon?" Connors asked.

"He didn't make it into the sub with us?" The King said sorrowfully.

"Why are you here still?" Connors said panting. He gripped his abdomen hard. His insides were on fire. The early effects of radiation were upon him. "They're coming!"

"No, we have them on watch..." The King said.

"Winterfield!" Connors said. "Have I been wrong yet?" The King did not answer. "I just flew forever, coasting with the wind and only stopping to run when scout ships were upon me. I am thoroughly exhausted and probably going to die unless I get some Arcs. Tell me, have I been wrong?"

"No." The King said firmly.

Some medics approached Connors and began running a mobile diagnostic scan of his body.

"Guard!" Connors yelled. "Come here." The guard approached Connors. "Have you applied heat signature scans yet?"

"Well, no. Why would we?" The guard answered.

The King covered his forehead with his hand. Connors was about to yell at him. His face was so tired yet so filled with fury. Then he stopped. His face muscles tired and gave out at his command. He stopped and surveyed his senses. The light snow that merged with a whistling wind had been silent for just a few seconds. Everyone looked at Connors with such inquisition. His mouth hung open as he swayed his head slowly. He felt all his senses at a peak moment. His sense of sound, hearing, sight, and even a general feel of the air were so alarmed at what he had just noticed that even his taste buds were beginning to overreact. And as silence waited for his break in the moment, he said, "They're already here."

Before Connors or anyone could make a physical reaction, a thunderous pop of the Lux Inhibiter invisibility bubble echoed through the frostbitten air to uncover the massive Curator

fleet. The Aries was already fully powered and the moment its cover broke it fired a super massive energy blast into the lower side of a tall skyscraper in the center of the city. The immense blast lit up the metropolis with a different glow. An explosion ensued as the Aries stopped firing at that particular building. The skyscraper began to tumble down and smash into other buildings as it fell into the depths. The other two capital ships fired at other buildings around this city. This was all the while the entire fleet released air ships all throughout the city taking down defense weapons and obliterating ships in the sky.

Facing imminent peril, the royal family scurried across the walkway away from Connors at the discretion of the guards. Connors shoved away the doctors who were already applying Arcs into his system. He tore away their medical supplies and held onto them himself.

“Your highness!” Connors yelled. His voice was heard, but muffled from the deafening war hums of the city. The King stopped in his tracks and looked at Connors. “Come my way, I can get you out!” Without thinking twice, the King listened to Connors and darted across the long walkway to him. The guards tried to grab his arms but he slipped past them. Shane saw his father running the opposite way and ran after him pulling Rita’s wrist as he ran.

“What are you doing!” Was just one of the many shouts the guards gave off as they waited at the other side of the elevated pathway. Both sides of the path had a building with doors. Once the King and Shane and Rita reached Connors, he pulled open the doors to an elevator room and they all poured in. As Connors began closing the doors behind them, he watched across the walkway where the guards waited and saw a Curator frigate fire upon the building causing the walkway to snap into pieces. Connors quickly pulled the doors closed with his strength and turned around to the elevator controls. The power had been wiped out in the building. He opened up an emergency hatch to a lever in the elevator and waited to pull it.

“Hold on!” Connors yelled. He then pulled it. The elevator detached from its couplings and dropped through the shaft quickly. The sudden feeling of weightlessness caused everyone to grab hold of handle bars around the walls for support. The elevator was completely dark except for a red blinking light near the emergency handle. As the room dropped floor after floor, it passed windows that had a glimpse of the warzone outside. They all watched a large Curator capital ship hang over the city dwarfing it in size comparison. It fired its energy cannons at another building across from its position causing a massive explosion and shaking the buildings all around the city. An enormous roar from other the ship firing and the building’s destruction still echoed through the elevator shaft.

Finally the elevator room sunk far enough into the building that it began to slow into its base. The little supplied backup energy allowed for the room to decelerate. Once the elevator reached the bottom floor and stopped moving, Connors ripped open the elevator doors and ran

out of the room with the royal family close on his tale. They exited into a police hangar bay where a police suited Martian Windcutter was docked and ready for use.

"I know this city better than your own men." Connors said. "Had you stayed with them you would have died."

The King gave no response.

They climbed aboard the Windcutter. As they ran aboard, a small poor family already covered in ash from the warzone outside ran into the hangar seeking refuge. They saw the Windcutter and ran toward it.

"Ugh. Hurry, take off before this peasant filth tries asking to be brought aboard." Shane ordered to Connors. Connors was the only person on the ship with experience flying and was flipping on the Windcutter's engine switch when Shane told him. Connors looked and saw the helpless eyes of the peasant mother waiting for permission to climb aboard. He bypassed Shane and grabbed the hands of the family while pulling them aboard. "You can't be serious..." Shane said.

Connors walked back to his pilot seat after he closes the hatch and made sure the family was in their seats. As Shane walked toward him, Max pushed him in the shoulder and shoved him away. He took a seat in his pilot chair and blared the engines into taking flight. The building directly above them was shaking and the ceiling was crumbling. The ship flew out of the hangar with haste and escalated itself moving outward of the city.

"I'm taking you to Defense City." Connors said.

"No, you can't." The King complained. "If the Curator fleet spots us, it will be all over. They'll track us and destroy the only safe haven we have left on this planet."

Connors sighed frustratingly. "Damn. That's a good point."

"Fly west of the city as far as you can. We might be able to find one of the small suburban towns to stop at temporarily." The King requested.

Connors turned in his chair and looked around the cabin. "That might actually be the best chance we've got." He faced his controls again and drove the ship low to the ground and flew it as fast as it could go.

Aboard the Aries, Lutz watched as the city took its toll from his armada of ships. Destruction was laid everywhere. As the city fell to pieces with little to no resistance, Lutz tapped into the signal of the Interfectorem capital ship. He began a face to face meeting with Commander Hydric.

“Commander, since the entire city has fallen under our might, we will begin our harvesting and prepare to scout the city for the Monk, if it is still here. Assuming Packer’s information is potentially correct; we will split the fleet. I will keep the ships here to find the King. You will now take the Interfectorem to follow up on the lead at your command.” Lutz said.

“And what of my Covis?” Hydric asked.

“Covi One will go with you. But let us be clear that they are mine, Commander.” Lutz said.

“Aye, my lord.” Hydric said as he began ordering his ship out of the city.

Covi Six was beginning to cool down their jet engines aboard their Firehawk. Nathan, as the lead pilot, was tapping a keyboard and flipping switches to get the ship’s targeting online.

“That’s unbelievable.” Pat said looking out the front window.

“What’s that?” Stevens asked who was not facing the front.

Pat pointed at the destruction of the city that had so quickly been dealt out by the fleet.

“It’s amazing how fast we are conquering everything. This war has moved so quickly in just the last few days.” Pat said watching the beauty of the burning and crumbling city.

“We let them in the atmosphere. That was always the biggest test.” Stevens said.

“Exactly, without us opening the door the army wouldn’t be this fortunate.” Colin added.

“It’s almost sad to see it all go.” Pat said.

“Hey, we’re not done yet. Do we have a signal on the King?” Banner asked.

“I’m already on it.” Nathan told. “I’ve got a lock on something.”

“Which is?” Stevens asked.

“Ah man, I doubt it’s him.” Nathan told. “It’s just a Windcutter flying out of the city. There’s no way the King would be flying without an official squadron flying along side.”

“It’s more than likely someone just trying to leave.” Banner said.

“Can’t we still try and shoot it down?” Kayla asked. “Are we really going to just let them leave?”

“Yeah we are.” Nathan said. “This is only a Firehawk. That Windcutter would split us in half assuming they’ve got a full crew. Do you know how many weapons are on that thing?”

“He’s right.” Matthews said. “Our best bet is to search the city.”

“Assuming Lutz or Covi One didn’t beat us to the royal family.” Colin said.

“Or to the Monk.” Banner said.

“Well, if we’re going to be the ones to find the Monk, I will take the second shot on the Martians then.” Colin said.

Pat stared out the window at the beauty of the city. The blazing inferno on top of coveted building architecture with a light snow was a once in a lifetime sight to see. He extended his arms back around his head and watched patiently as the Firehawk cruised through the air toward the crumbling metropolis.

Pat heard a slight hum in the air and looked around for the source of the noise bothering the perfect moment. All of the Covis in the ship, including Pat, had taken their helmets off. Pat looked at his as he believed it was the source of the noise. As he picked it up, he looked inside the helmet and saw a blaringly bright graphic coming from his display screen. Slowly he put the helmet on his head and he heard the noise grow louder and louder as the hissing came closer to his ears. He looked through his visor display and saw the same strange yet familiar symbol fading in and out in front of his eyes. A signal appeared once and vanished. It appeared as a bubble over a patch of area outside the city that only the Windcutter had been covering, and then Pat knew.

“Wait.” He said pulling off his helmet as the signal disappeared. “Turn the ship around. Go after that Windcutter.”

“What?” Nathan asked.

“Why, Pat?” Stevens asked.

“Just listen to me. Hurry, before it’s out of reach.” Pat said.

Nathan didn’t hesitate at the request of his good friend and he throttled the engines while turning the ship back toward the Windcutter. The Firehawk blazed through the wind as Nathan put an extra boom in the engines. It accelerated closed to the Windcutter.

Inside the Windcutter, Connors just noticed the flashing beacons on the radar.

“Damn it.” Connors said.

“What’s the matter?” The King asked.

“Someone seems to know where we are.” Connors said. He looked back at the royal family.

“We’ve got a Firehawk chasing us. It’s a while back. How did they find...”

Connors felt a chill down his spine making him regret starting the sentence. He unbuckled his seat belt after switching the ship to autopilot and jumped up from his chair. And Stormed over toward Shane. Shane jumped up from his seat from the panic of Connors taking forceful steps toward him. Shane tried to stand in front of him, but Connors tossed the smaller Martian aside very easily. He walked right over to Rita who stared him down with a sense of entitlement. Connors grabbed her and pulled her out of her seat and pushed her up against a metal corner of the ship. She dropped her attitude very quick.

"I should have known it all along." Connors said. "You've been giving them information this entire time."

"What? No!" She cried out. "Shane!"

Shane jumped up and stormed Connors in a haze. He threw a punch at Connors, but his hand was forcefully beaten by the Martian armor Connors still wore. Connors didn't even bother turning around and simply kicked Shane into a metal wall. The King was at odds with himself as he couldn't decide what to do. He simply viewed both sides of the argument and panicked with each.

"Admit it." Connors said quietly.

She mumbled softly.

"Damn it!" He yelled while punching and denting a wall next to him. He still gripped her tightly and pressed her against the wall.

"I... I didn't. I wouldn't..." She said. A tear rolled down her face. Her eyes tightened up in fear as they became watery. Her expression was doused in fear.

Connors looked at her face and found sincerity. He still felt aggression toward her, but it slowly faded with his thoughts as he viewed her scrunched scared face. He slowly released his grip of her and walked away towards the front of the ship. As he walked, the ship's sirens began blaring. He ran the rest of the way into his seat. The Firehawk was upon them.

Inside the Firehawk, all of the Covis were strapped in tight as Nathan flew and operated nearly every aspect of the vehicle.

"Get a lock on the ship." Pat said. "Open up the machine guns. Fire at will."

The Firehawk shot rapid firing bullets out of its wings and began damaging the top hood of the Windcutter. Connors swayed the ship from side to side rapidly shaking those inside uncomfortably.

“We got any energy?” Pat asked.

“Yes we most certainly do.” Nathan replied.

“Cook their shields.” Pat answered.

The Firehawk opened up its small ray and targeted the Windcutter that was rapidly trying to evade them. The ray, once locked, blasted the energy conserved in the ship and smacked the shields of the Windcutter. The blast resonated throughout the midsize Martian carrier and spun it so it almost tipped completely upside down. Inside the Windcutter, the ship shook from its rustled engines. The integrity of the ship’s frame was failing and Connors was losing control of the ship’s steering. He quickly countered the Covi attack by opening up the weapon hatch on the top of the ship. Pat saw the Martian ship opening up for an attack.

“Fire missiles at that ship’s engines!” Pat yelled.

The Windcutter throttled its speed and began turning around to face the Firehawk approaching in the distance. The Martian ship fired several tracking missiles at the Covi ship. Nathan made the Firehawk slow down as well as he unloaded upon the Martian engines with superiorly fast turbo missiles. The turbo missiles were small and nimble and jettisoned from the Firehawk through the engines. One at a time the small missiles ripped away the back engines holding the Windcutter in the air. A small burst of exploding energy was the only noticeable effect on the Windcutter before it started sinking and tipping backward.

The Martian missiles targeted the Firehawk and were much more destructive. One missile was all that was needed to completely knock out the shields of the Covi ship, while two more shots exploded on impact with the armored exterior. The Firehawk’s back half was completely decimated and the engines ripped off. The Covis remained fastened in the front half, but fell in unison with the ship’s dramatic descending fall. The Windcutter spiraled out of Connors’s control and dropped to the surface relatively smoothly, only smacking into a couple trees before landing on solid ground.

The Firehawk took a ferocious dive a couple hundred meters forward and tore through the icicle riddled trees. The powerful Curator metal managed to protect the Covi passengers from severe injuries, but the impact was still not smooth in any sense of the word. Connors ripped off his buckle and hopped around his chair. He opened up a small hidden weapons cache in the ship and grabbed a rifle while vehemently eyeing down the Arcs he had not finished taking. After flipping the rifle into his hands, he slipped his long Golden pistol from one holster to another.

"Let's go. Unbuckle. We have to move into the jungles now before they get here." Connors told the two families.

The poor family was visibly shaken but they were quick to follow his orders. The King was slow to stand up and Shane hardly moved at all while holding Rita's hand tightly.

"Are you kidding?" Shane asked. "It's freezing outside. And dangerous. There are Tundra Bears and other wild animals out there."

Connors took his time closing the space between him and Shane while tossing him a small pistol. "It wasn't a question." Connors said. He turned to the King. "This thing still has power. I've already put out a scrambled beacon calling for help. But we need to move now."

The back hatch of the Windcutter was severely damaged from the crash and Connors kicked it open. The metal easily fell open onto the sheet of ice and snow below it. Connors jumped out into the snow, he turned and helped the both families crawl out of the downed ship. Once in the snow, they marched as quickly as possible into the wooded area.

The Covis whizzed out of their downed aircraft plopping their black metallic rubber boots in the plane white snow and wielded their weapons.

"Nathan, There was an Apla field not too far from here. I'll bet they have some cargo ships we could use." Pat said. "Bring the cruiser back to us and track our signals. But don't jump on any channels right now, we aren't even supposed to be here. Everyone else, keep the Apla off for now. This could be a long journey going straight for the Monk."

"Are you going to tell us why we just risked our ship to hunt this one Windcutter?" Banner asked angrily.

"The King is here." Pat said. "Now we're about to go find him."

Banner threw out his arms in amazement at Pat's strange confidence. Stevens gave him a curious but nonchalant shrug of the shoulders and followed in formation behind Pat.

Pat dashed through the delicate icy frost of the frigid forest. The trees showed a glimpse of their colored bark, but olden ice sheets covered everything and imprisoned the nature in a look of glass. Yet fresh fluffy layers of snow floated through the air and to the ground to give each step a confirming crunch of snowfall. Still the Covis moved silent, their movement more decisive with each leap and bound. Their black armor blended poorly with their swift motions against the pale untracked snow. Pat still led the journey on for a minute before stopping in his tracks. He felt unsure after being sure and polished his view by taking the sight in. Then he darted off again, knowing full well his team was behind him. This time he was sure of what he

was looking for. He could only hear the strident howl of the wind while his eyes searched and searched through the jungle tundra trees for a distinct tint of the royal prey he was after. But before he could lay his eyes on the target he was chasing, he felt the time to change his course was at that instant when he no longer knew the King was the greatest priority.

“Get down!” Pat said as he noticed Connors running before his eyes. The Golden gun he had tucked away was whipped out and ready to fire. Connors was tall and slim and managed to uncover himself just as the Covis were rushing toward him. All of the Covis were experienced to Connors’s gun. As soon as they realized what Pat was referring to, they took a dive out of his line of fire by bounding into the iced jungle trees. All of them took to their defensive positions except Colin. He remained standing within the Martian’s sight. Colin powered up his gloved the moment Pat yelled for Cover. He held the energy wholly in his hands. Connors turned his shoulders and made the barrel of the gun line up with an unmoved Colin. Colin waited patiently and confidently for Connors’s first move. Without hesitation, as soon as the Martian had the angle he wanted, he fired the golden gun. Colin reacted before Connors had officially pulled the trigger. At a near simultaneous firing, the Martian’s bullet and the Covi’s Apla blast traded places, with the bullet tearing through the air and puncturing the armor and body of Colin’s upper left torso. The blast hit second and smacked Connors in his shield. The blast was a loaded quick hit and pushed the shield carrying Connors several feet backward and onto his back.

At the moment the bullet had cleared the air, the rest of the Covis jumped back into position from their covering spots. The white snow and ice stuck to pieces of their armor from falling against it. Guns loaded, Pat and Banner had very low closing speeds while leaping at the downed Martian and disabling him from his weapon. Pat picked Connors up and threw him against an ice tree. Connors tried to fire at Pat in response. He placed his hand up, but his body was drained of energy and the heat effects made Connors tremble from exhaustion. He grabbed his arm by the forearm and held it tightly out of fatigue. Banner tackled Connors against the tree and punched him twice in the gut which had not healed from his injuries. The Martian buckled and Banner’s third punch was already in motion punching Connors and knocking his helmet off. Pat then tackled Connors to the ground and flipped him over on his back. He clawed at the Martian’s Apla storages, which were nearly empty, and broke them with his hands. Pat jumped off the Martian as Banner subdued him.

The other Covis after realizing Banner and Pat take down Connors, rushed to help their downed friend and check to see if he was okay. Pat rushed over the group of Covis and pushed Matthews out of the way while crawling up on the ground next to Colin’s body. Pat pulled off his helmet to match the others in the collection of Covis. His face shivered from the cold along with his fear. He looked up at Stevens who was heartbreakingly distressed.

“Kyle...” Pat said.

"He's gone, man." Stevens said cheerlessly. His eyes watered and freezing air and cold snow brushed against his face. "Both the young guys in the group. Both my guys. Man!" Stevens brushed at his watered eyes before they could become tears and sighed long and helplessly. His fist clenched and released with the motion of his troubled breathing.

In the darker colder shadows of the forest, a figure drew near unannounced to the Covis. Shane, freezing and scared, urged himself to be a hero. He held the gun Connors gave him by his side and closed in behind the grieving Covis. Finally, he stood right behind the tree directly adjacent to the Covis. Shane rapidly twirled out and stuck the nozzle of the gun against the back of Stevens' head.

"Nobody more or I shoot." Shane said proudly.

Kyle fearlessly whipped his torso around and clobbered Shane with his long thick arms. Shane pathetically dropped the gun while collapsing on the snow. Stevens picked him up by the neckline before Shane thought about what had happened and pitched the Martian prince through a small tree. Shane lied on the ground practically motionless as Stevens quickly picked the prince up again and slammed him back first into another thick tree while still gripping him tightly at the upper torso.

"Kyle wait!" Pat said.

Stevens' arms were shuddering at Pat's call. The Covi had the might to split the prince in two but knew Pat's request was a wish for peace.

"Look." Pat said.

Stevens turned his head and saw Banner still holding Connors down to the ground. And he saw Ace dragging the King to Banner with Kayla holding Rita and the stowaway family at gunpoint doing the same. Kyle thoughtfully lowered Shane and dragged him roughly through the snow before depositing him in front of his father. The Covis surrounded the royal Martian family. The King trembled in fear not only from the confronting Covis but also from the damage his son had taken.

"Which one of you knows about the Monk?" Pat asked. He then looked directly at the King.

"Would it happen to be you, Mr. King of Mars?"

The King's mouth dropped and he shook his head between the Covis. He was speechless. Rita kept her mouth shut. And instead of resuming her normal submissive and caring position at Shane's side, she kept behind the King and in the mix of the poor family with which she clearly stuck out. Matthews stepped into their group and grabbed her by the arm and pulled her out.

"Someone answer me right now." Pat said sternly.

No one answered so Pat pulled out a pistol and pointed it at Shane who was still lying still but conscious on the ground.

"No wait!" The King said at last while throwing his arms out in defense of his son. "I do know where this Monk is." The King said.

"What?" Shane said still in the snow.

"It's true." He replied.

Pat eyed the King down and thought about his tone of speaking. "I don't believe you." Pat said while re-aiming the gun.

"No!" The King said. "It's with the rebels."

"What?" Connors shouted.

"I shouldn't have kept this... from either of you." The King said sorrowfully. "I've been meeting in secret with them for about a year now, once every so often. I stopped speaking to them after the peace negotiations started." He told them. The Covis listened attentively.

"But we fought them year after years along with the Curators." Connors said. "Hundreds, thousands of men on both sides were killed when we could have been fighting these people." Connors said nodding his head in Pat's direction.

"I know, Max. I know." The King told. "Which is why, when the rebels sent for me in secret, I was quick to meet them for a compromise. I had no idea what they were bringing to the table, before and after I met with their leaders."

"The Monk." Pat said.

"Yes." The King replied.

"How could you... To think of all the men I lost..." Connors said.

"Max, you have no idea the presence they have become on Mars!" The King yelled to him.

"They are far more powerful than we could have possibly imagined. They have more men than we could have ever predicted. And their Monk device is more than just some game changer! It is a paradigm I never had even conceived." The King thundered away at Connors. "You think this is about the war? This is so much greater than the Orbital Wars. So much more important than our control of Apla."

"Then why didn't you tell me about this sooner?" Connors asked firmly back.

"I believed we could ward off this attack. But their men attacked us secretly and once we lost our fleet from such an unhonorable attack, I believed our best course of action was to go to Defense City and I could explain it there and speak with the rebels." The King told.

"Why wait til then?" Connors said while trying to inch forward.

"We could contact them in Defense City, because they are in Defense City." The King said. Everyone's eyes widened. "Lutz has been on this trail since the beginning, and I bet this was Lenz's idea from the start. Max, you must understand I had no choice."

"So that's where it is then." Kayla said. "Defense City."

"The Monk is not there." The King told. "That still remains a safe haven for the people of Mars. The Monk is with the rebels."

"Olympus Mons." Pat said.

"The rebel base is at Olympus Mons." The King told.

"Patchy." Stevens said pointing to his arm pad which had a screen on it. Pat then turned to his and activated the same feed Stevens was looking at. A couple other Covis did the same. The map that had opened up depicted a capital ship's signal already heading on its way to Olympus Mons, and it was moving quickly.

"We need to get moving now." Pat said. The Covis held their guns toward the Martians and walked away.

"What about them?" Banner asked.

"Spare them. I didn't kill Gordon Winterfield, I don't know why I would kill them." Pat told. Banner jumped away from Connors and followed up with the Covis. Each member of the Royal family took note of Pat's comment on Gordon. The King was especially pleased, but his mind riddled with questions.

The Covis ran off into the woods leaving the family completely disarmed.

"Where's Nathan at?" Banner asked.

"He's here right on time." Pat replied.

The soft glow of a ship appeared above the frozen tree line. But the mighty roar of the battering nonmilitary engines killed the tranquil setting of the snow filled whistling wind. A

strange claw lowered from the ship and pushed through the trees down to the snowy ground near the Covis. Confused, the Covis slowly stepped aboard the claw and it pulled them up to the ship. The claw brought them above the trees and they pulled themselves one by one into the ship. Pat rushed to the cockpit.

“Nathan, what the hell is this?” Pat asked.

“This is an Apla mining ship. They didn’t have any cargo ships hanging around.” Nathan replied.

“How are we supposed to get to Olympus Mons on this?” Stevens asked.

“Oh so that’s where we’re going.” Nathan answered. “We should be alright. We’ve got plenty of energy to keep this thing afloat.”

“Alright, no time for chatter. Get us on the move right now.” Pat ordered. “Oh, and Nathan...”

“Yes?” He replied.

“For the future, why don’t you make us a ship so we aren’t flying garbage containers all over the place.” Pat told.

Nathan laughed and punched the engines into motion. The Covis were on their way to Olympus Mons.

Down in the ice forest still, a Martian Windcutter touched down near the King with several Martian Angel ships hovering around as heavy guard ships. The squadron of ships were scattered and scrambled the airwaves as best they could to remain undetected. Martian royal guards poured out of the Windcutter and rushed to the King to get him aboard. They flashed lights through the iced area even though there was still some daylight out.

“King Winterfield! It’s time to get aboard now. We have direct orders to bring you straight to Defense City.” They told the King.

He turned and looked to see if everyone was joining him. All were accounted for except Connors who lay against a tree. The King stepped toward his long time protector.

“Max, I am sorry I lied to you. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.” The King said. “But you must come with us now. We need to go to Defense City now.” He told. Max shifted his body and didn’t move toward the King.

“Max, please.” The King said. Connors still didn’t answer or move. The King approached Connors and grabbed his shoulder. Connors rolled over and faced the King. He winced in pain

while grabbing his side and his arm. "I need help... Help over here!" The King yelled to his guards. He knelt by Connors. "What's wrong?" He said softly yet concerned.

"I think I'm dying." Connors said.

The guards grabbed the King and brought Connors aboard the Windcutter and flew off.

Back at the Curator Grand City base, Gordon hid along the fencing of the Apla camps. Thousands had already been killed, and there were still many thousands more waiting to be harvested for energy wallowing in their misery within the fenced areas. Apla reserves that had been stored for trade inside the city itself had been broken open and used to maximize the efficiency of the camp. Large energy batteries were used for storing all of the power generated from the mass murder. And all the while, frigates hung over the cities scanning each building and then decimating it with a high surge of energy blasts fueled by the very people that once inhabited them.

He walked past the fences and toward the base armory. He looked at the miserable faces of so many people, and it troubled him emotionally seeing so many Martian citizens under such duress. Even some Martian guards were left outside in the camps, though most were too dangerous to be left together and were jailed alone inside the base.

Once he reached the armory, he looked around to check if anyone had seen him. He took the jacket and swiped the sleeve across the door and it unlocked. He stepped inside and closed it shut. The armory was two rooms wide and had shelves and shelves of stacked weapons. Ammo packages were sufficient and stores of gun batteries were plenty. Across the room was a large computer screen. Gordon casually made his way to it. Again, he found a terminal where he swiped his sleeve across. The computer jumped on and displayed Pat's information in the left hand corner. A list of commands appeared on the screen along with options to check out weaponry. In the top right corner, a message read that the terminal had been granted full activation privileges at the base as most Covis were given. Gordon was particularly surprised at the detail of Pat's profile.

"This guy's a Covi." Gordon said to himself as he rechecked the patching on the jacket. He continued scanning the computer mainframe in awe of what he had just learned.

"Who are you?" A Curator soldier asked behind Gordon. Gordon turned in the seat to face him.

"What?" Gordon asked.

"Where is Pat Listowel?" The soldier said. "His patch was used to open this armory just a short minute ago and no one has seen him in hours."

Gordon shook his head suspiciously. "You might want to... call it in." Gordon said trying to get the man to focus elsewhere.

The soldier stared at Gordon annoyingly and then looked around the armory as he moved his wrist up to his mouth to call the base administrators. Gordon looked to his right while still facing the soldier. He was a package of pistols so subtly sitting next to him. He waited a second breathing heavily and then threw his hands at the package and pointed the gun forward. The soldier turned and looked at him as Gordon shot three times, each bullet hitting the man somewhere in the midsection. The soldier collapsed on the ground and died. His connection was unbreached and the base heard everything. Gordon swiveled back to the computer moving as fast as he could. He punched through the workstation to find controls to the base.

The base sirens began blaring as the Curators became aware of Gordon's presence. He made the computer reinforce the door locks on the armory letting no one get through. And he did so just in time as more Curator soldiers reached the armory door and were trying to access the closed terminal. Next he typed in commands that opened the cell doors of all those imprisoned within the base, the very same as those who were guards that were captured, and released all security weapons along the walls of the warden's office in case of a riot. He watched on screen as the imprisoned Martians slowly exited their cages like ferocious angry animals. The few guards patrolling the halls were a clear minority against the dozens and dozens of angry Martian men. One by one they outnumbered the guards and snatched away their weapons along with grabbing the riot gear Gordon had gifted to them.

Inside the base control room, Commander Packer panicky danced at the commotion. His computer officers were hard at work.

"How is this possible?" He yelled. "How does one guy have access to all of the base mainframes?"

"He's got Pat Listowel's security hacks on him somehow." An officer yelled back.

"Sir he just locked the hangar doors on us. We've got minimal birds in the sky." Another officer told.

"The camp gates have just been disabled. The prisoners are escaping." A third officer yelled.

Packer was pulling at his hair.

"Ugh... sir..." Another said.

"What!" Packer yelled turning to him. He saw his officer at gun point by several Martian rioters who had bolstered through the doorway.

Gordon waited while the riots ensued. Guards all over the base were outnumbered and killed by the thousands of Martians. Soldiers who stood in their posts were pulled out off their high walls and killed. Within minutes, the entire camp was overrun by the Martian prisoners and the plan to use a small force as guards to thousands was failing. As the few soldiers outside of the armory were shot and killed, Gordon opened the armory door and signaled in the freed people to snatch and grab the various Curator weaponry. He exited the armory and called for any royal guards to approach him for assistance. As they gathered round, each was shocked at who they were approaching and quickly dropped to a knee. After a couple dozen had gathered near him, he spoke.

“What happened here is a travesty. Everything. From the peace treaties, to the invasion, to the destruction of Grand City, and this most appalling action the Curators have taken against prisoners of war. Which is why I have a plan. It started with me freeing all of you. It will take a peak as we hijack the rest of this base and their hangars. And it will end... with all of your lives.” Gordon said with rigid confidence. “Anyone who is afraid to give their life to make amends here for what has happened, I am giving you a chance to walk away now. Otherwise, pick up a gun and follow me to that hangar.” Gordon finished his speech and took off on a run. Every single one of them followed.

High above North Calumet, Lutz grew tired and angry at the dismantling of the beautiful castle city. Report after report came in indicating no return of the Monk or the royal family.

“Sir, Commander Hydric says he found a full rebel base beneath Olympus!” An officer yelled from below Lutz’s station.

“Fire all engines and get us there as soon as possible.” Lutz commanded with fury.

Chapter 10

(Four hours from prior time...)

As the Covis approached Olympus Mons in the Apla mining ship, they saw the Interfectorem and several frigates by its side attacking the turrets and ground forces on and around the front of the massive and very much alive volcano. The high powered cannons of the capital ship were bombarding the side rocks of the area. The red Martian rust spread throughout the air. Ground troops of both sides were taking positions in an ongoing battle. There was a clear front entrance to a base that must have led inside the volcano as rebel forces were pouring out and attacking the threat. But after a minute of fighting, the rebels had a shortage of men and the base entrance became a venue for the Curator ground troops to enter into.

Olympus Mons was a huge sheet of land mass that stood higher than anything on the planet. It sat by a body of water where the ships attacked it. On the whole, the volcano was covered with red rust, but green thriving vegetation grew thick around the section of land the base was near. To the north of the land mass, ice sheets covered the ground.

"I am hardly believing my eyes right now." Kayla said. "So the rebels have had a secret base all this time."

"It looks that way." Pat responded as all the Covis huddled at the window.

"It's harder to believe that they were the ones in control of the Monk all along." Banner said.

"What do you think the King meant by saying the Monk was bigger than the war?" Stevens asked.

"Probably just a lie, I'm guessing." Matthews answered.

"I don't think so." Pat said. "He definitely wasn't lying about the rebels here. I don't know why he would lie about that."

"I'm just having a hard time imagining what could be so powerful." Stevens said. "Something of such value I have nothing to base it on. If it transcends the Orbital Wars, what could it possibly be?"

"It must be about incalculable energy, or immortality, or something like that." Banner said.

"What could be greater?"

"I think the more important thing now is how you guys are supposed to make it into that base." Nathan said. "I mean it looks like we're winning, but those rebels could delay us from the Monk."

Kayla stepped away from the main console and walked to the back of the ship.

"We could just try fighting our way in." Banner said.

"Yeah, we are Covis." Matthews added.

"That's a weak chance. Even if we did get in the base, there is no telling that we could fight our way to the front of this mess. Someone else is bound to get to the heart of that thing first." Stevens said.

"You may be right, you may be wrong..." Kayla said. "But I think I have a clear solution here." The Covis focused their attention on Kayla. "We're on an Apla mining ship right?"

“Yeah.” Pat responded.

“Well that means it has drills to mine the Apla.” Kayla said. “And the only way to harvest Apla is with drill capsules. We fly somewhere over the base and drop the drills from the ship into the ground with us still inside. The drills will dig us down to the base and we can get out at some point quicker than we would have been. Oh, and avoiding any rebels in the process.”

Pat stepped over by Kayla and touched the walls which held Apla mining rigs attached to them in awe of what he had just learned.

“Where did you get that from?” Pat asked.

“Well, I received an honorable mention...” She said.

“Honorable mention from Holsen... Apla mining, right, right.” Pat hugged Kayla in awe and then stepped away still pondering the idea. “Genius, genius.”

Banner turned to Nathan as the rest of the Covis walked toward Kayla. “You heard the lady. Punch it.”

The ship flew faster through the air than it did before. It cruised right over the base entrance on the island and wasn’t noticed by hardly any. As it flew in, it dropped its altitude closer to the ground. Once it was far enough inside the volcano, Nathan slowed the ship’s speed and drifted in the air. The Covis were packed into the mining drills two by two.

“When we get into the base, open the mining capsules and use whatever Apla you need. It’s gonna be hell down there.” Pat told.

“I’ve got you guys dropping somewhere over a patch of metal lies under the ground. All ready?” Nathan asked from the cockpit.

Pat buckled himself into the seat and gave a thumb up to Stevens who in turn yelled to Nathan, “Ready.”

Nathan timed up the release and pulled the lever releasing the drills from a not too steep altitude while the ship drifted past the release point. The Covis held on inside their capsules as the drills fell to the vegetation below. The drills rotated quickly ready to plow into the ground. A laser centered at the bottom of the drill burned up the ground below for an easy puncture for the spinning razors as was the typical method of mining Apla.

After a few seconds of falling, the drills finally punched through the ground at the angle they were falling. The toasted ground gave way to the thick chomping metal and the drills swiftly dove through the surface. The Covis shook aggressively inside the capsules. After a minute of

fast digging deep into Olympus Mons, the drills hit a sheet of metal and slowly pierced through it until they hit a patch of air. Each Covi prepared for their exit by having Apla injections on standby on their display screens. The capsules broke through and the Covis jettisoned from the drills and landed in the base. A long stretching curved hallway was all they could see in front of them. Pat swiveled behind the debris caused by the drills and saw nothing back the other way of the hall. The other Covis checked their surroundings. The hallway was tall and wide. The floor was made of smooth marble. The ceiling was made of white platinum while the walls were blue glass.

"Are we that far deep in the base?" Stevens asked.

"We can't be." Banner said frustrated. "Where are all the rebels?"

"Where are all our troops' is a better question." Kayla said.

"Any idea on where to go Pat?" Stevens asked.

Pat was concerned as he looked at down both long curved paths with no insight as to which was a better route. He was totally lost. He checked to his left one more time and saw nothing, and once more to his right. When he looked right, his display fuzzed with the symbol and the eerie hissing static started again.

"I... I think we should go this way." Pat said pointing to his right. "Keep your weapons out for now. And move as a group."

The Covis huddled together as they moved stealthily down the hallway curve. The lighting from the ceilings fell in and out at times leaving the Covis with only the soft glow of the walls and flashlights on their helmets. They continued down the stretch for some time making slow steps and scouring the room. Pat's signal throbbed on his display every few seconds. The static became more faint and under control as they walked.

"Woah..." Stevens said.

Up ahead were bodies covering the floor. Nearly every inch of the marble was flooded with blood. Soldiers of both sides were seen. There was the familiar Curator armor, but also a distinct colorful breastplate on all the rebels making it clear there was a warzone there. The Covis drew near to the death vicinity. There was a clear line of separation between blood and marble at the end of the massacre.

"This is so strange." Kayla said. "The bodies just stop here."

"Yeah, I see that." Matthews added. "It's like there was a wall here."

"Keep moving." Pat ordered.

The Covis crossed the plane of the dead bodies and stepped through continuing down the hallway. Stevens was the last one to step a few feet into the bloodbath when a large thick door shut across the hallway behind him and locked tightly closed. The Covis heard the rapid movement of the door and pivoted around to see them locked out from their way in.

"What just happened?" Matthews yelled.

"We just got locked inside." Banner said.

"Someone knows we're here." Pat told.

"Guys, look down here." Kayla said. The Covis ran down toward her to see what she was pointing at. Another path led out of the hallway and it was covered in bodies again. It was a short path as a similar bulky locking door mechanism blocked the view and passage of the lane.

"This was planned." Pat said. "I've got the feeling that someone is watching us."

"Pat..." Matthews said. He called the Covis over as they examined what Matthews had pointed at. Dead soldiers were lying all over the ground, but he pointed to a specific one. When Pat reached Matthews he noticed one Curator soldier was obviously different than the rest.

"Full body Covi armor." Matthews said. "He's dead. I already checked."

Pat noticed the Covi markings on the armor and saw the emblem for Covi One.

"So Covi One was here." Pat said.

In the background Ace was huddled over a couple more Covi One bodies. He waved his hand at Matthews. Matthews ran over and saw the bodies and called out, "Hey, Ace found two more over here." No one turned to look.

"Looks like Lutz is still playing favorites." Stevens said.

"It doesn't make any sense though. We have always been the best." Banner said.

"I guess there was change of plans." Pat told. He looked at Kayla.

"It all started when she was brought on board the team." Banner scolded.

"I don't know what I have to do to get your approval. I am not the enemy." She scolded back.

"No one is saying you are." Pat said. He kept Banner on restraint. "But something isn't right here. This chase for the Monk has changed the game."

"But what would I have to do with Lutz and his views on the team?" She asked.

"Your father." Stevens said. The Covis darted their heads toward him. "He voted no against war. This isn't a public war."

"Right, only the governors know about this." Matthews added.

"How do you know he voted against the war?" Kayla asked.

"C'mon, his daughter is going to war on the most lethal team on the most dangerous missions and he wasn't totally against it?" Banner laughed.

"Actually Nathan told me." Stevens said. "But it makes sense. Lutz probably wasn't happy with the veto and he planned to take you out."

"With the rest of us unfortunately." Matthews added.

"It doesn't seem like it mattered which team you were on." Pat revealed to Kayla.

A loud cracking noise sent an influx of sound down the hallway. All of the Covis darted their attention down the direction they were heading.

"Quietly." Pat said as he pointed directly down the hall.

The Covis lightly jogged the remainder of the hallway. Pat signaled to slow down and draw weapons. He saw a group of bodies heading his way.

"Stop moving!" Pat yelled. "Stop there."

The group had rifles in their hands and eyed the Covis down across the long stretching hall.

"Covis?" A voice shouted from down the hall.

Pat shined his light down the hall and revealed Commander Hydric leading a handful of Covi One members.

"I don't believe it." Stevens said.

Pat moved slowly down the hall with the Covis stacked behind him. They pulled in closer to Hydric and began to settle their nerves. The soldiers across from them also lowered their guns as their intensity faded.

"Covi, what are you doing here?" Hydric asked furiously.

"Not following stupid orders, that's for sure." Banner said.

"I asked your team leader." Hydric bellowed.

Pat counted the living Covi One members on hand at five and noticed one of them was Cal Sharp.

"So you survived, Cal." Pat pointed out.

"Don't mock me, Pat. Your men would have died too in that battle." Cal said.

"Which is why we're standing here all together." Pat said enthusiastically.

"That's right. All together." A voice said from behind the Covis. Pat recognized the tone of the voice and turned around with an expression of disbelief just as every other Covi in the group faced the voice with guns pointed directly at the mystery person.

"Parker...." Pat said with a hint of question. Stevens lowered his weapon in disbelief as well, but did his best not to show it.

"Yeah, I just checked down the other way." Parker said. "There's no exit back there, Pat. All the doors are sealed."

Pat was stunned. Slowly the Covis lowered their weapons after having seen Stevens lower his. Parker was wearing totally different armor than what he was last seen in. He had his helmet at his side while he ran in to join the Covis. Banner let his words mumble out of his mouth as he said his Covi friend's name.

"Wait a second, wasn't Parker MIA?" Cal blurted out.

"What are you talking about?" Parker called out in his own defense.

Commander Hydric stuck his damning eyes on Pat and waited for his response.

Stevens turned to Cal, "Parker's been with us the whole time."

Pat's expression beneath his helmet was undoubtedly that of disbelief, but he turned back.

"Are you sure you aren't thinking of Potocki as KIA?"

Parker's outfit was different than that of the Covis. It was similar to theirs but had a different color scheme and the helmet shape and body armor was designed totally different.

"Hydric, something isn't right here." Cal said. "It's obvious, look at his armor and color."

Hydric's rage was building up as he couldn't decide what to believe. His expression was an angry disbelief and he gave everyone a deathly hating stare.

“Look at my armor colors too.” Pat said. “Our technician, Nathan Black, designs new patches to our uniforms all the time. Parker is just wearing the newest prototype.”

“Commander, don’t believe it.... It’s just a....” Cal said.

“Stop it. I will not put up with this ignorantly dense Covi rivalry.” Hydric yelled. “Lutz might put up with your crap, but I’m not going to.” He shoved his finger in Cal’s helmet space. “We need to find a way out.”

“Way out?” Parker asked. “But Commander, you want to find the Monk. Don’t you?”

Hydric nodded.

“I have a feeling it’s right this way.” Parker said pointing past Hydric.

Parker turned his head to Pat smiling. Pat looked at his appearance and gazed back down the curved hall where he could nearly see the end. One clear beat of the mystery symbol appeared on Pat’s screen and he took a step down the hall.

As Pat led the way, the rest of the groups followed closely behind. As they neared the end of the hall where a solid wall cut them off from what seemed to be more of the hallway, Pat noticed two more Covi One bodies and many more rebel bodies.

“What happened, Commander?” Pat asked.

“They ambushed us. They let us into the base as a trap only to decimate most of our men and use these mega doors to block off the rest of our troops from getting through. We have many more soldiers outside the base, but they’re locked out for now.” Hydric responded.

They reached the end of the hallway. On the wall was blood stains next to a statue of a man dressed in chest armor and a kilt with a metal sword placed in the ground before him. Another statue on the wall across from it was a man wrapped in robes with chest armor pointing towards markings on the wall adjacent to it.

“What are these?” Kayla asked. “Statues?”

“Made out of cement I think.” Stevens told.

“This is where we ended up, Covi Six.” Hydric told. “Now unless you have some information we don’t know you just brought us back to a dead end.”

Pat didn’t respond and neither did any other Covi. Pat studied the statues and took careful look at the one pointing. On the wall were markings. A very official large imprinted seal of the

mysterious symbol was on the wall. It was scraped and scratched by the forces of time, no doubt. Pat touched the wall where the markings were.

“Covi, do you have an answer for me.” Hydric pressed angrily.

Parker gawked at Pat who paid no attention to his superior officer. The other Covis were occupied with the dead or the statues. Pat touched the letters on the outside of the seal. He swiped his fingers across what appeared to be gibberish. Then he tapped at the symbol in the middle. He stared at it knowing it all too well at this point.

“Pat-ronus... Patron-us.... Patron...” Pat said. He turned to Parker who comfortably smiled as he watched him say the words. He scanned the other three words and only found one of them he decided to depict. “Scriptor... Script. Patron Script. It’s like a code. I recognize these words. I wonder...” He read the words out loud sounding them out in tune with his own familiarity with vocals. “Patronus De Annalium Scriptor.” The wall of writing cracked and moved backward and slid into the wall beside it revealing a metal door that was tightly locked with the crested symbol imprinted on the chrome metallic front. All of the Covis rushed themselves near Pat. Hydric was at a loss for words and also crowded around Pat. The locks began unraveling and unbinding themselves while the crest in the center turned around ticking unveiling the locks. When all the security devices and bolts were undone the door slowly split in two and pulled away while folding into the walls. The passageway had been opened. Pat was first to step through the entrance to a massive room. Everyone filed in tightly behind him. Covi One piled through right behind Hydric who was just behind Covi Six. As soon as Hydric stepped through the doorway, the metal doors clipped the group in half and split Covi One from the pack.

“What just happened?” Hydric yelled at the door. Covi One started shooting and blasting the doorway. Clinking and banging sounds rumbled through but another door clamped shut sealing them apart indefinitely. The Covis faced each other juggling their thoughts with what had occurred.

“Where are we?” Stevens asked.

The room was immense in size. It was wide and round at the base with a ceiling that slowly curved into the top like an upside down bowl, totally capsulated from outside forces. The ceiling was nearly 100 meters high and had words carved all over its chrome metallic cemented mixed construction. The floor was a marble chrome surface with blue lines running all throughout it. Strands of blue streaks ran up and down and across the entire floor. Large glass panels stood in long rows all around the circular space which teemed with blue strands and writing all over them. In the very center of the room, a tall bowl shaped structure sat beaming a majestic blue hue into the air and up to a long rounded metal funnel that grew outward up to the top of the structure’s ceiling like a tornado funnel connecting with the clouds. Inside the

clear blue hue sat a device hanging in the air. Dozens and dozens of cemented small man sized statues stood along the round walls. They were very similar to the ones outside the room. Two very tall statues were located at each end of the room. They were at least half the room's total height. They were literally identical, each a man dressed in a full robe covering his entire body with a hood covering the head. One hand was at the side while another was held out in front holding a globe of spiraling blue heat.

Covi Six gazed at the extravagance of the room. They viewed things so unfamiliar to them. Pat took a specific note of the crested symbol which hung on the funnel for them to see. A real man sat down with his legs crossed right in front of the center of the room facing the Covis. They approached him with extreme prejudice. They're guns were held high and tight pointed right at him. The man was middle aged. He was white skinned with a shaved balled head. He wore a cloth robe of brown and white solid colors stretching across him. There was a hood in the back but it was not on but as clear as his face was he kept his eyes closed. The Covis were just several meters in front of him now.

"Dicitur Atheneum." The man said. He opened his eyes.

"What?" Banner asked. The Covis except for Parker kept their guns locked in on the strange man.

"Ah... dico autem vobis, nec a ratione." He replied.

"He's speaking gibberish. Shoot him." Banner ordered.

"Oh wait... You mustn't do that." He said back. The Covis lowered their guns. "For I was just about to explain, those who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it."

"Listen, you better start answering some questions or today isn't going to be a very good day for you. I know your game, and you know mine." Hydric yelled.

"Very rash words for someone who is about to lose a ship today." He shot back.

Hydric almost ran him down and killed him himself. Pat stepped in and asked a question. "How do you know him?" He asked Hydric. "Who are you?" He then immediately asked the man.

"I am the Doc. The keeper of the Monk. And this room, for those who don't know the dead language, is called the Atheneum." The Doc replied.

"The 'dead language'?" Kayla asked.

"Latin is the dead language. Though I suppose every language is dead to you, Curator. It is the formal language of the Protectors of Written History, or what you call us... the rebels." The Doc said.

"He's a traitor." Hydric blurted out. "Arrest him immediately." No Covis moved toward the Doc.

"For millennia, the caretakers of all of recorded history have kept this base alive, even through the many wars in which historical information was lost at the hands of the Curators and even some agents of the Martian government. How ironic... the only thing they 'cured' the world of was the ability to build on past mistakes... The greatest values of human curiosity, the finer principles of science."

"I said arrest him! Now!" Hydric yelled. Some of the Covis were compelled to follow his order, but looked to Pat for guidance.

"You could arrest me, but then Pat Listowel may never learn of what happened to his mentor and friend, Frank Smith." The Doc said.

Pat's skin crawled with curiosity. His head burned with a passion for knowing what the Doc had to say. A flashback shot a movie in his head of the warmest and simplest times he had ever spent with the man and his heart begged for rage as it pumped insurmountable amounts of adrenaline through his veins.

"Agh, he's a rebel and he's illegally keeping records from the Curator Government. Kill him immediately." Hydric said ferociously. Pat stepped forcefully in front of his Covis who raised their weapons at such a surely honest order. Stevens stepped over with Pat as well.

"We're not killing anyone, yet." Pat said. "I want to hear this."

"Covi, step out of the way! That's an order!" Hydric yelled.

"Allow me to slip these on before explaining more." The Doc said as he placed a glove on each of his hands without standing. Banner kept peaking back at the Doc and then looking at the device in the center floating heavenly. His nerves were itching at every part of his brain.

The Doc stood up and guided his hands in the air. A spectacle of light gleamed three dimensional images before the Covis.

"Your friend, mentor, Frank." The Doc said. "He was killed by the Curators."

"What are you talking about?" Pat called back. "He died on a mission with honor."

"In some aspects, that is true. The two worlds didn't always fight each other you know. An apocalyptic catastrophe ended the civilization that my direct ancestors knew. Out from the crumbling society the richest and most powerful war leaders collaborated and formed the Curators, though an argument could be made that major war was always the intention. Their only set goal was to destroy history."

"How are we supposed to believe any of this is possible?" Kayla asked.

"I still don't understand why the past would be their main focus." Stevens said.

"History is written by the victors. If you control and destroy all of the known past, you are in position to create any world you wish." The Doc replied.

Pat stepped in with his hands up. "Okay, okay. Let's pretend what you're saying is true, what does this have to do with Frank?" Pat asked.

"I called upon and showed your mentor the truth. The ways in which the Curators are ruthless, their roots in old Nazi fascist mentality, they're adherence to a governing system that empowers one above all, and the path they took to rid the past of its own existence." The Doc said. Above the Covis and all around them flowed images of the past they had never known. A wonder feeling chilled them stirring their inquisitive side. "Frank died on my mission. I taught him the values of the Monk, and evidently the Curator Empire had him killed as a result." The Doc said.

"The not-see?" Matthews asked puzzled.

"Fascist Nazism." The Doc replied. "...Possibly the most evil faction to ever hold power in the world coming from the 20th century. To you, under your fabricated calendar, that may seem like just a few hundred years ago. But it was actually nearly 1500 years ago."

"You're saying the 2309 we live in is not actually 2309." Stevens said.

"More like 3462." The Doc told. "When there is a clean record, you can write whatever you want. The colonization of Mars, the creation and farming of Apla, and the total imbalance of technology use in this age would alarm anyone who actually knew their place in time. But I suppose when you know nothing else, it is easy to fall back and lurk in the void."

"So the Monk is just a piece of computer hardware?" Banner asked. "And not something more... powerful."

"The Monk's magnificent ability to hold every article, document, video, and every piece of information ever recorded is a feat of its own that I admire dearly. But if you don't believe

learning and controlling history is such a vital undertaking, ask your Commander who is so nervously twitching behind you.” The Doc said.

“Hydric, is this true?” Pat asked.

“Pat, it is not what it seems.” Hydric said.

“Which part?” Stevens asked.

“Look, we were going to tell you Pat.... And your team. This had been in planning for some time now.” Hydric said frantically.

“Why wasn’t I told sooner?” Pat asked harshly.

“Well the girl is why were delayed. Her father is a traitor... He knew about this for a long time with several other governors. And we have reason to believe he told his daughter who was not authorized for this secretive information.” Hydric said.

“So you would have had us killed in the attack?” Banner blurted out.

“My father is not a traitor.” Kayla ferociously claimed.

“He’s trying to turn us against her.” Matthews spoke up.

“And he has failed.” Pat said sternly. His fist clenched densely and he looked intently at his commander.

“Covis... This was your mission. The Monk was your mission. Now complete it.” Hydric ordered. Banner swayed his head between the two sides.

“When you are faced with dishonest orders you have a moral obligation to dissolve those orders and do what’s right.” The Doc said. “He is here for only three things Covis. My death, the secret treasures left behind by the Protectors, and the final destruction of the archives we have kept from them for so many years.”

“What treasures?” Banner asked as the Covis simultaneously looked at the Doc with interest. The Doc pointed at Hydric again. They faced toward the commander.

“That’s exactly the reason why you should stay Covis. You have no idea the power these weapon caches hold. They are scattered across the solar system. With them in our grasp and a clean slate of our pasts we can control anything we want. This was never supposed to happen this way, Covis. As much as I have favored Covi One over your squad, it was never supposed to be like this, Pat. Your group was always held highly in favor of command. But after Frank’s

betrayal, we had no other option but to keep you at a distance. We didn't know if you too were corrupted." Hydric stated.

Pat looked to his own for guidance as they looked to him. They were all uncertain of what to make of the situation, some more than others.

"You can choose to go down the path of destroying me and everything the Protectors stand for. It is so obvious what they stand for and it always is. Their extreme doses of irony in their name... Their strategies of controlling the populous.... Even the three ships they sailed in on resemble a similar historical voyage that led to massacres of civilizations... And lest we forget the more obvious symbolic control of two worlds who are brought together under such fragile and foolish peace to be broken by a prince and a very malevolent girl. You are their secret Trojans from the Epics, Covis, hiding in your wooden horse veiled from your true mission and purpose. The only thing they didn't see coming was my exploits, your hesitation to follow orders, and my subtle images placed under your visor which helped you along the way to here and now. In doing so, I effectively stopped history from repeating itself. But I must say, even with a moment's feel of past reference, you are already learning from past mistakes. You have made the conscious decision to stop and listen to what I had to say instead of blindly following their orders. The feeling of betrayal can go along way." The Doc said.

Pat was still stuck in a quagmire. But his Covis failed to come to a definitive conclusion as well. He turned to one person who still remained silent.

"Parker... What have you gotten us into here?" Pat asked.

"Wise thoughts and wise words, Patches." Parker said. "When I was split off from the group on our mission here, I was taken by the rebels. At the time I thought they were about to beat every secret I knew out of me, when they actually handed me all of their own. Coming from me... A guy who has had a lot of time to sit down and read from the history the Monk provides, this man is the real traitor." Parker said pointing to Hydric. "A traitor to all of civilization. They had a feeling that evidence of their lies was still out there, learned from their spies.... And we confirmed it when you captured those files. Luckily, the Doc here had the files switched to claim that the Monk was in Grand City. We were the keys to getting all the Curators into Martian Orbit. And now we're here."

A large explosion rumbled the walls of the Atheneum, though no damage was seen. After it simmered, Pat looked to Banner who had something biting at his lips to say.

"What do you think, guys?" Pat asked. No one answered. "Stevens?" Stevens looked back and forth without a word. "What about you Kayla?" Pat asked.

"I'm just concerned about my dad now." Kayla said. "But I'm with you whichever way you choose."

"Matthews.... Ace? Anything?" Pat said.

"All eyes on you, pal." Matthews said. Ace stared at Pat with a gun ready assuming his usual post alongside his leader.

"Andrew?" Pat asked.

"I'm stuck. This is what we came for. The Monk. These powerful treasures... How are we supposed to get them without the Curator army backing us up?" Banner said.

"Exactly!" Hydric blurted. "You see, you can create a new world with us... free of whatever you want, and abundant of whatever you wish."

Pat still stuck at a crossroads heard the rumbling and hallowing of something outside the room. The Doc focused his lightened eyes on Pat.

"Patrick, allow me to ask you a question." The Doc said. "You have an unbelievable opportunity that only a handful of men receive in any given era. With that said, would you rather be bought off or killed off?"

Pat waited and felt the question out thoroughly. He remembered all the lessons he had learned over his life, everything Frank had taught him. He remembered Frank in his death and kept him alive with his memories. "If it were a death that would live forever..." Pat said softly.

"You have your answer." The Doc said.

"Yes I do." Pat said as he swung around from facing the Doc and fired a quick Apla blast into the core of Hydric's body sending him flying through the air and crashing to the ground. He slid even farther away from the Covis and refrained from moving from all the pain. The entrance the Covis used to get into the Atheneum was now being hollowed out by a massive drill tank. Several explosions decimated the side paneling and the tank and many Curator troops pushed through. They saw Hydric lying on the ground and with barely a break in the loud destruction of the entrance, the troops began firing at the Doc and the Covis. Pat and his squad fired back, all of them using Apla. The tank took considerable damage and exploded with little time. Soldiers took defensive positions and continued firing at the Covis with Covi One nowhere to be seen. Some of the Curator troops rushed over to Hydric and dragged him into safety.

Stevens used his enormous self to stand in the way of any bullets headed toward the Doc.

"I can't believe we're shooting at these guys now." Stevens said.

“Any idea on how we’re going to get out of this?” Kayla asked loudly in the crossfire.

“The same methods we used to create a path for you guys around the Atheneum before entering, by locking and unlocking some doors. Quickly, get to the opposite outlet!” Parker told.

“Wait! I must retrieve the Monk!” The Doc said. He ran around the other end of the device’s docking point. He opened up the terminal and accessed the file unlocking systems. Slowly the bits of data streams that ran along the floors and walls faded and disappeared. Finally, after the soft glow of the room was gone, the Monk slid into the Doc’s hands and locked tightly into a small confined shape.

After defending the Doc’s position for a short minute, the Covis rushed with the Doc toward the other end of the Atheneum. Curator troops swarmed the area and were chasing after. Ace pulled up behind the group and sniped dozens of troops running their way. His sniping skills were in prime while shooting such impulsive vulnerable combatants. One by one he helped the others get to the exit. As soon as there were enough downed soldiers, he took a run toward the exit as well.

Covi One had just managed to bypass the destroyed entry and fly full speed across the room at the Covis who were waiting on Ace to pass through the doorway on the other side. Stevens noticed the Covis approaching Ace quickly.

“Ace run, One is on to you!” He yelled.

Ace sprinted and dove through the doorway, just as the enemy Covis had closed in on him. The doorway slammed shut and locked Cal and his goons out.

“Follow us, quickly.” Parker said leading The Doc. The Covis tailed Parker who dashed through the open hallways and opened up doorways to other conduits they couldn’t believe existed. After moving through tunnels they reached the small hangar the Protectors had created just for emergency.

Nathan was standing in the center next to his mining ship.

“How did you get in here?” Pat asked while running toward him.

“I called him here.” Parker said. “Just before I found you.”

“Sounds like we’ve got to get moving quickly.” Nathan said.

“Yeah, the sooner the better.” Pat replied as he and the others boarded the ship.

"I hate to break it to you but this ship isn't fast enough to outrun those cruisers. The capital ships are fast enough to catch up to us, and that's not even counting the small fighters." Nathan said as he quickly rushed to the pilot seat of the mining ship.

"Leave that to me. Just get us airborne as fast as possible." The Doc told.

Nathan fired up the engines and the hangar doors to the surface opened up. As soon as a path to the outside air was clear, the ship blasted out of the bay and flew away from the base.

Commander Hydric was already flown from the ground to his place of command aboard the Interfectorem.

"There they are." He said while pointing out the escaping ship. "Pursue them and shoot them down with extreme prejudice. Use the heavy cannons. Wipe them out." He howled fumingly.

The Interfectorem revved up its engines and slowly accelerated toward the small mining ship. Just as it was moving forward, the other two capital ships had finally arrived on the scene. To Lutz's surprise, much of the action had already taken place. He noticed Hydric's capital ship blasting outward over the volcano and he checked the scanners as to why. He found the small mining ship flying away from it. His fleet was sitting over the water while the Interfectorem chased over the heart of the super massive, super tall volcano.

"What is he doing?" Lutz said. "Get me in touch with Hydric immediately." Lutz ordered to his pawns.

Aboard the mining ship, the Covis were either strapped in or helping Nathan navigate away from massive cruiser accelerating toward them.

"Drop low, drop low." Kayla said.

"Are you kidding we need height. Go up!" Matthews yelled.

"Sit down and shut up." Nathan commanded. "Bunch of backseat pilots..."

The heavy cannons on the ship were unloading large Apla blasts at the tiny mining ship doing its best to evade the crushingly powerful energy lasers. The blasts were missing from Nathans precise flying. Every blast that missed crushed the cool red dusted soil beneath the ship sending chunks of soil flying into the air.

"Got any ideas here, Doc?" Pat asked.

"Of course. I must keep my promise after all." The Doc said. "Open up the back door and keep the ship flying over the volcano. And it's 'The Doc'."

“Screw that, we’re calling you Doc.” Nathan said while attentively flying the ship.

Aboard the Interfectorem, Hydric was angrily commanding his own pawns at his throne. He received an incoming call from the Aries.

“Hydric what are you doing?” Lutz yelled.

“Covi Six betrayed us. They have the Monk and they’re getting away.” He told back.

“What?” Lutz said loudly. “That may be true, and they may be our enemy now, but you don’t recklessly tail them with a capital ship.”

“I’m taking them out along with that sniveling rebel leader.” Hydric said as he ended the conversation.

The back hatch of the mining ship opened. The capital ship was becoming increasingly closer to the mining ship, but was still a bit far away. The Doc, still wearing his gloves, extended his arms out wide. He held his hands out to his sides and stretched them outwards while slowly clenching them into fists. The reddish soil beneath the moving capital ship began to crack and fall to pieces. The Doc quickly swayed his hands out in front of him and then into the air as high as he could. With that motion completed, an entire section of the volcano where the soil had begun to break erupted. Lava was jettisoned kilometers into the air in a mildly explosive spew. A great flash of warmth from the heated air from molten rock filled the mining ship with its open hatch. The lava easily passed through the shields of the Interfectorem, and the supreme amount of such a fiery mess covered the ships under layered armor. Its scorching heats shut down even the most unyielding shell of the ship’s hull and tore away all of its small jets which kept it afloat. The super large engines at the back of the craft lost all power from the lower structure’s loss of control and influence in the ship’s stability. Even pieces of the top of the vessel were melting from lava that had been jumped above the ship. The large capital ship was at the mercy of the Martian gravity as it plummeted into the lava surface below.

The Interfectorem crashed into the lava and sunk into the volcano quickly. The heated pressure as it rushed into the lava caused the back end of the ship to explode when it overcooked the engines. The entire ship was being engulfed by lava. No one on board would make it.

The Doc moved back inside the ship as the doors closed shut.

“Take us to Defense City as soon as possible.” The Doc said.

“Defense City?” Nathan asked as the Covis also looked at him puzzled.

“Fly north, you’ll find it.” The Doc said. “The last of the rebels are there, we have a slight peace agreement with the Martians. They’re waiting on the Monk.”

“Great. We just switched sides....” Matthews said unenthusiastically.

“If the rebels had already left, why did you keep the Monk with you?” Pat asked.

“It didn’t matter how much longer we held out. Either way, the fate of history was in your hands. Your decision.” The Doc said. “Move quickly to avoid any late followers. I can explain some things for you on the way.”

The crew in the bridge of the Aries was stunned at the destruction of the Interfectorem. But their surprise was as great as their fear, for Lutz’s shock and awe quickly turned to rage.

“That fool destroyed my ship, a third of my armada. And what of my Covis?” Lutz said ferociously.

“Covi One was never aboard the ship, sir. They were still in combat with many more of our troops at the rebel base.” A minion said.

“Then they survived the attack. We will need them to kill our traitors. And I want them dead now.” Lutz demanded.

“Sir, shouldn’t we at least try and regroup?” A minion said. “We have countless frigates spread across the planet. Shouldn’t we wait for them to arrive?”

“Sir, I’m getting a distress call from our base in Grand City. Should we turn back there?” Another asked.

“No!” Lutz screamed with his heavy voice. “We have a chance to follow them to Defense City and we will do everything in our power to destroy them now.”

“But general, this is from the...” A minion said.

“Shut up!” Lutz yelled. “Get the fleet to Defense City now so we can destroy them once and for all.”

The Curator fleet, having been ordered to fly north, fired up its engines and flew toward Defense City.

(two hours later)

The mining ship’s crude engines were dying. The ship was old and rustic. The long flights and cruising speeds it was being used for was shaking the loosely held together parts that made up the vessel. Smoke from weak engine life began to pour out from the roof of the ship and it was noticeably damaged as it approached Defense City. Even more so, the more north the Covis traveled, the colder the temperatures became until finally the frigidness frosted every part of

the vehicle causing even more problems for the stability and tirelessly beating engines. But even through all that, it managed to stay coasting in the air.

It was night when they arrived at the northern landscape. The lack of light pollution, except for Defense City in the distance, allowed for the night sky to be filled with stars and a wonderful look at the open galaxy. The northern aurora lights hid at the horizon behind the city. As the Covis got close, the city and its magnificent size and striking structural design became visible. A massive metal wall surrounded the city which was spread out over a snow covered basin between two mountains. The wall faced the south and was covered with turrets and men ready for the showdown. Most soldiers were Martian royal guards wearing their traditional suits, some were simply Martian soldiers, and some were rebel troops. Outside the front of the city and the wall, the cold Martian Northern Ocean whipped with the winds up until the snow covered beaches.

The wall was about 500 meters high and was covered in a white pearl metallic paint. Snow that had drifted from winds was wrapped up around the base of the wall. An alerted light structure on the top of the towers brought a white soft glow to the troops. The whipping winds carried the light snow through off the mountains and pushed through the air in a magical way as if it was actually snowing without a cloud in the sky.

The city behind the walls was all military. There were no super skyscrapers like those found in Grand City or vast architecture resembling that of North Calumet. Small buildings and armories were the norm. Several runways for large cruisers and take off points for jets were active inside the base. Trucks transporting troops and supplies to the outer limits were running over the icy roads.

“Do they know we’re coming?” Pat asked.

“Yeah, it would be nice if we didn’t have to fly all this way only for this trash can to get blown out of the sky.” Nathan added.

“They’re aware of my forthcoming.” The Doc answered.

The mining ship’s controls were hardly working and Nathan brought the clunky ship in on a hard landing within the city. At the air pad, the Covis were greeted by Martian guards who were shocked at the passengers aboard the ship. The Doc stepped out carrying the monk. An added scarf was wrapped around his neck before he exited the ship. A few trusted rebel soldiers came to the Doc’s aid. They moved from the frigid outdoors into the royal safe house within the base. The King was sitting down having a quiet meal with his son and Rita. The King took a bite of his meal and then looked up at the approaching crowd. He saw the armored Covis.

“Covis...” The King whispered. He took a short jump backward in his seat. Shane looked at them and dropped his fork. Rita saw them and shook as her mouth dropped.

“Relax, they’re with us.” The Doc said.

The King’s shock loosened and he stood to greet them. Rita was still frozen with confusion. She knew all about the Covis. Shane kept his distance and glared at them. They took off their helmets revealing themselves.

“Do you have the Monk?” The King asked. “What of the Curators?”

“The Monk’s safe.” The Doc replied.

“We probably have only an hour until the Curator fleet is here.” Parker said, who was just handed a datapad by the lead rebel. “We’ve been tracking them with our inverse satellites. They can shoot anything out of the sky, but can’t do a damn thing when we have hidden sensors all over the planet.” Parker handed the King the datapad.

“Look at you, Protector.” Pat whispered to Parker.

“I learn quickly.” He said back.

“Do we have a plan?” The King asked.

“Not officially, and we are running out of time.” The Doc replied.

“We have to take out the capital ships first and foremost.” Stevens said.

“That’s a near impossible task.” The King said.

“What about protecting the Monk?” Kayla asked. “Shouldn’t we leave someone here on watch?”

“No. Sooner rather than later to take out the cruisers. I bet there is a good chance Lutz will try and use the Caelum Fulmen as soon as he gets through the wall defenses.” Nathan said.

“How does that work exactly?” Pat asked.

“It is a plasma collection device and nothing more.” The Doc said. “It is one of the secret treasures that were left behind, hidden by the original Protectors. Quite obviously the reason that the Curators suspected more, and suspected the Monk. With minimal energy to start it, it can instantly tap into any planet’s electromagnetic field and stiffen its atmosphere. It will literally crush the air molecules creating heavy amounts of friction. The unbelievable amounts of energy is then poured through the machine creating that lightning show you saw. It is simply

plasma harvested in seconds. It was once an alternative power source to Apla from what I know, and has now become an agent of evil.”

“So the Curators didn’t build it.” Kayla said.

“Precisely.” The Doc replied.

“Then our highest priority just became destroying that before it destroys us and the Monk.” Banner said.

“I didn’t think you liked the Monk after you heard it wasn’t a weapon.” Matthews said.

“But it will lead me to weapon which is all I really care about.” Banner replied.

“Then how do we go about doing this?” The King asked. “Is it as simple as firing nukes?”

“Absolutely not.” Stevens said.

“Even if the Detaunts didn’t disable all of your missiles, the shields would be ready.” Matthews said. “Not to mention nuclear fallout.”

“Can we just stop suggesting nukes?” Kayla asked rhetorically.

“We have a small military here.” The King said. “Most of it was wiped out in prior battles.... No help from you on that.” He said to the Covis.

“Do you have any capital ships?” Pat asked.

“None. We have only small fighters. A decent number of ground troops already serve on the walls. We have small automated defense systems in the mountains. And we have one frigate ship.” The King told.

“How big is the frigate?” Stevens asked.

“Probably the same length as a Curator frigate.” He replied. Pat put his hands over his face in disappointment.

“Turrets... Like the ones from Grand City?” Banner asked.

“Not quite. On the smaller side.” The King responded.

The Covis were filled with disappointment from their resources. They had been spoiled for years with the best technology and were now fighting for survival rather than glory. Pat took a step away from the group as the Covis expanded and groaned. His hands managed to grip

tightly at the back of his head as he tugged on his hair. He thought about his options and finally swiveled around to face the despaired group.

“Unless...” Nathan said. The Covis looked back at him with hope. “Unless I trigger my quantum teleporter. Normally if I simply tried to send a virus through the air, their automatic firewall would rip it to shreds. But if I transport bits of data like a virus or something to it, it can radio it to my computer mainframe in the lab and from there disable the Aries’ engines. They just found out we joined the bad guys a couple hours ago, and no one knows I have a lab there. They would have never touched the thing.”

“What about the Infernum?” Banner asked.

“What about it?” Nathan asked back. “The Aries will be out of commission at least temporarily. The King will need a few of his cronies to bomb it while it’s sinking in the ocean. Lutz is too high strung to call off the attack even while he’s drowning. The Infernum will enter our airspace and the small fighters will attack it. You guys will board it discretely and safely bring me inside. All I need is the closest terminal on the ship and several minutes of cover fire. A couple of you will need to break off and make it to the bridge of the ship and activate the launch sequence while I’m still in the mainframe. After that, it’ll be a short time before the whole thing is floating in space with its core set to detonate.”

“What about Covi One?” Stevens asked.

“They could be a problem, but our advantage is that there are more of us. It would give a couple of you time to slip away and make a fast break to the bridge.” Nathan said.

“That sucks. I was really hoping to get aboard the Aries and clock Lutz in the head for screwing us over.” Banner said.

“You’re telling me. I was hoping to get a crack at Cal Sharp, but there’s a good chance he’ll be swimming with Lutz.” Pat said.

“Anyone else still shocked we’re actually collaborating with the Martians?” Matthews asked.

The King smiled with a little chuckle. “Imagine my position.”

“King Winterfield, if you don’t mind me asking, what happened to Max Connors?” Pat asked. “I was hoping he could provide some assistance with all of this.”

“Max won’t be doing anything anymore. Certainly not war.” The King said sadly. “He’s lost his arm.”

“What?” Pat asked.

"How?" Banner asked who also was familiar with the Curator turned Martian.

"Apla overdose. It had been days since using a great deal of Apla and the radiation was far too much. He nearly died. Many other portions of his body were badly damaged but could be repaired. But his arm was completely radiated. So it was amputated." The King told.

"Is there any way I could speak to him?" Pat asked.

"I'm afraid he's in surgery." The King said. "It's a sad day to see your world fall and lose your best fighter at the same time... And presume your son dead."

"Gordon isn't dead." Pat said cheerfully. "I saved his life."

The King exploded with happiness. Shane and Rita both jumped out of their seats. "What?" Shane yelled.

"I was supposed to kill him, but something told me not to.... I just couldn't do it." Pat said. "I let him go with my stuff, and that was the last I heard from him."

"So there is a chance he is alive." The King said optimistically.

Pat saddened his face knowing that even with his help; the Curator camp was no place for a prince. "Sure." He replied. "I'm sure he's doing okay."

"This is wonderful news." The King said happily.

"Shane, I don't like these Covis. Can we please get out of here?" Rita whispered.

"Absolutely. I refuse to stand here for another minute with these mindless brutes." Shane said as he grabbed Rita's hand and stormed out of the room.

A base siren lit off and the Covis were immediately alerted.

"We need to get ready." Nathan said. "Now."

"I'll take the Monk into hiding." The Doc said.

"I'm coming with." Parker said.

"What?" Pat stopped and asked. He was upset at his friend's statement. "Parks, I need you out there."

"I can't anymore, Patchy. The Monk is my job now." He replied.

Pat sighed. Then he lifted a smile. "Take care pal. We'll talk when we win this thing. Together."

He and the Covis ran outside and prepared their plans.

Chapter 11

(40 minutes from time)

The Covis had already made their way through the base and into the armory and hangar. They grabbed what weapons they needed, but each knew this would be a time for maximum Apla energy to be expended. The Doc and Parker and several Protector Soldiers were already stashing themselves away in a safe bunker within the base. The only Martian vehicle that could fit all six of them plus Nathan in was the Martian Windcutter, so they climbed aboard.

“Alright, I’ve spent all my life shooting these things down, but never before had I to fly one.” Banner said.

“Allow me the honors.” Matthews said. “This thing is slow, but it’s enough of a tank to plow through the mid hangar of the ship.”

“Just make sure no one tags the top propellers. You all can make it out, but I’d be a tad on the dying side.” Nathan said.

They all strapped themselves into the seats around the ship. Pat and Banner kept near the back exit where they were prepared to shoot their Apla blasts out of the ship. With Matthews piloting the ship and the others synced up ready to fire the vessel’s secondary weaponry, the Windcutter broke into the air and flew just above the city wall before flying toward the Martian small fighters flying in the sky.

“Covi leader, this is Commander Bradon Sage. I’ve been instructed to sculpt a seam in the Curator fleet so you can board mid-ship. Turbo missiles will be launched from base as well when our turrets come online.” Sage said over the intercom. The blazing fast jets of the Martian squadron cracked into formation right in front of the Windcutter. Only a few dozen ships were supplied to protect the last of the Martian cities still fortified. The back burners of the jets were the only light in the dark sky over the water other than the bright stars and northern lights that gleamed above them. Behind them was the lone frigate that still flew off into battle at impeccably low odds.

Off in the distance, it was clear a massive armada was approaching quickly. Their bright lights illuminated their side of the sky in vivid colors of red, blue, and orange blending siren lights. The two capital ships were present along with countless small fighters and a dozen frigate ships.

“Okay Nathan, this is where it counts.” Pat said. “Let’s see your quantum theory in practice.”

“Just give me a minute.” Nathan said as he typed away on his personal computer. He tapped at his screen a couple time. “Got it. I just sent information through space and time! Now to access their jets.”

The two sides were getting increasingly close to each other.

“I got it! Their back thrusters are offline.” Nathan said.

The Aries slowly sifted through the air in a downward plunge. Its dramatic surge from the loss of its main engines caused it to knock into two frigates at its lower side. The frigates cracked and fell out of the air much faster than the Aries was descending after the super massive ship crashed into them. The other half of the fleet failed to wait for its falling head capital ship.

“Just as we thought.” Pat said.

“Nice job Nathan, you just cut the odds in half.” Banner added.

“It was my pleasure. Just don’t screw up on your end and I’ll have the Infernum nuking itself in Martian upper orbit.” Nathan told.

The Curator armada accelerated toward them after the Aries started plummeting. The small fighters of the Curators expanded their distance very quickly toward the small convoy.

“We got squadrons coming in hot.” Stevens said.

“They’re out of range for protection. Preparing turbos.” Sage said. “Fire.”

Missile launchers at the base not too far behind unleashed their turbo missiles, powered by Apla, and back by explosive ingredients. The missiles soared high after being fired from hidden silos and launch pads in the base. They traveled quickly and flew past the Covis in their protective group of ships. The small Curator attack ships, that flew too far away for help from the anti projectile onboard targeting and dismantling systems from the frigates and capital ship, were obliterated by the missiles. Debris and explosions brushed the night sky. The Martian ships slipped through the wreckage and continued forward. The Windcutter banked to its left and right rapidly as Matthews poured all his effort into dodging the fragments and fire. One ship whose right engine was the only thing that was destroyed spiraled and swung out of control just missing the Windcutter cockpit and skimming the top armor. The Windcutter shook as the loud scrape gave everyone the jump that there was almost a crash.

“Take it easy there, Matthews.” Banner said.

The Infernum was just on the right of the small Martian squad with a few of the Curator frigates just to the left. The Frigate busted through the rubble and accelerated to the left of the armada.

It was attempting to avoid the heavy cannons of the capital ship which would have torn it to pieces had it not been for its successful maneuvering so that their own Curator frigate was in the way. The Martian frigate deployed its small cannons and weaponry and fired at the Curator frigate that was retaliating in the same way. The other Curator frigates began moving toward the Martians in an assault formation while the Infernum fired several of its own turbo missiles into the air toward the small fighters and Martian frigate.

The large Martian ship had targeting technology much like that of the Curator ships and shot out as many of the turbo missiles as possible while also fighting the foe right across from it. The two hung in the air while continuously berating the other's shields and side armor with laser cannons. The smaller ships flew past the turbos as best they could, although some were immediately crushed by the turbo speed. The ships that made it out quickly made their way into Curator airspace flying right adjacent to frigates and the Infernum as to avoid enemy missiles and some of the smaller left over enemy crafts. They pumped up their speed to contrive about the area.

Matthews flew the Windcutter past a couple turbo missiles. Several more were heading their way and Pat and Banner opened up the back exit. They fired a couple blasts at the incoming missiles and destroyed them before they could make impact with the ship. The Windcutter spun around as they shot two more. Some missiles that were flying over the top were targeted and eliminated by Kayla who used the ship's side guns to rip apart the rocket. The night sky hardly seemed dark anymore as constant jets, explosions, flashing lights, and blasts elucidated the air.

The Windcutter sunk into the large hangar after fighting off a few more turbos and allowing Pat and Banner to team up and demolish two Curator aircraft flying by the ship. As the Windcutter entered, it was faced with extreme hostility. The automated side guns of the Martian ship shot up all it could within the bay. Pat and Banner both jumped out flying and immediately killed the Curator soldiers they once considered allies. Knowing full well the tactics and similarities in Curator military scheme, the group was able to dominate the resistance quickly. Stevens and Kayla jumped out next and quickly fought Curators who were shooting at them. All they needed was their hands as they easily tossed aside the men and beat them bloody. Any bullets that were fired by Curators put mere dents in the expensive top of the line Curator Covi armor. Ace rolled out of the lowering Windcutter and rapidly sniped a few of the stragglers without even trying. The Curators were losing by way of their own game.

Although Curator troops inside the ship were being ordered to rush into the hangar faster than they could operate, Pat and Banner managed to keep the area clean. Kayla and Stevens covered up the doorways where the soldiers were piling at. Ace allowed them to give way to the space

every so often as he sniped down those trying to enter. Once Matthews had the ship landed neatly in the hangar, he guided Nathan out with no crossfire.

“Where are we going here, Nathan?” Matthews asked.

“Uh... Just here, actually.” Nathan said. “This should suffice as a terminal.” He said as he synced his portable computing device with the wall visual display unit.

“Okay, all I need is one of you to get to the bridge and override the head access manually. I can walk you through it, you just need.... Look out!” Nathan said as he dove into the corner.

Covi One appeared in the hangar flying in from the outside. They were immediately hostile and dove at the Covis. Pat was the first to get swiped and clobbered across the floor. One of the members mounted him and Pat wrestled him off. Since Pat was taken off guard, the enemy Covi had him stuck. Pat couldn’t find a way to get out or get his arms free to fire a blast. But as he fought and struggled, he kept a reach on the enemy’s hands and didn’t allow him to fire any deadly beams.

One more took Matthews down and fought fist to fist with him and the same happened with Ace. Another Covi One member darted right for Stevens who was already alert to his surroundings. Stevens shot out his arm as soon as the Covi was about to plow into him and caught the enemy in air with one hand. He then slammed the enemy Covi into the metal floor cracking his armor. After a couple more solid throws at the already shaken Covi One member, Stevens tossed him aside like a rag doll where he ceased to get up.

Cal Sharp, the last to enter the hangar, rushed toward defenseless Nathan who he knew was the only one that could stop him and the Curators. He extended his arm quickly and powered up the blast, but before the energy was released, Banner slingshotted in and pulverized his and Pat’s long time rival. Cal did his best to recover from the hit and rolled up into an attack position. Both Stevens and Banner stood together in front of Nathan and stared down Cal. The fight between them was already brewing and no words were needed to tip the tea to get it going.

The Martian frigate held its own against the Curator forces. It managed to pump enough power into its guns to knock the Curator ship out of the sky and destroy it before it fell completely in the water. Another frigate took its place shortly after, but the majority of the armada was moving toward the shores of Defense City. While the Infernum straggled behind, the forward frigates flew into the airspace alone. There was no hesitation by the city’s forces and they immediately fired upon them. Small Curator drop ships dove into the snowy beach area and let out troops who were pressing forward toward the wall. Opposition on the Martian’s behalf was met when soldiers fired heavy ammunition from the high walls. Even the large frigates

attempted to land on the beached area to really get the push on the high thick wall. Their small cannons and missiles were launched into the city's fortification, but the sturdy infrastructure stayed true. The turbos and towers amongst the mountains opened up in the snow covered fields and fired everything they had at the nearest cruiser, taking out its engines and puncturing the side armor.

The crashing ship slammed into the wide land just outside the wall and the Martians opened up their artillery even more. The Aries finally began dipping into the ocean waters, sifting through the waters, and sunk.

Inside the hangar of the Infernum, Pat was struggling with the arm of his attacker. He held it tight locked in place with his arm and shoulder, while he tried punching with his left. After a few jerks and a pull, the attacker released his hand from Pat's clutches and immediately powered up his glove before Pat could make a move to stop him. Seemingly out of nowhere, Kayla dove and tackled the man off of Pat. She took to two swings at him while he rolled on the ground. One punch was landed at his core armor. He stuttered back, but chased after her. He threw a kick into Kayla, but she raised her knee and deflected his throw. As she did so, she threw another haymaker across his neck. And then a tight left uppercut into his core. And finally one more lunging cuff at his helmet. Each blow was felt even through the armor.

The Covi rolled backward as Kayla stood her ground. She placed both hands at her lower side and poured Apla energy into her gloves collecting a large dosage of balled power. As soon as the weary Covi member got to his feet, she blasted her energy right out at him and immediately fried his armor all the way through sending him skidding across the ground and out the other end of the hangar that was only meters away.

Pat jumped up having witnessed the asskicking she had performed. "Thanks." He said. He looked back over at the other Covis who were viciously fighting each other. Noticing no one else free, he turned back to Kayla. "I need your help to get to the bridge. You in?"

"Count on it." She replied. The two ran off toward the corridor that led to the bridge.

Matthews resisted the onslaught of his foe. He battled, but mostly in defense. Ace was dominating his rival. He tossed him aside several times making the fight look easy. As Banner and Stevens engaged Cal, the enemy Covi erupted with a spew of beams right at them. Nathan took a dive out from the impact of the bursts. Banner flew upward and Stevens charged Cal. As the large Covi throw a heavy whack, Cal sifted underneath his arm with a steady encircling motion while grabbing his wrist. The momentum he put in, and the opposite pull by Cal, caused Stevens to flip over violently.

Banner landed right behind Cal and started whipping his arms in to him. Cal avoided some and countered others. The two collided with haymakers constantly until Banner overreached. Cal caught him in an arm lock and leveraged his elbow so it was tight and out of place. Cal attempted to break Banner's arm, but Stevens charged him and knocked him to the ground. Before Stevens could fire an Apla blast, Cal sent one to his chest from the ground causing Stevens to fly backward. Banner reacted as well firing a blast right into the upright member of Covi One. Cal skidded backwards across the ground. He slowly stood to his feet. He clenched his fists tightly as fury flowed through his blood.

Back at the city, the Martians and Curators were battling fiercely, though A few drop ships had managed to fly over the wall and position men inside the city. Protector forces were small in number, but they felt obliged to aid the Martians who fought valiantly. To their dismay however, after carriers began flooding the city, Curators were scouting out the barracks and fighting in close quarters battles throughout the streets. Remaining missiles were being fired all over the place as the Curator ships scattered.

Tucked away in a private secured building on the west side of the city, Parker watched as a horde of Curator soldiers rushed toward the royal palace.

"Hey Doc, I think it's time we get moving." Parker said.

King Winterfield dashed out of his seat toward Parker. He peaked out the window and saw them almost at the doors.

"I have a bad feeling about this." King Winterfield said.

"You two get in the next room, now." Parker said. Outside, the battalion of soldiers armed a bomb on the large doors and blew them open. Parker ran to the dining table and grabbed his helmet. As he placed it on, soldiers flooded the doorway. He then pulled out an assault weapon and called The Brook and fired shot after shot at the discombobulated soldiers who smashed open the doors. He killed all but one that seemed to be taking cover right behind the wall. Before he did anything about it, a second explosion occurred in the back room. He turned around and killed four more soldiers who tried to enter through the side. Each one went down with haste as they were unprepared to fight a highly skilled Covi who was already so quickly in their face. The hidden man jumped out from his hiding place and Parker spun around after hearing the footsteps. The soldier pushed the nozzle of the gun away just as it was firing and punched Parker in the head which caused him to drop his powerful gun. He threw a couple more punches at the Covi, nailing each one. After taking several beatings, Parker began dodging blows by stopping them with his forearms. As the soldier wore out his attack, Parker retaliated as he picked the Curator up and slammed him on the dining table.

The King and Doc watched frightfully from the other room. Finally, Parker's strength and ability overpowered the man and slammed him against the wall in one humongous violent throw. His body went limp. Before there was a break in the noise, two more soldiers who had broken into the house holding strong guns pointed them at Parker. He froze and turned to them. He slowly breathed in big gulps of air after the workup he gave the unconscious man against the wall. He wasn't in a Covi suit, so his ability to fend off bullets was nil.

Before he could make up his mind, two heavy loud shots rang out taking down both the Curators. Parker stuttered in his step from the noise. He looked over and to his amazement was Max Connors.

"What did I miss?" Connors asked. He held his golden gun in his hand, the only hand he had left. He wore a casual military outfit instead of armor.

The King and Doc both came out from their hiding spot.

"It's great that you're doing better Max." The King said.

"I understand the rebels are working with us now, but someone at the hospital said the Covis are now too." Connors said.

"That's right." The King said. "Covi Six."

"Pat Listowel is leading their charge." The Doc said.

"At least he's not trying to kill me now." Connors said.

"I hate to burst the reunion, but we need to get out of this palace and find some guards now." Parker said.

Cal fired all he had at Banner and Stevens. They continuously avoided his blasts until one struck Stevens and sent him to the ground hard. Banner charged Cal out of remorse for his friend. The two fired quick Apla blasts that hit in the air as they both came together. Banner leaped off the ground and so did Cal blasting their jets and accelerating toward one another. With a blast of Apla in hand for both of them, they punched mid air causing a massive explosion that sent them tumbling back. Banner failed to recover quickly like Cal who was already rocketing toward him. He tackled Banner on the ground and assumed a firm mounted position. Banner focused everything he could on getting away, but even his jets could not help him escape the Covi's clench.

Cal pulled out the knife from his chest armor and activated it with hibernated plasma energy. It cooked the very air around it. Noticing this, Stevens could do nothing. Ace, who was across the hangar, threw his man down and pulled out his sniper. With careful precision, he aimed right

for the right peck of Sharp. Cal was just about to plunge the newly heated knife into Banner's neck when he was shot twice in the peck. The bullets didn't pass the armor, but the momentum was enough to toss him slightly off balance over Banner with his arm holding the knife stretched. Banner wasted no time and grabbed extended hand and forced it into Cal's exposed rib cage.

Cal grasped for air as the scalding knife went clean through his armor, ribcage, lungs, and other vital organs. He fell back off Banner grabbing at the knife trying to pull it out, but couldn't muster the strength to do so. Banner stood up slowly and then walked over to Cal. He pulled the knife out of the Covi's chest. Looking at it and studying it, he turned the knife's heat off. Stevens managed to make his way slowly toward Banner who was standing over a slowly dying Cal. Matthews finished off his soldier after a tiring battle and met up with Ace as they walked back to the group.

"If you live by the sword, you die by the sword, Sharp." Banner said.

"What does that make you?" Stevens asked.

Banner looked at him and then looked at the knife he was holding. He tossed it aside on the ground. "A gun man." He said while staring at Cal who was still alive, but terminal. "You okay?" He asked.

"I've got a bit of a burn to the armor, but I'll be alright." Stevens told.

Matthews and Ace arrived in the group. "Where's Kayla?" Matthews asked.

"I think she went with Pat to the bridge. And don't all help me at once guys. It's not like I'm the only one who can take this ship out." Nathan said while crawling out from his cover. He walked over to his computer set up at the terminal which was miraculously undamaged. "I'll get a hold of them."

After running through the corridors of the Infernum for minutes, Pat and Kayla grew cautious. They hadn't faced any opposition running through the familiar halls. The doors to the bridge were now in front of them. And Pat knelt down next to the login matrix at the side of the door.

"Pat, you there?" Nathan asked over the intercom.

"I'm here, Nathan." Pat replied. "We just arrived at the bridge."

"Already?" Nathan asked. "That was quick."

"It's weird." Pat said. "We haven't seen any opposition. What's the bridge code?"

"7-7-4-0." Nathan replied. Pat punched in the digits and the large door slid open. Both he and Kayla came together with their hands out in front of them ready to blast something. They moved vigilantly into the bridge. All of the minions that Lutz had running the controls were still in place. They froze when they saw the Covis enter, but still stayed at their stations. Pat looked up to the pad where Lutz was usually perched at, but he was nowhere to be found. He took a few more steps into the large bridge. Outside the windows he could see the battle the Martian air force was putting in. Kayla stepped toward the window to take a look on how the battle was doing only to focus her attention back on the crew.

"Anyone wanna tell me where Astley is?" Pat asked.

"He isn't here. I am." Lutz said at the bridge entrance from behind.

Pat and Kayla swiveled around from their perspective positions and prepared to fire at Lutz. Lutz, dressed in his usual general's uniform but with a special glove on each hand, already had his arms raised. As they turned to face him, he unleashed a blanket of lightning upon both of them. The shock sent both of them to the ground quickly. The extreme heat burnt their armor and inflamed their skin. Not enough for any damage, but the uncomfortable heat was unbearable. The suits, which were normally easy to move in and generally comfortable at all stages of combat, were stiff and stifling. The minions of the room ran out at Lutz's discretion.

"Pat!" Nathan yelled over the intercom. "Pat, you there?"

The Covis waiting in the hangar, while casually securing the area, rushed to Nathan.

"It was Lutz. He planned a trap for them. Pat isn't responding and they just locked down all the corridors in the ship." Nathan said.

"Is there any way to get to the bridge?" Stevens asked.

"Were you listening?" Nathan asked back.

"I'm gonna find a way to the bridge!" Banner yelled.

"Stay here." Nathan replied. "I need you while I think of another plan."

"Get those doors open." Matthews complained. "We've got to help Pat and Kayla."

Lutz stepped slowly and confidently into the bridge as the door locked behind him.

"I switched cruisers expecting you to go for the Aries first. What a hilarious spectacle it was to see you attempt to drown it. You know Pat, it was never supposed to end this way for you or Frank." Lutz said.

Pat was aching. Some of his systems were fried inside of his suit. His personal display was still working, but it seemed there was a gap in the energy of the Apla. He scraped to his knee and thrust his hand forward at Lutz preparing to blow him away with an Apla blast. Nothing discharged from his hand. Lutz sent a lighter beam of electricity at Pat which tossed the Covi on the ground in a tense electrifying fashion.

“Your Apla tanks are boiling. ” Lutz said. “When I sent Frank on a mission alone to Mars, he was my top and most trusted Covi. But when he came back and confronted me about the seizure and destruction of history, the misleading ideology, and so much more... I simply tried to bring him in on the story. Once someone discovers the Curator ambitions, they are either too powerless to stop it or want their own piece of the vast power that comes along with controlling the population in these means. He declined my invitation into our elite ruling class.... Into our secrets... Our own Curator history.”

Pat still gasping from the shock rolled his head up, “You killed him.”

“I did, Pat. My orders were to have you killed as well, but I had to be sure that you knew before I were to kill such a promising young Covi. You were going to be my best, but under the suspicions we had of your possible betrayal, we kept you to a distance.” Lutz said. Pat’s expression changed to that of hatred. He was pure anger.

“I can’t believe you killed him.” Pat said. “I served for you for years. Every major battle I fought for glory directly under you. You, the person who betrayed me by killing the only family I had all my life.”

Lutz gazed out the window of the bridge witnessing the battle without saying a word. A crew member ran into the room and rushed up to Lutz and saluted.

“Alert Commander Astley that he may resurface now. Have all forward cannons, fire upon the Martian frigate even if it means destroying our own.” Lutz told the minion. He grabbed a small microphone from one of the bridge control panels that served as a relay to the entire ship’s sound systems. “And if all personnel could rush the Covis inside the mid hangar of the Infernum and eliminate them, it would be most pleasing.”

Banner, Stevens, Ace, Matthews, and Nathan all switched around and watched their backs for soldiers to be pouring in from bay doors. Within seconds, heavily armed Curator troops rushed the Covis in their area. Ace took up a defensive position next to Nathan personally protecting him. Ace sniped while Nathan did his best to fight the ship’s computer. Stevens grabbed a heavy machine gun from the ground off of one of the dead soldiers and charged in while Matthews and Banner hurried to the doors to plug the outpour of men.

The Infernum's side cannons unleashed their heavy powered Apla blasts on a cluster of two Curator frigates and only Martian frigate. Their metal hulls were easily punctured by the high powered lasers; the weakened shields of the frigates provided no defense.

In one frightening defining moment as the frigates fell dead into the ocean, the Aries slowly launched out of the water. Little by little its massive size reclaimed the sky. The water from the ocean fell off the top of it like a constantly ushered waterfall. Its back engines roared into place. The Aries' lower jets thrust it into the air.

"You are a god, Pat." Lutz said looking back at Pat.

"A god?" Pat asked. He had no sense of the meaning of the word. His helmet officially stopped functioning from the loss of power. He pulled it off and tossed it lightly to his side in his weakened state.

"You stand here in my presence with such a magnificent natural born gift." Lutz told. "But I must admit, you were part of a larger plan. For years we studied your DNA, your blood, everything. We tried to figure out what made you naturally great so we could expand on it. And after years, my scientists finally gave it to me. That is why I, like you, no longer feel the fear of putting on these gloves, that suit. I no longer fear damaging effects of Apla. And I plan to expand. To make an entire army of you.... Loyal, obedient, super soldiers. It will be my world."

Pat crawled up to his knee again. "Your world...?"

"Lenz and his time is coming to an end." Lutz said. The dark bridge and dimly lit night outside the windows places Lutz inside his own dark shadow. "He has always been obsessed with the Monk. He's been obsessed with these historical relics like the Caelum Fulmen. He's been obsessed with finding and controlling all of them. But I no longer care. Which is why I will destroy the Monk as its powers are useless to me."

Pat looked over to Kayla who was crawling toward Lutz. She had recovered from the shock and was sneaking toward Lutz slowly. She looked at him and nodded. Pat divided his concentration.

"Why?" Pat asked struggling. He made a hand gesture to Kayla to go forward. "You of all people would want nothing more than the most powerful weapons in the universe."

"After we learned the plasma technologies of the Caelum Fulmen, it inspired me to become self reliant on my own time." Lutz said. "I have the most advanced weaponry in our solar orbit. Lenz has been involved in something of his own betrayal for a long time. And I plan to wipe out all of the Curators and this pathetic dynasty that has seemed to last longer than the hundreds of years they've had world power for."

Kayla finally was close enough and finally had enough strength to rush Lutz. She sprinted toward him and made a dive at his back to grab his arms from behind. Lutz heard her light bounce from the metallic flooring and turned with his fingers pointed right at her. She grabbed his belt buckle and threw something away as he turned around. A thick stroke of lightning plowed into her chest. The discharge hurled her up against the windows. The plasma firing ceased and she dropped lifeless hard to the floor. Her toasted armor cracked easily when she dropped. The helmet easily separated from the suit. Pieces of the armor broke off like glass.

“Kayla!” Pat yelled for his fallen friend.

Lutz fired a small bolt at Pat which shocked him back to the ground. His body shook with pain and he collapsed backward against a computer terminal. Pat winced and tried to position his body upright. As he sat up his squinted eyes caught a distinct red stick sitting between two chairs on the floor on the other side of the bridge cabin. He looked harder at it. It was one of Lutz’s Apla shots. Pat concentrated and reviewed Kayla’s actions in his mind. He remembered her rushing Lutz and throwing something. That something must have been an Apla shot she snatched from his belt. Lutz, not wearing any Covi armor with the Apla tanks built into the interior, casually kept injection shots with him. After all, with his new power, he was insuperable to the negative effects of Apla and carrying them at his side was harmless. Pat now understood Kayla’s reasoning and her sacrifice.

“Now watch, Pat. Watch as the city melts along with the Monk.” Lutz said. Pat was so weak. He could see what was going on outside the windows, but he knew he didn’t have the speed to grab the Apla, inject it, power himself up, and fire before Lutz could eliminate him completely.

Astley prepared the ship for battle on the Aries’ bridge. The Aries super charged its engines and accelerated over the city with a fast jump. It then halted its movement very quickly and hovered over the city which was still in a full war. In the palace The King, Doc, and Connors stood and watched as the ship quickly zoomed in over their heads.

“The heat signatures are weak. They aren’t prepared to fire.” One of the soldiers said.

“Yeah, that isn’t gonna last long.” Connors yelled. “Is there an underground bunker in this place?”

“A bunker wouldn’t save you, captain.” Doc said.

“Well anything’s better than being out here.” Connors yelled. He grabbed the Doc and King. “Come on.” He said as he pulled them inside and went into the lowest room in the palace.

The metal doors of the Aries slid open once again in a manner that presented no threat and no concern. The dark sky that was illuminated with northern lights went completely black allowing

viewers to look straight up into the sky as the colorful lights disappeared. Once again, the air slowed and with one giant pulse a massive shockwave rumbled out through the air like the sky itself was breaking.

“Lutz...” Pat said. “Don’t do this. I have only had a taste of the Monk, and it already has made me a believer. It has made me want to protect the relics.”

“The value of being able to write my own history, create the world I want, is far greater than saving any of the past.” Lutz told Pat in his dark heavy voice. “The winners write history, and I will be the winner. Imagine how long my name will last in the ages when everyone believes I am a god.”

He laughed at the Caelum Fulmen prepared its blast. Nathan checked the position of the Aries and knew what was going on as well. He would have told the Covis, but there were busy fighting platoon after platoon. A Curator frigate, that seemed to enter the battle late, came screaming with the wind right past the bridge of the Infernum. It dashed toward the Aries with extreme speed using every inch of its back engine thrusters to power it against the wind.

“I’m broadcasting on all Martian signals, this is Prince Gordon Winterfield.” Gordon said over the Martian military airwaves which was heard by Nathan, Doc, Connors, The King, and many soldiers fighting in the city. “I have an electronegativity machine that I’ve armed as a bomb aboard this Curator frigate. I am piloting this ship with many other Martian guards I’ve found along the way. And we are all prepared to make the sacrifice necessary.”

“Is that my son?” The King said. “My son Gordon!” The King grabbed the intercom. “Gordon, it’s your father.”

“Dad... it’s great to hear your voice.” Gordon said. The frigate he piloted was not too far from the shores now and was nearing the Aries. “I’m sorry, father.”

“What?” The King asked. “What do you mean? Gordon? Are you there? Gordon!”

“Wait a minute, he’s going after the Caelum Fulmen’s plasma generators.” Doc said.

“So?” Connors wondered.

“He’s going to ignite the sky.” Doc said. “A self sacrifice.”

“What! No! He can’t!” The King screamed. “My son! Gordon!”

Lutz watched as the ship was obviously out of order and he called to Astley. “Destroy the frigate coming towards you!” Lutz yelled to Astley. “It isn’t adhering to any orders.”

Astley commanded from his perch among his own crew. "Fire upon the frigate!"

"Sir, it's one of our own ships." A crewman said. "Our auto turrets aren't built to shoot down our own technology."

"Fire our heavy cannons then!" Astley yelled back.

Another crewman ran up. "We can't while the Caelum Fulmen is firing!"

"Do something!" Astley yelled.

Gordon dove in his altitude slightly to get under the Caelum Fulmen while still at a distance. He armed the bomb with the controls in front of him and he accelerated the engines. The frigate plunged forward and smacked the Caelum Fulmen which had just begun to shoot its first beam to the ground. The frigate alone caused a massive thump in the ship and a huge explosion. But then, the electronegativity bomb exerted itself and mixed with the powerful plasma of the ancient technology. The two were supposed to lock in and dissolve for docking purposes. But since Gordon's weaponizing of the instrument, the particles ignited the Aries in eerily calm decimation of the entire ship and all its armor in a fiery bulb. The sky settled as the Aries was dematerialized. And then, in a massive burst, the winds blew back as an explosive line of combustion.

The heat scalded the city. Snow on the hills that were in a direct line with the explosion was instantly evaporated. Most of the soldiers within the city were fine, but the burst affected all of the air vehicles. Martian small fighters were sent flying through the air uncontrollably from the sudden rush of air. Frigates were turned around and the Infernum took a direct heat spike which skyrocketed the pressure on the shields turning up a bright light around the ship as the northern lights in the night sky also glowed again. The Infernum turned suddenly from the burst shaking everything inside.

In the hangar, all of the soldiers who were fighting the Covis fell straight out of the ship and fell to their death. The Covis fell as well, but turned on their jetpacks at the right moment. Nathan was prepared for the shockwave and had already grabbed a hold of something stable.

Inside the control deck of the bridge, Lutz, who was already shockingly furious at the negligence of the Aries command, was tossed by the jolt of the floor. He was slammed against the glass of the bridge. Pat was also flown through the air. As he fell, he grabbed on to a computer terminal once used by one of the Infernum's pilots. The Apla shot fell as well and it was about to drop right past Pat. As if in slow motion, the item so important to him was hanging in mid air before him. He reached out and snatched the vital tube. Kayla's lifeless body was still lying tightly in the corner.

The Infernum's natural computer autopilot systems reversed the spin of the back engines and spun the capital ship slowly back into place. Pat and Lutz were both leveled out and the general spared no time to rage out. He quickly fired a bolt of lightning at Pat. Pat was expecting the furious attack and he dove out of the way toward the command deck. Lutz fired again and Pat scrambled behind some cover. Acting quickly, he pulled off the cap of the shot and pushed the needle into his neck which was the only exposed part of his body. He felt the powerfully addictive sense of Apla energy rushing through his body. After being electrocuted, the feeling was rejuvenating.

He took a deep breath in and pushed the small amount of energy into his suit. "Counting on you here, Nathan." Pat said softly to himself.

He jumped out from his cover and saw Lutz on the other side of the bridge winding up his lighting gloves.

"Prepare to die, Pat Listowel!" Lutz said with his evil laugh as he shot two heavy doses of lightning at Pat.

Pat threw his arm in a circle in front of his body and created a large block shield in front of him. A red laser thin shield stood in front of Pat's crouched body that was attached to his wrist. Lutz unleashed his full fury of lightning at Pat, but every bolt of plasma was neutralized by the shield. Lutz finally stopped with a loud gasp of air. His face was in disbelief from the shield. Pat had been collecting a ball of Apla energy in his other hand behind the shield. As soon as Lutz relinquished his attack, Pat shut off the shield and launched the entire heavy blast of energy at Lutz. It hit the defenseless general and killed him instantly. His fried dead body slammed against the windows and hit the floor.

Chapter 12

Pat rushed as fast as he could to Kayla once Lutz went down for good. Her helmet was off and parts of her armor were broken. She was face down when he knelt by her and he pushed her over on her back. She was still motionless with her eyes closed. Her armor was fried and he couldn't get a technical reading on her health. He bent over closer to her head and listened for her breathing. She was softly calmly inhaling and exhaling. Pat put his fingers on her neck and checked her heartbeat. As soon as he noticed it was at a decent rhythm, he lightly tapped her cheek and stared right over her while calling her name.

"Kayla. Kayla. C'mon Kayla..." Pat said over and over again.

Finally, she blinked her eyes and awoke quickly. Pat let go and she sat upright.

"You did it, didn't you?" Kayla said.

“Well, I guess that diversion put in a little help.” Pat said.

She grabbed Pat’s hand and pulled herself up.

“Pat! You there?” Nathan yelled over the intercom.

“I’m here, Nathan.” Pat said.

“That’s great news. I was beginning to wonder if...” Nathan was saying.

A large shake of the engine occurred that rumbled the entire ship. Sirens went blazing and red lights appeared all throughout the hangar, bridge, exterior of the ship, and hallways.

“What was that?” Kayla shouted.

A large self destruction sequence appeared on the bridge screen. It read “CORE MELTDOWN IN PROCESS. SELF DESTRUCT SEQUENCE INITIATED WITH FULL SPEED.”

“Hey Nathan, I think Lutz beat us to destroying this thing.” Pat said.

“I see the warning, Pat. To be honest, I thought we could save the ship at this rate. But with a core meltdown, there will be more than enough energy to smoke us and the city.” Nathan said.

“How was this started?” Kayla asked.

“Lutz...” Nathan said.

“What?” Pat asked.

“How?” Kayla said.

“I don’t know, I don’t know. It’s probably a safeguard if he was killed or something. A sensory chip to his vitals. I don’t know, but all I know is we don’t have much time.” Nathan rambled quickly. “I need you to work with me on this. We have just enough time to mop up some of the left over messes, but I need your suit to stay in the system so I don’t get locked out.” Nathan said. “This is Nathan Black to Martian command, get all of the ships back to the city.” Nathan ordered over the secure channel.

“All Martian vessels return to base immediately!” Sage ordered over the same channel.

The Martian ships that were still alive brushed past their enemies and flew directly toward Defense city. Immediately after, the frigates and small fighters that were in an airborne battle with the Martians chased them down blasting off at the city.

"Time to even the odds." Nathan said. "Send all targeting and weaponry permissions to my terminal. Hopefully using some energy will kill the clock a bit on that meltdown."

Pat worked quickly to meet Nathan's needs. The computer mainframe of the bridge was a bit confusing to him, but there were enough easy operations for him to transfer the controls. Once Nathan had access to the entire ship's weaponry, he moved the heavy cannons into range on the frigates traveling toward Defense city. He put all available energy into the cannons which fired heavy piercing blasts through half of the ships. The other half retaliated by firing all available missiles. The Infernum's hull was battered by the turbo missiles of the frigates, and some of the bottom boosters were damaged, but the ship as a whole remained unshaken. Nathan quickly had the rest of the ships terminated in a spectacular feat of high powered illuminated destruction.

"Now that that's taken care of, I'm putting in the final procedures for the ship's engines. This thing is a massive time bomb and it's gonna blow in just a couple minutes. I'm preparing the engines for an Orbital take off." Nathan told. "We'll be out on a ship pretty quick, but you two are going to have to find a way out quickly."

"What about smashing these windows?" Kayla asked.

"They're built to withstand heavy ship cannons, turbo missiles, and nuclear and fusion blasts." Nathan told. "You'd probably have a better chance Apla blasting your way through the hull of the ship."

"Can you open up an access route straight from the bridge to the hangar?" Pat asked.

"It's already done." Nathan said back. "Are you ready?"

"Go now." Pat said.

Nathan activated the sequence of the ship to get its engines roaring and its lower boosters firing. It accelerated upward. Nathan jumped on board the beat up Windcutter as Matthews prepared the take off. Pat and Kayla rushed out of the bridge and raced down the long hallway. They were both exhausted from battle, but their highly trained athleticism allowed them to carry on. The ship began to tip upwards as it tried to accelerate into the upper orbit and it began to tilt slightly as some of the weaker and damaged jets gave out.

Inside the ship, to Pat and Kayla the turning looked like the walls were slowly encircling around them. As they ran toward the hangar at the back end of the ship, they're joints felt relief from running while the ship provided them a running lane that was like a downward sloped hill. Troops were frantically running through the hallways. Most of the soldiers simply ignored the Covis and did their best to escape, but as Pat and Kayla neared the hangar, they found

themselves pinned up against a few of the Curators. The soldiers fired their weapons. Kayla instantly took a dash for cover as most of her suit was missing. Pat dove at the soldiers by letting himself explode off the already uneven ground. Without his helmet, he courageously tackled the first man to the ground and beat him in the head once putting him out. The other two soldiers swung their automatic weapons around to shoot Pat, but Kayla had already left her cover and knocked one out by slamming his head against the wall and maneuvered herself to pin the other one in a bone crushing arm lock. As she set the second man down from his torturous injury, she sprinted toward Pat and the two rushed into the hangar.

The ship was rapidly reaching the upper atmosphere and the hangar sat open. The thin air and powerful gusts swam through the wide room. The two Covis were choking up at the weak air as they quickly made their way to the long open window for the ships to evacuate. Just before they reached the edge, Cal Sharp appeared behind. He was wounded. The stab through his chest would have normally killed him. But the supreme heat that seared his skin, closed the wounds long enough so he didn't bleed out. In his hand was the safe plasma coated knife he had been stabbed with. He raced and caught up with the unsuspecting Covis. He quickly kicked Kayla's legs out from under her while barrowing down on Pat. Kayla collapsed on the ground.

Pat turned to see what happened and Cal lunged the sword against his armor. The blade cut clean through the breastplate but only skimmed his chest. Then Cal managed to fold back into Pat and push the knife right through the side of his abdomen. It missed the major organs but cut a severe hole in the Covi. He was stunned. His eyes widened from the extreme and unfamiliar pain. While inhaling before letting out a painful hollow, Cal kicked Pat in the same abdomen area and she slipped off the edge and out of the hangar. His body plummeted through the air. The ship was already in the upper orbit. The dark skies were even darker without the artificial lights in the sky, but even brighter from the nearing galactic horizon.

Cal quickly spun around ready to finish off Kayla. She was already up, and before Cal could get his arm all the way around, Kayla stiffed him and knocked him off balance while keeping him close. Cal tried to flip the arm with the knife around her head, but Kayla wouldn't let him and eventually elbowed him in the face. She grabbed the arm and the blade handle and yanked across his body with his hips. As she faced his rear, she stole the weapon right from his hands and slashed the back of his Apla supply. She pulled out one of the Apla cartridges and holstered it inside her own armor. As soon as her armor powered back on, she kicked Cal back down to the ground. The Covi One member didn't move as his wounds were ripped back open in the fight.

"Goodbye, Cal." Kayla said. She turned away running and jumped off the edge and soared downward away from the ship.

Kayla turned on her jets and used the last of the energy inside of her to blast her way downward toward Pat. As he fell, the air that whipped around him took his breath away. He fired the jet pack and jet boots as much as he could, but the power supply reading on his arm began to fade and his armor was without energy. The pain and lack of air forced him to close her eyes. Kayla worriedly checked her wrist scanner which showed her increasingly shrinking power supply as she dove in faster. Kayla blasted her jetpack and jetboots one more time to throttle herself downward. She saw Pat drifting, falling so softly through the air. She extended her arms outward and glided swiftly right over him. Kayla latched her arms around his falling body and armor and pulled him tight and secure. Pat woke up from the jolt of Pat catching her. He looked straight up into the sky. Straight up at the stars, space, and the Infernum. A small pulse from the back burners of the ship bubbled and then the entire capital ship exploded from within. Streaks of Apla covered metal chunks raced across the sky and space propelled very quickly by the hyper energy that was finally released. The explosion was immense. It would have sent a shockwave toward Pat and Kayla had the ship not already been in the upper orbit of Mars outside of the air to ripple through.

In one magnificent explosion the final Curator capital ship was destroyed. Pat regained his strength and wrapped his arm tightly around Kayla's back while he clasped her hand with the other. Kayla thrust herself so her feet were below her again and she pushed the remaining energy through to power the jet pack and boots. They popped on and they decelerated rapidly. Pat slipped off Kayla's armor, but he still held tightly on to her arm. After their velocity was paused and Kayla hung in the air, Pat looked up at her and smiled. She held on tightly to his forearm with her hand.

"Man, am I glad I hired you as an intern." Pat said. Kayla laughed.

"Funny, because after today, I'm not so sure I want the job." She said.

"Why not?" Pat asked.

"I just don't think I want to be carrying my lazy boss around everywhere." Kayla responded. Pat smirked as he looked at her tight grip holding him from falling.

"I wouldn't call myself a boss anymore. We're a team." Pat said. "Sorry I didn't make a good first impression."

She smiled and nodded. "So what now?" She asked as she hung in the air.

The Windcutter with the whole team inside rose up to their side. Its large hovering jets were humming to keep it afloat. The back of the ship rose up to meet them and the hatch released. Banner and Ace stood at the back with their hands out stretched.

"I think it's time we went home." Banner said.

The Covis grabbed onto the hull and pulled themselves in and the Windcutter sailed back to the city.

(Early morning at the city. Times will be adjusted.)

The night passed on Defense City. The last of the Curator stragglers were killed off throughout the night. Once the main army was decimated by the Martians along the large wall, small sects broke off and wandered through the city. Slowly but surely they were hunted down and imprisoned by Martian troops. After the large cruisers were destroyed, nothing stopped the Martian air force from wiping out the Curator small ships. By day break, the entire city was secure. Martian and Protector losses were relatively minimal compared to the other battles they had in recently. Part of the city was in ruins, but most of it was undamaged.

The air force was in the sky flying and making sure the area was secure even though they knew it was. Soldiers were right back at work in the morning cleaning the city and rebuilding infrastructure. Ships from other parts of the planet were reaching top speeds as they blazed through the air to bring word to other cities that their main fleet had been destroyed. Plans of reorganization of satellites and military bases were already underway. And the whole ex-Curator team, the King and his family, Doc, and several other Martian and Protector officials were gathered together around a table inside a military building in the city.

"Where do we go from here?" The King asked.

"Well with the main fleet gone, taking back the rest of Mars shouldn't be too difficult." Connors said.

"It'll be easy." Sage said. "Most of their frigates have already been taken out from being stretched too thin from city to city. Local police were enough to win the battle in some of those."

"I think we should actually try and take prisoners. Most of these men were only following orders." Pat said.

"He's right." Doc added. "Almost anyone can be turned when they are calm enough to see the truth."

"I think we need to get closer to combining to Protectors and the Martians." The King said.

"I agree." Shane blurted out. Rita's eyes went astray as she couldn't believe her man's words. "I think the Protectors should fall into line under the Martian empire. Together we can win this war and capture earth."

"No." Doc said blatantly. "The Protectors are not designed to be politically accumulated. We are an entirely separate entity and will be so until there is peace. I don't believe there is an earth to be captured, but simply ridded of the evils in power."

"You will fall into line, or you will be considered a traitor." Shane said. "Anyone on Mars is under my jurisdiction."

"Enough!" Pat said. Shane looked furiously at Pat and then stormed out of the room with Rita at his hand.

"There are bigger things to worry about here than fighting." Kayla said. "Obviously we can't destroy or capture earth and the Curators. There are many good people there. People like my father who are just caught in a tough situation."

"I think it's very early to be talking about winning a war." Banner said. "We are decimated on this new side. The infrastructure, trade, and cities on this planet have been slashed. Your military is practically eradicated. And you don't even have a working satellite grid."

"Banner has a point here." Stevens said. "We should be talking about survival rather than routing the enemy."

"I don't think it's all that bad right now." Matthews said. "We have at least close to two years before they would dare sending another fleet. Proximity month is long over and not even the Curators want to send a fleet that far for that long. We have time to prepare and rebuild. And together we can do just that."

"We actually have a considerable advantage." Kayla said. "All of you are forgetting something major here. We have the Monk. We can use it to find all of the highly powerful weapons hidden out there and use them to our advantage."

"That's brilliant!" The King yelled.

"I can't believe I forgot about the Monk!" Banner added.

"Let's get started right away." Pat said. Many other voices at the table clamored.

"Well..." Doc said. "The problem with that is I bluffed." Everyone went dead silent. "I knew by making the Curators think the Monk had the map information would at least give us some leverage that they wouldn't just kill us all right away. Lutz happened to be an outlier. But truth be told, the Monk has no information on those weapons. It only holds history. To keep both safe, the creators of the Protectors separated the two pieces of information. The map and the weapons are still out there, but I have no idea where they are." Everyone remained silent and gloomy. "After all, if I knew, don't you think I would have gone out and found them myself?"

"Then I guess we'll have to win conventionally." Pat said. "Where can we go for more supplies, more resources? We will definitely need more."

"The colonies of course." Nathan said. "It's where the Curator army used to get all of its resources from. They mine asteroids for their entire economy. Because the Curators need them so badly, the mining communities have managed to remain neutral and out of Curator jurisdiction."

"Great." Banner said. "Just where I wanted to go; some giant spinning rings in the middle of nowhere with a bunch of miners."

"What do you got against miners?" Stevens asked.

"If they were better fighters with less of an ego, they wouldn't be miners. They would be soldiers." Banner said.

Stevens laughed a little bit with a slight sarcastic tone. "My entire family is miners."

"I know some contacts there as well." King Winterfield said. "We used to make deals with them from time to time during the Orbital Wars."

"Then that is what we'll do." Pat said. "We can make great deals with them. I heard they are very happy to make loans with the supplies. While we're there we can recruit a lot too."

"Absolutely, I'm sure there are plenty of miners looking to get out of that place and see the real world." Matthews said.

"We'll be able to bring those people a big chunk of their history as well by slipping it into the airways." Doc said. "It might turn into a better deal when the colonies are backing us with the war."

"I know you don't want any agreements now, Doc." The King said. "But, you have my utmost trust and thanks." They both smiled at each other. "You too Covis. You used to be my most feared adversaries, but it's good to have you at least mostly on our side now."

"It's too bad about Gordon, though." Pat said. "I'm sorry about that."

"No. Gordon did what Gordon always wanted to do. He saved us all." The King said. "I just wish I had listened to him sooner."

"It looks like you've learned from your past." Connors said to the King.

"It seems I have." The King responded.

"You all will continue too as well." Doc said. "It's time I let the Monk expand all its energies to the world. Everyone will learn all the history they want."

Pat, Nathan, Kayla, Ace, Banner, Stevens, Matthews, and Parker went outside on a balcony and looked at the magnificent view. From their area, they could see the ocean, the light blue daytime sky, and the snowy mountains.

"So now that this is all over, what do we do?" Banner asked.

"Officially?" Pat asked. "I think we stick with Doc. We will be Protectors."

"I like the idea, but the names kinda lame. We personally need a name as a team." Nathan said.

"That's true, we need some more jazz." Matthews said.

"What about the 'saviors'." Stevens said.

"No." Nathan called out.

"The Trojans?" Matthews said. "According to Doc, we were much like a group of these legendary warriors."

"Someone's already done it." Nathan said.

"The Guardians." Pat said. There was a silence.

"I kinda like that." Nathan said. "It's different."

"The Guardians." Stevens said. "Hey guys, I'm a Guardian."

"I love it." Kayla said.

"It's perfect." Matthews told. The others nodded in agreement.

"I think it's settled." Pat said. "Now for our first mission... Guardians.... I think we should all explore that Monk a little bit. If we're going to put our life and glory all on saving a small device, we should at least get something out of it."

Doc walked out onto the balcony with the Monk in his hand. "Guardians, I'm one step ahead of you." He revealed the Monk and let its internal explosively amazing memory dispense out at them. The Monk was finally being used by outsiders.

The End...