

Prologue- The Cataclysm

"Conflict, the life blood that makes mortals... well, mortal. Conflict exists in the very nature of people, the desire to fight for *something*. This went for any world, so long as it had mortals living upon it; and that just so happens to go triple for the people inhabiting the planet known as Genesys.

Across the entire Galaxy from your Planet Earth, Genesys was once so very similar as it had continents brimming with life. Tens of thousands of varieties of plant life, perhaps millions of wild life species, most of which were quite peaceful. Many of them could be considered quite different from those found on Earth, some made up of simple gases and even liquids. The fossil records of what life was back then are quite remarkable.

Though of course as with any world, evolution would of course happen and with evolution came what some consider the greatest disease of all... man.

From the very beginning they had begun to kill each other for mundane reasons: religion, philosophy, land, vengeance, resources, love, whims, anything they considered as the pursuit of their own peace. Was that all truly worth dying for? To some perhaps but to others, not at all.

And so for eleven-thousand years kingdoms formed, all for the act of furthering themselves, to further widen the social divide that was wealth and poverty. Not until sixteen hundred years ago did a cease fire at last come when the children had taken more than they wished, no longer seeking conflict. That was when the Light Ages began, a time of prosperity for mankind for the first time since they walked upright.

Technology advanced, civilizations prospered, extinct species had even begun to be brought back. How had they done this so quickly in a thousand years? They had discovered how to siphon off the world's Life Energy and, by extension, the life force of the Celestial River which gave life to the cosmos.

Playing God, mortal man began to suck the life from their world to speed up their prosperity which in the process had begun to kill it internally. Many spoke out in opposition, though none would act fearing the loss of such energy would result in another chain of wars. And so they continued to play God with their own world. But as the song and dance goes, there is always a vicious cycle, this time with *The Cataclysm*.

It was divine judgment sent by the Cosmos for robbing them. Six-hundred years ago in what we now know as Year Zero, an object described only as God's Fist fell to Genesys. While it would have severely crippled the planet, it was believed that it would not utterly destroy all life, only the Southern Continent. Still, False Gods attempted to use their power to save what they could out of greed instead of letting nature take its course.

What resulted was them siphoning the Planet's Life Force to cast a Celestial Barrier to try and repel the falling asteroid. This act was what would doom their society. Upon striking the Barrier, the Asteroid unloaded so much radiation and unknown power that it shattered the planet's Life Force, breaking space and time. The physical impact felt annihilated much of the Southern Continent and created a massive crater which had also kicked up enough ash and debris to block out the world's star for decades.

The effects of this impact were felt everywhere, rippling through the planet's life energy. With its fold, life everywhere began to die no longer able to be sustained. With the blocking of the star came a nuclear winter, causing further loss. Famine, drought, pestilence, extinction. Divine intervention against those who would play God, it was the Celestial River's retaliation. It wasn't until the coming months that the latter effects were noticed, wild life being mutated by the radiation and blow to the planet's force, changing biomes, and so much more.

The worst was still to come, for the hit that had cleaved the life force of the world had also opened portals to a much darker world, one full of burning atmosphere, rampaging evil, and the Darkling; vile

creatures beyond the creation of God with only one purpose, destruction. Hive minded and warrior driven, they infested Genesys to prove their worth which ended with further destruction.

Technology and societies had become lost, the sheer numbers of the Darkling overrunning Genesys to the brink of utter extinction for the entire planet. Their ability to possess organic beings enabled them to only further adapt, to further their knowledge, to blend into society and further their agenda to destroy. For thirty-two years, Genesians quaked in fear at the name of Darkling, entire towns committing suicide to escape the threat of being possessed and used. Humanity had been lost.

That is, until Project Revelations.

It was said that travelers to the planet had come offering gifts, powers considered unnatural. Having discovered the power of the Celestial River, if harnessed proper, they created a warrior program of people who could wield the elements and further powers; they were supernatural fighters. Using extreme strength, extreme twisted powers, they tipped the scale of war to inspire humanity once more to fight. Founded by the Celeste Church and following their faith of God, the Genesians pushed back against the Darkling for as long as they could, hoping for a victory. Finally, the heavens smiled down upon Genesys once more.

Sixty-four years following The Cataclysm the clouds that had blocked the star's warmth began to recede, basking the lands in golden glory for the first time in decades. It had been a sign that Genesys's Life Force was also returning, healing from the wound caused those many years before. It had become a beacon of hope, especially when another event came to life. Like Vampires, the Darkling had begun to burn when out of a host body, completely victim to the star's raise. That was the change that drove the Genesians forward.

Building new technology and new societies behind the Church, they pushed the Darkling menace back and managed to reclaim their world after years of trial and error, behind Light Tech Industries who used the star to their advantaged, and of course The Church's Revelation Program.

One-hundred and six years after The Cataclysm, humanity had stood atop Genesys once more as dominate. Their societies had begun to rebuild following the Church, who by then had established the Holy Kingdom of Celeste in name of both God and the Celestial River. No one played God again, though the Revelations Program was continued, something that others would eventually try to replicate. But like a cycle, history would repeat itself. One-hundred and fifty years following the Genesians returned to war among themselves following a new population boom, all for the same reasons they had fought for thousands of years prior.

It is now 648 A.C. and after another several hundred years of battle, conflict has subsided though tensions are far from dead. The Holy Kingdom of Celeste remains atop the world though even they do not know what lies in their world now that the Darkling have been pushed away, for monsters of unknown type and origin still remain. Evil is on the move like always and the clock is ticking. Lessons of the past are being forgotten as once more many believe they can play God. While many fight for wealth, many remain to fight for freedom from the societies built up over the years. Only time will tell if they are destined to succeed, or if the Celestial River will fight back and send them into oblivion yet again.

This is the story of Wings of Freedom.”

Operation Avalanche

“Hey Mimi can’t catch me!”

“Bruno! Gosh-”

“You kids get back here!”

Waving tall grasses, brisk breeze rushing through the crisp autumn leaf filled trees, a babbling creek. Through the grasses two children ran with one ahead of the other, a boy in the lead and a girl trailing. Further back in the tree line stood a woman, considerably older than the two young kids. Her arms waved as the two ran through the tall grasses, many insects flapping into the air off the blades.

“Come on Auntie Lynne,” came the cry of Bruno who was leagues ahead.

A slight buzzing could be heard along the winds, the hum of motors.

“Children please, don’t go too far-”

“WHOA! Look at that!”

Bruno’s right arm extended, his pointer finger pointing to the air. Far out from the clearing, high above into the sky drifted large red objects. The dotted the sky in such few number though their size was considerable, perhaps a kilometer and a half away from where they stood.

“What are those big blagloons?!”

“Balloons Bruno, and those aren’t balloons, those are Zeppelins from The Church you dork! Just look at the insignia on their sides,” Mimi called back.

Lynne slowly began to approach, her eyes locked to the sight of the airships as they glided across the skies above the further out forest, “That’s part of the Eastern Fleet, General Taido’s unit. There are just dozens.”

“Auntie Lynne, where are they going? Are we at war with someone?”

By this point Lynne had caught up to the two children, slowly approaching from behind. Without word she placed both hands on their shoulders, her eyes not moving, “War with something, the monsters in the mountains.”

Silence fell over them as they watched the Zeppelins move further and further away towards the backdrop of large mountains beyond them.

“Mother and father will be avenged, right?” Mimi murmured, a slight sob behind her voice.

“We can only hope sweetie, we can only hope. The Light of The Church is with us all, that’s all we really need to stay strong against our enemies.”

Through the sky the Zeppelins moved, their red exterior painted with the insignia of The Church, the golden cross surrounded by the Servant Orbs. Forty-eight Zeppelins of two hundred and fifty meters, fixated behind another thirty-three at one hundred and twenty-five meters, fronted by twenty-three at sixty meters which were more blimp-like. At the head of the fleet drifted a massive Zeppelin of over four hundred and twenty meters, decorated with gold and bronze supports on the outside. At the head was a dragon head mounted, catwalks all around the underside of the structure.

On those catwalks moved men in what resembled Knight Armor, though upon closer inspection held more of a plastic-like appearance. Some moved armed with rifles, others with pistols, a few with staffs and swords. Nonetheless they were soldiers painted with the insignia of The Church across their chest plates, visored and on guard. Metal hatches stood before the soldiers attached to the ships, hatches shielding metal-lined corridors of twisting steel.

Inside many a man moved in armor, armed and at the ready, shifting down hallways and through various rooms. Some rooms large, some rooms small. Off the bridge where many in officer attire, to port, drifted many differently dressed individuals all stationed around a single table. The lights dim, a pale dark emerald glow emitting from the table, control pads and sensors scattered. Wires ran around the table, some going in and some drifting out along the floor.

Just above the table, hovering in thin air, a display in the emerald glow of mountains, of forests, of plains, of the skies. Around it were many scattered in keen observation, some young, others old, some just like the hologram in appearance as they were present by such technology. One at the head of the table dressed in flaring attire and lite armor moved, his arm extended with a finger pointing at a position on the hologram.

"-and as reminder, this is a joint operation of the Revelations Project and Celeste’s own military, alongside some action by The Church with two separate advances to the Northern Quadrant and here with the Eastern Quadrant. We will be covering approximately a radius of four point two thousand kilometers South to North, and in between twenty to two hundred kilometers West to East depending on the area, to pacify a section of the Monster Mountains. There is an estimated

one hundred and fifty-seven square kilometers of mountain just to start this assault off, and that does not account for the second expedition when that time comes to push further into the region which could turn into a push of eight hundred plus kilometers squared.”

“General Taido, might it not be wiser to involve all five of the armies and fleets in this endeavor?” came the voice of one of the officers, one decorated with several medals on the right side of his chest.

“Captain Damerick, the thought has been considered and unfortunately both The Church and His Majesty objected in the event that the West or South are invaded. The Central Army is all we have access to in the event that we need backup, otherwise this operation is dead in the water.”

“General, while I agree that the time has come for this, that it is far too long overdue, why involve the Revelations Project like this? They are Darkling Hunters and defenders in time of war, not lapdogs to the military. The Church has spoken about this prior,” came the voice of one of the holograms, the voice of a younger looking woman.

“Director Yuno, with all due respect, Darkling sightings are rumored to be heavy in this area. I say rumored because of all the false tips we have received in recent years. Plus there are creatures here my men alone can not defeat without reinforcements.”

“At that General, why only a handful? Forty of C-Class, thirty-three B-Class, eleven of A-Class, and three S-Class. And mind you, that’s spread between General Revan’s Forces as well as your own. You could have at least attempted to get more of the Warriors if you needed them. Darkling sightings within the mid-section have declined rapidly in recent years, and unlike the other armies, they are manageable and movable.”

“Director, all due respect, I think it doesn’t matter,” came the voice of a young girl who slowly began to approach the table.

Stopping she moved an arm, brushing her black red-tipped hair out of the way of one of her magenta eyes. Raising her left arm she quickly pointed towards the map towards the mountainous region, “We’re not unleashing a full campaign, only a spearheaded front to push the monsters back with potential to break further ahead in the future should we desire. We Warriors even in short number can help alleviate many of the problems that the two armies might experience. Taken in half, it’s at most seventy-five thousand square kilometers per army, arguably sixty thousand each depending on how far we go. And its not like monsters inhabit every square meter.”

“You speak your mind far too easily Sinno.”

“Director she isn’t wrong necessarily. Yes, it sounds like a lot of land in the long run but it is unlikely that we will find clusters of monsters every square kilometer. With any luck we might come across a group or species every hundred.”

“You can count on Shadow Squadron General,” Sinno said, “So what’s the plan?”

“The fleet will divide into three and head to different regions with a spread of a couple hundred kilometers. Once base points to land the ships are established, we will deploy stealth squads with Warriors at the head along with several garrisons of soldiers. They will split up and splinter throughout their respective landing zones to survey areas of note and any and all monsters we might need to be made aware of. Once enough data is recovered we’ll deploy our full forces.”

“Why not just bomb the bastards outright?” a younger man questioned, one who looked to be barely into his twenties.

“Because Zayden, that might do more harm than good. The purpose of the scouting parties is primarily to find any and all tunnels where monsters, or Darkling, could emerge from. If we just bury them in a wave of rock with bombardments, they could eventually find their ways out right behind the main units and flank us. Not to mention in the past we have lost many a ship to flying monsters the size of houses, sometimes bigger. Our airships are not the most maneuverable in formation or even alone for that matter. After my predecessor’s attempt to pacify the mountains where he lost fifty ships, I intend to take this more carefully.”

“Fifty!?” came the cry of another.

“Yes Rhett, it was considered a complete blunder on the military’s part. That never went public either, though it was hard to cover up.”

“So what happens beyond the scouts?” asked another.

“They’ll take notes and keep moving ahead. Once able, we’ll deploy all as I stated into the mountains to hit what we can. If applicable, then we MIGHT just bombard and attempt to land further into the mountains. Expect this operation to take considerable time. We’ve estimated for the last four months of spring to the six months of Summer into the six of Fall, maybe with a wrap up by the end of the first month of Winter before the heavy snows fall.”

“Oh god, I don’t want to stay here THAT dang long,” the last to speak spoke again.

“Then hope we can push harder than we’re anticipating Yato. The strategy is about as simple as it’ll get and as fast as it’ll get.”

At that moment a hatch on the left side of the room opened from which a man in uniform entered, pressing the door open to the wall, “General Taido, we’re five minutes out from our launching point.”

“Thank you Armagias. Everyone make your final preparations. Captain Frankie, I’m assigning you and the three hundred and twenty-second division to back Shadow Squadron’s, well, back.”

“Very good sir,” came the reply of a man standing two paces away from Sinno.

Sinno nodded with a step back, “We’re ready General, we won’t let you down.”

“Heh, I knew you’d say that. Then with that, to all of you, good luck... and may the Light of The Church be with us all.”

The Operation Begins

The rata-tat-tat of gunfire, crackling and popping across a large area of several kilometers; explosions climbing and clouds flying. Unholy howling, screams of humans and roars of lions, sharp winds carrying the cries of mortified mortal men. The roar of engines above in the clouds, moving red zeppelins; they made their way forward from above a lit green forest of trees towards a gradual rising clearing of grass and rock.

Many meters before them, the rise of the mountains, a steep climb upwards and it was up this climb that the zeppelins moved. Directly below the airships explosions climbed into the air reaching out for them, objects falling from above causing the blasts, bombs straight from the fleet. Back a ways at the clearing and forest's edge moved a variety of figures, many humanoid and many *other*. The humans moved, dressed in a silver and black plastic-like body armor that resembled that of knight armor.

They moved forward from the trees, many wielding rifles while others ran with swords and spears. Ahead near the mountains fighting against them, creatures three meters over them; creatures human in stance with the appearance of scorpion-men. Towering over, they moved with plated red shells and outstretched sets of arms with claws. Tails swung forward from behind, purple liquid being sprayed from their mouths, a liquid that quickly began to dissolve the rock it hit.

The humans fired their guns, unloading all at these creatures; while the creatures in turned charged straight through to strike back and bisect the soldiers. Many on both sides went down, the humans cut and struck, the creatures shot dead or stabbed straight to the eye.

"Move it ladies, get the lead out!" came a shout from the forest line.

Many meters from the front line stood a man, arms behind his back, dressed in green and silver with a military coat. A hat sat on his head, keeping his thick black hair mostly hidden. His face, grizzly and screaming of rage, "You worthless slime, you will all be subjugated by the might of the glorious Celeste Empire!"

Following his roar of command came more cries of his soldiers before him charging in. Blood ran down the ground and rock, blood of both sides. Explosions continued to fill the battlefield before him, scorpion creatures and soldier alike being sent flying off to crash.

"Where are my cannons? Where is my air support!? I want a status report now god dammit!" the man spat.

“Cannons are being brought through sir, we need a little more time!” came the shout of a man close behind the Commander.

Dressed in a gray coat, gray pants, black boots, white gloves, a gray cap, and fear; the man looked back quickly with a turn of his head and then shot his attention back to the Commander, “They’re clearing the line back behind yet and clearing the forest. Shadow Squadron is here and ready though sir!”

“Good good, General Taido recommended them for this. Let’s put the precious warriors to the test then. Shadow Squadron! Heed my command well! Take out these Scorupi Mamba, push them back to the mountains and buy time for the cannons to arrive. For the glory of our marvelous empire, for the righteousness of humanity, do it in the name of our Gods!”

Behind there was a clanging, something heavy and metal banging against rock. A sheathe could be heard flying off at which point another figure came into view. A young girl dressed in black and purple, her hair black with red tips, red eyes almost glowing with determination. Her head moved with a nod, “Understood Captain.”

A midst the battle’s sounds, her boots echoed with the few steps she took, a scythe at her side dragging across the ground just behind via the butt of the blade. Her steps brought her just ahead of the captain where she in turn stopped, the soldiers around her looking on with glee. One however looked on in confusion, glancing with a quick murmur to one of the gleeful, “Who is that young girl Sergeant?”

“Who?! You licker spittin snopper, that’s Sinno Murasame! C-Class Warrior of the Church, leader of Shadow Squadron!” the man spat back.

“Shadow Squadron? How can one damn squadron make a difference?!”

“Watch and learn kid, you don’t see shows like this that often.”

Sinno’s eyes gleamed in the flashes of the battle, a scowl spreading across her. With a quick heave the scythe flew up in her right hand, her grip at the butt of the weapon’s snath. Forward it swung down, stopping midair just in front of the girl who looked now across the entire field, “Shadow Squadron, you have your orders! Leave not a single one of these blaspheming bastards alive. In the name of The Church, we shall clench this victory firmly! ADVANCE!!”

Upon the command to advance, multiple shadows darted across from forest to the battle field. Multiple people cloaked in black went on the move, a little over a dozen with varying types of rifles and a few under a dozen with melee weaponry. Sinno took charge just ahead of the group with her scythe hanging back, up until they got near. As the group of

cloaked individuals went on the move, many a soldier pulled back while only watching, the Scorupi Mamba even taking a turn of interest mid-combat.

The scythe shot up, launched high just above its leaping owner, backed by several others with other weapons such as sword. Double grip, the slight whistling of wind from a falling object, the sound of steel moving quickly through the air, then the shriek. The weapon plunged clear down, slammed through the head of one Scorupi Mamba center point; its lite shriek lighting up the battle field before being cut off. Down it dropped with blood flying high into the air, running from eyes and mouth, jaw hanging as the body crashed down.

The blade, having come out of the throat, slammed through the ground as the creature crashed. With a quick yank the scythe plopped out, the head sliced in half in a single second. Ahead two of the cloaked figures moved in unison, twirling and kicking off the ground. One leap, two leaps, then the third followed by a somersault. Following that somersault one shot high and the other dropped, a sword in the right hands of both. The low individual slammed their sword through the chest of one Scorupi with little effort, the shrieks quickly cut off as its head went flying with its blood.

Both individuals landed, the body of the Mamba dropping as behind came gunfire via the weapons of the other cloaked individuals who held the rifles. Blue energy-like bullets filled the air, slamming through multiple Scorupi Mamba. Again they shrieked, many turning and being mowed down in seconds with pieces spilling out everywhere. All the while more of those with melee weapons charged, slamming swords and axes through the many stunned Scorupi.

“Open fire, all of you, help Shadow Squadron push the enemy back!” came the yell of the Captain.

Battle cries out and excessive yelling in, the soldiers behind the moving cloaked figures opened fire on the Scorupi just as Sinno swung her scythe again through several more. Split at the waistline, many Scorupi fell over, coating both weapon and wielder in a splatter of blood. She turned her head back, observing the constant fire of the guns behind, noting the positions of many, “Firing away from us at our sides. Good, fewer casualties on our part that way. Razor, Nani!”

Her scythe rose into the air yet again as she looked to two cloaked people by her side, both with assault rifles. With a nod at them they quickly shot ahead of Shadow Squadron, rifles dropping to their sides and held by light blue strings. Sinno’s gaze followed, watching as their cloaks flew off revealing black armor akin to that of the normal soldiers. On their backs rested small devices resembling Rocket Launchers with three rounds just below.

Both grabbed and held them forward with both hands, the barrels extending with the jolt movements. Down on one knee each, both taking aim with a scope to their eyes, then the BANG!!

A bang loud enough to shatter glass, large shells being spat out the back of the weapons while ahead flew a glowing blue net with spheres of silver at the intersecting points of the net. In yet another jolt of movement, rather a blink of the eye, they tripled in size. A dozen Scorupi Mamba stood before the nets, a dozen that quickly found themselves flying down into the ground underneath the nets. Without warning they combusted, fire launching high up that turned black; what followed after were twin explosions enough to take out a car entirely.

“HRYAAA!!” Sinno yelled with the blasts with a mighty heave.

At the end of her scythe caught by the blade was a Scorupi Mamba being hoisted through the air, impaled through the chest. With that heave it flew off behind Sinno, the blue bullets of her comrades cutting right into it and shredding it. The scythe dropped just as the body did, her eyes locked forward, “Shurren, Ellie, take the right! Shawn, Dawn, the left! Sapphra, you’ll be with me and Razor and Nani. We’re going to break through to the mountains now while the rest of you covers our rear. Go!”

“Time to face the music! SONSABITCHES!” came the yell of one just behind Sinno.

With a sudden roll to the right she evaded a charging man who ran straight towards the approaching Scorupi Mamba ahead of her. In this man’s hands was an even larger version of the weapon used by both Razor and Nani, one with its scopes aimed towards the Mamba. Many lights flickered along the side of the device which was propped onto his shoulder, his expression a wide grin with crazed eyes.

“Here’s the noise, you bastards!”

With the press of a button on the side came bolts of black electricity that blew forward into the Scorupi, the electricity surging around many of them. A crackle like thunder, followed by individual explosions of the Scorupi Mamba one after the other as the black lightning entered their bodies. The man fell backwards, still laughing as the group he hit screamed in pain. In just seconds, eighteen Scorupi Mamba had blown apart into pulp with the push of a button.

“Thanks for the assist Donavin, I appreciate it,” Sinno chuckled slightly.

“Someone has to save your neck every now and again, eh boss?” he replied with laughter.

“Above you!” came a shout from behind.

Both pairs of eyes shot up to see three Scorupi dive bombing from high into the air with tails forward, slobbering and shrieking as they flew. In the blink of another eye, lightning flew into the three to send them packing. Their shrieks hit

the eardrums of those below, the eyes of the would-be-victims watching them tumble away near lifeless. Behind stood one of the two from earlier with twin crystal-like swords now, unhooded revealing brown hair waving in front of a set of golden eyes.

Landing just beside him was the other from before, white visible hair flowing all around their face that was quickly parted, “You got ahead of me, dang it.”

“They were wide open Ellie, don’t blame me.”

“Thanks for that one Shurren, guess I owe ya,” Donavin chuckled.

“Sinno, this battle field is getting a bit chaotic, enemy are flying from blasts from the mountains.”

“I can see that. Inform the captain to pull back the line for now until the airships are out of range, we can’t afford to lose soldiers to falling Scorupi Mamba.”

From the right came multiple cries of anguish and pain, strong winds blowing dozens of soldiers away. Some flew into the rocks, some into the ground, into trees, even other soldiers. Sinno’s attention was quickly turned towards the epicenter of climbing dust, the attention of her squad following.

“The heck was that?” Shurren mumbled.

From behind the raging cloud of dust and dirt came a form, three large scorpion tails the size of an adult human visible, large pincer arms, several insectoid legs. Forward the creature moved several steps at a time like a gallop without the hop, its body coated in plates of protective armor. Finally came the head with twin horns pointed outward, sets of six eyes on each horn. On the center of the head was a larger eye bloodshot with a drooling mouth just below. A slight hiss came forth as it neared, a soldier visible in its left pincer and two soldiers impaled by two of its tails.

“Well well, what have we here?” Donavin chuckled with one eye fully open and the other half closed.

“Alpha Mamba. That’s beyond what the military can handle without cannons,” Sinno mumbled, watching as multiple soldiers around the creature fired on it with bullets to no avail, “Right then. Shadow Squadron, hear me! Our target is the Scorupi Mamba Alpha to the east!”

Raising her scythe into the air above herself horizontally she called out again as those under her command came near, “Shadow Squadron, Attack!”

Pressing the Issue

Many drenched in the black cloaks shot off behind Sinno who took the lead, her scythe out to her right side fully extended. Their feet echoing on the ground as they got near the rampaging beast, her head turned back quickly, “Black Ops establish perimeters. D-Class reinforce and wait for signals. Shurren, Shawn, Ellie, Audrey, we’re taking that thing directly.”

“Copy that Captain,” came the shout of one behind, followed by chatter from others also in agreement.

Behind twenty five figures broke off from the charge, leaving just four right behind Sinno. One rushing right alongside Shurren looked to his captain ahead, “So Sinno, how are we going to go about this? That thing looks pretty tough,” he spoke with a hint of humor to his voice.

“Smash it like always. Armor looks tough but I bet we can crack that in no time. Shurren, Ellie, take its sides. Shawn, Audrey, with me!”

“Right!” the four shouted back, Sinno and two others branching off as Shurren and Ellie zigzagged forward.

They crossed each other, one pulling ahead of the other only to pull back and behind. Finally when just a few meters out from the rampaging beast they shot, Shurren left and Ellie right. Two tails lashed out, stingers flung through the air like fired arrows. Shurren without word rolled right, Ellie up with electricity surging around her feet. Shurren shot forward, Ellie upon the creature’s tail and forward along it. With a roar came green liquid that splashed forward, something both acted quickly to evade with more tucking and rolling.

Finally they came up on it, Ellie first with a shot just above with twin swords flipping around, sparking with electricity, “Take this!”

As its head turned, Shurren shot in front of it with a crystal-like sword glowing with flames in mid swing, “Where ya lookin’ you beast?!”

Its mouth flung open, a powerful roar raging its way out of the Alpha with such force that the two young warriors were flung off.

“Gyeh-” Shurren croaked.

“Ah!” Ellie cried out.

Both flew and crashed back across the ground, both looking up at which point three figures had begun to climb high into the sky. Sinno came down first with her scythe flying, the beast's gaze focused. Blood flew as the scythe impacted, another roar exiting the beast though with far less force, the blade right through the center eye, "Shawn, Audrey!"

Above one of the three figures began to descend, the third being simply gone. As the second came down, a male shot up just behind the Scorupi Alpha, right hand placed upon its back, "Sorry fella. Sound Art- Riveting Sonar!"

Again howls left the beast that now dropped straight to the ground, cracks spreading from where Shawn's hand was placed. A very silent hymn could be heard resonating from the cracks, the beast's other eyes going wild. Above, just as Sinno ripped her scythe back out, the final figure took aim with what appeared to be a bow, her eyes locked, "Eat this-"

With a release a light blue arrow flew down and slammed straight through the creature's eye. A light shriek came, then nothing as it dropped limp, crashing forward to the ground. All five landed before it, side by side with Sinno at the head, all others slowly approaching.

"What, that's it?" Audrey chuckled.

"I had heard that the Alpha were difficult. Have to say, that was almost too easy," Ellie replied as the others came near.

"Almost too easy," Shawn mumbled, "Supposedly their Power Rating is a seven or an eight. That felt like it was barely a six."

"Power Ratings don't guarantee anything, especially if it's brainless," came the snark of Donavin, "They're just assessments of what a thing can go up against out of warriors and other creatures, which also aren't even. Guarantee you, next to Sinno the C-Class Reaper, I'm a Double S."

"Double S isn't even a thing," Ellie mumbled with an eye roll while Sinno took a step forward.

"What are you thinking Captain?" Nani murmured slowly approaching.

"Power Ratings might not mean everything but still, that was far too easy. Whatever Recon Braco Squad reported weeks ago, it wasn't an Alpha. Or, maybe this isn't actually an Alpha."

"Sinno, what made you assume this is an Alpha to begin with? These things have never been encountered before anyway."

"I just assumed because it looked different and the Recon Bravo said that the thing they found wasn't that different from normal Mamba, that it commanded the Mamba too, which would make it an Alpha. Could this be a variant of normal Mamba or a mutation?"

"Hmph, so this isn't the thing that wiped out Bravo. Well, that's reassuring. Here I was feeling confident about this operation," Razor grumbled.

"Shadow Squadron!" came the yell of the nearby Captain.

The man slowly approached the squad, soldiers at his side looking considerably on edge. A simple glance was given to the dead beast, then another to Sinno, "Not a bad kill. Rather sad that it took as many of you to take it down as it did."

"What's that?" came the growl of Shurren.

"Fat boy thinks he can dictate with his Doctor Cleanser looking face," came the laugh of one of the Shadow Soldiers.

"Pudgy little gnome," laughed another.

"Tch, you dare talk back to a superior officer like that?!" the man barked.

"All due respect, Captain, Shadow Squadron falls under my command. We might be following your orders but as the Squad Captain, command falls to me. And as an asset of The Church, command has to be given in a mutual agreement. So I am their superior, not you. Now, what are our next orders?" Sinno mumble in reply, a scowl appearing rather quick.

"Hmph. I should just send you all on a suicide charge, you wouldn't be able to do much about it."

Sinno slammed the flat edge of her scythe to the ground, an audible clang echoing, "Captain Shallot said the same thing and tried that anyway. Know what happened? I broke his pelvis for risking the lives of my squad mates over petty injured pride. Though he was a different case, flirting with the underage warriors. Heh... I can't even remember how many times he's been injured trying his crap."

"Well I'm not Shallot so shut your trap Sinno."

Her eyes closed for only a moment as she moved her head to face the man, eyes opening with a strong glare, a hateful glare, "Watch who you try to undermine, Ralsavin. I could easily cut you to pieces and blame it on the Mamba.

Maybe I could even make it so they never find your body. I could always just leave you for dead to be eaten by the damn things so watch your fucking mouth you sexist pig!"

As she spat out, her scythe rose up and crashed down harder, cracks spreading on the rocky ground it slammed to. Ralsavin took a simple step back following, his gaze softening, "Ugh... alright alright, you win Sinno. Shadow Squadron is too valuable to dispose of anyway, and Shallot is an incompetent waste of space for trying to do that. You're worth more than a hundred of our normal soldiers versus the twenty-eight he tried to sacrifice you for."

Her glare turned into a smirk, her eyes softening and opening a bit more, "Glad you see things our way, Captain. I'll be sure to report on your outstanding stature in the face of the enemy. So, what next?"

"Continue Northeast into the direction where these Mamba keep popping out of. There has to be a Hive somewhere out there. You'll be leading a heavy squad that can properly deal with anything that you might find. If you find it and it is beyond you, mark the location, radio in, and fall back. Do NOT engage something you can't beat. I'd sooner have you pull back to another ridge and bomb the area with the airships."

"Understood."

"Good. May the Light of the Gods rest well with you and your squadron," the captain said turning, walking off with several of his soldiers, "The rest of you, follow Sinno's lead. Do not disappoint me! Frankie, you're promoted to temporary captain of the unit, you answer to Sinno."

"Understood sir," one of the soldiers hanging back replied at attention.

With that the man disappeared into the trees with several soldiers following, leaving dozens back with Sinno and the rest.

"Hmph... alright then, listen up. As you can no doubt tell, I value the lives of my comrades above all else. If it means losing the mission, big whoop, you'll get another shot, you can find an alternative if it's vital. That said, I want none of you showing off. You listen to my fellow C-Class, you listen to Captain Frankie, you act smart, and above all you don't do anything stupid such as trying to be a hero. Risk anyone's safety, abandon anyone, and you'll be answering to more than just me. Got that?"

"Yes sir!" the many said as the rest of Shadow Squadron began to surround Sinno, some grinning and others blank.

"Alright. Now that that's out of the way, let's get a move on!"

The Messenger

“The eyes, aim for the eyes!”

The rata-tat-tat of gunfire once more filled the air, the sound of thick liquid splashing to the ground, the collapsing thumps of heavy objects. Shadow Squadron and their soldier escort stood before the mountains once more, far from the site of the first battle. Before them dropped many Scorupi Mamba and several of the alpha creatures. Sinno stood at the head of the fire fight, scythe attached to her back with blade at the ground, her arms crossed and her eyes sharp. Ahead of them the Scorupi were breaking forward, many cut down with every step leaving others to step over the bodies of the fallen.

Twenty meters sat between the humans and the monsters, a gap full of Scorupi bodies, fire, and holes. Rockets fired out from behind the line, striking the Scorupi front and center, blowing those hit to pieces from the impact. The Scorupi Alpha on the other hand charged forward, all until they dropped with holes in their eyes.

“GET SOME DAMMIT!!!” came the yell of one soldier behind, one of the Black Ops Units with Shadow Squadron.

The roars of the creatures were all that retaliated, the majority of the roars coming from those being mowed down before the soldier groups. Shadow Squadron sat at the head still, leading the fire fight with their weapons, though it was primarily the soldiers attacking with the warriors acting in response to Scorupi that broke through.

Shawn gazed ahead, his eyes locked to the charge of Scorupi, “There are so many... we must be near a Scorupi Nest or Hive of some sort. Sinno, what would you recommend?”

Her head turned, eyes to Shawn as she spoke, “If there is a nest then we have to locate and exterminate it immediately. These things are going down now but if they fall under Darkling control, it could mean the end, especially if they further mutate.”

“Right! Hmm? Wha-”

Shawn’s eyes quaked with but a simple glance up, a shadow above in the air purely humanoid coming right down at the unobservant Sinno. With a sharp turn his mouth flew open, “Sinno, above!”

“Huh?”

Eyes up, eyes wide, eyes quivering. Above shot a figure cloaked in black, hooded much like the Shadow Squadron, “{Shit, not enough time to-}”

Electricity cried out through the air, striking the figure who had come down at Sinno. From its hands flew an ax off behind the Celestia Group, the figure being flung back towards the Scorupi Mamba. With a thud it crashed to the ground, hood flying back to reveal a masked figure, the mask flying off to reveal a mannequin's face. A breath of relief left Shawn at once, "Ooof, nice save, Ellie!"

"Right!"

"The hell was that, a mannequin?" came a murmur beside Sinno, the murmur of Captain Frankie.

"Mannequin? Hmph. As dirty as always, Satori!" Sinno snapped looking out across the waves of Scorupi.

"Heh heh, hahaha, what a nice save. You truly owe it to that girl, Serpent," came a sharp, relatively soothing voice with sarcasm mixed in.

Beyond the waves of Scorupi a humanoid figure came into view of the group, at which point the Scorupi ceased their charge forward. Sinno's arm flew out to her side as well at that point, the soldiers ceasing fire. All eyes rested upon the figure which began to move forward now, the Scorupi Mamba moving aside with their own heads turned.

"That guy's a human?" a soldier questioned.

"Why are monsters working with a human?" asked another.

The figure stepped to the head of the Mamba, dressed in a long black trench coat that matched his long black hair. Silver eyes began to shimmer, one opened more than the other; one half raised, the other nearly wide eyed, a snarling smirk spreading, "Heehee."

In the man's right hand was a mask, akin to that of the mannequin's; a human face white with symbols carved in, painted black.

"Satori, look at you, you've got yourself a bug army to command now rather than those dolls of yours!" Sinno chimed off.

"My you're as snarky as ever, dear girl," he said softly, lips curling with delight, the eyes becoming sharper though not one raising or closing itself anymore.

"Satori Gilgar, known as *The Mask* of the criminal organization Specter," Dawn murmured.

"Specter?" a soldier questioned, "What's Specter?"

“Pft, haven’t you ever been briefed before soldier?” Captain Frankie mumbled taking a step up beside Sinno, “Specter is a criminal organization known for theft of government riches and technology, murder of high officials and soldiers of various kingdoms, experimenting on monsters to produce stronger weapons of war, and the ideology that they should be running the world. That guy there, Satori, is one of Specter’s top members. And as I recall, he and Sinno have had a bit of a history of fighting one another.”

“Heh, damn straight,” Sinno chuckled with a grin, “I always come out on top. So, what are you doing here Satori? What is Specter up to this time?!”

“Ho ho, you expect me to just up and reveal our plans? Sorry but I’m above that sort of thing. That’s little time villain one-o-one Sinno. Heh, heh heh heh. I really should be getting back to my business but I just have this itch, this itch for whenever I see you. Whenever I see you, the itch acts up and I just have the most compelling urge to kill you, to see the light leave your very eyes as I drive my blade through your flat chest!”

“Really? Why don’t you come and try to satisfy that itch, rag doll!”

“Tempting, you don’t know just how satisfying it’ll be when I wrap my hands around your throat for the last time,” Satori chuckled raising his mask up to his face.

Without word it was placed on, the arm lowering while the mask simply stuck in place. The ground around him then began to crack and crumble, figures like the first that attacked Sinno bolting out and landing atop the surface. Around as more of the mannequins rose, the Scorupi got themselves ready with acid dripping and their tails flickering.

“Shawn, you take command with your sister. Ellie, Shurren, you’re both with me as per usual.”

“Enrolling us to take down a grudge? That’s not like you,” Shurren laughed.

“In this scenario, I’m granting an exception. Satori knows what we want to know about these mountains, I guarantee it. If we capture him, we’ll bring this operation to a swifter end and save countless lives in the process.”

“That’s IF I let you capture me dearest Sinno. In this situation, I think it’ll be more satisfying to let one of my creatures do the work for me, then finish you off when you’re too weak to resist. Come now, Emperor Mamba!”

Satori’s arms flew out to his left and right, a large howl filling the air followed by a thud that shook the ground all around, then another, and another. Rock behind Satori shattered and crumbled to the ground, a large figure stomping forward.

Towering at seven meters was a beast much like the normal Mamba, though mixed with that of the alphas. A humanoid body with six large claws, three heads, multiple sets of eyes atop two large legs. Behind the body of a scorpion with multiple legs stomping down flat, nine large tails and stingers swishing around. Its back, spiked with three sets of wings flapping.

Captain Frankie took a step back, shock flooding his face as it did with many soldiers around, even some from Shadow Squadron. Dawn herself took a step back right into Audrey who audibly gulped.

“Heh heh heh. Yes, my DEAR Shadow Squadron, behold... The Emperor Mamba Scorupi!”

Emperor Mamba

“Good luck Sinno, you’re going to need it, hahahaha!” Satori laughed, a cloud of black smoke quickly enveloping him at which point he utterly vanished.

“That asshole,” Shurren growled.

“Oh fuck-” Razor mumbled.

Ahead the Emperor roared out with all three of its heads, charging forward quickly slamming its fellow Scorupi aside. All guns were raised towards it, rocket launchers, grenade launchers, standard rifles, the works. Captain Frankie looked ahead, fear built up in his face visible by the bright blue just beneath the eyes, “Everyone shoot it! Fire!! Fire fire fire!!!”

Guns rumbled, rockets fired, the air screamed and was filled with screeches with the roar of the explosives. Forward, crackling and blasting, they all impacted into the Emperor to no avail. Several steps and scrapes followed, many a soldier moving away, their faces painted wide eyed with jaws to the ground.

“Shit, fall back!” the captain yelled, his head bobbing left and right, “Fall back, fall back, fall back!”

Without a word twin figures shot forward right by the captain, both heading towards the Emperor Mamba with the first just behind the second, the two being Sinno and Shawn respectively, “Shadow Squadron, cover ground!” Sinno spat out with her scythe flipping around in her right hand.

“Sinno, Shawn, you can’t beat that thing!” same the captain’s yell, “We need to fall back!”

“We’ve got this!” Sinno spat back.

“Don’t underestimate the Shadow Squadron!” Shawn barked in retaliation as the Emperor came down upon the two, “You ready Sinno?”

“I was born ready!”

“Let’s go, super sonic!” Shawn began, his mouth flapping open at which point visible rings of disrupted current became visible, rings of pure distortion from his sound technique.

These rings traveled fast, ripping apart the ground and sending many Scorupi Corpses flying in the process, the bulk of which had their shells shatter. In no time at all these waves struck the Emperor Mamba, its feet slamming to a stop.

The Mamba's mouths opened, a howl leaving it, claws moving up to the sides of its heads and ears. In mere moments there was a thud, the result of the beast dropping to two knees.

"Hold it Shawn!" Sinno yelled back with her scythe out at her side, taking a large bound towards the beast covering well over ten meters.

Behind soldiers who had turned quarter were now ceasing, many turning including the captain. All eyes rested on Shadow Squadron which charged forward. At the head of the charge behind the first two was Donavin with his cannon, "WATCH THE BIRDIE YOU FUCK!"

The weapon fired, black lightning shooting way passed Shawn and even by Sinno, striking the beast in seconds. The lightning surrounded the Emperor, its pained screams filling the air. The charging Scorupi around took aim, a variety of blasts and bullets flying into them as they closed in. Razor and Nani held the line at the front with their twin blasters, firing round after round of energy shots straight into the skulls of the Scorupi, dropping many like flies. Shurren and Ellie both joined in the fun, tag teaming a group of Alpha with their lightning coated weapons.

Meters before the Emperor, rock crumbled and scattered, Sinno taking a final leap into the air to its side with her scythe out to the right with both hands. Eyes sharp and locked to the neck of the beast she swung, slamming it straight into it as the sound cut off from Shawn's technique and as the black lightning faded.

CRASH!!

The pole bent, the blade shattered and jagged, a single piece of it flew straight by Sinno's side with a clang right behind. With a moderate tumble she flipped to the side and crashed down, rolling across the ground just before the Emperor Mamba. With a roar it stomped straight forward yet again, its target being Sinno.

"Sinno!" Shawn yelled.

"Oh hell-" she groaned, pushing off the ground with her right hand, continuing to roll away as it stomped right after her only a few meters away with its roar.

Shurren and Ellie shot forward quickly with Shawn following close behind, the latter of which yelled out, "Shadow Squadron, hold the line and help your leader!"

"Belay that!" Sinno shouted slamming her hand into the ground with such force that cracks quickly spread out, the force sending her off in the air further away as the Scorupi slammed down, "Help your fellow soldiers, not me!"

A simple somersault and she landed just in front of the approaching trio with a huff, "Dammit, it broke my scythe."

The three skidded to a stop, the Emperor doing the same not far off, all of its heads observing the group. Around them the normal Scorupi continued to charge, all of the soldiers falling back into the tree line leaving just the four C-Class Warriors.

"That scythe can cut through a solid meter of iron with no problem. Damn that thing must be packing some serious armor," Shurren grumbled.

"More like could," Sinno mumbled dropping the rod to the ground with a clatter, "That was high grade Tetrazinium, not impressive with durability but great for sharp blades. Whatever it is made of, heck, that's over what an anti-tank rifle can do. I might have to actually give this my all, rare for a mindless beast."

"Heck, look at you getting all worked up boss," Ellie chuckled.

"It resisted my sound vibration technique though it caused it a fair amount of pain. If push comes to shove, I can hold it for a few seconds and let you guys strategize."

"No need Shawn, a few seconds wouldn't be enough. This beast is tough, no doubt about it. I might have to use my actual weapon on this guy."

"Actual weapon?" came the reply of Captain Frankie who was quick on the approach with several others from Shadow Squadron.

"Captain Frankie? What happened, why are you here?" Ellie questioned immediately.

"Audrey and Dawn are leading the beasts into that clearing we studied on the map. A couple of us got cut off and decided it would be best to circle back here to assist against that thing. So, what's this talk about an actual weapon then?"

"Does it matter?" Shurren growled.

"Well yes, I want to know so I can coordinate," Frankie said pulling out twin pistols, "If she brings out a hammer, I need to know versus a lance or a sword or bow and arrow. That way I don't shoot you, you know?"

Sinno stepped forward, a sigh escaping her momentarily before her reply, "Mmm... yeah, I suppose. My main weapon is a scythe, heavier duty, made of far better material. Now, here's the plan- Shurren, Ellie, your tag teaming is legendary. We'll have Ellie put up her darkness to minimize that thing's visibility first. The first act will be Shurren's ice and followed by his fire to melt it, backed by Ellie's electricity. That should be enough to drop it. Shawn, you'll then hit it from

behind with another sound technique to paralyze it when it's immobile. That's when I'll act with a finisher. Once I infuse my actual weapon with my energy, I should be more than able to take its head off."

"Your last scythe couldn't," Frankie mumbled, "What makes you think your *personal* blade will be any different?"

"Because, once I pump it full of my energy, it'll be able to cleave through a solid wall of iron without much interference. Unless this thing is about as durable as a meter thick diamond, it should go down."

"You're only C-Class, how the heck are you this good? For that matter, how the heck are any of you this good?"

"Classes are like Danger and Power Ratings. They might give you a good guesstimate but they never truly determine everything. Shadow Squadron is full of future S-Class, you'll see. Now, let's cut this thing down!"

"Right!"

"My oh my, such eager souls ready to rush to their deaths. So charming, eh, Satori my friend?" came the voice of a male, a voice right behind the group.

Lightning flourished towards the group, screaming through the air. All eyes turned, all watching the lightning strike the ground just before them.

KABLAM!!

All stumbled back, some leaping away. Shawn shot back with Ellie and Shurren near, "Gah, what was that?!"

"Specter!" Sinno shouted.

Launching straight at the group were multiple cloaked figures, all masked, all the same as those commanded by Satori prior. Without another word spoken, Shawn slammed his palms together, "Cutting Blades!"

A whirlwind of wind packed with energy flew before him and those around him, winds that struck the puppets. All blew back and climbed into the air, those struck quickly falling to pieces. They fell, dozens of different pieces that themselves were cut into dozens of pieces to be blown away. Shawn breathed at ease, "Ooof, close one."

Standing before the small group were two, the masked Satori and another right beside him, puppets moving around them.

"Back so soon Satori?" Sinno growled, her head cocking slightly to see the Emperor Scorupi step ahead a few paces.

“Heh heh heh, I just want to make sure this is done right. I couldn’t help but overhear your strategy. So many on one just isn’t fair, Sinno dear, so I thought we could even the odds, eh, Carbon?”

The one beside Satori stepped forward in a similar outfit, his coat with a large V-neck and a neckband along with. Black hair waved around, slicked back though still loose, eyes quite visible, one silver and the other purple, “Heh heh, yes yes of course Satori. It just wouldn’t be right to let the good guys have a plot armor advantage now would it?”

“So true, heeheehee.”

“Tch- of all the... Donavin, Nani, Razor, Captain Frankie, with me. I’ll handle those two while you guys cover me. That leaves everyone else to take on the Scorupi. Shawn you brainiac, if ever there was a time for you to show off your smarts, now is the time.”

“Heh, you sure you can handle them Sinno?” Shawn chuckled taking a step forward, glancing back to the growling Emperor Mamba.

“Shawn, I’m surprised. Have yee so little faith? Both of us, Shurren, and Ellie, we’re all four C-Class who could one day be S-Class so easily. Heck, as a squad we already outdo most. Let’s give them a show worth remembering, right my man?”

“Heh, gotcha. This works, should be fun,” he chuckled swirling around to face the Mamba.

With a subtle glance around the others set to work with him did the same, all turning to face their enemy. Shawn took several steps forward, followed by the rest while Sinno and her backup did the same towards their enemy. Satori cocked his head as did many of his puppets, Carbon simply grinning wide with eyes wild and wide; the Scorupi on the other hand drooled with all three of its head. All stood ready, all ready to begin.