

SPADE GENESIS

The Origin of Shadows and Steel

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INTRODUCTION

In the grand tapestry of life, every thread is woven by the choices we make. It's a profound truth that echoes through time and cultures. In Indian mythology, even Lord Krishna once unveiled the concept of alternate realities to Lord Brahma, introducing him to different versions of himself. Each reality, in turn, shaped by the choices one makes in their life's journey.

Consider this: A person aspires to be a painter but is compelled, by unforeseen circumstances, to pursue studies in commerce instead. In an instant, the decision gives birth to two alternate versions of the same individual. One continues the artistic pursuit while the other delves into the world of commerce. This, in essence, encapsulates the concept of the multiverse with just two words - "what if."

"What if that person had received unwavering support from their parents to pursue a career in painting?" or "What if financial constraints compelled them to choose commerce instead?" These 'what ifs' give rise to alternate universes,

coexisting simultaneously, where the fulcrum of divergence is a single decision.

Stories, much like life itself, can be straightforward, sweet tales with happy endings. Yet, often, they are intricate and complex, all owing to the choices made by the characters within.

This story, too, adheres to this ideology, a reflection of how a solitary decision can turn an otherwise simple life into one fraught with complexity and despair. It's a narrative that invites contemplation on the profound impact of a wrong choice and how it can either bring peace or sow chaos.

This tale doesn't revolve around a solitary protagonist or a singular incident; rather, it explores a world residing in a different dimension from ours. It investigates the intricate connection forged between this alternate reality and our own, in a manner that transcends the conventional boundaries of good and bad, heroes and villains, right and wrong.

Instead, it's a narrative that weaves together the lives of various individuals, each hailing from their distinct worlds, and showcases how the

choices they make reverberate across their respective domains.

It also offers insight into the harried pace of our own society, where technological advancement often eclipses our humanity, driving us toward greed and selfishness, and thus contributing to the world's misery. In stark contrast, this story introduces you to a captivating world, profoundly different from ours, where the denizens possess extraordinary abilities and a remarkable sense of tranquility. They are an inspiration to all, standing in stark contrast to the complex lives we lead as humans today.

Yet, in this world of wonder, where goodness thrives, a shadow looms. For where there is light, there must be darkness to maintain balance. This world, too, harbours its enigmas, tragedies, and untold secrets concealed within its ethereal tapestry.

To uncover these mysteries, you must embark on a journey into this enigmatic realm, guided by the first individual to have traversed its boundaries and lived to tell the tale—a man whose destiny led him to this realm, forever altering its fate.

So, without further ado, let the journey commence, and let me introduce you to the first and most pivotal character in this saga: Mr. Richard Dylan...

CHAPTER 1

THE LOST ARK

6:30 PM

SOMEWHERE IN THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

A blue-and-white-colored giant cargo ship was cutting through the choppy waves of the ocean. All around, the fury of nature raged on - a cacophony of lightning burst and deafening thunderstorm roared. The experienced sailor, who was also the ship's captain, along with a few loyal crew members, was in charge. However, with every nautical mile, the weather appeared to worsen.

The captain stood in the wheelhouse of the great ship. His imposing stature, dressed in a neat black-and-white uniform, exuded an air of command. It went hand-in-hand with the seriousness needed to resolve whatever might

have been happening around them. He held the polished wooden wheel with one hand firmly and looked out into the vast open sea. Every muscle of his body strained as he fought with the wheel, each move calculated to maintain the balance of the ship.

The ship pushed relentlessly through the dark waters, and the captain's thoughts wandered to all his previous voyages, the storms he had weathered, and the challenges he had overcome. He was a man of the sea, forged by its ordeals and bound to it with an unbreakable rope.

Just then, the old wheelhouse door creaked open and landed violently, interrupting the captain's focus on his task. He turned to see one of the crewmen rush into the room. The crewman's face was flushed with impatient concern, evident in his weathered dress that spoke of the difficult life on deck.

Breathless, with a somewhat nervous voice, he said, "Sir, the thunderstorm is ferocious. I think we should consider rerouting the ship."

The captain, a man all worn, whose eyes had seen many storms, looked at him. With the calm assurance born of many years at sea, he spoke slowly, "It's all right, son. This is not my first sail. I have faced a lot of storms in the course of my career. This will pass too."

"But sir," the crewman continued, his voice full of terror, "Haven't you heard of this route? We have received plenty of warnings regarding this treacherous ocean. There have been many cases of ship and aircraft disappearances here in the past few years."

The captain, staring at the ship's wheel, shifted his weight slightly, and signaled off the fearful crewman with a casual wave of his hand.

“Oh, come on, do you seriously believe these stories the government is feeding us?”

The captain’s words lingered like a tongue of disbelief, seemingly casting doubt on the fear that had taken hold in every heart aboard.

He continued, his voice touched with a bit of cynicism, “These are just government tactics to take control of the ocean ways. None of this makes any sense, okay! Just cool down; we are going to be alright.”

There was something remarkably reasonable about the captain’s words – perhaps he was trying desperately to settle all those fears that were so clearly in play on everyone’s faces.

“But ... sir –”

“Now just shut up and get everyone covered in a safe place.”

The crewman gave the captain one last look, a mix of disappointment and fear visible in his eyes. He knew that pressing the issue any further was bound to be a futile exercise, given how resolute the captain had appeared. He turned, with a heavy heart, going back to the deck where he left his crew waiting for him.

By the end of that conversation, at its very unexpected moment, the thunderstorm was growing even stronger, making it challenging for the captain to maintain control of the ship. He struggled with the steering wheel, attempting to turn the ship away from the ocean waves.

Suddenly, a monstrous wave attacked the vessel, creating a gigantic hole in its hull. Water flooded the belly of the ship as if the very sea itself sought to claim it.

“Can anyone hear me?” the captain bellowed across the wheelhouse with a trembling voice of fear and determination. “What on earth was that?”

He desperately hunted for answers within the pandemonium that had engulfed them. His words hung in the air, "Is everything alright?"

The silence that followed was as ominous as the turbulence that had gripped their ship.

The situation grew darker on the ship deck as the crew tried to grapple with the tremendous damage. Lightning had struck the mast of the ship. The wreckage went from bad to worse as cargo tumbled into the merciless depths of the ocean. Helpless, the crew struggled to keep their footing as they were tossed about in the turbulent seas.

The ship wobbled dangerously like a dying giant, and the crewmen, unable to handle the chaos, were tossed in every direction, resulting in injuries. As it became obvious that the ship was gradually sinking into the mass and depth, panic broke out.

The captain jumped onto the deck after exiting the wheelhouse. The stark reality staring back at him weighed him down with fear. His formerly valiant crew, battered and injured, lay strewn about the ship's deck, their lives in shambles.

He hurried to the injured crewmen lying across the deck, his desperation evident in his every move.

"Hey," he called out, "Are you okay, young man?"

One by one, he approached the fallen crew members, but as he realized how serious the situation was, his heart fell. It was already too late. The deadly storm had destroyed the hopes and dreams of every crew member, who lay motionless. With tremendous sadness, he realized how foolish it had been to ignore the crewman's plea.

Surveying the debris and mayhem, all of a sudden, a spectacular bolt of lightning tore the sky apart, and a sudden, blinding light from the heavens struck his eyes. The crippled ship soon disappeared into thin air, leaving behind a frightening silence.

LATER THAT NIGHT, AROUND 2 AM

In the center of Washington, D.C., an unidentified man was sleeping peacefully on his bed. His room was dark, save for the dim light of streetlights seeping through.

The night's silence was shattered as his phone rang jarringly.

The man was surprised and made a slight move, abruptly awakened from his peaceful sleep, his mind suffering the impact of slumber. He reached for the phone on his bedside table and took the call, sounding half asleep.

"Hello," he mumbled.

"Sir, there has been another incident. It's urgent. Can you just—"

The man's sleepiness evaporated instantly. "What? Okay, I'm coming as soon as possible."

Determined, he hung up the phone. Pushing aside his covers, he swung his legs over the edge of the bed. He had a purpose, and he needed to act fast.

As he prepared for the upcoming task, he dressed in clothing appropriate to his profession – black formal trousers and a white shirt combined with an olive-green corduroy jacket. His closet smacked of order, just like his otherwise impeccably clean house. A glass cabinet contained his achievements in physics – medals and trophies that spoke volumes about the man's brilliance. Framed photographs of famous scientists adorned his room, with one picture

standing out – a cherished memory of his parents who seemed to have been taken away from this world. Right next to the framed photograph was his ID card with the name “Richard Dylan.”

Richard Dylan, our protagonist, was an internationally acclaimed scientist and one of the leading figures in Global Space Research and Observation (GSRO). GSRO was a secretive government agency that investigated and monitored mysterious occurrences in space and the environment that deemed unknown. Richard was undoubtedly one of the brightest minds among them. When there were mysterious cases with nothing left to cast light upon them for the investigation, Richard would be called on first.

For the past three years, an inexplicable sequence of events had marked the Atlantic Ocean. Ships and aircraft were lost without a trace, leaving no wreckage. As the case escalated, GSRO appointed Richard as a special consultant. Despite his outstanding skills, the case remained unsolved, fueling his obsession.

Richard was not a man to give up easily. The challenge had lit a spark in him, an eagerness to uncover the mystery regardless of the cost.

He picked up his ID card and keys to his car and prepared to drive through the streets of Washington to reach GSRO headquarters.

AT GSRO HEADQUARTERS

Richard parked his car, stepped out, and approached the headquarters of GSRO. It was a typical large building constructed entirely out of glass. Even at this hour, the facility was abuzz with activity. He marched with determination toward the door, his spirit preparing himself for yet another confrontation with the mysterious illusion that had dominated him all these years.

A man rushed to him, bringing the news about what had happened. They walked through the facility, their voices carrying intense weight.

“When?” Richard asked, his eyes fixed on the path ahead of him.

The man answered, “Sir, it happened last evening. There was a fierce storm in the ocean, and we had already issued warnings. Unfortunately, they ignored our advice.”

Richard nodded his head, “It’s a common human trait, ignoring sensible advice. What’s the status now? Any wreckage found?”

They got into an elevator, and the man’s reaction was solemn. “No, sir. As usual, no sign of any unusual disturbance at the site. Just the storm and disappearance. But there was a high—”

“High radiation spike,” Richard cut in, “I know, like every other incident.”

The man nodded with a troubled look. “Yes, sir, the same. But the pattern of the spike seems to be

increasing with each occurrence. It's a matter of concern."

"It surely is," Richard replied. "How many were on the ship?"

After a brief pause, the man hesitantly replied, "Thirty, sir. According to the distress signal we received before the disappearance, the ship broke down due to the thunderstorm, and most of the cargo sunk in the ocean. After that, the ship vanished."

"The ship and cargo can be covered by insurance, but what about the lives we lose every time this happens? This is the ninth incident, and we still know nothing about what or why this is happening."

The man nodded to agree, but his words did little to comfort. "Sir, we are conducting our research on the radiation —"

“Still, it’s of no use,” Richard cut him off, evidently impatient. “Just like every other time, we will have nothing useful to work with. This isn’t working. It’s high time we find another approach.”

Richard and the man came out of the elevator as it stopped at its destination floor. They walked into the command room of the organization. Mr. Mayden, the head of GSRO, was awaiting. Mayden was a middle-aged man, dressed in a nice and clean suit. Silver hair and a white moustache highlighted all his years of experience.

Mayden raised an eyebrow and regarded Richard with a wry smile. “It seems like you won’t get a well-slept night until this case is solved, am I right, Richard?”

Richard’s lips touched with a faint smile as they shook hands. “No mysteries are solved without sleepless nights, sir. Nobody knows it better than you.”

Mayden leaned over towards him, his face grave, and expression serious. "You have been briefed, right?"

Richard's response was curt. "I don't need it. I'm tired of the same data and findings. I don't understand how there isn't a single piece of wreckage found at the site."

"Aliens?" Mayden asked.

Richard smiled lightly, shaking his head. "If they were involved, I doubt they would choose the ocean for invasion when they have plenty of land to conquer and people to subdue."

"Well, what would you suggest, Richard?" Mayden asked.

Richard's gaze remained steady. "You know the answer."

Mayden sighed; his reluctance apparent. "Sending a team there is dangerous, Richard. No one has the courage to undertake such a mission."

Richard's response was resolute. "It was crazy to send a man up on the moon, right?"

Mayden conceded, though with hesitation. "And who do you think will be willing to go down into this danger?"

"Let me," Richard declared.

Mayden's skepticism surfaced. "Oh, come on. You're a scientist, not an operative; this is beyond your scope."

"I only have two arguments. One, I know how to fly a chopper. Two, I have the guts to go," Richard replied.

Mayden grinned, "Nice try, Rambo, but I'm not sending a lab geek on a suicide mission. That too, one of my best. Never."

"Come on, Mayden," Richard urged. "You know there isn't any other way, and you know I can do this."

Mayden struggled with the decision, but realizing that it could be their last chance, he gave in to his heart's desire. "Okay, but you are on your own with this one."

Richard nodded; determination reflected on his face. "I'll take my chances."

Mayden gave his final directive. "Prepare for the trip. You'll be leaving in the morning."

With Mayden's approval, Richard smiled knowing he soon would be on the mission to uncover the greatest mystery of his career.

IN THE MORNING

When the sun shone brightly over the GSRO headquarters, casting a golden hue all around, Richard prepared himself for the fearful mission. His helicopter stood ready, equipment stowed carefully, and determination set on his face.

Mayden approached him, "You ready?"

"Yup, just give me a second," Richard replied with focus. In careful preparation, he made sure every piece of equipment and any tool that might help him or allow him to maintain contact was securely placed in his helicopter.

Mayden called out, saying, "Richard."

Richard sighed, turning to his superior, already knowing what the conversation was about. "Yes?"

“Are you sure about this?” Mayden’s words had a sense of past regrets.

Richard replied, “Oh, come on, Mayden! Don’t start it all over again.”

Mayden persisted with his voice full of sincere concern. “Not my place to stop you. But what haunts me is that your father died while working with me, and now, I don’t want to lose you too.”

Richard’s face softened, and to comfort him, he said, “Listen, nothing’s going to happen. And even if it does, remember, none of this is your fault. Not my father’s death, and not mine. Besides, we are scientists. We are born to take risks for the betterment of society. If we don’t do it, who will?”

Nodding, Mayden understood the gravity of their chosen path. “I understand.”

“Now, not a single word more about this. Just let me go,” Richard reiterated.

Mayden reluctantly agreed, and with those final words, Richard climbed into his helicopter. He fastened his seatbelt, initiated the engines, and took off. As he soared over the Atlantic Ocean, two more helicopters joined him, ready to assist in this perilous mission.

Approaching the mysterious occurrence spot, Mayden’s voice came across the airwaves. “Richard, we are afraid that from here, you are on your own.”

Richard acknowledged the message, his tone filled with resolution. “Yeah, thank you, gentlemen, for the support. I’ll see you when I’m back.”

“Good luck, my friend,” Mayden wished him.

Two side helicopters drifted away, leaving Richard alone to face the unknown. His helicopter cut through the air, carrying him deeper into the mystery that had eluded his understanding for so long.

“Well,” he mumbled to himself, “Let’s see what exactly you are.”

But as he moved forward, the helicopter began vibrating, shaking him.

“Mayday, mayday, can you hear me?” he called out on his radio.

His communication systems broke down, and the aircraft swayed badly. Richard tried to regain control, fighting different maneuvers to balance his flight. As he continued, a blue light hit his helicopter, and then there was an unknown force enveloping him.

Swept into a portal, he fought to keep his out-of-control aircraft from spiralling down. He was plunged into a blind abyss in which the world around him dissolved into darkness.

Moments later, he emerged out of the portal, his helicopter in shambles, crashing on an unknown beach. Despite being badly injured; his safety vest had saved his life. Injured and dejected, he crawled out of the debris and lay on the sandy shore.

Exhausted and disoriented, Richard could do nothing more than gaze at the unfamiliar place before him. As his vision blurred, he succumbed to unconsciousness, the mysteries of the new world waiting to reveal themselves in due time.

CHAPTER 2

NOT FROM AROUND HERE

After what seemed like an eternity, Richard regained consciousness. Blinking, he slowly opened his eyes to a disorienting reality. He found himself in a complete dark room, his body strapped to a chair. There were several other hostages, all in chains.

"Where am I?" he asked but received no response.

"What is this place? Can somebody tell me?" Richard said in a trembling voice, as he attempted to make sense of his surroundings.

“Shut up, they will hear you,” one of the hostages, who was tied next to Richard, hushed in whisper.

It was so dark that Richard couldn't see the man beside him. His head throbbed with pain. In confusion and fear, he asked him, “Who? What are you talking about? My head hurts badly. Can you please tell me where — “

“Shhh! Don't you get it? Keep quiet, or they will hear us,” the voice cut him off mid-sentence, showing signs of fear and urgency.

Two masked men arrived, interrupting their whispered exchange: their masks bearing frightful expressions. They looked here and there, and their eyes halted on a woman, who was tied right next to Richard. One of the masked men dragged her out of the room while she shrieked.

"Take one more," one of the masked men said. The other man, not wasting much time, took hold of Richard and forcefully pulled him out too.

As he looked around the surrounding, he sensed something was weirdly wrong. An array of people, all masked in frightening attire, reminiscent of soldiers, stood armed with guns and knives. A camera on a tripod pointed in their direction, ready to record. Richard and the woman were forced before the camera by the masked men.

"What's going on? What is this place?" Richard said, his voice quivering in a mixture of fear and desperation.

Irritated by his constant questions, a masked man put a duct tape on Richard's mouth to shut him up. On the other hand, one of the masked men, holding the woman hostage, pressed a knife against her throat, while the other activated the camera, starting to record.

“King Ryan,” the masked man began, his voice a chilling blend of menace and authority. “It has been a long time since we have talked. You know, after all the warnings we, the *REVENANTS*, gave you, you still chose to preserve your pride. Well, now it is time for your people to pay the price. I don’t know how many times we told you to cede control of *CYBERIA*, but you, you never took us seriously. Okay, but let us see what you will do today. Until you fulfil our demands, every day, your people will be killed by us, and you will have nothing to do about it.”

Richard thought it to be a hollow warning, but he was shocked to the core when a masked man began to slide the knife across the woman’s throat. Amid this grim tableau, just when a drop of woman’s blood touched the knife, a sudden explosion shattered the wall of the room. Two people, dressed as soldiers, entered the room, taking advantage of the chaos.

One of them wore a long beige trench coat, his face hidden behind a combat mask and his body covered with a combat suit. The other was clad in

a bulletproof vest, his body wrapped in a black leather jacket.

Both carried weapons.

As soon as they entered the hall, the soldier in the trench coat kicked the masked man, who was holding the knife, and rescued the woman. She was terrified, crawling to find a safe place to hide.

The masked revenants, who were surprised by the attack, launched a counterattack against the two intruders.

The soldier in the leather jacket threw a grenade toward the revenants, its explosion sending a cascade of destruction among them. Bodies were laying here and there, some dead, some trying to stand up to fight.

In between the chaos, both soldiers were engaged in fierce combat with the revenants, determined

to protect the hostages. Finding a gateway to freedom, even the hostages were defending themselves.

Bullets and blades clashed with deadly intent between both the sides. The soldiers manoeuvred with precision, their warfare skills in perfect use, shielding, and dodging to safeguard the trembling hostages.

Despite the aggressive counterattack from the revenants, both soldiers proved to be formidable adversaries. With their combined skills and weaponry, they began to dismantle the ranks of their revenants.

One of the revenants, desperate and ruthless, took hold of a hostage and threw him toward a window. He wanted to kill as many hostages as he could. But before the unthinkable happened, the man in the leather jacket engaged the revenant. However, he was late. The revenant had thrown the man out of the window.

“Save him,” the man in the leather jacket screamed, engaged in fist fight with the revenant, stopping him to harm any more hostages.

Simultaneously, the man in the trench coat raced to the window, his extraordinary powers helping him to conjure a rope. He saved the plummeting hostage mid-air. With controlled strength, he pulled him up and hauled the hostage to safety while his partner continued to confront other revenants.

The man in the leather jacket, locked in deadly combat against five masked men at a time, suddenly found himself facing a harsh reality – he was out of ammunition. As the revenant soldiers closed in aggressively around him in an oval, he outsmarted a revenant, hitting him on head by his bullet-less gun, and took cover behind a partially shattered wall.

He realized he was out of options. He urgently called out his comrade. "Ethan," he shouted, "I'm out of ammo! Use your thing!"

Ethan, the man in the trench coat, wasted no time. With his unique powers, he conjured a machine gun and unleashed a barrage of fire upon the revenants. Bullets rained down, relentlessly decimating their ranks until they lay defeated.

After a long and grueling battle, finally, the revenants had been vanquished, and the hostages were safe.

"Are we safe?" one of the hostages asked.

"Yes! Help the woman with her throat," Ethan said, pointing out towards the wall, where the woman was hiding, slowly bleeding by her throat.

Panting heavily, the two soldiers saw each other from distance, emotions running high. John was sitting covered behind the shattered wall while Ethan walked towards him.

Ethan wiped sweat from his brow, his frustration evident. "You know what, John, I can create anything with my powers, but that doesn't mean you should carry less damn ammo!"

Ethan seemed genuinely angry than being just sarcastic. The machine gun in his hands transformed into a luminous blue energy, absorbed back into his body.

"Are you kidding me?" John retorted in a defensive tone and said, "Did you see the firepower they had? I carried enough ammo. Don't pin this on me!"

"Yeah, I think you need to redefine your 'enough' ammo correctly," Ethan said, smiling and mocking.

Ethan deactivated his combat suit with a swift motion, which was absorbed back into his belt using advanced nanotechnology. He then extended a hand to John, who accepted the help resentfully.

“Very funny,” John replied as soon as he stood up.

One of the severely injured revenants, lying nearby, began to laugh in a sinister manner. Both Ethan and John turned their attention toward him.

John snapped his fingers irritably, saying, “What’s so funny, asshole?”

Ethan approached the revenant and removed his mask. The revenant had dark, abyss-like eyes.

“Tell your boss that you will never get what you want. Whoever tries this again, we will find them

and finish them from the face of the world," Ethan warned the revenant, his tone serious and threatening.

The revenant laughed boldly in a manner that clearly showed his resistance. "Ha-ha, what motivation! I like it. But have you forgotten about the prophecy? Cyberia is *destined* to be destroyed, and neither of you can stop it. You may stop some of us, but the question is, how many can you stop? Our boss doesn't appreciate interference. You know what he is capable of. We will soon achieve our goals."

Richard observed closely how Ethan formed a gun with his powers and shot directly on the temple of the revenant's forehead.

"Fucking prick! All right," Ethan declared, "Let's clean this up."

John pulled out a cylindrical tube from his pocket and activated it with a twist. As he held it near

the lifeless revenant bodies, the device began to draw out some kind of malevolent black spirits that had possessed them.

“All clear,” John announced, adding, “Let’s free the hostages.”

“Everything is okay,” John assured the hostages, working to untie and free them in a dimly lit room.

“Will they come back?” one of them asked, still in fear.

“They won’t. There is nothing to worry about now,” John said.

Outside the room, Ethan approached Richard and untied him.

“Are you alright, mate?” Ethan asked him.

Richard, still disoriented, his eyes roaming here and there as if scanning the room, replied, "Yeah, thanks, a-a Ethan, you saved all our lives. I was wondering, what place is this?"

"This is sector 12. It is a remote area where the revenants operated. It is not a big issue now; we will get you back home," Ethan said, putting a hand on right shoulder.

John, having joined the conversation, sensed Richard's confusion.

" There is something wrong! This is a strange place," Richard began, looking around him, and added, "This is not from where I am."

John tried to reassure him, "I think you are drugged. Don't worry, we will take you to a hospital."

Richard persisted, "No, I am not drugged. I just want to know where I am. There is something wrong about this place."

"That's what I told you a minute ago. Sector 12. Which sector are you from?" Ethan said, confused with Richard's confusion.

Richard, growing increasingly frustrated, insisted, "I am not from any sector. Don't you understand what I said? This place is not something that—"

John interrupted gently, "I think he is just anxious. It is alright, buddy; you are safe now. We are here. Take a deep breath."

"Oh, is it like that? Don't worry," Ethan said, attempting to ease the tension, reached out to his pocket and took out a chocolate bar and offered it to Richard, "Here, have some dark chocolate. It's one of my favourites. Good for anxiety, reduces blood pressure."

"You are not getting it. I don't want chocolate. I hate chocolate, by the way," Richard said, inwardly thinking to try a bite. However, his attention was more in observing things around. The more he looked, the more he understood that he is far from his place.

"Oh, no worries." Ethan, was unfazed, deciding to enjoy the chocolate himself, remarking, "I will have it myself," as he ate the entire bar in one go.

John, feeling left out, voiced his displeasure, "You didn't even care to ask me if I wanted!"

"Why? You were not feeling anxious like him," Ethan said, mocking John.

John didn't seem like he was joking, disappointment clearly visible on his face, saying, "You should have asked me earlier before stating I-will-have-it-myself. Anyway! Forget the fruit cake in the car. That will be completely mine."

Richard was frustrated. He needed them to understand his situation. "Wait!", he shouted. "Can you guys listen to me for a second? I am a scientist, and I know I am not drugged, and neither am I anxious! I don't know what place I am in; I don't know what the hell you guys are talking about. I don't have a clue. I am from Washington; I work for the GSRO, the Global Space Research & Observation Centre, if you have heard. I don't know how I got here."

John and Ethan looked at each other, smiles replaced with concern.

"Are you saying that you are not from Cyberia?" John asked.

"Where is Cyberia on map? I don't know what you both are talking about. I already told you, I am from Washington DC," Richard rightfully groaned in frustration.

"Ethan, I guess we have got a problem here," John remarked.

Ethan, sharing John's unease, responded, "Don't tell me you are thinking the same."

John nodded gravely. "Of course, I am thinking the same, and you know it very well."

"Please stop this and tell me what's going on! Where am I?" Richard urged in irritation.

Ethan, attempting to calm the situation, told Richard, "Wait, mate. It is a bit complicated. If you want the answers, you are looking for, then you must come with us."

"Where?" Richard asked, perplexed and confused.

John spoke, his voice filled with mystery, "To the courtroom."

"What the hell is even that?"

"We understand your situation. I request you to have patience, my man. You will find your answers," John offered a glimmer of hope.

Ethan reached into his pocket, retrieving a sleek, futuristic car key. With a simple press of a button, a low hum filled the air as a cutting-edge flying car appeared outside the room's window. Its softly glowing blue lights illuminated the dim around, and its smooth lines hinted at a level of technology that was beyond anything Richard had ever seen.

With a swift exit through a broken wall, Ethan and John led the way, and Richard followed, his heart racing with anticipation. As they approached the car, Ethan's touch opened its gull-wing doors, inviting them inside.

“Calm down, buddy,” Ethan reassured Richard as they settled into the car’s plush seats. “We will tell you everything. You just sit back and enjoy the ride.”

“You can trust us! We aren’t the bad guys,” John said.

Ethan took control of the car’s advanced navigation system, and the vehicle gracefully lifted off. They left behind the remote area by the sea where Richard had initially landed, soaring over forests and farms as they made their way toward the heart of the city.

Richard looked out of car’s the window, absorbing the astonishing sights. From his vantage point in the sky, he observed a world that was both familiar and utterly alien. A massive sun, much larger than Earth’s, hung in the sky, casting a warm and inviting glow. Even in the daytime, the stars were visible, twinkling against the blue canvas of the heavens. Richard

was starting to realize that he was far, *very far* from home.

Beneath him, there was an advanced civilization. Towering skyscrapers reached for the sky, much higher than from where he was, their sleek designs a showing the level of architecture that surpassed anything Richard had encountered on Earth.

It was like he was in the future!

The city's cleanliness was astounding, with streets and bridges creating a carefully planned tapestry.

Modern electromagnetic trams moved through the crowded streets of the city with grace as they followed their rails. Like the one they were in, flying cars danced across the sky in a planned march forward. This place seemed to be defined by efficiency and order, which left Richard in awe.

“What is this place?” Richard asked, astonished, as he continued to take in the breath-taking view.

With a hint of pride in his tone, John replied, “This, my friend, is CYBERIA.”

“Heads up! We’re approaching our destination,” Ethan said, issuing a timely warning, as they approached their destination.

The king’s palace was right before them, a grand structure unlike any typical, old-fashioned palace. Anyone who saw the architectural miracle in the middle of the city would gasp in astonishment. A massive, cylinder-shaped building that was made entirely of shimmering glass stood there like a monument to the almighty. The structure rose magnificently, appearing to be reaching for the sky with its elegantly rounded pinnacle. The monument—The Shivling—was an iconic depiction of Lord Shiva.

Richard was fascinated by the architectural wonder as they got closer, observing that it was positioned on a large, square foundation that extended in all directions. Towering buildings stood vigil at each corner of the vast plaza, watching over the incredible creation.

The area of the palace was square in shape, with big statues of three ancient warrior knights on three corners, whom the people of Cyberia worshipped.

The three warrior knights were their saviors in tough times.

However, the most enchanting statue was in the fourth corner of the square base. Here, the majestic grandeur of a massive statue of Shiva's sacred bull, Nandi, appeared. With eyes that seemed to witness the passage of time itself, Nandi was not only a symbol of devotion but also the main entrance to the palace.

The square base itself was a marvel of design and functionality. It comprised a series of buildings, each of equal height, dedicated to various purposes.

Richard observed these gems of architecture, each with a distinct personality and function. It encircled the central glass, resembling devoted servants of a sacred deity.

Ethan expertly steered the flying car toward the mansion's landing area as they approached the palace grounds. He gave his identity to the security personnel there, and they gave him permission to safely park the car in the allotted spot. They headed toward the courtroom with the automobile securely fastened.

But on their route to the courtroom, they stopped in front of an enormous, gaping hole in the ground. It seemed to reach into an uncharted chasm of depths.

Taking a moment to address the group, John declared, "Everyone, wait a minute."

John pressed a button on the cylindrical tube that he had been holding, and an image appeared in front of their eyes. The tube opened and a swirling mass of ethereal creatures, the damned souls, emerged, driven irresistibly toward the enormous abyss in the ground.

They were absorbed into the depths of the hole, disappearing from view.

"What is this?" Richard asked, perplexed by the spectacle.

"This is the Well of Damned Souls. The people who kidnapped you were possessed by some malevolent souls. We captured them in this tube, and all these damned souls are now trapped in this well. It is sealed with Cyberian energy, making sure they never escape," John explained.

Richard, still trying to wrap his head around the concept, asked, "Souls, like ghosts or something like that?"

"Yes, mate. You just saw them go in there with your own eyes. How can you not understand anything?" John chuckled, recognizing Richard's confusion.

"John, don't forget that he is not from Cyberia," Ethan said.

"Oh, yes, I'm sorry, non-Cyberian resident," John said, acknowledging the oversight while adding his flavor of fun.

"Let's go. We are done here," Ethan said, urging to forward.

With that, they continued their journey towards the courtroom, leaving behind the enigmatic Well of Damned Souls.

AT THE COURTROOM

The courtroom was a grand assembly presided over by the King of Cyberia, where the members of his council gathered to address the issues facing their realm. The discussions revolved mostly around the Revenants and other pressing problems afflicting Cyberia.

The council members, three middle-aged men and two women, were well dressed in formal attire and sat on a dais facing roughly a hundred commoners from Cyberia who were looking for solutions to their issues.

Placed in the center of the dais, was the grand throne of the king of Cyberia, which was surprisingly vacant. The council members urged the people to wait patiently for the king to arrive as the commoners' voiced questions after question with desperation and impatience.

Amidst the serious deliberations, Ethan, John, and Richard entered the room. Three energetic children, Nick, Edmund, and Sam, who were playing in a corner, noticed Ethan and John and ran towards them in excitement.

“Hey, Uncle John! I missed you so much. It has been so long since you and Dad were gone,” Nick, who was eight years old, said.

Ethan, out of jealousy said, “Yeah, you just miss him, why would anyone miss me?”

This was the first time Richard saw Ethan joking.

Nick’s younger brother Edmund, who was seven years of age, added jokingly, “Of course, there is no reason to miss you. You are the most boring dad anyone ever had.”

Nick and Edmund were both son of Ethan. They were accompanied by the ten-year old Sam, who was the son of Ryan, the king of Cyberia.

Quite interestingly, Ryan was the elder brother of Ethan.

“Well, at least your father has time to spend with you. You both are lucky,” Sam said.

Ethan, the ever the loving uncle, lifted little Sam in his arms and said, “Oh, Sam, your father is the king of Cyberia. He has a lot of responsibilities to deal with. You should be proud of your dad. And apart from that, I’m always here for you to spend time with. You never have to feel upset. I love you.”

“Thank you so much, Uncle,” Sam replied with gratitude.

Eager to engage John in conversation, Nick asked, "Uncle John, how was your mission? Did you kick some ass?"

"Watch your language, son," Ethan said, raising an eyebrow.

With a smile, John responded, "Sure, we did. I'm just waiting for you to get old enough so that we can go on a mission together. It would be cool to have strong Nick by my side."

"I want to become strong, just like you," Nick said.

"Honestly, in my opinion, your father is much stronger than me. You should have seen him on the mission today."

"Yeah, whatever, but still, he is boring," Edmund sarcastically said.

Ethan playfully stared at Edmund, and the banter continued, lightening the mood.

While they were having conversation, Ryan, the king of Cyberia, made a spectacular entry from the sky flying down to the floor. He carried a sceptre, his body covered with outstanding blue and white suit of armour.

Richard inwardly admired the royal cape that Ryan wore.

Ryan was a living example of a monarch. Stepping onto the floor, he made his way over to the throne with dignity, receiving salutations from every person in the chamber.

Ryan took the seat, removed his mask, and said, "Greetings to the courtroom," as he lightly struck the dais with the bottom of his sceptre.

“Greetings to the king!” was the ecstatic response from the audience.

Ryan began with an announcement that hooked people in the hall from nook and corner. “I am really happy to announce that today is a very special day for Cyberia. We are finally completed with the construction of hyper-speed railways, which was delayed significantly due to various disturbances. But now, I can assure you that in three days, the railways will be fully functional and will serve as free transport for everyone.”

However, a concerned voice from the crowd interrupted, “Sir, sorry to interrupt, but what about the disruptions in the market due to the terrorist attacks?”

Another added, “Sir, we have heard they call themselves the Revenants. What does that mean? Who are they?”

Ryan acknowledged the concerns, "Well, as of now, things are in control. We have our team led by my brother Ethan and John, and they are doing well in handling things in this matter."

But another voice from the crowd continued to voice the public's distress, "But, sir, in the last four months, there have been three bombings reported in sectors 9, 16, and 24, and approximately 60 people lost their lives, with more than a hundred wounded. Apart from these, the kidnappings and executions are too prevailing. How can you say that things are in control? People are frightened."

"I know it is a tough time for the people of Cyberia, but we are all in this together, and my team and I are giving our level best to get rid of these people as soon as possible," Ryan said, maintaining his composure.

Ethan couldn't wait. He interrupted the discussion and climbed on the dais accompanied by John and Richard and approached Ryan,

whispering, "Brother, I need to talk to you about something."

"First of all, you tell me, how did the general public get information about the kidnappings and executions? I told you the news should not be spread. It will create chaos," Ryan said in a hushed tone.

John added, "Sir, I think what we are going to tell you today is going to change everything."

"Okay, go on," Ryan said. He looked at Richard, took a brief pause and asked, "By the way, who is this guy?"

CHAPTER 3

PROPHETS AND THEIR PROPHECIES

In the center of the spacious courtroom, Ethan and John stood beside Ryan on the dais and recounted the story in detail. They described how they found Richard and how his arrival could align with the *prophecy of Cyberia*.

Understanding their perspective, Ryan rose from his seat and adjourned the courtroom, stating, "Thank you all for being here. However, I deeply regret and sincerely apologize. There is something important that must be addressed immediately, so the courtroom is adjourned until next week."

The noise of people titling and tattling turned louder.

“Very well, let’s find a more private place to discuss this,” Ryan spoke softly to Ethan and John. All four of them walked away, leaving the dais.

Ryan led them into an empty room, and as they entered, he secured the door. The room felt welcoming, in contrast to the bustling assembly outside.

Curious and confused, Richard stepped forward, saying, “Sorry, respected king. I don’t want to interrupt you, but can anyone tell me what the heck is going on? I have been waiting for so long, and nobody is telling me anything.”

“Wait, Richard, I will tell you everything,” Ryan said, trying to reassure him.

Ryan used his sceptre to project holographic images, revealing Cyberia’s history. Watching the visuals unfold, Richard became more intrigued.

“First of all, let me tell you the story of the origin of Cyberia,” Ryan began. “This world was created by two men who possessed a powerful stone known as the CYBERIUM STONE. It held enormous power capable of creating, destroying, or altering reality. These two men, working together, used the stone’s energies to shape Cyberia into a beautiful piece of land and also gave birth to a race of beings, who were gentle and peaceful in nature. However, where there is light, there is also darkness. After the world’s creation, dark energies emerged, giving birth to evil forces.”

A cat moved outside the window, nearly breaking the glass, diverting their attention.

Ryan continued when he had Richard’s attention, “After a while, one of the two men got corrupted with the dark energy and harnessed all the dark energy of Cyberia within a mask, granting him destructive powers. In response, the other man created three warrior knights, equipping them with powerful weapons, including a suit of armour, a set of 10 rings, and a sword to combat

this dark force. After a fierce battle, Cyberia was saved, and the man who sought to protect it concealed the Devil's Mask in the dungeons of Cyberia, hidden from the world."

Richard contemplated the three statues he had seen while entering the building. Internally, he concluded that these statues of warriors must be the same ones Ryan was talking about.

Ryan paused for a moment before continuing, "After an era of peace, John's father who worked in the palace inadvertently found the Devil's Mask, and it possessed him, turning him into the very devil the warriors fought against. Chaos and destruction ensued, and he eventually killed the King of Cyberia, our father."

Richard glanced at John. Somehow, it all started to make sense to him now.

Ryan explained, "To stop him, Ethan, John, and I sought the temple of the ancient warriors which

was hidden by the Creator, where I got this suit of armour, and the power of the warrior knight and Ethan got his set of powers from the other 2 knights. In the final confrontation, we defeated the possessed devil, breaking the mask, but we had to sacrifice John's father in the process. We sealed the Devil's Mask in the Well of Damned Souls, guarded by Cyberian energy. Finally, Cyberia was at peace."

Putting it all together in his mind, Richard said, "Well, now everything is clear. What's the problem then?"

John added, "But there is another chapter to this tale - The Revenants."

The ones I encountered earlier; the ones who kidnapped me, thought Richard.

Ryan nodded gravely and continued after a brief pause, "That's right. Several years later, we found that when the Devil's mask was broken, dark

souls were released which possessed many Cyberian people. These possessed individuals, who gradually infiltrated the society of Cyberia, formed an organization called the Revenants. For a long time, the Revenants created havoc and destruction in society. And now, they have stolen the Cyberium Stone.”

“And how is that a big deal? What has it to do with me?” Richard asked.

Ethan clarified, “The Cyberium Stone has a unique power. It functions as a connector between your world and ours. The Revenants are trying to use the stone to create a doorway into your world, and —”

Not able to control his words, Richard interrupted to ask, “And what if they win?”

Ethan looked straight into Richard’s eyes and replied, “If they win, then both our worlds— Cyberia and Earth— will be taken over. So, that is

why individuals from your world are being teleported here because the wall between two worlds weakens with each passing day. That's how you came here."

"Well, I understand that it is something serious, but are you saying there's no way we can prevent them?" Richard asked.

"In reality, there is one," John said, and before Richard could ask 'What?' John added, "It is You."

Richard gave John a confused look, as if talking to himself inwardly.

Ethan stepped in to explain, "Long ago, we had a man known as '*The Philosopher*,' often called 'Philips.' He was our father's advisor, renowned for his predictions and prophecies.

“Back then, he made a prophecy that CYBERIA’S FATE IS DOOMED, AND IT WILL FACE A DESTRUCTIVE FUTURE. This was the prophecy the REVENANTS were talking about, and this is the same we were worried about too. But after a long time, after Philip’s death, we found his diary and we discovered those prophecies that he had written right before his death.”

“Prophecy? What did it say?” Richard asked, still confused but trying to understand.

Ethan continued, *“It stated, ‘In the time of crisis, when Cyberia will be burdened under misery, one day, a man from another world will come to Cyberia and change the fate of the world forever.’”*

“And we believe you are the man Philips spoke of,” John said.

Richard remained skeptical. “What!” He took a moment to digest what he had heard and then spoke, “Look, I get what you are saying, but I am

not entirely convinced. There might be other people from my planet who must have been teleported here before I did."

"And none of them made it through the unstable passage between our universes. You are the first and only person we have encountered who is alive," Ryan clarified.

As his face showed skepticism combined with doubt, Richard expressed his concerns. "See, you are quite sure of what you say right now, but everything that has come from your mouth so far is all theoretical and not factual."

Always the voice of reason and compassion, Ethan stepped in to say, "I think, in times of crisis, sometimes we just need to operate on faith rather than the facts."

Addressing Richard's doubts, Ryan said, "See, I know you are confused right now, and we are not forcing you to do anything for us. But you must

understand that even if you want to go home, you can't. It is only possible with the Cyberium Stone, and right now, we don't have it."

Richard closed his eyes, fighting with his emotions within. He was frustrated and felt regret as he absorbed the weight of the situation.

"So, you are saying I'm stuck here forever?"

"You will have to wait until we retrieve the Cyberium Stone from the Revenants," John said.

"Oh, God —"

Ethan cut off Richard mid-sentence, offering an alternative, "Or, you could just help us find it. You are a scientist, right? We can use your intellect to find the stone, so we can get you back home as soon as possible."

"Ethan is right, Richard," Ryan said, keeping his hand on Richard's shoulder, trying to make him understand.

Richard pondered the idea deeply. For a moment, he prayed for it all to be a dream. However, he knew it was real. It wasn't that he didn't trust these people; from what he had seen, they were the only ones who could help him return to Earth. It was just too much for him to absorb.

"Listen, Richard, take your time to think it over," Ryan said, his tone comforting.

"Well, it's been a long day for all of us. For now, Richard is our guest. Let's all get some rest, and tomorrow, Richard can decide what he wants to do further," John concluded.

Ryan agreed, "Certainly. Ethan, I think you should take Richard to your house today and provide him with everything he needs."

Ethan nodded, accepting the responsibility. "Yes, sir. Let's go, Richard."

Before they left, Ryan called out, "Richard."

Richard, Ethan, and John turned to face the king.

Ryan continued, "Remember, we won't force you to do something that you don't want."

Richard offered a comforting smile. Uncertain of what to do, he realized he needed some time to decide.

SOMEWHERE IN THE REVENANT'S HIDEOUT

In the darkness, soldiers gathered in a hall, their faces concealed by masks of typical fabric. Each one focused on specific tasks – some perfecting combat skills, while skilled blacksmiths crafted

weapons, from guns to grapple hooks and shields.

The atmosphere was charged. Soldiers moved weapons from one corner to another.

Amid the organized chaos, a commanding figure—the supervisor—patrolled the hideout, carefully inspecting his subordinates' progress.

His watchful eyes moved from one station to another, ensuring operations ran smoothly. The hall echoed with activity, and the supervisor, a figure of authority, moved with purpose, demanding respect. He checked everything that met the required standards.

Eventually, the supervisor reached a mysterious room where soldiers rigorously tested specialized weapons infused with radiant blue energy. Upon entering, he addressed two soldiers who were immersed in their task.

“What’s the progress on the weapons? Are we good to go?” the supervisor asked, his tone anxious, radiating throughout each individual in the room.

One of the men immediately answered, “Yes, sir. We are almost ready with our weapons; we have tapped power directly from Cyberium Stone, and its energy absorption is perfect.”

“They are working fine, but we will only have a limited amount ready for use today due to the tight time restrictions of mass production,” a soldier said in a tone tinged with concern.

“Will they be enough for today?” the supervisor asked, his gaze fixed on the soldier.

The soldier hesitated for a moment before responding, “According to my estimation, yes, but —”

“That’s the only thing I’m interested in. We have a job to do today, and we are on the clock. Just get the weapons ready. We will be moving tonight,” the supervisor said, his voice leaving no room for disagreement.

A concerned glance was exchanged between the two soldiers, a wordless understanding of what lay ahead. Yet, they yielded to the authority of their supervisor and replied together, “Yes, sir. We will do it.”

When the supervisor left, there was a hum of anticipation in the air as soldiers resumed their mission with concentration.

OUT IN THE SKY

Under the brilliant canvas of a bright afternoon, the clock ticked away, marking 2:30 PM. Ethan and Richard began the long journey to Ethan’s house in his car.

They didn't speak at all during the journey.

The awkwardness hung in the air, perhaps a result of the bizarre conversations that had occurred earlier. There were uncomfortable glances, followed by awkward smiles from the two companions as they tried to deal with the strange uneasiness.

In order to break the unbearable silence, Ethan finally spoke, "May I play some music if you don't mind?"

"Of course, after all, it's your car," Richard replied, offering a polite nod.

Ethan, in charge of the musical strings, chose Tom Petty's song 'Love is a Long Road' to fill the gap. The awkward silence gradually disappeared as the melody cascaded through the car.

With a subtle smile and genuine enthusiasm, Richard revealed his familiarity with the tune, saying, "Man, that's one of my favorite songs."

"Oh, really! I love it too. I listen to it every time I am flying in my car. I just love retro music," Ethan shared, breaking through the silence with a common ground.

"But how do you have this song here in Cyberia? This song is from our world, right?" Richard asked, his curiosity piqued.

"Music has no boundaries, mate," Ethan replied with a hearty laugh, attempting to dispel the seriousness that had settled between them.

However, Richard maintained a straight face, his curiosity undeterred.

“Okay, I was just kidding, Richard. You should try to smile sometimes; it is good for health, you know,” Ethan joked in a light-hearted tone.

“That was seriously a lame one, Ethan,” Richard said.

“Okay, man. Actually, you are right. This song is from your world. I got this when I was on a mission, where I found a crashed aircraft from your world. There was no sign of life, but there was an MP3 player with this song playing on it. I just loved this song, so I took the player and kept it with me,” Ethan confessed.

“Wow, you were on a mission, probably surrounded by dead bodies, and you decided to vibe to the funky song playing there, like seriously?” Richard questioned; his disbelief evident.

“Umm ... Well, that is just an oversimplification of events, but yeah.” Ethan explained, attempting to downplay the gravity of the situation.

The two locked eyes, expressions stern, but the tension gave way to spontaneous laughter.

“Well, it seems like music seriously doesn’t have boundaries,” Richard said.

They laughed while vibing and singing the song together, enjoying at their best.

In a quiet forest, there was a wooden house surrounded by trees. It was owned by Ethan and his family, standing as a nature-bound oasis, a peaceful place connected to the natural world.

The flying car smoothly approached their home on the lawn, expertly guided by Ethan to a graceful stop.

Exiting the car, Ethan and Richard walked towards the wooden house. After reaching for the doorbell, Ethan heard its chime break the silence.

“Sarah! Honey, I’m home,” Ethan called his wife with familiar warmth.

However, there was no response from inside.

Confused, Ethan tried once more, a trace of worry in his voice. “Honey? Are you there?”

Finding no response again, Ethan and Richard exchanged looks that spoke volumes. Ethan peered through the keyhole, only to learn that Sarah had been standing on the other side of the door, her expression etched with anger.

Ethan was anxious. He hastily sought to figure out what had caused Sarah’s discontentment.

“Honey, have I missed something?” he asked hesitantly, his voice full of courtesy and terror.

Sarah snapped, “What day is today?”

“It’s, umm ... Saturday,” Ethan stuttered as he struggled to remember.

Sarah yelled, “DATE!”

Richard whispered, “Anniversary?”

“Oh! Shit!” Ethan reacted. The revelation came upon him as a whiff of wind. He was feeling the brunt of forgetting their wedding anniversary.

“Sarah, listen to me dear. I’m sorry,” Ethan said.

However, Sarah didn’t respond. She was angry as ever.

“Sarah, listen to me, honey. I’m really sorry,” Ethan said, his words carrying a desperate plea for understanding.

On the other side of the door, Sarah responded with an angry tone that seemed to echo through the woods surrounding the house. “I don’t want to listen to anything. How can you forget this day, Ethan? You didn’t even wish me in the morning and just left for your work. How irresponsible can you be, Ethan?”

In an attempt to pacify the storm of emotions brewing within Sarah, Ethan continued, “Sarah, it was a really urgent task this morning, and I am really sorry. Can you please open the door and let me make it up for you, please!”

“NO, I WILL NOT!” she shouted, her words echoing through the stillness of the forest. Sarah’s anger clearly didn’t seem to die down.

Richard, who was observing this domestic storm, broke in with a mock smile that sought to fuel Ethan's fury.

"I am very happy I do not have a wife," Richard joked, taunting Ethan.

However, Ethan seemed to ignore it. He was more engrossed in making efforts to heal the wound.

"Sarah, I am with somebody. Someone is here. Please open the door once," Ethan pleaded sincerely and desperately.

"WHO IS WITH YOU? YOUR NEW WIFE?" Sarah screamed.

Ever the mischief-maker, Richard seized the opportunity to make the situation worse for Ethan, saying, "No, Sarah, he dropped her off at her house on the way."

Ethan looked seriously at Richard, expressing with his eyes not to make things worse, in a way pleading.

Richard laughed; a playful mockery aimed at Ethan.

“Is it true, Ethan?” Sarah sought clarification, her tone a mixture of disbelief and anger.

“Of course not, honey. What are you even thinking? Richard is just pulling my leg in this sensitive situation. Can you please just open the door so I can explain everything?” Ethan requested.

Richard, in the midst of his fits of laughing, brought an unexpected dynamic to the situation.

“Who is Richard? You don’t have any friend of that name,” Sarah pressed on, her skepticism evident.

"I met him today. He is not from Cyberia. It is a really long story. Can you please open the door now?" Ethan pleaded.

A minute of deep silence followed. Ethan and Sarah, both of them seemed to have held their collective breath. Then, finally, Sarah relented. The door squeaked, and a wave of comfort swept across Ethan's face. "Oh, good Lord! Thank goodness, I am so sorry, darling," he said with his arms open on approach to Sarah for a hug.

But out of unresolved anger, Sarah just ignored Ethan so she could concentrate on Richard. She changed the topic, asking, "You are not from Cyberia? Is it true?"

"Yes, unfortunately! But nothing can be done. By the way, I was just joking about his new wife, and I am sorry for that," Richard explained in an attempt to soften the tension in the room.

Sarah expressed her keen insight by saying, "That is fine with me; I know my husband. He may be stupid but not that much so as to cheat on me. Okay, looks like we have plenty to discuss."

"Well, that's right," Ethan said, contemplating how to make it up to Sarah.

"And where are the kids?" Sarah said, steering the conversation toward more practical matters, letting Ethan and Richard enter inside.

"They are with John and Sam; might get back till evening," Ethan replied. He was happy to be inside. However, he knew that he would have to face the consequence of forgetting their anniversary once he and Sarah are alone.

The door closed behind them, sealing off the outside world.

The charming interior of Ethan's house was warm and welcoming, filled with cozy decoration. Richard felt he was in a very comfortable environment. The walls had records of Ethan, Sarah and their children's eventful lives.

However, as they made their way to the dining hall, it still had unspoken waves of tension.

Positioned at the head of the table, Ethan inhaled deeply and then gave a detailed narration of what had happened during morning hours. He left no detail uncovered, telling of his race against time and the unexpected meeting with Richard.

Listening carefully, Sarah was calm. She was no doubt angry, but she also understood her husband's commitment towards protecting Cyberia.

Sarah heard the entire story being composed. As the practical thinker she was, she understood the situation very well.

“It is alright, Richard. I know it is very complicated for you right now, but for now, just relax. Both of you can rest for now. Richard, feel free to ask for anything you need,” she offered, her words extending hospitality.

“Thank you so much. I really feel like taking this break. I have a mild headache,” Richard said, thanking Sarah and Ethan, carrying a note of tiredness in his tone. The entire day of drama was too much for him, physically, mentally as well as emotionally.

In the meantime, seizing this chance to bring some humour into the mix, holding Sarah’s hand, Ethan replied, “Yes, brother, of course get that headache fixed before evening. It is our anniversary, and I will be making this evening really special.”

Richard simply nodded in recognition of the sentiment. He rose up from the table and replied, "Yes, I shall let you be for a while now."

He made his way to the bedroom upstairs, seeking what he truly needed at the moment, some rest. For he knew, there was a big mission coming up, for which he had to decide.

CHAPTER 4

CHANGE OF FATE

BACK IN THE KING'S MANSION

At late afternoon, around 4 pm, Ryan and John were having a conversation about the revenants in the corridor, while the children, Nick, Edmund and Sam, were playing around.

“So, what is the status on the revenants?” Ryan asked.

“As of now, nothing significant. They are operating fast and multiplying themselves by recruiting more people. Much like manipulating them. It is a big problem for us because now we don’t even know how many of them there are or even where they are operating from. Many of

them could even be among us, and, sadly, we wouldn't be able to know," John said.

"Yeah, I understand," Ryan said, sighing.

"By the way, Ryan, can I ask you something?"

"Go ahead."

"Do you really believe in the prophecies?"

"John, I can't accept or deny either. But there's one thing that I am sure about is that we must try something out. It's been a long time since we have been facing the revenants, and now as they have the Cyberium stone, I think our practicality this time can cost us our world, or even Earth. This, my brother, is really serious," Ryan said.

“Yes, I understand, but just look at Richard, he just seems like a regular guy, maybe ... maybe I guess he is not the one.”

“When I saw him, I too thought the same, but we can’t be sure about it as of now. Richard may seem like a plain book cover, but sometimes the most amazing stories lie within the pages waiting to be discovered.”

Sam, Nick, and Edmund were playing together. Nick and Edmund had some superpowers just like their dad, Ethan. Nick could create things with his blue energy just like his father. On the other hand, Edmund had a very sharp IQ, which resembled some part of Ethan’s powers. He could create energy shields of green energy.

As they played, Nick created toys and started playing with them. He even created a Rubik’s cube for Edmund, saying, “Take this, brother, this is for you. Only you can solve it faster than anyone else.”

Edmund, being the youngest, was able to solve the whole cube in just seconds showcasing his intelligence.

Sam, on the other hand, was a very silent and innocent kid who surprisingly had no superpowers. All his dad's powers were from the suit of the ancient warriors, and no power was genetically passed on to him.

"Nick, can you share some toys with me as well? I too wanna play with you," Sam said.

"Sorry, I only have these, and I am playing with them right now," Nick said.

Overjoyed, Edmund called out, "Nick, look! I solved the Rubik's cube."

"Woah! You are smart, Edmund. I haven't even figured out how this thing works yet."

“Eddie, can I do it too?” Sam asked, wanting to give it a try.

“I would have given it to you, brother, but I don’t think you will be able to solve it even if you try,” Edmund said, mocking him.

Sam got upset with his words, but he didn’t show it on his face as he was the eldest among them. Being mature, he gave a smile and said, “Haha, yeah, I know I am not as smart as you. It is not my cup of tea, I guess. You carry on with it.”

By the time they were having a conversation, John called Nick and Edmund, “Kids, time to get back home. Let’s go, I will drop you both at your house.”

“Coming, uncle. Let’s go, Eddie,” Nick said, observing Edmund completing yet another success in solving the Rubik’s cube.

"Bye, Sam, see you, bro," Edmund said, finishing his last move, and added, "Have fun. And miss us."

John left with the kids to drop them off at their home. Ryan was there, looking at Sam, who was upset for some reason, going back to his room. He called out to his son, "Sam."

"Yes, dad," Sam said, turning to face his father.

Ryan walked close to him and got on his knees. "What happened, dear?"

"Nothing. I am okay."

"Tell me, son. Is there anything bothering you?"

"Umm ... dad, why don't I have any superpowers?" Sam asked, his eyes glistening as

if he would burst into tears anytime soon if he spoke anything more.

Being a loving dad as he is, Ryan tried to console him as much as he could. "Oh, Sam, why are you thinking like that? Not everyone has superpowers. And dear, listen to me, it's not the superpowers that make anyone special, it's the intention, purpose, and deeds that make us special. Everyone is special in their own way, right?"

Sam gave a nod in agreement.

"Now, I remember, you were learning something special, right? You told me a few days back?" Ryan said, shifting his son's attention to something positive.

The question itself brought a big smile to Sam's face. "Yes, dad, I am working on it," he said.

“Wanna show me now? I am really interested to know what special thing my boy is doing.”

“Yes, dad, let’s go to my room. I will show you.”
Sam seemed thrilled.

“Let’s go,” Ryan said, picking Sam up in his arms, walking towards Sam’s room.

LATER THAT DAY AT ETHAN’S HOUSE

Richard, Ethan, Sarah, Nick and Edmund ate dinner together. The table was filled with chatter and laughter.

Thoroughly enjoying the meal, Richard couldn’t help but express his appreciation. “I swear to God, I have never had a better meal in my life.”

"Yes, my mom is the best cook," Nick said proudly.

"Oh, thank you, Richard. It's really kind of you," Sarah said, looked at Ethan, and added with a playful tone of sarcasm, "Now, at least there is someone who appreciates my work."

Ethan grinned. "Of course, I know you cook well, Sarah. Richard, who do you think taught her cooking?"

"Of course, you did, father," Edmund said, "That's why the chicken is half-cooked." He winked at his brother, playfully mocking.

Displaying his gracious nature, Richard addressed Edmund, saying, "Ed, it is okay, buddy. You shouldn't reveal secrets like that to your elders."

Looking at Richard, Sarah spoke, "My son has always been a bit different. He speaks very bluntly. The same since he was born. But, on the brighter side, he is very sharp in mind. Sometimes he finds out things that everyone else can't."

Nodding in agreement, Ethan chuckled and said, "I agree. That's why I am a bit afraid of him. Like if I ever cheat on Sarah, he will be the first one to find out."

"You cannot, dad, because you won't find anyone better than her. My mom is the best you can ever get," Edmund said, his tone confident.

"I trust you on this, bro," Nick added with a laugh, joining in the light-hearted banter.

"By the way, Richard, can I ask you something?" Edmund said with curiosity, turning to his left to face Richard.

"Of course, dear, go on," Richard said with a warm and friendly demeanor, encouraging Edmund to ask his question.

"What is on your mind now?"

Richard deflected the seriousness of the question with a touch of humour and replied, "Well, right now, I am just worried about my funeral, which I think should be going on right now in my world. None of them know that I am still alive."

Everyone laughed apart of Edmund. He sensed there was more to it and persisted, "No, I mean seriously, there is something on your mind that you are not telling us."

Richard contemplated for a moment. "In what sense? I mean, I am just happy to be alive, and the only thing I want right now is to go home."

“Eddy, now that your interrogation with Richard is over, I think you should go to sleep,” Sarah stepped in to defuse the situation.

Edmund reluctantly agreed, “Yes, of course. But I still didn’t get an honest answer.”

“Oh, please, Ed. Stop playing Sherlock all the time. I know you are smart, but not that much, okay?” Nick teased his brother.

As the two boys engaged in a playful scuffle, laughter filled the room.

“Enough now, kids! It’s bedtime,” Sarah said with her motherly authority. She gently ushered both Nick and Edmund off to bed.

Meanwhile, Ethan and Richard took advantage of the quiet garden area for a peaceful evening stroll. The moon shed a gentle glow, the stars shimmered overhead, and the tranquility of the

surroundings enveloped them as they took in the beauty of Cyberia. The soft step of their shoes against the garden path had its echo as if each step was a whisper in the ear of the dark dropping softly in one ear, then the other, along with a whispering of the leaves and the chirping of crickets in the distance.

With his gaze drawn to the celestial display, Richard expressed his admiration. "I must admit that your world is really beautiful."

Thoughts tinged with the weight of the on-going struggles; Ethan responded with a hint of nostalgia. "I know, but it was way more beautiful before the Revenants came into existence. You know, the only reason Cyberia was created was to make a world where everyone lives peacefully. But I think there cannot exist a place where peace prevails now."

"I know it is hard for you. My world is the same; it was a very beautiful place too, but humans made it a hell with violence and destruction. By

the way, how did you get all these resources and technology?" Richard asked, gesturing to the miraculous nature and technological advancements of Cyberia.

Ethan explained, "It all was developed from the Cyberium Stone itself, by the creator. Why, don't you have all these?"

"Actually, we had all these. There was a time when our world was rich with resources. But then, humans made technology and ruined the resources of our world. Now, in my world, everyone is just fighting to survive, and nobody is living a peaceful life."

"That is sad. I wish I get to see your world one day, brother."

"If we are lucky enough, then I will take you there. We will have a nice tour."

Ethan appreciated the gesture. "Oh, that is so nice of you."

As the conversation turned to the events of the day, Richard expressed his gratitude. "By the way, thank you for what you did back there. You saved my life. I owe you that."

"Don't you worry; that is my job here. And, by the way, if you feel thankful, you can buy me a beer sometime."

Richard chuckled. "Ha-ha, okay, sure."

Their exchange was interrupted by Sarah's arrival. "Hey honey, I think you should get some sleep now. Even Richard looks tired."

"Yes, my queen," Ethan said, playfully bowing down. "Let's go, Richard."

Following the reassuring embrace of the night, the three of them returned to the house, eager to find relaxation after their difficult voyage.

SOMEWHERE IN THE KING'S MANSION

A dark presence crept into the mansion like a shadow in the stillness. A troop of Revenant soldiers waited in the shadows; their identities hidden. When the chance presented itself, they quickly overpowered the gullible guards with an unexpected and vicious attack. A thrashed and bruised guard was left defenseless against these trespassers.

"Who the hell are you? And how did you get in here?" The guard inquired in fear.

A Revenant soldier retorted with a steely resolve, "Shut up!" His face was twisted by the dark forces that controlled him.

The soldier's comrades continued their ruthless assault on the fallen guards, leaving them no chance to resist.

The guard's voice carried a hint of hope mixed with desperation. "I know you are good inside. It is the devil that has taken over you. Just get yourself back. This is not who you are."

However, a second Revenant soldier, heartless, gave the guard a hard blow with the butt of his gun. "I said shut up!"

The guard flinched in agony but his devotion to his monarch was unshakable. He spat back at his captors. "You fucking pricks. Do whatever you want to do with me. I am and will always be loyal to my king."

Another Revenant tried another tactic, his voice icy and calculating. "Listen, buddy. I know you are loyal. We respect that. But here is the problem. It is you who will pay the price for this

loyalty. We know your family, where you live, your 2-year-old son, and we have enough people to take care of them right now."

The guard felt fear for his family members, and his heart fell. "This has nothing to do with my family. Leave them out of it."

"Then just take us to the portal for the temple of the knights. It is as easy as that."

The guard had to agree to guide them to the secret portal. He had to choose his family. However, he secretly signaled Ethan, alerting him about the situation that had befallen them. The battle for the mansion had begun, and the forces of darkness wanted to gain control of the sacred portal to the temple of the knights.

AT ETHAN'S HOUSE

Ethan, Richard and Sarah walked back toward the home; their hearts relaxed. However, their calm was fleeting. Their quiet evening was abruptly interrupted as Ethan's pager vibrated violently as they got closer to the house's threshold. When he got the pager and read the message, Ethan's face twisted in alarm.

"I have got to go," Ethan exclaimed.

Sarah's brow furrowed with worry. She pressed for details. "What happened?"

"There is some serious issue in the king's mansion. I need to go right now," Ethan replied.

"You're not going alone," Richard said.

"It's okay, Richard. You don't have to."

“Listen, I am coming with you. You should not go alone.” Richard offered his assistance, displaying his bond with Ethan.

Ethan, however, remained resolute, understanding the dangers involved. “No. I need you to stay back here with Sarah. It is not safe for you. Both of you, get back in the house and stay there. I will be back.”

Without further ado, Ethan swiftly made his way to his car, the engine roaring to life as he sped off into the night. The danger that waited for him inside the king’s mansion consumed his mind.

AT KINGS MANSION

The revenant soldiers marched forth into the mansion’s dimly lighted dungeons, led by the guard. They advanced until they came to a massive gate that stood in their way. The gate seemed like an intimidating obstacle to their destination.

One of the revenant soldiers gave the command, "Open it up."

However, as the command echoed throughout the room, they were stopped in their tracks by an unidentified voice. "He can't do that!"

Suddenly, with a rebellious expression on his face, a middle-aged guy appeared in front of them as if he had been called out of thin air.

The revenant soldier was quick to demand answers. "Now ... who the hell are you?"

With a demeanor of authority, the mysterious person introduced himself, his hands radiating a sinister electrical force and his eyes going completely white. "I am Nomad, the protector of the Temple of the Knights," he declared. "And I will not entertain your silly talks further. So, get the hell out of here."

With a fierce response, the undead troops, the revenant soldiers, pulled out their weapons and opened fire on Nomad. But he appeared to defy even the rules of physics, vanishing and avoiding their lethal missiles. With a flash of white, electrical power, Nomad returned fire, launching thunderbolts from his palms and quickly taking out a couple of the revenants.

The guard, meanwhile, saw his chance and lunged at the revenants, only to be quickly and fatally attacked by them. As they concentrated on Nomad, who had shown to be a dangerous foe, the situation became more severe.

One of the revenant soldiers decided on a change of strategy, his voice cutting through the chaos. "Bring on the firepower!"

From a hidden bag, the other revenant quickly produced a stash of brand-new, advanced weaponry. They wasted no time in launching a nonstop hail of laser fire at Nomad. As Nomad felt the scorching force of the lasers, suspicion

began to grow in his eyes as he realized that he was vulnerable since these weapons were made from the fearsome might of the Cyberium Stone.

After being struck several times, Nomad's body ached, and he started to bleed heavily. With his head being targeted by the revenants' weapons, he fell to his knees, helpless and vulnerable.

"Stand down, asshole," one of the revenant soldiers demanded, his voice cold and unyielding. "I will not entertain your silly talks further. Now open the portal."

Gritted teeth and overwhelming odds didn't stop Nomad from delivering his words. "Never... ever..."

Tension was evident in the eerie silence. With his finger on the trigger, the revenant soldier faced Nomad and issued a terrifying command. "Okay then, if we are not going in, then your life is not worth anyway."

Without hesitation, he prepared to pull the trigger.

Nomad, standing his ground, issued a challenge. "Do it!"

However, the quiet was broken by a fresh voice just as the tension was about to explode. "Stop!"

A woman appeared in front of them like a ghost. Her existence was a startling revelation. She was none other than Nomad's wife, Aubree. Her cries for help rang throughout the room. "Don't do it, please!"

The revenant soldier couldn't resist a taunt. "Oh, so the protector has a girlfriend. So cute!"

Nomad begged Aubree to leave after understanding how dangerous the situation was. However, the revenant soldier pressed on. "Open up the portal or your man will die in your arms today."

Against his better judgment, Nomad requested Aubree to pull away. "Aubree, don't listen to them. Just go!"

With tears in her eyes, Aubree had to make a heart-wrenching decision. "I will do it. Just let him go."

"Do it." The revenant soldier insisted on compliance despite Nomad's protests, which were met with silence.

Aubree leaned out and touched the gate, her hands shaking. She was covered in a white electrical glow that radiated from her eyes. The intimidating gate opened in a matter of seconds, revealing the massive portal in front of them.

"Aubree, what did you do?" Nomad's voice trembled with regret.

As Aubree attempted to reason with their captors, her voice faltered. "Now, as you promised, let him go."

"Yes, sure." Reluctantly, the revenant soldier dropped his weapon, giving Nomad a moment's respite.

However, their struggle was far from ended.

They encountered an unexpected turn of events as they proceeded deeper into the portal. A huge rush of energy was released by both Nomad and Aubree, resulting in a deadly volley of blasts that killed several soldiers.

"Take them down!" the revenant soldier barked.

The surviving soldiers quickly equipped themselves and opened fire in a ceaseless barrage. Nomad and Aubree were outgunned and outnumbered in the ensuing shootout.

Unfortunately, in the middle of the mayhem, they were both killed.

“Son of a bitch! Let’s move. We are running out of time. We have to find the relics,” the soldier said.

Only twelve of the revenant soldiers had survived the deadly encounter. They pressed on further into the depths of the temple. As they ventured deeper, they came upon the statues of three ancient warriors, two of which adorned with the coveted relics – a sword and ten rings.

“At last, the ancient relics are in front of us,” the revenant soldier proclaimed with a sense of triumph. “Master would be so proud.”

As they closed in, their fingers extended to touch the ancient artefacts, a sudden interruption echoed through the chamber. “Well, only if you stay alive for that long to tell your master about this.”

It was Ethan's voice cutting through the tense atmosphere like a blade.

With shocked and furious expressions on their faces, the revenant soldiers spun to face their new danger. John and Ryan were standing behind Ethan, surrounded by a phalanx of Cyberian troops that had emerged from the darkness.

Before long, the undead warriors, the revenants, had located their enemies. They lifted their firearms and opened fire. Well-prepared for the encounter, Ethan, John and Ryan quickly sidestepped the oncoming shots and fired back with accuracy.

The three men engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fight with the revenant soldiers. The remaining revenants were faced by the disciplined and skilled Cyberian guards, who had the advantage due to their superior weaponry and coordination.

Two of the revenant soldiers eventually surrendered, realizing their defeat due to sheer

numbers and lack of unity. They fled to cover where they made a strategic withdrawal in order to regroup and alleviate the loss they were facing.

The revenants took out a frightening shotgun, mysterious grenades and a sizeable gun from their bag of weapons.

The revenants deployed their weapons hurriedly across their base and soon found themselves next to one another, plotting their counterattack. The room was in a state of alertness as combatants fought with each other until the last man was standing.

AT ETHAN'S HOUSE

Richard and Sarah soon realized they too were not safe. They went inside the house when panic struck. They hurried to lock up every window and door to protect themselves from the attack. The lights flickered, plunging the house into darkness in the middle of their fear. They were

surprised by what was happening and made the decision to hide in the kitchen.

Understandably alarmed, their children, Edmund and Nick, turned to their mother for comfort.

“What’s happening, Mom?” Edmund’s voice trembled with fear.

Sarah hushed them in a whisper, attempting to calm their anxieties. “It’s okay, kids. Just keep quiet and relax. We are here with you.”

The shadowy noises attempting to break through the house’s doors eventually shattered their nervous silence. A few moments later, the main door was burst wide open. The revenants flooded in.

Richard launched himself at them with a bat in an attempt to save the family. He dealt some serious damage to a few of the revenant soldiers, but one

of them struck back, strangling Richard with a strong elbow hold.

But Sarah was not going to take it quietly. Seizing the chance to save Richard, she attacked from behind, causing the soldier to loosen his hold. Richard and Sarah fought together, even though they were outnumbered.

But then, Nick exhibited powers akin to Ethan's with his blue-hued abilities. He made a metal rod appear and struck the revenants with it, taking them by surprise.

In the meantime, young Edmund protected himself by using strategic thinking. He manoeuvred to thwart the invaders.

Through their combined efforts, they were able to gradually shift the tide of the battle and defeat each revenant soldier individually.

As soon as the final revenant soldier was defeated, Richard took the chance to question their prisoner. "Who are you? Why are you doing all this?"

The soldier was silent at first, but he eventually spoke. His words sent shivers down Richard and Sarah's spines. "You can't do anything. Everything is happening as per the master's plan." He chuckled sinisterly.

Richard pressed for more information. "What? Tell us the truth, or, I promise, you won't be able to say a word."

The revenant soldier continued to giggle while ominously hinting at a terrible plan. "It's okay, you can take your time interrogating me while your king dies tonight, just like before."

He laughed once more.

Richard and Sarah exchanged a look as they realized, they had stepped into a well-planned trap. That very night in the mansion, the Revenants had planned to kill Ryan.

Richard made the decision to defend his friend.
“Sarah, you stay here. I need to save them.”

“No, Richard. I am coming with you. You won’t be able to do anything there. It is suicide,” Sarah protested, her worry etched on her face.

Richard, however, was firm in his decision.
“Listen, Sarah. The children need you here. Please, keep them safe. I will take care of myself.”

Richard began to depart for the king’s mansion as Sarah agreed, realizing the seriousness of the situation.

“Listen, if you find Ethan alive, then —”

Richard cut her off. "Stop. Nothing is going to happen. I promise you. Tonight, I will bring back Ethan safely to you. I give you, my word."

After making a commitment to Sarah, Richard departed for the King's mansion.

Nick looked at his brother Edmund for help after growing concerned about the captured revenants who were unconscious. "What are we going to do with them?"

Edmund smiled wickedly, for he had a plan. "We will tie them up."

BACK IN THE KNIGHT'S TEMPLE

The combat continued inside the King's mansion as the revenant soldiers attacked. The shotgun blasts were deadly, killing anyone unlucky enough to be in their line with their thundering, powerful blasts.

Meanwhile, the Cyberian guards were dying because of the bombs the revenants were using.

Ryan was filled with rage after seeing the devastation. With all the might his abilities could generate, he launched himself into the air to confront the revenants.

However, his well-intentioned plans were quickly foiled.

A revenant pointed an odd weapon at Ryan—a large pistol with a hidden net trap inside. He was caught in the tangled grip of the net as soon as the trigger was pulled. He fell to the ground, trapped and powerless, the net created by the energy of the Cyberium Stone making his powers useless.

“Ethan!” Ryan’s cry for help echoed through the chaos.

While he raced to save his sibling, Ethan too encountered danger. He was sent flying to the ground by a vicious strike from a revenant soldier striking him from behind. The soldier was just a few moments away from taking Ethan's life with his rifle until help arrived from an unexpected source.

Richard appeared at the last second and used his skill to precisely swing a metal rod, crushing it into the revenant soldier's form from behind. The soldier fell to the ground, unable to move.

"Richard! What are you doing here?" Ethan's voice was a mix of astonishment and gratitude. He reached out to Richard, who extended a helping hand.

Richard responded light-heartedly, given the circumstances. "I think now we are even."

Richard extended his hands to pick Ethan back from the ground. Ethan couldn't help but chuckle

amidst the chaos. "Yeah, but I still expect that beer from you."

After coming together, Ethan, Richard and John were a strong team that engaged the revenant army in heavy combat. However, despite their united efforts, they were unable to defeat their opponents' massive numbers and arsenal of weapons.

In the middle of the fighting, Richard was badly hurt by a laser blast from one of the revenants. He fell to the ground, apparently helpless and unconscious. A revenant approached him, poised to deal the final blow and finish Richard once and for all.

Then, though, something remarkable happened.

A brilliant glow appeared on Richard's fingers, glistening with red sparkles. The ten rings that were on the warrior knight statue broke free and swung in the direction of Richard's extended

hands. His fingertips felt the rings, and a rush of red energy shot through him.

Richard sprang to his feet with a forceful outburst of energy, radiating red light all over his body.

Everyone was amazed and confused by his unexpected skills, including Ethan, John, Ryan and the Cyberian troops.

Richard gained immense strength from the ten rings, which he promptly used against the revenant soldiers. Red energy bolts shot out of his palms that quickly took down every soldier.

As Richard's newly acquired skills swung the war in their favour, the battlefield was reduced to a spectacle of destruction. The revenant soldiers were defeated by Richard's onslaught, one by one.

Their resistance was now meaningless.

But when all was said and done, Richard was the one who finally gave in to the pressure of his newly acquired abilities. He fell on the ground, unable to breathe.

CHAPTER 5

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS

IN THE KING'S MANSION

The next day, everyone kept watch over Richard, attempting to wake him up. They were worried more than anxious. However, Richard remained unconscious in bed, like a dormant volcano awaiting the spark of awakening.

“Dad, is he even alive?” Edmund said, his voice filled with concern.

Nick tentatively reached out to check the ten rings gracing Richard’s fingers, curious about its power. Meanwhile, Ryan, Ethan and John gathered close, whispering to each other about the events of the previous day.

"So, it is true then," Ryan mused.

John nodded in agreement. "Yeah, now we are pretty sure about it, after what happened. What we saw was marvelous. A clear proof."

Ethan's thoughts seemed far away as he brought up another concerning matter. "Nomad and Aubree are both dead. We have to reinforce security at the gates. What about *her*?"

"*She* is safe. Don't worry. We are taking care of her," Ryan reassured.

In the midst of their quiet discussion, Richard slightly moved on bed. He slowly opened his eyes, waking up from unconsciousness. He heard worried voices, and took a moment to realize what had happened. As soon as people noticed him, they helped him sit up.

“Are you okay?” Ethan asked, his worry evident on his face and voice.

Richard winced, his head throbbing with pain. “I think so. Just have a severe headache.”

“Don’t worry, it’s because your body has absorbed the cyberian powers for the first time. It will take time for you to adapt. But you will be okay,” Ryan said, trying to explain and calm him.

Richard slumped over the side of the bed and vomited.

Ryan gave a humorous nod of assurance. “A little more time to adapt, I guess.”

Richard was clearly curious and confused about the events of the previous day. “What happened back there? How did I do all those things I did?”

Ethan, John and Ryan exchanged glances before Ethan attempted to clarify the situation. "You used the ten rings of one of the three ancient knights."

"But how?" Richard reacted; his skepticism obvious.

"Because you are the chosen one, Richard," John said.

Richard raised his eyebrows, his forehead creasing in a manner that indicated he didn't believe a word of what they said.

"Don't be blind, Richard. The relics of the ancient warriors cannot be used by just anyone. One must be chosen by the spirits of the warriors themselves to wield them. Without being chosen, nobody can ever touch the relics. That's how I got this suit, that's how Ethan got his powers, because we were chosen," Ryan said, confirming their belief in the prophecy.

John added his perspective. "And, Richard, you were just a human. You could have easily died there. But whatever happened, it was pure fate. It was *your* fate. It is your fate to lead us and save us."

They sought to convince Richard of the prophecy's veracity, and gradually Richard started to consider the possibility that he might have a bigger role in this world.

Ryan's call from the security team abruptly ended their conversation. With a more serious demeanor, he answered the phone. "Yes, what is it?"

A soldier on the other end of the line spoke urgently. "Sir, I am afraid we have a message from the leader of the revenants."

Ryan issued his order firmly. "Redirect the message to me."

The video call played out on a hologram screen before them, revealing a mysterious figure dressed in black, his face obscured in shadows.

“Greetings to the king. I am both happy and sad to see you alive today, as my plan failed. But not for long. I have waited long enough to conquer this world and the world beyond it. I can see that the prophecy of the saviour is coming true with your new fellow teammate.” The voice took on an ominous tone. “But don’t you all worry, I will prove that prophecy wrong by killing him and all your friends, and then, especially you, with my own hands. This world is destined to be destroyed and nobody can stop me from doing that. And whoever dares to stand in my way, I will squeeze their blood out of their body and crush their soul. Keep this in mind, dear king – nobody can stop me from conquering this world, and once I am done with Cyberia, I will go for the outer world. Live out your remaining peaceful days, reassure your kids, kiss them goodbye, and just wait for me. I will meet you soon.”

Ryan and the others fell silent as the video message ended, allowing them to contemplate the seriousness of the new threat.

“I cannot let more people die because of me,” Ryan declared. “We have to end all of this soon.”

Despite admiring Ryan’s determination, John couldn’t help but mention the hurdles they faced. “But how? We don’t know where they are. We don’t know who they are. How are we supposed to do this? We don’t even have the Cyberium Stone.”

Richard came up with an idea. “Wait. This Cyberium Stone, can we track it?”

Being the expert in matters of the Cyberium Stone, Ethan spoke, “I don’t think so. Even if we can make a tracker for the energy it emits, we don’t have a sample of what we are tracking.”

“Why? We have the relics; they emit the same energy,” Richard suggested, seeking a solution.

Ryan possessed the most knowledge amongst them about the stone. Responsible, he explained the complexities involved, “No, it doesn’t work like that. The relics are ancient, the energy signatures of the stone change over time. They must have changed remarkably by now. We need a recent sample of the energy.”

“Where are we going to get that?” John asked, doubtful they could obtain such a sample.

Unexpectedly, Sam interrupted, injecting hope back into the discussion. “The people who attacked Dad, didn’t they have the same energy weapons? They must have been made recently with the use of the stone itself. We can use their sample.”

“Right! Genius, kid,” Ethan said, admirably patting Sam on his back and continued, “Richard,

will you be able to make a tracker with it?", seeing potential in Sam's suggestion.

"Of course. I didn't tell you this, but I am a genius back in my world," Richard claimed, smirking.

"Alright, John, get Richard a lab to work in and provide him with whatever he needs," Ryan instructed, taking charge of the situation.

John nodded in agreement. "Absolutely."

Ryan's battle cry inspired his allies with a sense of purpose. "Let's get those motherfuckers!"

SOMEWHERE IN THE HIDEOUT OF THE REVENANTS

The revenant soldiers gathered in a dimly lit room, their shadows swirling menacingly in

dark. The place would give anyone creeps. It seemed like something out of a horror movie; a perfect place for such meetings that anyone would hardly know. It was in this secret location that they had held their mysterious master's video conference.

The soldiers greeted their master with a mixture of reverence and apprehension as they sought to atone for their past actions.

"Greetings, our master," they spoke in unison. "We apologize for what happened in the temple."

With a gesture of his hand, their enigmatic master silenced them. "Enough!" he commanded. "Let it be. Everything is proceeding according to my plan. Now, all you have to do is wait for them. According to my knowledge, they will surely attempt to track the Cyberium Stone. Once they do, they will come to us. And that is exactly what I want."

“Don’t worry, master,” one of them vowed. “We will handle them properly this time. We will be ready for their welcome.”

Their master responded with firm certainty. “Yes, you will. You must.”

IN THE KING’S MANSION

Ethan and John meticulously arranged Richard’s laboratory, ensuring every inch of space was tailored to his needs. The trio worked late into the night to develop a tracker for the Cyberium Stone.

“John, could you bring me a coffee?” Richard requested as he focused on configuring the tracker on a computer.

“Of course,” John replied with a nod, and hurriedly left to fetch the refreshment, leaving Ethan and Richard alone in the laboratory.

“By the way, how are we going to track the stone? Don’t you think we need a receptor on the object we are tracking?” Ethan asked, curious about the specifics of their plan.

Richard explained his approach. “You are right. But in our case, the stone emits a significant amount of energy, and this thing,” he gestured toward the weapon and added, “is receiving energy directly from the stone itself. We can say that these weapons are, in a way, connected to the stone. So, I can make the energy rebound from the weapon to the stone, causing the stone to emit a significant amount of energy around it, which can be easily captured on our energy tracker.”

Though Ethan was not as tech-savvy as Richard, he grasped the concept and responded with a self-deprecating tone. “Oh.”

“You didn’t understand a thing, did you?” Richard teased.

Ethan chuckled. "No, it's not that complicated. It is just that I am more of a fighter than a genius."

"I think you and I will make a good duo. Your combat skills and my brain."

"Well, your combat skills are good too. You were great back there."

"Nah. Those were just instincts. By the way, I had a question in my mind," Richard said.

"Go on," Ethan replied.

"I was wondering, why don't you have a formidable army with high-tech weapons like these? The technology you have here is way ahead of its time. Haven't your people ever considered creating a strong arsenal with the tech you have?"

Ethan explained, "You see, war was the last thing we expected in Cyberia. The creator of Cyberia intended this place to be the most peaceful realm to ever exist. And we never felt the need for an arsenal. Before the Revenants, everything was very peaceful here."

"Yeah, but if you had one, it would have been of great help in fighting the Revenants."

"Here's your coffee," John said, returning with the coffee and handing the steaming cup to Richard. Curious about the on-going discussion, he asked, "So, what's the discussion all about?"

John, Ethan and Richard engaged in a conversation regarding the origins and goals of Cyberia. Richard learned a great deal about its history and importance.

John spoke thoughtfully. "Well, my father had this idea in mind. He even proposed to the king, Ethan's father, to build an arsenal for the security

of the world. But the king declined, as he was very certain that Cyberia was never going to face a threat like that. But he didn't anticipate that he would be the one to bring that threat to this world."

"John, it's not your father's fault. What's done is done," Ethan said.

John accepted Ethan's reassurance with a nod. "Yup. Well, I am a bit tired," he admitted with a yawn. "I am going to take a nap. If you need anything, just wake me up."

"Of course. Ethan, you can rest too, as this will take a lot of time," Richard suggested.

However, Ethan preferred to stay awake. "No problem for me. I am not tired at all," he claimed, took a yawn, and added, "I can stay up all night."

As luck would have it, Ethan's statement proved false, and he quickly succumbed to fatigue, dozing off.

Richard spent the entire night laboring in the laboratory, diligently working on the tracker. He utilized his time to create other devices that would be useful when it was time to return home, in addition to the tracker.

Hours passed by. Richard's efforts paid off as the first rays of dawn appeared. He successfully constructed the tracker, which was crucial to their mission.

The laboratory fell into total silence. The faint hum of the machinery signaled the conclusion of a long night's work and the commencement of a new chapter in their mission.

IN THE MORNING

Richard woke John and Ethan from their slumber, eager to share the good news of the completed tracker. "Guys, wake up! Guys! It's ready, we are ready to go."

"Let me sleep a bit more, Sarah!" Ethan protested, thinking he was at his home, on his bed, beside his wife, still groggy from lack of rest.

However, John was less patient. He had woken up and nudged Ethan forcefully to rouse him.

"Ouch! That hurt!" Ethan exclaimed, now fully awake, surprised and happy to see Richard's hard work paying off.

Undeterred, the three of them made their way to the king's mansion to meet with Ryan. They informed their king that the tracker was finished.

“Excellent!” Ryan exclaimed upon hearing their report. “Let me assemble a team for extraction.”

Richard, John and Ethan exchanged glances, deliberating their options. Ultimately, it was John who spoke up. “Wait, just let the three of us handle it.”

“What! No, you don’t know what you are getting into. It is dangerous,” Ryan protested.

“Yes, but we can strategize. We can’t risk more lives. And we are the best, you know that.”

“Okay, I am putting my full trust in you three for this operation. Gather whatever you need, and good luck!” Ryan said, changing his mind understanding the gravity or the situation.

As they turned to leave, Ryan called out to Ethan. Ethan paused, turning back to face Ryan.

“Try not to get yourselves killed. And bring everyone back safely.”

Ethan nodded in understanding and replied,
“Will do my best.”

CHAPTER 6

KNOCKING THE DEVIL'S DOOR

Their helicopter, armed to the teeth, sliced through the sky. Determined, they had their mission clear in front of them.

Richard deftly flicked the switch on the tracker with his fingers, and the cyberium stone came to life with a surge of brilliant blue energy. Encased in protective casing, the stone pulsated with ethereal light, casting shimmering reflections across the walls. The blue energy emitted from the stone spread out in a wide, radiant halo. The tracker screen displayed a map, with a pin-like point marking the exact location of the stone.

"Here it is," Richard said, smiling as if he knew what he was about to do.

The destination—an old, ruined, and abandoned building—was far from the city. Their aircraft touched down carefully, ensuring no one knew about their arrival. Armed with weapons, they disembarked and set out toward the building.

“Yes, let’s get what we are here for,” Ethan said, taking the lead. His combat suit was activated, while Richard charged the ten rings of power. John reloaded his weapons, preparing for the challenges ahead.

“I think we should have brought reinforcements with us,” John said. “We don’t even know what or how many we are going to face there.”

Ethan laughed and said, “Well, brother, we are too late to think about that now.”

“It’s okay, we will handle everything. We won’t be needing anyone. Don’t worry,” Richard said, his tone calm and assuring.

They reached the building and silently dispatched the guards stationed outside. Maintaining utmost stealth felt like an easy task, but even they knew the real fight was about to begin.

Inside the building, they continued their assault, silently eliminating threats in their path. Strategically, they ascended to the top floor where the Cyberium Stone was safeguarded.

Everything was going fine until they had a momentary lapse.

A weapon dropped on the floor, shattering the silence. The noise alerted the revenant soldiers inside the building.

“Intruders!” one of the revenant soldiers roared, sending all the revenants into a frenzied state.

Soon, what was a silent control win turned into a fierce firefight. Richard, Ethan, and John clashed with the revenant soldiers. Richard harnessed the power of the rings, Ethan utilized his tactical prowess and supernatural abilities, and John wielded his weapons against the revenants.

The revenant soldiers escalated the situation for the three, powering their weapons made from the Cyberium Stone.

That sinister smile on the faces of the revenants!

Amidst the chaos, John revealed a hidden surprise. He opened a bag containing weapons powered by the Cyberium Stone, taken from the revenant soldiers in the temple.

“Surprise, you motherfuckers!” John exclaimed, extinguishing the sinister smiles of the revenants with his laughter.

John unleashed the arsenal upon their foes. With remarkable teamwork, they fought off the revenant army in a protracted battle, pushing their limits. Finally, the smoke cleared, and the revenant soldiers lay defeated on the ground.

Richard, Ethan, and John made their way to the room where the Cyberium Stone was stored. Their mission was within their reach now.

"Is this it?" Richard asked in awe.

Ethan confirmed with a sense of fulfilment, "Yes, finally!"

"Let's not waste a moment. We need to take this and leave before they retaliate," John urged.

"Yes, let's leave. More might be coming—" Before Ethan could complete his sentence, more revenant soldiers attacked them, and all three ran back to keep the stone safe.

"Ethan, take the stone and get back to the helicopter," Richard said.

"No, we will fight them together," Ethan replied.

Richard shouted, "Don't let your emotions cloud your judgment. Just leave. Take the stone safely to Ryan."

The number of revenants rapidly increased. Ethan realized the situation could become more difficult for them. He decided to guard the stone. Moreover, he blindly trusted Richard.

Ethan took the stone while John strategically guarded him. They both exited the building safely, while Richard remained stuck fighting the revenants, outnumbered.

Within no time, some of the revenants captured Richard. They restrained his hands with a special kind of handcuff powered by the cyberium stone. It quickly deactivated Richard's rings, and he fell there, powerless.

Meanwhile, Ethan and John managed to escape the premises of the building.

"What do we do? We should go back and get him out of there," John said.

"I'm afraid we can't do that. There are too many of them, and we can't take them all down. We can't risk the cyberium stone again," Ethan replied.

"So what? You're just going to let him die there?" John said, with a sense of worry.

"No! This was the real plan. Richard told me earlier that he wanted to do this if the situation got out of control," Ethan revealed.

"What?" John looked at Ethan, confused, baffled.

"I can't explain everything now. We don't have time. Just listen to me. Take the helicopter and take the stone safely to Ryan."

"But what about you and Richard?"

"Just go, John! Don't worry about us. We'll both be back," Ethan said. He placed a hand on John's shoulder and added, "I'll bring him back alive. Now ... just go."

John agreed, understanding the gravity of the situation. He carefully kept the Cyberium Stone with him and left in the helicopter, while Ethan called his car to their location and waited for Richard's signal.

In the building, Richard regained consciousness and found himself tied to a chair. His hands still had the special handcuffs that restricted his powers. He was surrounded by hundreds of revenants.

Suddenly, all revenants started to make way for someone. He was none other than their leader, who walked through the revenants, fully covered with black clothes and a hood. Richard observed that their leader had his face covered.

“So, you are the special one, huh?” the leader reacted.

Richard found the leader staring at him with his frightening face.

After a long wait of 30 minutes, Ethan lost his patience. He started walking towards the building to save Richard. However, he saw a huge bomb blast in the building which set it ablaze, destroying it completely.

“Richard!” Ethan exclaimed, shocked and confused.

He then witnessed something extraordinary.

From the burning door, Richard emerged with his body surging with red energy from the ten rings. It was all fire on his body, but he seemed to be okay.

Richard walked up to Ethan, saying, “Why are you screaming like that?”

"I thought you ..."

"The plan worked. I was doubtful about the bombs, but" Richard paused to take a look at the now destroyed building and added, "The bombs went off at the right time."

"What about the revenants?" Ethan asked.

"All dead." Before Ethan could ask further, Richard answered, "Along with their leader."

"What!" Ethan said, surprised, rather shocked.

"I'll tell you everything once we get back."

Having accomplished the mission, Richard and Ethan left in the aircraft towards the king's mansion.

IN THE KING'S MANSION

John hugged Richard and Ethan as they returned. "What did you guys do? I mean, how did you do it?"

Before they could answer, Ryan joined them. Richard and Ethan told Ryan and John about their mission's success.

With the Cyberium Stone now secured, they handed it over to their king with a simple instruction. "Take this, and now try keeping it in a much more secure place."

Ryan happily accepted the precious artefact. He extended his hand to each of them in gratitude, acknowledging their remarkable accomplishment. "I don't know how to thank you all for this."

"Just don't. It was our job," Richard said humbly.

"Now answer me. What about the revenants?" John asked. "How did you manage to escape?"

"This was the plan from the beginning," Richard said, sharing a smirk with Ethan. "We planted bombs all over the building when we got in and just waited for the right time for them to go off. Ethan and I didn't tell you, as it was your job to get the stone safe here without us, and you wouldn't have agreed to it if we told you."

"But you told me that their leader was also there. That was not part of the plan," Ethan said.

"Was he?" Ryan asked.

"I managed to escape and kill him when the bombs went off. It was a tough fight, but I guess I was too powerful for him," Richard said, looking at the ten rings.

"Name it, whatever you three want," Ryan said, expressing his gratitude.

Ethan couldn't resist. He added a touch of humour. "Can you give me a new house to live in? The recent one feels a bit old-fashioned," he quipped.

John joined in. "And a new car for me, please."

Ryan chuckled heartily at their banter. "Ha-ha! I would love to provide you with both of those, but still, my brothers, it is not enough for whatever you have done for Cyberia."

Among their banter, Richard was more serious. He conveyed his true request, "Ryan, if there is one thing I want, I just want to ask, can I return to my world now? I mean, I love it here, but I have to go."

Ryan readily agreed. "Sure! Now that we have the Cyberium Stone, you can easily use it to return home. We understand your family must be waiting for you."

Richard admitted, "Well, I don't have one, but still, I have got a lot of serious things to figure out."

"Hey, we are your family, brother. You can always come here and meet us. You have us," Ethan said.

"Yes, you have us," John said.

Richard expressed his gratitude. "That is really kind of you. I came here as a stranger and found brothers."

"Yes, by the way, I think you should start working on a way out to your world," Ryan said.

"Actually, I already have." Richard revealed his preparations by displaying a bracelet-like device with a tracker.

"What's this?" John inquired.

Richard explained, "This is a tele-porter with which I can create a small portal to my world, way smaller than the anomaly in the ocean. I just need to power it with the Cyberium Stone."

Ryan readily gave his approval. "Alright then. You can leave whenever you want."

"Ryan, you said I can have anything I wanted, right?"

"Yes, whatever you say."

Richard presented a second tele-porter and outlined his proposal. "With your permission, can I take Ethan with me to my world for a few days? He wanted to see my world."

Ethan's face lit up. He was surprised and happy that Richard remembered his wish.

"Well, I think we need him here right now with John," Ryan said, considering their immediate needs in Cyberia.

"You obviously can take him," John said. "I will handle everything here. It's not a big deal for me. It's good Ethan will get a vacation for some days too, which he deserves."

Ryan acknowledged the decision and ultimately agreed. "Well, if everyone is comfortable with it, then yes, go on."

With the matter settled, Richard and Ethan looked at each other and smiled, walking back to the laboratory. They started to prepare to activate the portals. Richard powered up the tele-porters

using the Cyberium Stone. He then handed one to Ethan, instructing, "Wear it on your wrist."

With practiced movements, Richard manipulated the controls on the tele-porters, generating a shimmering portal before them, leading back to Earth. Ryan, John, and others gathered to bid them farewell.

"Tell Sarah and the kids that I will be back soon," Ethan said.

"Don't worry about her and the kids. I am here," John said.

Richard looked at Ethan with a smile, "Ready to witness Earth, my friend?"

Ethan's eyes sparkled with anticipation. "Absolutely!"

Together, they stepped through the portal, leaving Cyberia behind.

ON EARTH

Returning back to Earth, Ethan and Richard appeared just outside Richard's house, while the

portal closed behind them. They stood there for a while, Richard taking in the familiar surroundings and Ethan marveling at the differences between Cyberia and Earth.

“Wow! This place is beautiful,” Ethan said with genuine wonder.

“I agree with you totally on this, Ethan,” Richard said, smiling warmly.

“So, what’s the plan?”

“Well, I have some plans, but for now, it’s very late. Let’s get some —”

Ethan broke Richard off mid-sentence, gesturing toward a nearby building. “Is this your house?”

Richard confirmed, “Yes, come in.”

They entered the apartment building, took the elevator up to the 11th floor, stepped out of the elevator, and entered Richard’s flat.

Still in awe of the surroundings, Ethan complimented Richard. “Wow! You have a beautiful house, Richard.”

“Thank you,” Richard replied, offering him a seat.

Ethan sat on a chair, and Richard got two bottles of beer from the refrigerator. He handed one to Ethan.

"Here's your beer," Richard said with excitement. "I owed it to you, I guess."

Ethan took a sip, "Umm! This tastes so good."

Richard agreed, "This one's, my favourite."

Richard opened his laptop on a nearby table. "Just give me a minute, Ethan. I really have to send this email. It's a bit urgent for me."

Ethan made himself comfortable on Richard's bed while enjoying his beer. In the meantime, Richard composed an email to Mayden, the subject being:

"I am alive, and I am back here. I need to meet you after 3 days in the HQ urgently...R.D."

With a click, he completed his task and closed his laptop.

Ethan asked, "So, you have a girl?"

"Nah. Not as such. I am not into those things that much. I have got a lot of work to do," Richard said, clearly trying to avoid the subject.

Ethan playfully held up a girl's hairband he had found on Richard's bed. "Oh, yes, work. I agree." He teased, "Yes, this might not be yours. I think someone else is using your bed for some things best known to him!" Ethan grinned mischievously.

Richard blushed and tried to explain himself. "Umm, yeah. Maybe sometimes I don't have that much work, so I just hang out with some of my female friends."

Ethan was amused. "FRIENDS!" he exclaimed in mock shock. "So, this is what friendship is on Earth." He laughed heartily.

Richard defended himself, laughing as well. "No, not at all. It's just some special friends. I can't explain it to you further."

From the girl to Richard's lifestyle on Earth, they talked on many interesting topics. In the meantime, Ethan yawned while finishing his beer.

"I think we should get some rest for now. It's late. We have a lot to do tomorrow," Richard said.

"Yes, I am sleepy too. But is it safe to sleep with you?" Ethan quipped.

Richard chuckled and teased him back, "You will find out tomorrow. And, by the way, you don't have any other choice."

Richard and Ethan laughed out loud. Eventually, they retired to bed, taking rest from their struggle.

THE NEXT MORNING

The morning sunlight streamed through the windows. Richard had already gotten up and was keen to start his day.

"Wake up! Or we are going to be late," Richard urged.

Still in the haze of sleep, Ethan mumbled, "What?"

"Wake up, Ethan. We are on Earth, remember? I have a nice tour planned for you. We have to leave right now."

With a yawn, Ethan began to rouse up. "Okay," he replied, still a bit groggy. "Give me a moment."

After getting ready, Richard and Ethan left the flat and entered the elevator. Richard pressed the button for the parking area, and the elevator began its descent.

Curious, Ethan asked, "So, what are we riding?"

"Be patient, my friend," Richard teased. "You will see."

"I gave you an air ride in my car," Ethan playfully said. "My ride in yours must be special too."

Richard chuckled. "Unfortunately, we don't use flying cars on Earth, but you will enjoy the ride in my car, for sure."

The elevator doors slid open, revealing a sight that left Ethan stunned. The parking lot had exotic supercars, including Ferraris, Lamborghinis, GTRs, Skylines, and more.

"Woaaaaahhh!!!" Ethan exclaimed. "I will not compare it with flying cars, but these are really beautiful."

Tugging on the parking lot access, Ethan inquired, "So which one's yours?"

Richard grinned. "Are you kidding me? This is *my* parking lot."

Ethan was taken aback. "So ... you are saying all of these are yours?"

Richard nodded. "So, which one do you want to ride?"

Ethan had a look at the remarkable selection and decided on a sleek silver Nissan GTR. "This one looks cool."

"Alright, here we go."

As they approached the car, Ethan insisted, "Wait, I am driving."

Richard raised an eyebrow, saying, "Ethan, have you ever driven a car on land?"

Ethan replied with a touch of sarcasm, "Actually, once. Ten years ago."

"Ten years, seriously?" Richard chuckled.

"Come on, it will be fine. It is easier to drive it on the road than flying a car."

Richard reluctantly agreed and let Ethan take the driver's seat. The GTR's engine roared to life as Ethan set the wheels in motion. Richard was a bit

nervous as Ethan accelerated the car, his frightened expression clear.

"Slow down, buddy," Richard said, rather requested. "We are not in a hurry."

On the other hand, Ethan enjoyed the sensation of speed. "Come on, don't be a kid. I can drive it easily. So, tell me, where exactly are we headed now?"

"Let's go to the Museum of Science and Industry first," Richard suggested.

With that, they cruised through the city roads. Richard held onto the door handle with a white-knuckled grip while Ethan enjoyed the thrill of driving on Earth.

IN THE MUSEUM

The Museum of Science and Industry was a sign of progress to human ingenuity. With childlike curiosity, Ethan marveled at the exhibits, particularly the colossal planes hanging from the ceiling.

"So, these humongous things you call 'planes' are used to transport large numbers of people from one city to another through the air? Seriously?" Ethan asked.

Richard nodded, saying, "Yes, that's precisely what they do."

"Well, we don't have these in Cyberia. We rely on our cars for travel."

"That's because your world is quite different from ours."

"I don't think there's much difference."

"Ethan, according to my observations, Cyberia is certainly as vast as Chicago."

"That's what I said. It's as expansive as your world," Ethan replied confidently.

Richard clarified, "No, Ethan. Chicago isn't our entire world; it is just one city among countless others. There are hundreds of cities in this country and possibly thousands or even millions across the globe."

Ethan's eyes widened in astonishment. "Wow, I had no idea about that."

"That's precisely why I brought you here. I wanted you to gain a deeper understanding of our world."

Ethan gestured towards a massive plane-like object equipped with weaponry. "And what's that?"

"That's a Heli-Carrier."

"Oh, what's it used for?"

"It is a military vessel. In times of war, hundreds of soldiers' board these carriers to launch attacks on the enemy, fully equipped with weapons."

"And how powerful are they?"

"If two or three of these carriers were to be deployed together, they could potentially obliterate entire cities. What you see here is a relatively primitive version. The modern ones are significantly more advanced."

Ethan nodded in acknowledgment. "Okay, now that is truly impressive. It seems your world knows a great deal about military power and weaponry."

Richard agreed, saying, "Yes, our world has been through two world wars, both of which were

exceptionally brutal. While we now strive for peace, the possibility of conflict always looms.”

Ethan sympathized, “That’s indeed a somber history. In Cyberia, we never focused on such matters because our world was designed to be a peaceful one. The Maker of Cyberia never intended for its people to witness war. But then the Revenants happened.”

“You see, my friend, where there is good, there will always be the presence of bad. These are natural forces that balance each other out. Eliminating one factor would disrupt the equilibrium of nature.”

“Agreed! You’re absolutely right.”

They continued to explore the museum, and as the day passed, Richard and Ethan took to the streets of the city. They visited various landmarks, all while strengthening their bond.

As the sun was about to set, they ventured into a lively nightclub, ready to experience another facet of Earth’s diverse culture.

IN THE CLUB

The ambiance had warmth from the different colors of glow over the bar counter where Ethan and Richard sat. The songs were playing in a mix, while people were enjoying their drinks, and some were dancing on the floor. Glasses of various cocktails reflected the nightlife of Earth for Ethan. He leaned in, curious about Richard's life.

"So?" Ethan asked.

"So, what?"

"What's the plan?"

"I have planned everything for tomorrow. Today is just the party day."

"I wasn't talking about tomorrow, stupid."

Richard was puzzled. "Then what?"

Ethan dove deeper, his voice carrying a hint of concern, "What are your plans for the future? Don't you want to get married at some point in time?"

Why do married people push for others' marriages all the time? Do they really want them to be trapped as they are? Richard thought.

Richard contemplated the question, saying, "Well, honestly, I have never thought about it. Since my childhood, I have always been busy with my studies, my research, and my work."

"But what after that? You are getting old now. You can't live your entire life alone like this."

"I know. Maybe in the coming future, I will think about it."

"In the coming future? Are you crazy? I mean, look at yourself, you are 30 already, right?"

"32, actually," Richard corrected.

"So what future are you talking about? Brother, right now is the only time you have. You can't be young forever."

Richard smiled sarcastically. "Not now, but maybe *someday*. Science has its own miracles. There are secrets we don't understand now, but one day we surely will, and that day, who knows, maybe we can be young for a longer time, or maybe forever."

"You and your science. I think you should get married to science itself."

Richard chuckled, raising his glass. "I already am."

Ethan noticed a girl sitting across the bar counter, looking at Richard. He signaled to Richard, who followed his gaze, their eyes meeting the stranger's.

With silent gestures, Ethan pointed out the girl to Richard.

"What?" Richard asked.

"You have a chance. Take it. What else?"

Richard hesitated. "Absolutely not. I am not good with these things."

As mischievous as he can be, Ethan urged, "Oh, come on. Take a shot and go approach that girl."

Richard shook his head. "No, Ethan. I'll mess it up. Let's not do this."

Ethan teased, saying, "See, if you are not going there, I will. I will say to that girl that my friend here is in love with you."

"You will certainly not do anything like that, okay?"

"You going or not?"

"No!"

Undeterred, Ethan stood up and walked towards the girl.

"Hey! Wait!" Richard called out, somewhat exasperated.

By then, Ethan had already reached the girl. He initiated the conversation with a friendly greeting. "Hey."

The girl responded with a warm smile. "Hi."

Ethan introduced himself. "I am Ethan, and you?"

"Emma."

"Emma! Nice meeting you."

Meanwhile, Richard arrived, ready to intervene if needed.

Ethan, being the mischievous friend, continued the conversation. "Actually, my friend Richard here," he said, pointing towards Richard, "wanted to have a dance with you."

Emma responded with a friendly smile, showing no discomfort.

Richard interfered. "Uhh! I can explain, it's not like that—"

"Sure, Richard. It's nice meeting you. Come on, let's dance," Emma said. Richard observed her ever-cute smile.

"Really?" Richard asked, baffled by the comfort Emma showed.

"Yeah, sure," Emma said.

Emma led Richard to the dance floor, and Ethan, seeing his friend's hesitation, encouraged him with a confident nod. Richard and Emma began dancing, enjoying each other's company and the music.

Meanwhile, Ethan noticed Emma's friend, who was standing nearby, smiling at him with genuine interest. She blushed, her smile growing brighter.

The girl said, "I think now that they are enjoying themselves, we could hit the dance floor too."

As she began to touch Ethan's shoulders, he took a step back and gently grasped her hand to halt her advances.

"Thanks for the offer, but I am married, you know. My wife will beat me up if she found out about this."

The girl, still hopeful, tried to persuade him.

"Your wife will never find out anything about this."

"Nothing against you, but I won't be able to forget that my wife is waiting for me." To further solidify his excuse, Ethan took out his phone and pretended to receive a call. "Oh, it's her. See, she even knows whenever I miss her."

Ethan faked the call conversation, "Hey honey ... I too missed you so much," leaving the girl annoyed and walking away in response.

It's not what you do in their presence but it's what you do in their absence defines loyalty. And Ethan was a superb example of that.

Ethan watched as Richard and Emma danced, while he remained on the sidelines, glad to see his friend having a good time.

AFTER FEW HOURS AT MIDNIGHT

Ethan steered the wheel through the city roads, while Richard and Emma enjoyed each other's company in the back seat. Their kisses and embraces spoke of everything. There was this spark that had ignited after their dance at the club.

Ethan smiled as he glanced at them through the rear-view mirror.

Upon reaching Richard's home, the couple exited the car. Their affectionate gestures clearly portrayed their intentions for the evening. They hurriedly made their way inside, and the bedroom door was soon locked behind them.

Amused by his friend's sudden romantic switch, Ethan chuckled to himself as he entered the living room. Feeling quite content with the evening's events, he gradually drifted off to sleep on the sofa, still smiling at the delightful twist of fate.

THE NEXT MORNING

It was Ethan who was up this time.

“Wake up...!!!” Ethan exclaimed.

Richard responded with a sleepy murmur,
“What?”

“Wake up ... It’s almost noon, we are late,” Ethan urged. “You said you had plans for today, right?”

Reluctant to leave his dreams behind, Richard mumbled, “Let me sleep a bit more, Emma.”

Ethan grabbed a pillow and swung it at Richard, waking him up furious.

“What ... What happened?”

“Wake up, it is too late, and I have prepared breakfast. Or brunch, or whatever you call it here.”

Rubbing his eyes, Richard asked, “Where’s Emma?”

Ethan replied in a casual calm, “She got up early and left.”

“Oh,” Richard reacted, surprised and confused.

Ethan simply nodded. "Yes."

Richard groaned. "I'm feeling very tired. My body is aching."

"After what she told me, I can totally understand your situation."

Suddenly, Richard became more alert. "Told you what?"

"Everything that happened," Ethan said, grinning mischievously.

"What exactly did she tell you?"

Ethan chuckled. "Nothing! Leave all this, let's go. You said you have plans, right?"

"Oh yes, what's the time? Let's get ready and leave."

"But what's the plan for the day?"

A wicked smile played on Richard's lips. "Today, we are going to have a lot of fun."

They ate sandwiches and omelette and had a cup of coffee each before getting ready as fast as they could and left their apartment. Richard decided to take the wheel of the car this time.

"So, you are not afraid of heights or anything, right?" Richard asked with mischief in his voice.

Ethan shrugged confidently. "Nope, I drive a flying car. Why would I be afraid of heights?"

Richard smiled, saying, "We will see."

Soon, Richard parked the car. Ethan looked around, confused. The place was nothing like he had ever seen before. It was a vast amusement park with towering roller-coaster rides and thrilling adventure sports. It was completely opposite to Cyberia, where such attractions didn't exist.

"What is this place?" Ethan asked, puzzled.

"Fun!" Richard Replied.

Richard wasted no time in taking Ethan on a roller-coaster ride, despite his friend's bewilderment.

Ethan voiced his confusion, "I don't understand what this is."

"You will see. You said you are not afraid of heights, right?"

Ethan nodded confidently. "Yes, of course, I did say that."

As the roller-coaster launched into motion, Ethan's confidence quickly turned to panic, and he screamed in terror. "WHAT THE HELL IS THIS!!! STOP THIS OR I WILL DIE!!!" he yelled.

On the other side, Richard laughed with a slightly sinister edge.

Desperate, Ethan cried out, "Stop this!"

Richard taunted him, "But you said you weren't afraid of heights."

After the ups and downs of the roller-coaster, they came out of the ride. Ethan was shaken. He confessed, "Seriously, brother, that was the most horrific thing I have ever tried in my life."

Richard laughed out loud. He quickly stopped when he saw Ethan's annoyance. "Okay, sorry."

Ethan sighed, and said, "So, what's next?"

Richard led Ethan to various adventure sports, including go-karting, rock climbing, and a paintball shootout. They spent the entire day enjoying the thrilling activities at the amusement

park. As the sun began to dip below the horizon, they left the park.

Ethan's face had a child-like excitement. No one could tell he is a father of two.

"This place was a hell of a lot of fun," Ethan declared. "I must suggest Ryan that we should have something like this in Cyberia too."

Richard smirked, having kept his surprise a secret. "Told you we were going to have a lot of fun today."

Ethan grinned back. "Yeah. Thank you so much for this amazing day. But I am a bit tired now. Can we go to a peaceful place and just sit for a while?"

Richard nodded knowingly. "I know just the place."

Richard started the car, and steered it towards a magnificent mountain cliff. The golden rays of the setting sun cast a mesmerizing view that was nothing short of heaven itself.

As the car went up the cliff, Richard expertly parked it beneath a towering windmill. With two beers in hand, Ethan and Richard stepped out of

the car. The rays of the setting sun glowing on their faces.

"Wow. This view is really awesome," Ethan said.

Richard gave a knowing smile.

They settled down on the car's bonnet, their eyes on the sky as the sun descended.

"When I was a little kid, my dad used to bring me here. We used to just sit here, and he used to tell me some of his stories," Richard said.

"What about your mom?"

"She died when I was a kid."

"I am so sorry for that."

Richard nodded, his gaze distant. "It's alright. Death is the only certain truth of this world. When I was in college, my dad died too, in an accident. From then, I never visited this place because I was all alone by myself. I never had anyone whom I could call family."

Ethan placed a hand on Richard's shoulder, assuring, "But now you have. I am always there with you, brother. And if you need me anytime, anywhere, I promise I will be there."

Richard smiled. "I know, and thank you so much. That is the reason why I brought you here. I don't know if it's fate or whatever that took me to Cyberia and made me meet you people, but whatever it was, it was the best part of my life. Now, I feel that I am not alone, and I too have family and friends ... in the other world."

Ethan nodded in agreement. "Yes, you have. And thank you for bringing me here."

They sat in a peaceful silence, their eyes fixed on the horizon that had its final strokes of crimson and gold. In that serene moment, with the taste of beer on their lips and the breath-taking vista before them, they realized how strange and beautiful it is to have a family across worlds.

THAT NIGHT AT RICHARD'S HOUSE

Two days of laughter and adventure, and they had created memories that were precious for both of them.

However, it was time for Ethan to go back to his world.

Ethan and Richard stood in the same place where their journey had begun.

"Ethan," Richard began to speak with his voice of gratitude, "thank you so much for everything. These two days have been really amazing for me. I will never forget these moments. I am happy to have a brother like you."

"Likewise, brother. You hold a special place not only in my heart but many in Cyberia. I really want to stay. But I should get back to my world. Sarah and the kids must be waiting for me."

Understanding the responsibility that awaited Ethan, Richard nodded. "Yes, I understand. It's alright."

Ethan extended the tele-porter toward Richard. "Here, take this. It's yours."

Richard was taken aback. "What? Are you stupid? I made it for you. Keep it safe with yourself. And whenever I miss you, I will send a signal to it. Even if you miss me or Earth, use it and come here without any hesitation. My house coordinates are saved on this."

Ethan accepted the tele-porter with a grateful smile, realizing that it was more than just a device.

"It's not just me, even you can come to Cyberia whenever you want," Ethan said.

"I wish it was possible, but it doesn't work that way. After this travel, the portal can only be opened from inside Cyberia," Richard said.

"Why is that?" Ethan asked.

"It is because it takes a lot of energy to open a portal, and these devices cannot be charged without the stone being here in this world. For your way back, I just saved enough power in your tele-porter to get you back home. And it's good, I don't want these to get into wrong hands and reach Cyberia. You all have faced a lot of problems already. It's better for Cyberia to be out of reach of the outer world."

Ethan nodded. With the tele-porter in hand, he opened up a portal to Cyberia. Before stepping through, he hugged Richard and conveyed his emotions without words. Then, with a final wave, he disappeared through the portal.

As the portal closed behind Ethan, Richard returned to his everyday life. He made his way to his laptop, intending to catch up on his emails. Among the messages, one stood out - a communication from Mayden.

“Richard, where the hell were you?” the email read. “We thought you died like the others. Meet me tomorrow in the HQ ASAP.”

Richard closed his laptop and lay down on bed, his thoughts roaming from Cyberia to Earth until he drifted off to sleep.

IN CYBERIA

When Ethan returned to his house in Cyberia, he was greeted by Sarah and the kids.

Sarah instantly called Ryan and John to join them. “He is back. Just speed up the car and come here.”

It was a joyous reunion. He shared stories of his adventures on Earth with everyone, entertaining them with tales of the sights he had seen and the

experiences he had cherished during his short but unforgettable journey.

That night, after spending quality time with his family, he made his way to his bedroom. Nick and Edmund were already in bed. Ethan climbed in beside them, settling comfortably under the soft covers.

He began to recount the highlights of his Earth tour - the towering mountains, the thrilling amusement park, and, most importantly, the deep bonds he had formed with Richard.

Nick and Edmund listened with attention, their faces lighting up with fascination as they imagined the Earthly wonders Ethan described.

CHAPTER 7

A PERFECT STORM

ON EARTH

Things had returned to normal for the people of both worlds. The next morning, Richard made his way to the headquarters of GSRO. As he entered the building, he noticed expressions of shock and gasps of disbelief from the staff who had thought he was dead. However, Richard ignored the attention and strode through the corridors toward the conference room. Inside, he found Mayden seated at the head of the table, looking surprised and relieved as he greeted Richard.

"Oh God... you are here... finally," Mayden said, his relief palpable. "I have been waiting for you since you sent me that email."

Richard warmly smiled and replied, "Good to see you too. After so many days."

Mayden wasted no time in asking the questions that had been troubling him. "Yes. Where the hell were you? And how are you still alive?"

"I will tell you everything in detail. First, just lock the room and ask everyone not to disturb us. The things I'm going to tell you should remain confidential," Richard insisted.

Mayden nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation.

Once the room was secured, Richard and Mayden sat down, with the cups of hot coffee slowly turning cold on the table. Richard then began to recount his extraordinary journey to Cyberia. He described the world beyond the portal in vivid detail — the unique landscapes, the advanced technology, and the intense connections that he had built with the people there.

Mayden didn't interrupt Richard. He listened attentively, trying to absorb the incredible story, even though he couldn't fully grasp it.

"Well, it is shocking that there is a world out there in a different dimension which we have no idea about," Mayden admitted, "How big is it?"

"It is small, exponentially smaller than our world. Perhaps as big as a city in our world," Richard explained.

Mayden's excitement grew. "What! That is fascinating. We should have taken some samples from there. It would be nice if we interact with them; we can make them allies, help them with what they need, and they can help us too. We can share resources, knowledge, everything. This is as big as finding aliens for us. Everything we know about reality is going to change with this."

Richard sat in his chair, silent, his mind consumed with thoughts and possibilities.

"Richard! Are you even listening to me?" Mayden asked, concerned.

Richard blinked, coming back to the present. "Yes."

Mayden sensed the gravity of the situation and asked, "What are you thinking?"

"How many hell carriers do we have functional right now?" Richard asked, a well thought through plan ruling his mind.

Mayden was taken aback by the sudden shift in conversation. He hesitated for a moment before responding, "Umm! The big ones? I guess three, or the military should have more. Why?"

"And what about soldiers?"

"Enough for protection or destruction."

"And what about the Arsenal?"

Mayden grew increasingly puzzled and concerned. "For God's sake, can you tell me what's on your mind?"

Without hesitation, Richard projected the unthinkable, saying, "I am suggesting that we conquer Cyberia."

Mayden was shocked. "What! Are you out of your mind?"

"Just tell me, can we do it?"

"Yes, but why? Why the hell do you want to do it?"

"Think, Mayden. They have resources far beyond our time and technology we can't even dream of for decades. What could we achieve with all of it?"

We could create weapons, medicines, infrastructure that our world desperately needs.”

“But I don’t think—” Mayden paused as he saw Richard’s display of power, who used his ten ancient rings to unleash an energy blast against a wall.

“See what their technology can do,” Richard said, almost declaring. “Now imagine an Arsenal with this technology. No one will ever be a threat to our world, our country.”

However, Mayden couldn’t easily dismiss the ethical implications of Richard’s plan. He argued, “But Richard, there are people, children you are suggesting we kill.”

Richard justified his perspective. “Oh, come on, Mayden. It’s a tiny world, not even as big as our city. To build a better world, it takes sacrifices, and it’s a price I am willing to pay. It’s you who is thinking too much. The government will approve this in a minute. This is how the world works; if we want to develop and improve our world, we have to sacrifice Cyberia for it. We already lack resources and technology. And the government will surely pay a good price for our work.”

They kept silent for over a minute, both contemplating the possibilities. The fact that Richard had spoken about the bond he built with Cyberia a few minutes ago, and now projected a plan to exterminate them all, was shocking for Mayden. He realized that it was not an instant decision, and that Richard must have thought this through.

"If Richard has made his decision, then it is clearly for the good of our world," Mayden thought.

However, he was against the killing of innocent people. "But Richard, it's wrong," Mayden protested, "Think about your dad once, the work he did. He would have never done it."

Richard locked his eyes onto Mayden's as he defended his stance. "My dad gave his entire life to find a way to enhance the resources in this world. Remember the time he was working on self-sustaining energy sources? Now when we have finally found it, you are telling me to let it go. I always wanted to work like my father, and I wanted to fulfil his dream of enhancing the resources of this world. I am not going to let it go, whether you are with me on this or not."

Mayden took the cup of coffee in his hand but didn't drink it. His eyes were fixed on the cup, but his mind was engaged in an internal struggle. He wanted the resources of Cyberia, but the moral implications of their proposed course of action were weighing heavily on him. He was torn between his principles and his fear of the consequences of opposing Richard.

In the end, despite his reservations, Mayden reluctantly nodded in agreement. "Alright. So, what are we going to do?"

"Get me a meeting with the President, anyhow. Tell the higher-ranking officials that it's about the world's fate, and get me to him as soon as possible," Richard instructed with determination.

Mayden understood that they were venturing into uncharted territory, where ethics and ambition collided. It was an uncertain path, and the consequences of their actions would forever alter the course of their world's history.

IN CYBERIA

Days had passed with peace, and life had returned to normal. Ethan never stopped sharing stories of his tour to Earth. After the successful extraction of the Cyberium stone, there had been no reports of Revenant activity. Ryan worked tirelessly to address the day-to-day problems of the people, while John had received a well-deserved promotion. He now held the position of security head of the army, tasked with overseeing the protection of their world.

Meanwhile, Ethan had a dream he wanted to turn into reality. Inspired by the amusement park he had visited on Earth; he started a project to build a similar park in Cyberia. The park would offer thrilling rides, entertaining attractions, and a place for people to create memories.

Slowly and gradually, the amusement park took shape. It became a symbol of hope and a sign of the bond between the two worlds. Ethan continued to share his life with Sarah, and together, they raised their children in a world filled with wonder and possibilities. Like a warm blanket, happiness protected them from the cold.

One fine morning, the soft morning light entered through the curtains, casting a warm glow into their bedroom. Ethan woke up and noticed that Nick and Edmund were still sleeping beside him.

"I am lucky to have them," he said, smiling gratefully to the supreme power. He carefully slid out of bed, making sure not to disturb them, and walked his way out of the room toward the dining area, where he noticed an unexpected disturbance.

There, on the dinner table, lay his tele-porter, beeping. Confused, he picked it up and examined it closely, trying to find the source of the disturbance. It was a device he had grown accustomed to, but this sudden erratic behaviour left him perplexed.

Stirred from her sleep, Sarah made her way to the dining area, still sleepy. "What is it, Ethan?" she asked, curious and concerned.

Ethan furrowed his brow. "I don't know. This tele-porter, it's misbehaving."

He tried to silence the beeping, tapping it gently and fiddling with its controls. After a brief struggle, the beeping finally ended.

Ethan let out a sigh of relief. "Yes, now it's okay." Sarah smiled warmly at her husband. Ethan took a breath and added, "Well, Sarah, I'm going to take a walk near the lake. I'll be back in an hour or so."

Sarah nodded in understanding. "Okay, honey. Take care. I love you."

"Love you too, sweetheart," Ethan replied before heading out.

AT THE LAKE SIDE

As he strolled toward the lakeside, Ethan soaked in the peace and beauty of his home world. Settling into a chair, he relished the tranquility—a rare moment of respite from Cyberia's chaos and challenges.

Without warning, a man appeared. Dressed in a long coat and a hat that obscured his features, he took a seat beside Ethan on the same chair.

Ethan regarded the stranger with suspicion.

The man spoke with a calm, measured voice.
“Feels good, right? The peace in Cyberia.”

Though taken aback by the stranger’s sudden presence, Ethan offered a polite nod. “Yes, after a long time, it has been this peaceful.”

“Yes, but you have made a huge mistake.”

Curious, Ethan leaned closer. “Sorry?”

“You shouldn’t have believed Richard that easily.”

“Sorry, who are you? Do I know you?”

“Well, even if I tell you, you won’t believe me. So let it be.”

Clearly, Ethan wouldn’t entertain a word against his friend from the other world. He had formed a bond of brotherhood with Richard. But nothing meant more to him than the peace in Cyberia.

“I want to know, go on,” Ethan said.

The stranger introduced himself. “I am the *philosopher*, but people here used to call me *Phillips* a long time ago.”

“Wait, the philosopher is dead. Years ago, he —”

“Sure, I did die.”

Ethan's patience waned. "What nonsense are you talking, old man?"

"See, told you, you won't believe me."

Ethan's frustration mounted. "Just tell me what the hell you are talking about."

"See, you don't have time to understand things right now, but I just want to tell you this," Phillips paused, took a moment to closely look at Ethan, and continued, "*The prophecy I wrote back then stated that a man from another world would change the fate of Cyberia forever. But, Ethan, the man was never meant to be the saviour.*"

Ethan's eyes widened in astonishment. "What?"

"Hurry up, you don't have much time."

Before Ethan could learn more, he received a call from John.

"Hey, where are you?" John asked.

Eyes away from Phillips, Ethan replied, "Just taking a walk, John."

"Let's meet up in an hour."

"Sure," Ethan replied before ending the call.

Bringing his focus back to Phillips, Ethan asked, "Yes, so what were you saying?"

However, as Ethan turned his head back to the chair, the mysterious man had vanished without a trace. A feeling of eeriness left him with a sense of unease and curiosity. He headed straight to the king's mansion.

IN THE KING'S MANSION

John stood on one of the mansion's balconies, gazing into the distance, lost in thought. He noticed a strange movement in the sky and suddenly felt a chill. His instincts sharpened as he focused on the anomaly.

But before he could fully process what he had seen, his phone buzzed. Calm yet alert, he swiftly answered the call. The voice on the other end quivered with fear, sending a shiver down John's spine. "Sir, the radar!"

John's heart raced. "What happened?"

"We are under attack."

Before John could respond, he heard a deafening explosion, and the call abruptly cut off. "Oh, shit!"

In an instant, a missile struck the King's mansion, unleashing destruction. The force of the explosion rippled through the area, throwing everything into chaos.

On his way to the mansion, Ethan witnessed the explosion from a distance. He sprinted toward the source. He dodged Hell Carriers, helicopters, and planes raining gunfire and missiles upon the ground.

With his combat suit donned, Ethan took swift action. He rushed to aid those caught in the aftermath of the attack, pulling them from the wreckage and debris.

Amidst the chaos, he called Sarah with concern. "Sarah, where are you?"

"I'm in the house with the kids. What's happening? I saw the explosion. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. We're under attack. Just keep yourself and the kids safe and don't leave the house. I'll be right back."

“Please be safe,” Sarah said, growing increasingly worried about her husband, children, and the fate of Cyberia.

Meanwhile, John was trapped beneath the wreckage of the mansion, struggling to free himself. It was then that he heard a familiar voice. “John, are you okay?”

John turned to see Ryan, who had flown in to help. With Ryan’s assistance, John managed to extricate himself from the debris.

“What the hell is happening?” John asked.

Devastated, Ryan replied, “We are under attack.”

John took a moment to process the situation before speaking, “This cavalry, it’s not from this world.”

Ryan nodded gravely. “I know. We are being attacked by Earth.”

John’s disbelief turned to anger and betrayal as he connected the dots. “What! It’s Richard, he’s behind all this. He’s the only one who had the tele-porter. He betrayed us.”

"I'm afraid it's true, John. But he's not the one who opened the portal. The portal can only be opened from inside Cyberia, remember?"

"What? Then who is it?"

"Richard was not the only one with a teleporter."

John struggled to accept what he was hearing. "What? This can't be. I don't believe you. This can never happen."

"I know it's hard to believe, but I checked, and it was Ethan. He... he too betrayed us."

"How do you know? How can you be so sure?"

"Sarah told me this. From the day he was back from Earth, he was acting weird. And today, just before the attack, in the morning, Sarah saw him using his tele-porter."

John stood his ground, trying to understand.

Ryan continued with regret. "And then, when I personally checked, I found out that the portal was opened by his tele-porter itself."

The revelation left John shocked and seething with anger. The betrayal of someone he had trusted had ignited a furious fire within him.

With a mix of rage and disbelief, John demanded, "Where is he?"

CHAPTER 8

NOT EVERYONE HAS A HAPPY ENDING

It was chaos all around. John was furious when he learnt about Ethan's tele-porter. He grappled with a mix of fear and frustration within his mind.

As soldiers from Earth landed on Cyberia, people began to fear that the end was near. They became victims of the soldiers, who attacked and killed them. Their once peaceful land was now transformed into a nightmarish massacre right before their eyes.

Sarah felt chills coursing through her, but she remained focused on keeping Nick and Edmund safe from harm. While she pondered what to do next, Ryan soared through the skies and landed beside her.

Her voice trembling with fear and confusion, Sarah asked, "Ryan, what is happening?"

Ryan scanned their surroundings for any signs of danger. "Sarah, we don't have time to discuss anything right now."

Concerned, Ryan gently handed Sam over to her. "Keep him safe."

Sarah clutched Sam close, saying, "Yes, of course, but—"

"Just come with me. I will take you somewhere safe."

With a firm yet gentle hand, he guided Sarah and the children toward safety. Eventually, they reached a hidden safe house.

"Stay here and don't go anywhere else, okay?" Ryan said, looking at Sarah and the children, his voice low and serious.

Inside the safe house, the caretaker appeared to fulfil his duty. Ryan instructed the caretaker, "You, protect them with your life."

Loyal towards the safety of Cyberia, the caretaker nodded solemnly. "Yes, my king."

Ryan's mission was far from over. He had to join his people to save Cyberia. With a final glance at

Sarah and the children, he took to the skies once more and disappeared.

Near the Well of Damned Souls, Ethan found himself locked in a desperate struggle. Earth's army had blocked his path, forcing him to fight his way through them.

John approached Ethan with blazing anger. Their eyes met. Ethan sensed something was wrong, so he cautiously walked toward John, who mirrored his steps, but with fury.

"John," Ethan said with concern, "what's happening? Is everyone okay? Where is Ryan?"

But before Ethan could receive an answer, John punched him in the face so hard that the force of the blow sent him backward. Shocked, Ethan touched his bruised cheek.

"Why are you doing this?" Ethan protested. "What happened?"

"You traitor!" John accused Ethan in anger. He started beating Ethan, saying, "You did this."

Ethan tried to defend himself, but he couldn't understand what was happening. He stepped

backward and pleaded, "What are you saying, John? How could I do this?"

But John was in no mood to forgive him. He shouted, "The portal was opened by your teleporter!"

Ethan recalled the faint beeping of the tele-porter earlier in the day. But before he could piece together the puzzle, John continued his brutal assault, leaving no room for conversation.

Battered and confused, Ethan gasped for breath. "John, listen to me! It wasn't me. I can explain."

"SHUT UP!" John bellowed in a fit of rage.

John unleashed all his anger through his fists, elbows, and legs, striking Ethan relentlessly. Meanwhile, Ethan attempted to defend himself against his misunderstood friend.

"You were the one who got too friendly with Richard," John accused, punching Ethan in the stomach. "You went to Earth with him. How much did he pay you? For how much did you sell Cyberia?"

In a moment of frustration, Ethan retaliated with a powerful punch that struck John square in the face.

"I SAID I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING!" Ethan shouted.

However, John refused to believe him. Anger clouded his judgment, and he continued to attack, letting his fists do the talking.

On the other side of the ground, as the helicopters touched the ground, Richard landed on a distant cliff from where he was witnessing everything. His eyes were cold and calculating, untouched by the horrors.

Meanwhile, far from Ethan and John, Ryan's sharp gaze caught sight of Richard's arrival. He swiftly landed before Richard, saying, "Richard! What did you do?"

Richard, however, remained composed. He looked at Ryan, his lips curving into a sinister smile, and responded cryptically, "Exactly what *our* plan was."

Ryan took a step closer to Richard. Strangely, they shook hands. And there ... the reality was realized.

“Leader of the Revenants, Ryan, we have done it,” Richard said, smiling.

Ryan smiled back, a sinister grin spreading across his face.

It was long ago, during a confrontation between Ethan, Ryan, and John’s father, that the Devil’s Mask had been shattered. In that chaos, Ryan was possessed by a fragment of the mask’s malevolent soul. He had been hiding his true identity all along, playing his role as the king of Cyberia, while harbouring a dark ambition to conquer Earth. To achieve this goal, he had made a pact with Richard when they met at the cyberium stone extraction. Every step of their plan was executed flawlessly.

Returning to the present, Richard and Ryan continued their conversation.

“I have dropped Sam with the caretaker at the safe house. Richard, make sure that—”

Richard cut Ryan off mid-sentence, saying, “Yes, I know. I have addressed my soldiers not to harm

your son. He will be safe, don't worry. What about Ethan? He will surely try to stop us."

Ryan remained unshaken as he replied, "Right now, John is taking care of him. I lied to John, and seems he fell for it. He will kill Ethan. If he fails, I am there to handle it. Your task is to secure the Cyberium Stone and transport it to Earth."

"As you say," Richard said, giving an obedient nod.

Richard got onto his mission while Ryan flew back to take care of other matters.

Ethan and John stood close to the edge of the Well of Damned Souls. The well's dark abyss served as a chilling reminder of the horrors that lay within.

Desperate to reach his friend, Ethan called out, "John, please, just listen to me for a minute."

"Shut up," John spat out, advancing ahead in anger, poised to hurt Ethan for his betrayal.

Ethan's heart weighed heavy with sorrow and regret. He couldn't bear to harm his friend. "John, please, stop," he pleaded desperately.

But John was so consumed by his anger and blinded by fury that he stumbled and fell into the gaping maw of the Well of Damned Souls.

“JOHN!” Ethan cried out with disbelief, feeling utterly helpless as he watched his friend vanish into the abyss, forever lost in its depths.

Ethan collapsed to his knees, tears welling in his eyes. He couldn’t believe what had just happened. Overwhelmed by his emotions, he wailed, feeling remorse for failing to see the truth unfolding before him.

“Why didn’t I understand who the true puppet master behind all of this was?” Ethan spoke to himself, rising to his feet. He knew then that Richard was the orchestrator of this sinister plot.

Gathering his emotions, Ethan set out towards his goal. The loss of his friend became a driving force, propelling him forward to confront Richard and uncover the truth behind the chaos that had torn their world apart.

Meanwhile, in the safe house, Sarah shielded the children from the looming threat outside. The sound of soldiers approaching echoed ominously.

A few of the soldiers found their hiding spot, but Sarah swiftly drew her white sword. With a heavy weight of responsibility upon her shoulders, she engaged the attackers alone, her movements swift and decisive as she fought to protect the children with the white sword in hand.

But as the battle raged on, the odds began to stack against them. More soldiers flooded into the room. With a surge of energy, Nick and Edmund tapped into abilities they had only just begun to understand.

Nick's powers manifested in bolts of brilliant light, striking down the advancing soldiers. Meanwhile, Edmund channeled his unique abilities, creating a protective barrier of energy. Caught off guard by this unexpected display of power, the soldiers faltered.

Together, Sarah, Nick, and Edmund fought bravely while a frightened Sam escaped from the safe house, running to look for his dad.

Finally, the last of the attackers were driven back. Sarah, still clutching the white sword, turned to her young boys and reassured them with a smile.

They knew they had faced adversity together and emerged victorious.

"Where is Sam?" Sarah asked, noticing that the eldest one was not around.

Nick and Edmund looked at each other and then at the caretaker. None of them had an answer.

Sarah got anxious and told the caretaker, "Look after Nick and Edmund."

The caretaker nodded, and Sarah immediately left the safe house to look for Sam.

With a mix of anger, betrayal, and determination, Ethan approached Richard, the mastermind behind the chaos.

"Richard!" Ethan's voice rang out like a war cry.

Richard turned to face his former ally with a smirk. "Oh, hey, Ethan," he responded casually, as though they were meeting for a leisurely conversation. "Did you like my surprise?"

Ethan channeled his powers and formed a sword from pure energy, his intent clear as he advanced toward Richard.

But Richard, aware of Ethan's abilities, was prepared. With a flourish, he summoned the power of the ten mystical rings adorning his fingers. Time seemed to slow as he effortlessly dodged Ethan's attack, his agility leaving Ethan stunned.

Once brothers in arms, Ethan and Richard now clashed violently.

"I trusted you. I thought we were brothers," Ethan said, his voice filled with betrayal.

"Next time, don't trust anyone so easily, brother," Richard mocked, his tone dripping with disdain.

Ethan's fury intensified as their battle escalated, becoming not only a fight of powers but also a battle of emotions. However, despite Ethan's efforts, it became increasingly evident that Richard's mastery over his ten mystical rings granted him a significant advantage. Ethan found himself on the receiving end of devastating blows, leaving him heavily injured and battered.

As the battle neared its end, Richard delivered a devastating blow that sent Ethan sprawling to the

ground. Pain seared through his body, and he struggled to rise to his feet.

Just when Ethan felt his hope slipping away, Ryan descended from above and landed near the fallen combatants.

Ethan turned to Ryan desperation evident in his eyes. "Brother! It's him. Richard is the one behind all this. Help me."

Ryan slowly approached Ethan, and in that moment, Ethan believed that his ally had come to his aid in his darkest hour.

Suddenly, without warning, Ryan revealed his true intentions.

He plunged a knife into Ethan's already injured body, causing Ethan to cry out in agony.

"Ryan, what have you done..." Ethan gasped, trying to comprehend the betrayal unfolding before him. Such treachery was beyond anything he could have imagined, even in his darkest nightmares.

A cold and heartless expression crossed Ryan's face as he replied, "What did you expect? That I would save you? After you killed our master?"

“What?” Ethan’s voice trembled with shock.

Ryan’s eyes turned black, devoid of any humanity, revealing the truth that he too had become possessed by a malevolent soul.

“You’re one of them too?” Ethan gasped; disbelief evident in his trembling voice.

Ryan scoffed at Ethan’s incredulity. “I’m not one of them, you fool. I am their leader, their master. I orchestrated everything from the very beginning, from the day you shattered our mask. And now, we will escape this world and conquer a realm far greater than Cyberia.”

Ethan could only watch in horror as the world he had known crumbled around him, replaced by a reality where the lines between friend and foe had been blurred.

Despite his injuries, he refused to yield. With sheer determination, he pushed himself to his feet and declared, “I will not let you do it. I will stop both of you.”

His hands trembling, Ethan withdrew the knife from his body—the very weapon that had been plunged into him by the one he had once called

brother. He quickly channeled his powers, transforming it into a sword and shield.

Richard and Ryan exchanged a knowing glance, and without further words, they attacked Ethan.

Ethan fought with all his might, parrying blows, and launching counterattacks with precision and skill. His sword and shield moved in a fluid dance.

However, as the battle raged on, Ethan's injuries began to take their toll. His movements grew sluggish, his breaths labored, and his vision blurred with pain. Richard and Ryan exploited his weakness, targeting his wounds with ruthless efficiency.

Despite his best efforts, Ethan found himself overpowered by the combined might of his former allies turned enemies. With one last effort, he fought back with every ounce of his being, but it was all in vain. His body gave out, and he collapsed to the ground.

"So, this was it, brother?" Ryan taunted. "That's all you've got?"

Richard laughed sinisterly. "Let's finish him."

As cold as they could be, Ryan and Richard advanced on the fallen hero. But just as they closed in, Sarah emerged from the shadows. Her husband was lying on ground, injured, because two of their closest people betrayed them.

With her white sword in hand, she stepped forward and lunged at Richard, her sword piercing through his chest with a vengeance that left no room for mercy.

"Take this, you piece of shit!" Sarah exclaimed as she delivered the killing blow.

Richard's eyes widened in shock and pain as he fell lifeless to the ground.

Consumed by rage at the loss of his ally, Ryan attacked Sarah. She met his onslaught with swift and precise movements, but Ryan's strength and fury proved too much for her to withstand. With brutal force, he seized her and impaled her with her own sword, leaving her gasping for breath as blood oozed from her wound.

"NO! Sarah!" Ethan cried out in pain and anguish.

"Ethan!" Sarah managed to utter as she lay wounded and bleeding.

Unable to remain passive any longer, Ethan summoned an inner strength that helped him rise to his feet. With swift determination, he grabbed Ryan's neck from behind and, with a single motion, snapped it, ending Ryan's life. He then rushed to Sarah's side, who was struggling to breathe as her strength faded with each passing moment.

Ethan knelt by her side and gently cradled Sarah's head on his lap, tears streaming down his face as he looked upon the love of his life, wounded and fading before him.

"Sarah, are you okay?" Ethan asked, his voice choked with emotion.

"Ethan," Sarah whispered weakly.

Ethan pressed his palms against her wound, attempting to staunch the flow of blood, his tears falling upon her in a mixture of pain and sorrow.

"Sarah, just hold on tightly," he pleaded. "I'll get you help."

Sarah looked into Ethan's eyes and gently shook her head, silently conveying the truth that she knew she would not survive.

Ethan examined the deep wound, his heart breaking as he realized the gravity of the situation. "Sarah, please, let me try."

"Shhh! Just stay with me for a while," Sarah whispered, her voice fragile. "And don't go anywhere. Please, I just want to see you for the last time."

Ethan couldn't find the words to reply. He simply cried and cried.

"Shhh! It's not your fault, honey," Sarah reassured him.

"Yes, it is," Ethan sobbed. "All of this is. I put you and the children—" He paused, panic creeping into his voice. "Sarah, where are the kids?"

"They are safe with the caretaker of the safe house."

"I need to go get them."

Sarah tightened her grip on Ethan's hand, pleading with him to stay by her side. "Stay here," she urged. "They will be safe now. Your tele-porter, the one you left on the dinner table—"

"You sent them to Earth?"

"I told the caretaker to take them to Earth and hide them in a safe place."

Ethan's own wounds felt deeper than ever. Fighting through his pain, he lay beside Sarah, weeping and holding her hand tightly. "I am so sorry," he whispered.

"I am proud of you for who you are. I wish our kids would become like you one day. I love—"

Sarah's voice faltered, and her eyes grew dim. With a final exhale, she departed from the world they had fought so hard to protect.

"I know, honey. I love you too."

Ethan gently closed her eyes and kissed her forehead. He glanced across the ruins of his homeland, once vibrant but now reduced to rubble. The city, once alive with energy, now lay in ruins.

Ethan had lost his wife. He had lost his friends. He had lost Cyberia.

The pain from his wounds surged through him as he struggled to draw breath. Tears blurred his vision, and exhaustion overwhelmed him. Ethan closed his eyes one last time. The sounds of

destruction faded, and he surrendered to the inevitable. His breaths grew shallow, and his body weakened, until finally, he too succumbed to the darkness that enveloped Cyberia.

Ethan joined his wife and friends in eternal rest.

IN THE SAFE HOUSE

Sam returned on his own after a while. He was scared than ever. Nick and Edmund calmed him down.

“Stick with us, Sam. Don’t go anywhere. It’s danger outside,” Nick said.

“But where is mom? Edmund asked. She went out to search for him.”

“Shhh! Be really quiet, kids. Your mother can defend herself. Don’t worry about her,” the caretaker whispered urgently, his eyes darting around the room.

Though the footsteps of Earth’s soldiers echoed nearby, the caretaker ensured the children remained out of sight.

But the soldiers eventually found the caretaker and launched a brutal attack. He fought valiantly to protect the young ones. Realizing time was running out, he made a quick decision.

"I can't wait for them," he muttered to himself. Gathering Nick, Edmund, and Sam close, he handed the tele-porter to Sam. "Use this to escape with your brothers."

Sam nodded, clutching the device tightly, his fear palpable. Suddenly, a group of soldiers closed in on them from the shadows. Without hesitation, the caretaker stepped forward to confront them. Though outnumbered and outgunned, he put up a fierce fight. But despite his efforts, he was eventually overpowered by their force.

"Run, kids!" the caretaker urged, "I'll hold them off."

In the next minute, the soldiers silenced the caretaker with a fatal blow. His sacrifice, however, had not been in vain, as it bought the children precious time to prepare for escape. But Sam stumbled and fell upon the floor, twisting his ankle.

“Sam, come on, get up,” Nick urged. “We have to go.”

With neither Ethan and Sarah, nor John by their side, and the caretaker now fallen, the children felt utterly helpless. They had no idea about the betrayal by Ryan and Richard, which had cost so many lives.

In that particular moment, an unexpected saviour emerged in the form of a mysterious man, extending his hand towards Sam.

Identifying himself as the philosopher, he helped Sam to his feet, despite the discomfort caused by his injured ankle.

Curious and desperate, Nick questioned the stranger, “Who are you?”

With a warm smile, the philosopher responded, “You are too young to know anything that you seek, Nick. But one day, you will.”

Edmund, also seeking reassurance, inquired, “But can you help us?”

The philosopher nodded reassuringly. “Yes, my dear boy, that’s why I am here. Come, we must go.”

Guiding the children to a concealed location far from the soldiers, the philosopher took possession of the tele-porter and conjured a portal to Earth. "Hurry, kids, step through."

One by one, Nick, Edmund, and Sam entered the portal, leaving behind the desolation of Cyberia. As the philosopher turned for a final glimpse at the ravaged world, he felt sorry for the tragic downfall of what had once been a vibrant realm.

ON EARTH

After arriving on Earth through the portal, Nick, Edmund, and Sam, accompanied by the philosopher, walked through the busy streets of Chicago in a state of wonder. The towering skyscrapers and unfamiliar sights left them wide-eyed with amazement.

The philosopher led the way with confidence, guiding them through the streets as if he knew every corner. In contrast, the children took hesitant glances around, trying to understand the vastness of this new world.

Their journey led them to the entrance gate of an establishment named Sky reach Home, an orphanage.

“Kids, we have reached. Just wait here,” the philosopher said.

Concerned, Sam asked, “Are you just going to leave us here like this?”

Kneeling before them, the philosopher reassured, “No, I will always be there with you. But for now, you need to stay here. The people at Sky reach Home will take good care of you, don’t worry.”

Nick questioned, “Will you ever come back?”

With a faint smile and eyes full of promise, the philosopher replied, “Sooner than you expect, dear boy.”

With that, the philosopher rose up to his feet and departed, blending into the busy crowd on streets. The children stood there, feeling a sense of uncertainty.

Soon, the employees of Sky reach Home noticed the children at the entrance. With compassion

and kindness, they welcomed them into their care.

Outside the orphanage, the philosopher walked the streets before silently vanishing into thin air, leaving the fate of Nick, Edmund, and Sam unknown. What felt like an end to all three of them, they were unaware that it was the *GENESIS* of something so huge, they could've never imagined.