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SPECTRUM

The Not Too Distant Future...

Washington, D.C. 2057

Crowds filled the streets as the President Of The United States was preparing to sign a historic peace agreement to take the first steps towards a universal world government. The nations of the world had finally reached an agreement where each country would share in the responsibility of advancing the planet and it's various species. President Carrera was surrounded by her security; standing with several other world leaders on a stage set up so thousands of public spectators could watch. News crews from all around the world were watching the events on the screen, looking forward to the official announcements.

Members of all species raised up the universally accepted flag that was to represent the new world government. It was a white flag with smaller versions of the more prominent countries flags surrounding the border and a picture of the Earth in the middle. Excitement seemed to be at a fevered pitch as the crowd cheered before them.

Most of the rooftops were empty, having been cleared by security forces. One contained a single cloaked individual, with a long case in her hands. At one point she had been known as Lauren Rivers. She had a name, a family, and a history. It had all been taken from her, and now she was simply called Blue. Her memory suppressed, she now functioned only on instructions from her operator. For now, that was a cacomistle named Murdock.

Lauren opened the case in front of her and began to assemble a long-range sniper rifle. She lifted her ears as she heard what might be security approaching to clear the roof. She left the rifle where it lay and quickly ran behind one of the many hiding places on this very old rooftop. The statues and other such things provided significant cover. After a few moments, four security men arrived on the top of the rooftop.

"We heard movement on this rooftop from one of the satellites, find whoever is up here and take them into custody," the lead agent said. The lead agent's name was Kazerthan Zeal, a fox-dragon hybrid with reddish fur and backwards facing white horns. He had been tasked with rooftop security for the peace conference, which meant that every roof in the area had to be cleared before the proceedings could begin. They were on their last roof in their search grid when the satellites had detected what looked like a person. Kazerthan had acted quickly and ordered his men up there to secure the potential security breach.

"Yes, sir," one of the junior agents replied. They began to spread out and search the roof, their guns ready and their eyes alert. The youngest agent, a young bull, quietly

crept along with his gun outstretched. He did not see the attack coming as a slender hoof kicked him in the face and thrust his arm down on her knee. His gun slid away from him and before he could even go so far as to call for help, Blue had already struck him in the throat removing his ability to speak. As the bull gagged and struggled to breathe, let alone speak, he felt her hoof spin across his jaw and fell into unconsciousness. Blue disappeared from view and took cover, listening carefully for the other agents. She climbed up on top of the doorway to the roof and stayed low, spotting the second agent against the edge of the building. Quietly and quickly she dropped down and rushed towards him, intending to take him down as swiftly as she had the first agent.

Kazerthan stopped as he spotted what he believed to be the unconscious body of his youngest man. He leaned down to check his pulse and confirmed he was still alive. "All agents, we have a man down. Watch yourselves, whoever we're dealing with clearly has training." The fox-dragon tilted his head to listen for sounds, only hearing the muffled scream of another of his agents. He whirled around to scan his surroundings, seeing no one. His mind reeled to come to terms with the fact that two of his men had been taken down with no witnesses on this rooftop. He reached for his radio and was about to signal for backup when he felt his wrist being twisted. He screamed in pain as the radio dropped from his hand, and a stomp from Blue's hoof crushed it beyond the point of functionality. He barely had time to look at the demolished remains of his radio before he raised his hands to defend himself.

He took a fraction of a second to memorize her description. She was a female zebra, mid twenties, well-built, no facial stripes, and a mark of blue hair. The fox-dragon hybrid blocked her first hit, striking her across the face with his closed fist. Blue appeared to barely suffer any ill effects from his strike, and rushed at him. He dodged and pushed her past him into one of the statues. "Who are you?" he asked. The hybrid doubted he would get a response, but he had a fair idea why she was here.

Blue rushed at him a second time. She landed a kick square in his chest that sent him sliding back several feet. He barely had time to roll out of the way before she leapt and dropped both hooves on the spot he had just been laying in. He heard the clack of her hooves for a second before she kicked him in the head with a powerful kick. He felt himself become dizzy and struggled to remain conscious. The zebra mare punched him hard across the face and thrust her knee into his chest before she removed his gun and emptied the clip from it.

The zebra removed the clip and tossed the weapon over the side of the building. She kicked Kazerthan once more in the chest to be certain he would not be in any shape to stand up, and gave him a strong strike to the throat. He gasped for air, his body refusing to respond as his mind screamed for him to do something to stop her. He was paralyzed, his voice robbed from him and his body aching with pain. His wings weakly flapped as he struggled to get any part of his body to move.

Blue returned to her sniper rifle and completed the assembly of the weapon in record time. She loaded the ammunition into the gun and prepared to line up her shot. She

reached into her pocket and placed a small headset unit around her ear. "Blue is in position. All agents have been disabled. I have the shot." Emotionlessly she watched the proceedings through the scope of her rifle. She was able to view the presidents of at least seven countries from her vantage point, and she was only one part of the puzzle. The others each had their own assignments, though hers was the lynch pin. Once Lauren had done her part of the job, the others would know to act quickly and in turn they would all reunite back at their facility.

A few blocks away, a cacomistle remained seated in a large limousine. He poured himself a glass of single malt scotch while he watched the news reporters provide a basic breakdown of the planned ceremonies. His name was Murdock, and he had been placed in charge of a special project that had provided him with an unforeseen opportunity. At this very moment he commanded assets that most military men would probably kill to possess. All tests had shown the performance of his operatives to be perfect, without a single failed trial. He had chosen this moment to put his plans into action when many of the world's leaders would be in the same place. "Exciting, isn't it, Pete? We're going to change the world."

"It's Peter, sir," the skunk requested. He was the cacomistle's only companion in the limousine. He was monitoring all of their agents operations in the field. While Murdock called the shots, he would be the one to execute the commands. He adjusted his glasses and confirmed that he was getting a strong signal from all points. "We're ready."

Murdock mused at how the world probably thought it was safe, how most people likely didn't get up today thinking that this is the day the world would change. He smirked and placed his drink down in one of the drink holders and coldly spoke. "Pull the trigger."

The skunk pressed a key on his computer, and at that very moment the watch on Blue's wrist flashed. A moment later, she pulled the trigger on her rifle. The zebra mare fired twice at each target, the panic and chaos growing as the presidents of several nations fell from the high caliber bullets she shot through their bodies. After she had emptied the sniper rifle of every bullet it had, she turned and walked towards the stairs. She would be gone before the agents' backup arrived to check on them, and they would never know how to find her. As far as the world knew, Lauren Rivers was dead and buried. She was now Blue, her original personality gone.

News reports broadcast all over the world that the leaders of the United States, Canada, France, Spain, Russia, and at least two other nations had been killed by a sniper right before the peace conference. Fury evolved out of the lack of a suspect, and Kazerthan Zeal found himself with no case as the woman he claimed he saw did not by all records even exist. Disgraced and with nothing else to live for, he disappeared from the public view as the government struggled to put together the pieces. Nations accused other nations, and suspicion ran rampant as each government attempted to blame the others for what had happened. In time, panic and fury from the citizens had finally led to the enforcement of martial law in most nation states, and when that failed, total anarchy.

Borders between countries began to change as areas were controlled by whoever had the most weapons, and each person was responsible for their own survival.

TEN YEARS LATER

A trio of resistance fighters slowly drove through the woods, their radio playing the only independent broadcast in the area. The driver was Sabah Alev, a young male lion that wore a tank top and beige slacks, his hair tied back into a ponytail. Relatively young, he had been serving in the army when the world had started to fall apart. Despite his youth he had proven to be a capable leader, and was assigned to command the resistance soldiers out in the field. His companions were Fritz Jansen, a male paint horse in military fatigues, and Emmy, a female skunk in black pants and a short-sleeved gray shirt. While Sabah drove, the other two listened to the radio broadcast.

“This is Teric from Independence Radio, the only valid news source left in the Washington, D.C. area. Rumor has it that the United States military or what’s left of it is trying to retake this part of the country. Of course, Murdock and his forces have kept that from happening for ten years and the rumor mill says they’re developing a new weapon or two to keep the United States from liberating this part of the world ever again. The resistance is doing what they can to try and protect the honest citizens of the east coast, but between you and me, I’m starting to wonder. Probably the only thing keeping him from completely shutting us down is the fact that the resistance is a much more tempting target. If our broadcast range was a little bit stronger I might actually call on those boys in the new, more compact United States to try and give us a hand. For now, all I can do is report what I know and try and spread a little hope to those of you that could use it. This is Teric, signing off. Here’s some music from an old compact disc I found.” Teric’s voice faded out to be replaced by some Queen.

“Makes me wish I still had some of my old mp3’s,” Fritz complained. The paint horse had left his hard drive full of music at his mother’s house when the attacks had begun, and while she had survived his music had been destroyed. He lamented how many other such cultural treasures had been destroyed or lost in the chaos with looted museums, bombs dropping, and other such things.

Sabah shook his head. “Yeah, well, there’s not much we can do about that.” The lion generally avoided indulging Fritz in his nostalgic rants about the old days, preferring to keep his attention on the matter at hand. He too missed many of the things he once enjoyed as a younger man, though there was no point in complaining about what one did not have. “According to Kazerthan, the signal is out here somewhere.”

“What’s out here that could be worth a dime?” Emmy questioned, doubtful there was anything of value to the resistance. Sabah stopped the jeep, as the brush had gotten too thick to keep driving. He turned the vehicle around just in case they would need to leave in a hurry, and turned off the engine. All three climbed out and looked around the woods while Sabah pulled out a device from his pocket intended to scan for electronic signals.

“Some sort of advanced tech,” Sabah stated. “I don’t know any more than you do, but the last flyby by one of the pilots registered something here. So start looking around.” The three began to examine the area, Sabah leading the way. The beeps from his small device began to become more frequent and more insistent, until he finally stopped at what appeared to be a concealed hatch. It was recently exposed by weather so that one could see the metal doorway and the wheel used to open it. “What do we have here?” Sabah said to himself.

Emmy looked around and raised her Colt Python revolver in case anyone attempted to sneak up on them. “Can you get it open?” Sabah attempted to move the wheel and was finally able to force it with Fritz’s help. They turned the wheel several times until finally the hatch released and they were able to open the hatchway. Fritz dropped in first, his hooves making a loud clack as he landed. Sabah followed with a silent drop before he searched his pockets for a flashlight. Emmy looked around one more time before she finally dropped into the hole, landing ten feet beneath her in a smooth metal hallway.

Dust and the smell of corpses filled the musty air. Emmy covered her nose and wrinkled it as she coughed and tried to clear her throat. Sabah’s flashlight illuminated the hall somewhat, casting shadows on the nearest bodies. They had been here for ten years and probably had not felt a breeze since the moment they died. The lion waited for Fritz to activate his own flashlight that he had taped onto his Mossberg Maverick 88 rifle. Emmy’s own light was a small palm light she held in her paw. The trio walked along the shadowed hall as they began to explore the facility. “What kind of place is this?” Fritz questioned. He had attempted to breathe as little as possible, though the air quality appeared to improve the deeper they got into the facility.

“It looks like some kind of a lab,” Sabah mused. They entered into what appeared to be a medical examination area, with chemicals and other technology all over the place. “Definitely very high tech stuff. We might be able to use some of this. I think you guys can probably put your weapons away, everything in here is probably long dead.” Emmy did as instructed, though Fritz kept his weapon out as it doubled as his light source. Sabah stepped into the main medical lab first, looking at a rather nasty looking chair with hand and foot restraints, probably intended to hold a resistant subject. “I’d hate to be whoever they put in this thing.”

“Any idea what it does?” Emmy asked. She raised her striped tail to keep it out of the layer of dust that covered the floor. The female skunk read some of the devices it was attached to, reading the words ‘neural conditioning interface’.

The lion shook his head in confusion. Truthfully he didn’t want to know what this did. “No idea, but I don’t think it’s something we can salvage. Let’s keep moving.” Sabah commanded.

Fritz walked off from the other two towards the far end of the lab, and then stopped as he saw a metal tube with a glass window. Inside of the tube was a female body, a zebra mare in her mid twenties with black hair and a streak of blue on each side. She was resting with only a light pair of pants and a tank top covering her body with her arms folded over her chest. The paint horse whinnied as he inspected her form, and jumped in surprise as he realized she was alive! “Guys! Get over here, now!” he shouted.

Sabah and Emmy rushed up to the tube and similarly stopped as they took in this unusual sight. “What the hell?” The lion touched the glass and looked at her. She did not appear to be breathing, though the monitors next to her indicated she was in stasis. “Who is she?”

“No idea, there’s no mention of a name anywhere. It says ‘Blue’ on the tube, do you think that’s what they call her?” Fritz questioned.

“I don’t know,” Sabah admitted.

Emmy looked around at the otherwise empty medical lab. “What do we do? We can’t just leave her here, can we?”

Sabah held his hand out as he tried to stop the skunk from advancing. “We don’t know anything about her.”

“I’m not going to just leave her in here to spend the rest of her life in a tube. She could need our help. Now unless you plan to forcibly stop me, stand aside,” Emmy commanded. Sabah normally told the skunk to follow orders, though his curiosity was getting the better of him. She deactivated the stasis sequence and watched as the tube lost its frosty appearance and color returned to the zebra mare’s cheeks. All three watched closely as her heart rate increased, and the tube slowly slid upwards to allow her egress. Fritz watched her breathe for a moment before he tried to speak to her.

“My name is Fritz Jansen, this is Sabah and Emmy, what’s your name?” Fritz waited a moment before handing his rifle to Emmy and stepping closer. The lights in the lab had come on as the stasis had shut down automatically, and the paint horse reached out to touch her face. Just as his hand came close to her face, her own appendage gripped his with a painful tightness. “Holy shit!”

Blue punched him in the chest and sent him flying backwards as she stepped out onto the dusty metal floor. She performed a roundhouse kick to Sabah’s head and rolled out of the way of Emmy’s shot as she attempted to fire the shotgun and missed. The zebra mare calculated that there were three targets in the room. Her automated defense directive had been activated, which meant that she had to protect the lab and then find an operator for further instructions.

“We mean you no harm, we’re trying to help you!” Sabah shouted as he tried to determine where the others were. Emmy dropped Fritz’s rifle and pulled out her smaller

Colt Python to protect herself. Just as she stood to try and acquire a target, the zebra's hooves clacked on the counter next to her and kicked it out of her hands. The skunk cried out at the pain of the attack, but barely had time to react when Blue dropped down next to her and kicked her hard in the chest.

Fritz and Sabah attempted to grab her arms, but both men were simply thrown onto the floor by her impressive strength. The paint horse got up first and swung a punch, though Blue dodged it and thrust her knee into his chest. She spun around and kicked him back twice, before turning her attention to Sabah to attack him. Sabah barely avoided her attack using a capoeira roll and kicked her back into one of the counters. Blue appeared to pause for a moment as she considered this new information into her tactical parameters.

Emmy looked around for her gun, though it was long gone. She cursed to herself as she stood once again and screamed as Blue had made it right up to her face before she'd even noticed. She was on the verge of panic as the zebra grabbed her arms and twisted them behind her back. She forced her down against one of the counters and prepared to strike her hard in the back of the neck. Sabah pulled out his Glock pistol and fired a shot past the zebra's head. She paused and turned to him and released Emmy.

"Guys, we have to go!" Sabah shouted. "One more move and I shoot you!" he shouted. The female zebra rushed at him mid sentence and before he finished the final word had already grabbed the pistol and pressed the clip release. She knocked the gun out of his hands and pushed him back against the console next to the tube that had held her captive. She tore a patch from his arm and clutched it in her hands as she prepared her next attack.

Fritz motioned for Emmy to leave, and moved to distract Lauren so Sabah would be able to escape. "Hey!" He called out to her and threw a scalpel at her face. She caught it in her left hand and threw it to the floor and looked up to see Fritz and Sabah as they ran towards the exit. She rushed after them, intent to pursue them until they were no longer a threat.

Sabah looked to the side of the hall and quickly spotted an emergency door. He pushed the other two past it and smashed the glass plate in front of it. The emergency door activated and slid down faster than the zebra mare was able to catch up to them. Sabah struggled to regain his breath while the zebra found herself trapped behind the door. She tilted her head in confusion, and the defense protocol deactivated since she could no longer pursue her targets. The homing beacon directive then activated, and she felt compelled to seek out the nearest operator. Her assessment upon looking at the nearest functional monitor suggested she would need to leave the facility. She looked down at the patch that read 'Forest Hills College'. The zebra mare held onto it in case it would lead her to her targets should her operator wish her to renew her directive.

Now relatively safe, Sabah smacked Emmy on the back of the head. "We have to let her go, you said. She could need our help, you said."

“Sorry,” Emmy said, somewhat sarcastically as they headed back towards the jeep.

* * *

Shadows danced across the floor as the fan cut through the light streaming from the ceiling. The air was still and the atmosphere quiet as Kelvrin slept the day away. He was a black furred male gryphon with a black beak and blonde hair. He had slept in his clothes the night before, which consisted of a vest and a white collared shirt as well as black pants. An insistent beeping began to sound in his ear until he rose and deactivated the signal with his right hand. It was a proximity alarm, meant to warn him when an unexpected visitor was approaching his isolated cabin in the woods. He wasted no time as he moved to examine the video monitors set up around the house.

Quickly he searched for his revolver and loaded it with six bullets as he prepared for a hostile visitor. What he saw next on the monitor froze him solid as he realized whom his visitor was. “It couldn’t be,” he said to himself. “That’s impossible.” No sooner had he finished his sentence than the door opened and a female zebra entered his home. She remained emotionless as she took a position five feet away from him and stood rock solid and still before him. Her hooves paused at precisely the same point of distance from his body, and he looked at her for a moment as she remained still. “Blue?” He closed the door behind her, though she did not react in any way to either his query or his movement. The gryphon looked at the monitors again to be certain she had come alone and had not been sent by anyone else. He turned to her and tried to remember the code phrases he had once himself invented. “Good morning, Blue.”

“Good morning, Professor Kelvrin,” Lauren responded cheerfully before immediately defaulting to her neutral expression. He recalled that originally the volunteers had not smiled and he had found that disturbing during the course of his tests, so he had instructed each of them to smile as the day began to offset his discomfort. “Did I fall asleep?”

“For a little while. Blue, why are you here?” Kelvrin asked. He burned with questions as to her appearance, hoping she would give him the answers.

“I returned to you as the defense protocol was activated approximately one hour ago. Three individuals of unknown origin had infiltrated the lab. I attempted to subdue them though they were able to affect an escape. With my pursuit impossible, I sought out the nearest sub dermal homing signal. That signal was yours.” Lauren returned to her silent statuesque position, the only motion she provided was that her tail would occasionally flick.

Concern began to fill the gryphon as he listened to her statements. It meant two things, that the people he had worked for had kept tabs on him even after he had cut all ties, and that if they knew Blue was intact, they would hunt her down to join them or be

murdered. He searched his desk for a blade and pulled out a small thin knife. He removed his shirt and began to feel around his body for any bumps or marks he had never noticed. It was made somewhat difficult by his feathers and fur, though after a moment or two of searching he found it directly over his heart. "Damn you, Murdock," he cursed as he cut into himself. He gritted his beak as the pain began to flash through his body. He closed his eyes and felt around inside of the cut with the knife, finally removing it as he reached in with his talons to pull out a small electronic chip. "Son of a bitch," he swore again. Angrily, he crushed the chip with the nearest heavy object. He then realized Lauren likely had one as well. He felt her chest with his avian hand to see if hers was in the same place. He located hers on the back of her neck. "Blue, remain still," he instructed as he cut out her chip. It was easier than removing his own, and she did not move a muscle during the entire procedure. With their chips destroyed they would not be able to locate them anymore and they would be able to move undetected. The gryphon began to wonder if his chip had been active all these years or if it had only turned on when Lauren sought him out. Either way they would come looking for her once they detected her signal, something they had surely done by now. "Blue, what is your current directive?"

"I have no directive. I was boxed and placed into storage until reactivation. No duration was given for my hibernation," Lauren explained. Simply put, that had meant that she was under no one's orders and that the last person to interact with her had intended to put her in permanent storage.

"Why?" Kelvrin inquired.

"I do not possess that information," Lauren told him.

Kelvrin paused as he asked her another question. "When was your last directive given?"

"My last directive given was ten years, two months, five days, fourteen hours and six minutes ago. I was instructed to terminate several VIP's and immediately return to base thereafter, eliminating any threats on the way." The zebra mare quietly stared at him as if she had no will of her own. "Though the mission did not require our direct cooperation, I was instructed not to interfere with the missions of Yellow, Orange, Green, Red, or Violet."

Initially disregarding her statement, he paused as he realized one of the seven volunteers was missing. "What about Indigo?"

"Indigo's status is classified," Blue responded.

Kelvrin scoffed as he heard the common buzzword for anything you didn't want the public or anyone else to know. Classified. Evidently they had not even trusted the mind wiped volunteers with that information, which meant that whatever Indigo was doing, it was very damning to whoever had sent them on their final directive. For all he knew, Indigo was dead. He supposed it didn't matter, as he had left the program once he

realized that the people he was working with were not volunteers at all. They had been men and women stolen from their families and their homes, their bodies violated and their minds erased. He had occasionally had inklings that their original personalities had somehow survived the procedures, though he was never able to duplicate his results nor prove it when little idiosyncrasies had popped up suggesting such. “Blue, do you trust me?”

“With my life,” she said. The zebra reached out to touch his hand, and for a moment she held it as if she truly felt dedication. Immediately as he met her glance she returned to her motionless neutral pose. Kelvrin paused for a moment as he felt a pang of guilt for taking this woman’s life away from her without even realizing it, and then looked into her eyes.

“Blue, we have to go. The others will be after you, and probably me too.” He paused as he noticed the patch she still held in her clasped left hand. “What is that?”

Blue handed him the patch, and then explained. “I removed this patch from one of the intruders during the battle, in the event I would be able to resume the pursuit later and terminate the subject.”

Kelvrin read the patch; he knew where this college campus was located. They were probably resistance more than likely. If that was the case there was a chance they would protect them from Murdock, though the gryphon knew it would be a hard sell. One thing was certain; they would both be killed or captured if they remained here much longer. “All right, Blue, I’m giving you a new directive. You will assist me as needed and follow any orders I give you until further notice, understood?”

“Yes, Professor Kelvrin,” Blue responded. The zebra mare awaited his instructions as he gathered a few of his belongings.

He tossed a few documents and a book or two into his olive satchel before instructing her to follow him out the back door towards his shack. He opened the door to the makeshift garage and started up his motorcycle. The engine growled as he folded his wings inwards and requested that she wrap her arms around him so she wouldn’t fall off. The zebra mare held on tightly as they sped through the woods towards the college campus where the resistance made its home. Kelvrin considered what he was going to say to them so that they wouldn’t try to shoot Blue right away, though he hoped that he would be able to convince them to accept his help.

Though he had previously had little interest in action before tonight, seeing Blue before him made him realize that now he had the opportunity to right the wrongs of his past and atone for his sins, both the ones he had done knowingly and those he had been tricked into. When he had lived alone, it hadn’t seemed important. Now that he was faced with the zebra mare looking precisely as she had ten years ago, it seemed more important than ever. It was not about proving himself to anyone else, but for some reason proving

he was worth something to himself was the most important thing on his mind right now. They sped towards the college campus, and he hoped he was not too late to save himself.

* * *

Sterile marble floors covered the capital building of Murdock's part of the world. He controlled almost half of the eastern seaboard from Maine to West Virginia and maintained control over this area because of an energy field that disabled any technology passing through the barrier he had erected around his empire. His own forces were impervious to the technology which had meant that any time the United States had attempted to reclaim their lost territory they were forced to try without the aid of any advanced technology and no real way to sneak in. Murdock himself generally remained sequestered within his power center, preferring to avoid exposing himself to potential assassins.

Pete rushed towards Murdock's office with his PC tablet in his hands. He approached the door and nodded once to the guards, who had always been instructed to allow him immediate entry. The skunk then walked in without further eye contact and waited until the cacomistle acknowledged his presence.

"You have something?" Murdock asked. His desk was large and mostly made up of keyboards and computer monitors rather than actual writing space. He kept a virtual map of his empire displayed on a large table behind him that displayed the locations of his forces in a 3-D projection. He wore a dark business suit as always, as well as a permanent smirk on his face.

"I do," the skunk informed him. "Approximately four hours ago we detected a signal from one of the old Spectrum facilities. After I double-checked to confirm its authenticity I looked in the registry to determine whom the signal belonged to. I believe you'll recognize it." He tapped his stylus against the PC tablet and brought up the signal data on one of Murdock's screens. The cacomistle examined it closely for a moment and then stood up sharply as he realized what it meant.

"This signal reappeared four hours ago?" Murdock questioned. He and the others had believed that Blue had been killed when the United States had located one of their installations and attacked it. The fact that she had somehow survived the assault likely suggested that no one on either side had lived through the battle.

Pete adjusted his lab coat and placed his PC tablet on the desk as he continued his report. "Yes, sir. I should also inform you that I was able to track her for a short while after her signal appeared. It would seem apparent that Kelvrin is alive as well. It's possible that they are working together."

Murdock became silent as he thought about the gryphon for a moment. He had developed the initial programming that Blue and the others had all functioned under. While Pete had invented the technology, it was Kelvrin that had refined it to override

their personalities and make the seven people they had chosen into living weapons. Murdock had always suspected that at some point Kelvrin would lose interest in the project once he learned the seven subjects were not willing participants, though he had kept him in line for several years telling him that they were volunteers. Since these people had already been mind wiped, they would never tell him different. At some point, however, the gryphon had insisted upon working in his own lab, and then finally disappeared when Murdock had activated all seven of his volunteers to assassinate several world leaders and faked his death in the ensuing chaos. Being too occupied with suppressing the resistance on one side and securing his borders from the United States on the other, he had simply let the gryphon slip his mind, believing him to be dead and buried. It was likely he had hidden for some time in a shielded location until Murdock would have given up the search. "Very clever, Kelvrin."

"How do you wish me to proceed, sir?" the skunk questioned as he picked up his PC tablet again.

Silently Murdock considered the possibilities now that Blue was alive. The zebra mare had been one of his most effective weapons, having faster reactions and very graceful motions in combat. She had rarely returned from her directives with any wounds or marks on her body at all, and she had not once failed to terminate whom she was sent after. "I want her back. If she can't be recovered, you have orders to terminate her and anyone with her."

"Shall I send one of the weapons?" Pete had assumed that he would not wish to use mere soldiers against one of his former secret weapons and his former head programmer.

Murdock nodded in confirmation. "Send Violet. She's been idle the longest. I believe she is trained in advanced hand to hand combat?"

Pete tapped commands into his tablet ordering Violet to report to him for a mission. It was true that all of them were effective fighters, though Violet had a talent for the brute force styles of fighting, despite her small frame. She would match well against Blue, who was more of an evasive fighter. "Immediately. What about Kelvrin?"

"He left our good graces a long time ago. Terminate him," he ordered. "I'd like you to go as well," Murdock added. The skunk turned in confusion at the order.

"I don't understand, sir." Pete generally monitored the weapons from the facility; rarely did he enter the field for a mission. The skunk assumed perhaps it was because Blue would possibly have received new programming from Kelvrin if in fact the two were working in tandem.

Murdock turned and walked around the desk to stand next to the skunk. He placed a hand on his shoulder and let out a deep breath. "Violet is good, though Blue is better. You may need to adjust her programming on site. I'll have four squads of soldiers join

you to ensure that you get the job done. Don't worry; Violet will take good care of you. Bring Blue home, Pete."

Pete exited the office and came face to face with Violet, who had arrived at the office entrance while the two had been talking. The skunk looked at the vixen that stood motionless as she waited for instructions. She was armed with her standard complement, which meant she carried brass knuckles and body armor. Pete greeted her with a slightly amused smile as he recalled that her real name truly was Violet, and that her code name was the same due to the streak of violet that ran through her mostly blue hair, a signature of their living weapons. He looked into her eyes and then began to describe her mission parameters. "Good morning, Violet."

"Good morning, Pete," she responded cheerfully.

"New directive. You and I are going to travel to the last known location of Blue's signal in an attempt to reacquire her. We are to attempt to disable her using non-lethal force. Should that prove impossible we have been instructed to terminate her. Additionally, we have been ordered to terminate Kelvrin regardless of all other previously established directives." Pete waited for her to confirm the orders and watched as she stood at attention.

"Directive confirmed," Violet responded. The skunk waved his striped tail behind him and entered into his tablet several commands so that the soldiers and the aircraft would be waiting for him upon his arrival at the landing pad. Violet dutifully followed behind him staying no less than three steps behind him the entire time.

When the pair reached the landing pad, the soldiers had already boarded the craft and were waiting for them. Violet climbed on board first, though unlike the soldiers she chose to remain standing. Pete was helped up by one of the soldiers and handed a small pistol. "I don't think I need this."

"I've been told we're going out to find Blue," the soldier said as he raised his voice to be heard over the engine as it started up.

"That's correct," Pete replied.

The soldier patted him on the back and pushed him towards his seat. "Then you're going to need that." Pete frowned and put the gun down on the seat next to him, not really used to handling them. The soldier handed him a holster to place on his belt and then proceeded to issue the pilot their orders. Violet appeared perfectly calm. That was the one thing he envied about the weapons, they were never nervous or afraid, they simply were. That was a feeling he considered he might find useful about now.

The troop transport lifted off and headed in the direction of Kelvrin's cabin. Pete looked at his tablet and decided to use the time to familiarize himself with Blue's skill

set. Kelvrin had designed her abilities himself; she was considered his crown jewel. He wondered if perhaps it wasn't fate that she had found him first.

* * *

An old college campus had been converted to be the primary base for the resistance. They had fortified the location with weapons emplacements and makeshift barriers, and for the past few years had conducted their operations out of similar places like this. The jeep carrying Fritz, Sabah, and Emmy pulled up to the Library, which was where their leader held court. A wolf-dragon hybrid looked down from the clear windows, his red fur and dragon wings visible from where he stood. The library had a semicircular second floor, which he had secured as his own office. He heard the engine turn off and his resistance fighters enter the building.

Sabah took the lead as he approached Kazerthan. "Sir, we tracked down the facility detected on the last intelligence flyby and found a facility with some usable supplies, but we were unable to acquire them. We discovered a woman in a stasis device of some type. When we attempted to open it, she attacked us and forced our retreat."

Kazerthan folded his wings close to his body and turned his head towards the lion, his back largely remained towards them. He wore a black sleeveless vest and dark pants to match, wearing little other clothing because of his wings. The hybrid had led the resistance almost since the day it was founded. He had remained with the government until Murdock had raised his energy field that kept all advanced technology not already present from entering this part of the country. His men had been very efficient in destroying all transmitters powerful enough to reach the outside. Kazerthan had led some of the locals to safety and kept them safe with all the resources at his disposal, which at the moment wasn't much. "A woman?"

"She was a female zebra, sir," Fritz added. The paint horse stood rigidly at attention while he delivered his report. "Rather fast, and very efficient."

"Did she have blue hair?" Kazerthan asked. He recalled the day he had met this woman and fought her in battle. She had defeated him and murdered seven VIP's right in front of his eyes. He blamed her for the loss of his career among other things, damning them all to this life they now lived.

"Yes, sir," Sabah reported. "I was able to close an emergency door behind us, she did not pursue."

Kazerthan considered what his people had just told him. It alarmed him that a woman he had not seen for ten years was back, and even more so that she was still as dangerous as ever. He looked at the three of them for a moment as his intercom beeped. "This is Kazerthan, go ahead."

“Sir, we’ve got a gryphon and a female zebra at the front gate, and he’s requesting...,” the male voice started. Kazerthan immediately closed the connection and motioned for the three of them to come with him. The four walked in perfect sync as they exited the library and hurried down the steps. Sabah, Emmy, and Fritz raised their weapons as soon as they spotted Blue, their faces clearly showing controlled anxiety.

“Don’t move!” Sabah shouted.

“I will shoot you very hard!” Emmy called out, her weapon held tightly in her paws. The skunkette moved to the other side of Blue and Kelvrin in an attempt to set up a crossfire, while Fritz himself remained perfectly still next to Kazerthan. The paint horse kept his weapon raised in the event that Blue tried anything.

Kelvrin removed his glasses for a moment to clean them. “If everyone could just calm down a moment? My name is Kelvrin; I’ve come to offer you our help. Even if you don’t know it yet, you’ll need us to survive.”

Kazerthan took Sabah’s pistol and aimed it at Lauren’s head. “I doubt that. I’ve tangled with this bitch before, and I’ve been waiting ten long years to put her into the ground.” The wolf-dragon hybrid slowly prepared to squeeze the trigger until Kelvrin stood in the way.

“You do that, and you’ll kill your only chance to stop Murdock. I promise you, she won’t harm anyone here as long as I’m with her. Do you know what she is? She’s one of Murdock’s weapons, the elite super soldiers that obey his commands. She may be the only person that can stand up to the others and take that cacomistle down once and for all,” Kelvrin stated.

Sabah shook his head as he folded his arms and looked into Lauren’s eyes. “You’re not going to buy this bullshit, are you?”

The black gryphon stared Sabah right back as he stepped up to Kazerthan. “Listen to me. She is as much a victim of Murdock’s as anyone else. More so because she has had her mind and body taken away from her by force.”

“How the hell would you know that?” Kazerthan asked, angrily.

“Because I was one of her programmers,” the gryphon admitted.

Kazerthan growled and grabbed his collar, the barrel of the pistol forced up into Kelvrin’s neck. “Give me one good reason why I shouldn’t kill you right the hell now!” He spread his wings and pushed the pistol further into Kelvrin’s chin to emphasize his point.

“What do you want me to say?” demanded Kelvrin. “If you’re going to kill me then do it! If you’re going to blame me or her for the sorry state the world’s in, go right

ahead! Kill us both if it'll make you feel better. I guarantee that if you do you'll be throwing away your only chance to stop Murdock. You want proof we're here to help? All I can give you is the fact that we came in here of our own free will and you aren't dead yet." Kelvrin pushed Kazerthan away from him.

"Are you threatening me?" Kazerthan asked. He considered his last fight with Blue, and the fact that now she remained still even though she had several weapons pointed right at her. The red wolf-dragon hybrid looked at her emotionless face and then at Kelvrin, and lowered his weapon. "No, I suppose not. Emmy, take them to the student center and keep them there until I have a chance to decide what to do with them."

Kelvrin took Blue's hand as the two walked after Emmy, though the skunk was certain to remain a fair distance from Blue. Kazerthan motioned to Sabah and Fritz. "For now, I'm going to see what else the gryphon has to say. She does anything I don't like or either of them tries to escape; you've got my permission to stop them by any means necessary."

"Yes, sir," Sabah responded.

"For now, come with me." Kazerthan walked after Emmy and entered the student center, where they had kept most of their captured enemies. The skunk remained outside of the room where they had placed their newest charges. "Everything all right?"

"For now," Emmy reported. "I escorted them inside a minute ago, they're waiting for you."

Sabah placed his hand on his commander's chest. "Sir, are you sure you should be the one conducting this interrogation?" The lion could sense the wolf-dragon's obvious past connection to the zebra, given his reaction when he first saw her.

Kazerthan handed Sabah back his pistol. "Yes, I have to. She and I have a history." The wolf-dragon then entered the room, leaving the others outside. "All right, you've got my attention. Start talking."

A dim light was the only source of illumination in the room. Lauren remained standing against the wall while Kelvrin seated himself at the chair by the only table in the room. "I was one of the original programmers of the weapons Murdock used to seize control of the region. I wasn't the inventor of the technology, but I was able to perfect it. I was told they were volunteers, so of course when I discovered that they were anything but I tried to leave. I had to carefully plan my escape and fake my death so they wouldn't come looking for me. At the time I just wanted to save my own skin and get out of the Spectrum project."

"Spectrum project?" Kazerthan questioned.

“Yes. An unusual side effect of the gene therapy and neural reprogramming we performed on the ‘volunteers’ altered their hair pigmentation on the most successful subjects. Those that took to the project well enough developed streaks of color in their hair. For each formula we perfected, we achieved a different color. Blue was the first.” Kelvrin pulled out some documents that showed the chemical makeup of some of the substances they had developed. Kazerthan looked at them, though he did not understand most of the information before him.

Kazerthan slid the papers to the side of the table. “You erased these people’s minds, even if they were volunteers, what made you think they’d ever get their lives back?”

“I don’t know. All right? I was young and stupid. I thought, I don’t know what I thought. All I know is that by the time I realized what I was really doing I couldn’t just up and leave. I convinced them to give me my own lab and started working with Blue to try and determine if she was still in there somehow. I thought maybe I could fix my mistakes before it was too late. Then I heard what they were planning to do and I couldn’t stop it. I used the chaos to get away and Murdock was too busy with other things to worry about me. I convinced them I was dead, and then just tried to stay under the radar,” Kelvrin admitted.

“So what brings you here? Why now have you gotten the sudden pang of conscience?” Kazerthan questioned.

Kelvrin remained silent for a moment, and then he turned to look at Blue. “Because she came back.”

“What does she have to do with anything?” Kazerthan asked, still angry at Blue for her actions, even if they were out of her control.

“Blue wasn’t like the others, she seemed to still have pieces of her still there after the wipe. I thought maybe if she did the others might too. I don’t know if I can undo what I’ve done, but I have to try. If I don’t, then I won’t be able to face myself in the mirror ever again. I’ve been lying to myself for over ten years; it’s time I did the right thing. Kill me if you think you have to, but don’t kill Blue. She’s not responsible for this.”

Kazerthan folded his arms and considered his statements. The resistance leader in him told him to kill them both after extracting whatever information he could from each. Despite this, he couldn’t bring himself to give the order. Blue’s eyes seemed to convey a deep sadness, and for a moment he forgot who she was. “I’ll consider your proposal.”

Emmy knocked on the door insistently, causing Kazerthan to turn around and exit as soon as he finished speaking. She looked up at him and handed him a bulletin from the command center. “Sir, I thought you should know. Murdock has sent several units to a location not far from here. If they figure out where those two went...” Kazerthan did not

wait for her to finish her sentence, as he already knew it meant they had little time. The enemy was coming.

* * *

The troop transport landed in the vicinity of Kelvrin's cabin, and Pete and Violet were the first two to exit. Pete looked at the cabin where the gryphon had hidden from them for so many years. "Fan out, I want to find where he went! They can't have gone far!" The skunk began to search the area around the house while several of the soldiers went inside and the remainder began to explore the immediate area. "Violet, look for any signs of Kelvrin."

Violet walked around and began to examine the area for clues. One of the soldiers emerged from the house and shook his head, indicating there was no one in the cabin or any idea where the two had gone. He handed him the broken tracking chips that the gryphon had removed and destroyed. The skunk looked over at Violet, who signaled him to join her as she leaned down. "Fresh motorcycle tracks. These were the most recent, and they go off in that direction. The only structures we know to be in that direction is a suspected resistance base."

"Good work, Violet. Captain! Ready your men for an attack, we suspect they may have headed towards the resistance base!" The skunk ordered everyone back into the craft and contacted Murdock, informing the cacomistle that they believe they had located where they went. It took a fraction of the time it had taken Kelvrin to drive to the base, and as they got close one of the soldiers reported a lot of activity on the ground. Pete frowned, though he knew it didn't change his orders. "They know we're coming." The skunk looked down at the pilot. "Are you picking up any chatter that suggests Kelvrin is there?"

The pilot nodded in response. "Yes, sir. One of them is talking about two people they placed into custody, the descriptions fit our targets."

"Just as a reminder, men, this is a kill-capture! Kill Kelvrin but attempt to take Blue alive! Violet, you're primary target is Blue, capture her if you can, disable anyone that attempts to interfere!" Violet coldly nodded as the craft hovered over the campus. Two of the soldier squads dropped from the ship and started firing as soon as they were close enough to the ground. The next two waited until the craft landed, with the pilot and co-pilot remaining on board the craft protecting it with the mounted guns. Pete and Violet were the last two off the craft, with the skunk staying close to the side of the craft. The violet fox ran towards the first building she was going to search, while the soldiers continued to attack the resistance members. "Murdock, this is Pete, we're going to need backup, send an additional four troop units to my coordinates," he called into the radio.

Emmy fired her Colt Python at one of the soldiers and dropped him to the ground. She turned around to look at Kazerthan. "Sir, there are at least four squads, that means forty soldiers, all of them heavily armed. What should we do?"

Kazerthan started to consider his strategy. He knew that more would be on their way, and they had not had the reaction time to prepare a real strategy. He was used to thinking on his feet, and just shook his head. "We kill each and every one of these bastards." He picked up the dead soldier's rifle and turned a corner to shoot a second. The wolf-dragon growled and bared his fangs as he felt a bullet graze his left arm. He cursed and pulled back behind the corner.

Gunfire started to fill all parts of the campus as the Spectrum soldiers continued to kill members of the resistance. Kazerthan looked to Emmy as he motioned for them to fall back. "Come with me. Cover me while I issue orders!" Emmy nodded respectfully; firing her weapon several more times to provide cover fire and reloading as quickly as she could. The wolf-dragon pulled out his radio. "Status?"

Sabah's voice came back over the radio. "We're getting hammered up here! Fritz and I are okay, we've got about forty of us holed up in the library, but they've got about a quarter of their forces blocking any of the ways out! They've got some serious firepower, they're obviously after something!"

"Blue. They're after her. If they just wanted us dead they wouldn't be searching the campus," Kazerthan realized. He and Emmy turned around the corner and came face to face with Violet and Pete. "Shit." Kazerthan raised his weapon, though Violet smacked it out of his hands. Before Emmy could raise her own, she rushed her and twisted her wrist. The skunkette screamed in pain as she was forced to drop her gun, and then Violet slammed her into the wall. She turned and grasped Kazerthan's shirt as she flipped him onto the ground and punched him in the gut. Emmy struck Violet across the face, though she did not appear to feel the pain. Violet pushed Emmy back so hard she slid down the hallway.

Pete leaned forward and grabbed Kazerthan's shirt by the collar. "Where is Blue?"

Kazerthan spat in Pete's face. He kicked him back with both legs and stood up. "Emmy, run!" The two ran from Violet as fast as they could, though she was not far behind. Emmy closed a door behind them and locked it, leaving Violet to break it down. "That won't hold her for long."

"It'll buy us a minute!" Emmy called out. Kazerthan ran to a window and looked at the soldiers surrounding the library. A good number of his people were already dead from the sudden and ferocious attack of the Spectrum soldiers. The wolf-dragon could see Sabah and Fritz from where they stood, they were holding their ground for the time being.

Kazerthan picked up his radio. "Fritz, Sabah, hold out as long as you can! I'll try and give you guys an opening to get to safety!" The wolf-dragon looked at Emmy. "I need you to help them. I've got to talk to our guest before it's too late."

“All right,” Emmy responded nervously. She had dropped her gun, though she found a dead resistance member and quickly acquired another one. Blood had started to stain the earth as she rushed over to try and help her fellow resistance members. She opened fire at two of the men that blocked the rear exit. The first went down immediately, though the second she only struck in the leg. She leapt to the ground as he returned fire, though she felt a moment of pain as his bullet went through her shoulder. She held the wound, but it appeared it was not serious at the moment. Emmy fired her gun a second time and killed the other soldier.

Though the pain was significant, she managed to run into the library and up to the second level where Sabah and Fritz had been waiting. “I punched a hole through their defenses, we have to go!”

Sabah looked around at the other resistance fighters. “All right, everyone, make your way to the administrative building, it is the most well protected structure on the campus! As soon as you get out, do not stop for anything! That’s an order!” The lion led the way with Fritz taking up the rear. Sabah peeked out of the library for a second and looked in both directions. He laid down suppressive fire as the first group started to run. Emmy took up the other side and fired her own weapon in the other direction. The lion and the skunk waited until they felt Fritz’s hooves on their shoulders to tell them they were all out.

“Sabah, look!” Fritz shouted, as he saw another troop transport prepare to land. “We’re in trouble.” The paint horse pulled Emmy along on her uninjured arm as they rushed towards the administrative building. Sabah let out a deep breath as he killed another soldier, only to watch one of his men be killed at the same time.

Meanwhile, Kazerthan opened the door where Kelvrin and Blue waited and looked into his eyes. “My people are under attack and from what I’ve been told, more Spectrum forces are on their way or are already here. I’m still not sure I trust you, but one of those weapons is here and you just might be our only way out of here alive.” The wolf-dragon looked at Kelvrin to judge his reaction.

The black gryphon needed no time to respond. “Blue, you know what to do. Protect the resistance members and stop Violet. She probably has orders to kill you so if you have to do not hesitate to strike a killing blow.” Kelvrin adjusted his glasses and looked to Kazerthan. “As for you and I, we should probably stay out of the way.”

Kazerthan wondered if the gryphon was joking, though he could rarely tell with beaked animals. He opened the door and turned to see Violet approaching. He pushed Kelvrin away from her and started to run. “Go!”

Blue turned around the door and punched Violet across the face. She fell backwards as her body continued moving forwards, having not expected the attack. She jumped to her feet and stared at the zebra mare, considering her options. The vixen

pushed Lauren back and then performed a strong kick, sliding her back into the wall. Lauren dodged Violet's next punch, the force of which made a dent in the wall. The zebra kicked the vixen back with her hoof. Lauren grabbed Violet's clothing with both hands, through the vixen brought her arms up and then down over Lauren's forcing her to let go. The violet fox coldly considered the zebra for a moment.

Pete watched from the distance, impressed at how effectively the two weapons were at fighting each other. He knew that Blue was a more efficient fighter, though he suspected that she would not be able to overcome the improvements he had made to the programming. Blue whinnied as she ran towards the stairs to the second level and disappeared from sight. Violet followed and stayed low as she came through the doorway. She spotted Blue and rushed at her; her full weight collided with the zebra and drove them both to the floor. Lauren's hoof kicked the vixen off of her that gave her enough time to get to her feet.

The two were on the upper level, which was mostly a balcony exposed to the lower level of the lounge. Pete watched with morbid fascination as he wondered which one would kill or disable the other. He looked around to determine if anyone else was in the area, but it appeared that both the resistance and the soldiers were elsewhere. He continued to watch as Blue threw Violet over her head into the wall.

Violet spat out blood as she was punched across the face several times by Blue. The zebra coughed and gagged when her opponent struck her in the chest. She backed up several steps and attempted to regain her breath, doing so just in time to avoid Violet's next attack. As the vixen missed, Lauren whinnied and kicked her hard with her hoof in the center of her back. Violet broke through the railings and fell to the lower level with debris raining around her.

Lauren looked at the wooden railings and broke off a piece of sharp wood as she dropped down to the lower level. She landed with her legs slightly bent, almost in a fluid motion as she gave a roundhouse kick to Violet as she attempted to stand. She took the piece of wood and thrust it into her chest, pushing it through to the other side. She then stood as the vixen choked on her own blood, and Violet died before Blue's very eyes.

Pete was dumbfounded. He had not seriously considered for a second that Blue would truly kill Violet. She also appeared to be stronger than he remembered. He fell backwards as she spotted him, though she did not follow after him as he ran. Blue remained another moment and looked at Violet, a tear falling from her face as she looked at the fellow weapon she had been forced to kill. She was another victim, like her, buried underneath layers of programming. The zebra mare remained still until she finally turned to search for Kelvrin.

"This is Pete, all forces withdraw, now! That's an order!" the skunk shouted. One of the soldiers protested, though he repeated the command and ordered their immediate withdrawal. He ran towards the craft as the soldiers quickly began to pile into both of the

troop transports and pull out of the resistance camp. Kazerthan let out a sigh of relief as the Spectrum forces pulled away.

* * *

Several hours later, Murdock turned as Pete entered his office. The skunk was silent until the cacomistle motioned for him to speak. "Report."

"I have confirmed that Blue is online, and that Kelvrin is with her, sir. However, in our attempt to acquire her it would appear that Blue is evolving somehow. She terminated Violet," Pete replied.

Murdock was speechless. No one had ever killed one of the weapons before, despite the countless missions they had been sent on. The fact that Violet had been killed by Blue meant something important. Perhaps it was the start of something they had first seen with Indigo. Indigo was recruited after Kelvrin had left the Spectrum program and unlike the others they had completely removed their entire personality rather than suppressing it. Unlike the other six, Indigo was unpredictable, and some time after their programming they had murdered everyone nearby and vanished into who knows where. Murdock had never seen Indigo again, though perhaps like Blue, they were still out there. "Evolving?"

"Yes, the strategies she used to fight Violet were slightly different than those she was programmed to have last time we conducted an analysis. I am unable to explain the change in strategy as it is unlikely Kelvrin had the equipment to alter her programming at his cabin," Pete told him. The skunk considered the four remaining weapons they had at their disposal, certain that Murdock would order him to send another after Blue.

Murdock considered his options. He knew that if word got out that he had lost one of his weapons, it would embolden the general population. He knew that he would have to deal with the resistance, and to do that he would have to stop Blue. Part of him wanted her under his control, obeying his every command. He wanted to control the kind of power she possessed. The other part of him warned that such power would be difficult to control and impossible to stop if she turned against him for whatever reason. Either way, he would have to act fast. "Are the others ready?"

"At your command, sir," the skunk reported.

"Send Red. I believe those two have some catching up to do, don't they?" Murdock turned away from Pete, clearly indicating that their meeting was done. The skunk turned around and prepared to activate Red, the most dangerous weapon they still had under their control. Red had always been more fierce and savage than Blue, he considered that if Blue was Violet's superior, Red was Blue's. He smirked as he pondered the fact that Red had never fought Blue before. Not in a true battle. They had always had to be stopped when they trained together; it was simply something about Red versus Blue.

* * *

Kazerthan walked into the student center, where Kelvrin had found Blue at the entrance. He looked at the resistance members that worked to clean up the aftermath of the fight. The wolf-dragon watched Sabah as the lion counted out their casualties and came to report. "We lost thirty people, sir."

"Damn. Would you see to their arrangements, and have Emmy help you," Kazerthan told him.

"As you wish, sir." Sabah turned around and motioned for the skunk to join him, her arm in a sling from the battle. Fritz continued to stand guard in front of the library while the others retrieved what salvageable equipment they could from the dead enemy soldiers.

The wolf-dragon hybrid walked up to the black gryphon and reached out his hand to shake it. Though he felt somewhat odd doing so, he felt it was necessary. "I suppose I should thank you. You stopped one of Murdock's weapons, you kept a lot of my people from being killed, which is what would've happened if those soldiers hadn't bugged out after their girl here was killed. I guess that means you're telling the truth."

Kelvrin nodded silently for a moment, his black beak slightly open. Blue remained at his side as a loyal servant, her will completely buried under the programming. "So what happens now?"

"I don't know. I don't trust you, despite what you did, and I can't help but remember the day I lost everything every time I see her face. She may not be responsible for what she did, but I still see her every time I close my eyes. The smart thing to do is to probably send you on your way and forget you ever came here." Kazerthan turned away from them and spread his wings out all the way for a moment before he turned his head back towards them. "Though I have to consider my people. Now that they know we're here they'll send another one of those things after you or her, or me. As good as my people are we can't stand up to that. So for now I need you here. Whether that becomes permanent depends on you."

"Fair enough," Kelvrin said. He had considered that if the Spectrum forces hadn't attacked when they did that he would probably be in front of a firing squad by now. He mused at how their attack actually probably saved his and Blue's lives. The black gryphon stood up as the wolf-dragon hybrid turned to leave. "One second."

"Yes?" Kazerthan replied.

Kelvrin approached him and motioned for Blue to stay put as he did so. "If I'm going to do what I set out to do, I'm going to need your help. I plan to take Murdock

down and anyone that helps him. I intend to make this clump of dirt part of America again. To do that, I'm going to need the resistance."

Kazerthan nodded. "Our goals aren't entirely incompatible. What would you need?"

"I don't know yet. Some people, supplies, maybe a workspace?" Kelvrin requested.

"I'll see what I can do." The red wolf-dragon departed without any further comments, and left Kelvrin alone with Lauren. He turned to the zebra mare and touched her face gently. He wondered who she had been before Spectrum had robbed her of her identity. She was no one now, simply the weapon called Blue. The black gryphon looked into her eyes.

"Blue, I don't know if you're really hearing me when I say this, but I know you're still in there. At least, I hope you are. I don't know if the 'real you' is intact or not buried under all that programming that makes you the perfect weapon. I need to believe that you are." He started to choke up and sniffle as he spoke. "I need to believe that there's still a piece of you in there that's worth saving. If I can fix you, then maybe I can redeem myself too." He held her for a moment, and then sighed, as her face remained emotionless. He turned to walk out of the room.

"Thank you," a female voice said.