

Mark Fencer

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Mark checked his surroundings... no one saw him as he snuck down the hall away from the arena. He could hear the spectators cheering behind him as the match progressed. His friends from the Space Academy would be cheering the Red, Blue, Green, or Gold team according to their arbitrary loyalties but Mark had other plans this evening.

The door had blue and white angled stripes around it; they matched the blue and white stripes bordering the access card he had been given. He swiped the card through the slot and heard the latch snap back. He pushed the door and it opened. Quickly he slipped in and let the door close with a snick.

The lights came on, illuminating two facing rows of glass cylinders containing full combat suits. Between them were two long benches and a space three tails wide between them. The suits were white and blue; some had rank insignia. Each one had a name at the top ... tribe, pack, and individual names familiar to his tongue. At the far end of the room was a big screen that showed the main feed from the arena, and a door next to it. Some people in formal attire were discussing the athletes. The view cut to the match in progress.

Mark was a fan of fencing, and a fencer himself. He enjoyed the twice-weekly practice sessions and often stayed late to drill and perfect his form. He also followed the sport in the journals so he was familiar with the armor: its parts, how they work, how to select them, who the best makers are, the color schemes of the elite teams.

His intramural team wore hand-me-downs from years previous and his own set showed signs of wear and repair and could fit a bit better here and there. In this locker room, he admired the shiny suits of armor of his favorite elite student team. Having heard stories about it, he had fantasized about what it would feel

to put on the self-customizing armor. It would certainly not have gaps and pinch points like his own set.

Near the end on the left was one open cylinder; the armor it contained was not arranged the same way as the suits in the closed stalls. Instead of attached together into one full suit, the pieces were separate, on hooks and hangers. He looked at the name ... and was shocked to see his own pack name, Oakgrove, and his own name.

Trembling a little, Mark removed the torso armor from its hanger. The tag read M, his size. He tried it on over his cadet uniform. It was comfortable, as would be expected from elite armor, but his clothing bunched up under it.

He opened a drawer at the base of the armor locker and found clothing in it: underwear. It was made of a modern material and had some kind of embedded circuitry, with what looked like conductive pads here and there. They concentrated at a tag embedded in the cloth at the back, where the waistband joined above the tail. The temptation was too much to bear. He took off his pants and shirt and folded them neatly—a cadet always folded his clothes neatly if he wanted to avoid the wrath of the trainers—and placed them on the bench.

Quivering in excitement, Mark tried on the underwear. He felt the conductive pads against his balls and cock. In the drawer he found a groin cup that was obviously intended to go in the pocket at the front of the shorts. He slipped it in and arranged himself. That was quite comfortable, especially once the pads warmed up to his skin temperature. He could feel lumps at various points on the inside of the armor; soon they softened up and became unobtrusive. His knot started growing. He looked at himself in a mirror and smiled.

He pulled on the shirt. It had the same sorts of lumps and lined patterns; Mark wondered what they were for. He tried on the chest armor again. This time it slipped into place quite nicely, and the tag at the waist of the shirt fit into a slot in the armor.



He put on the armored leggings. These covered his lower torso, hips, thighs, and groin, and a tag on the back of the undershorts clicked into a slot in the armor. He saw how the leggings fastened to the chest armor, snick! Next, the shins and boots—snick, snick—followed by the arms, snick! He wiggled experimentally and took fighter stances as he had practiced. Stance. Lunge! It was lovely how this armor moved so smoothly compared with his own.

His cadet uniform looked out of place on the bench, so he put it into the drawer where the underwear and groin cup had been. It closed with a snick. He looked at himself in the mirror again: He looked like a fighter, armored up in blue and white. The mixed gray-and-brown fur of his head and tail seemed out of place. He found the tailsock and slipped that on; it fastened neatly to the back of his pants. He stared at the helmet on its bracket in the locker and it seemed to stare back at him; he felt his knot grow harder in his shorts.

Ah, what the hell, he thought, and grabbed the helmet. It hinged open at the top, separating it into front and back halves. He held up the back half of the helmet as he stuck his muzzle and face into the front half. When that mated with the collar of his chest armor, he folded the back half down so it covered his ears

and the back of his head. It sealed with a snick. He looked at himself in the mirror again. Now he really looked like a fighter. He could see rather well through the protective lenses, for they were brand-new, not scratched up like his own. There was just a bit of a blockage at the bottom center for his snout, but his peripheral vision was good and he could breathe without a problem. He tilted his head in different directions as though stretching. The helmet moved freely yet left no openings for a sword point to enter.

The last bits were the boots and gloves. They covered his paws and, like the pants and chest, connected to the rest of the armor. Snick!

He looked at himself in the mirror as he struck some fighter poses. On guard! Stance! Lunge!



Mark liked the anonymity of the helmet: he knew it was himself in that armor, but his grey fur was hidden by the blue and white armor, so he looked like all the suits of armor in the cylinders around him. He liked the masculine bulge the armor gave him between his legs. He rubbed it and felt nothing. Well, that was to be expected; it was armor. He punched himself experimentally in the groin. Just a dull thud. He could take quite a kick with this on! The feeling of the armor over his entire body made him feel strong and sexy, despite the couple of pressure points here and there. He wanted to rub himself, but the armor

prevented this. Besides, he thought, he should get out of this armor and put everything back before he got discovered.

He went back to his suit locker and pulled on the drawer with his stuff in it. It would not open. He tried taking off the gloves ... but the buckles would not release. He fumbled at the catch of his helmet ... he could not find it. Panicked, he went to the mirror to look for it. There was no catch. He realized that he was stuck.

Fuck!

He went to the door he came in through, but thought better of it: he could not be seen in this armor. He tried the door anyway ... it was locked.

On the main monitor a bout had just finished and the referee held up the winner's arm: Blue won! The blue-and-black armor shone in the arena lights as the winner ceremonially placed his foot on the chest of his defeated opponent. Then he graciously invited him to stand and they shook paws. The spectators cheered and applauded.

The formally-dressed woofs from earlier appeared.

"And there you have it," one of them said, "The end of the quarterfinals round. Now before we move on to the semifinals, we have a special treat for you. Two very special contestants will be appearing here shortly, our amateur contestants."

"We had hundreds of applicants for this chance to fight like the real gladiators in front of a real audience, and only two were chosen for this honor. The winner of this contest will join the elite school fencing squad."

Now this Mark wanted to see! He turned his attention to the monitor and wandered back to the center of the locker room.

One of the announcers turned his head slightly as though listening to someone.

"I have just received word that the blue contestant is ready. Yes? Send him out."

The lights in the locker room went out and the door next to the monitor opened. Blue lights in the benches and ceiling flashed a streaming pattern, seemingly urging him to go down that hall.

What the fuck?

Heart thumping and feeling nervous excitement and fear—and against his better judgment—he approached the door and stepped over the threshold into a small room. The door closed behind him and a panel to one side illuminated. There it were two icons, a bright one labeled “Calibrate” and a dim one labeled “Open”. He knew the dim one would not work. If Calibrate was his only choice, then why the icon for it? He pressed it.

His armor hummed and whirred and hissed. It rearranged itself to his body. Pressure points faded as the armor molded to his shape. The panel displayed an armored fighter like himself. The image cycled through a series of poses, then stopped at Parade Rest.

Mark furrowed his brow, then took that position. The armor made some adjustments and that pose dimmed. The image changed to legs apart, arms out. He did that, and the armor whirred and clicked a bit. The system led him through a series of twists and lunges, and at each stage there was an improvement in fit.

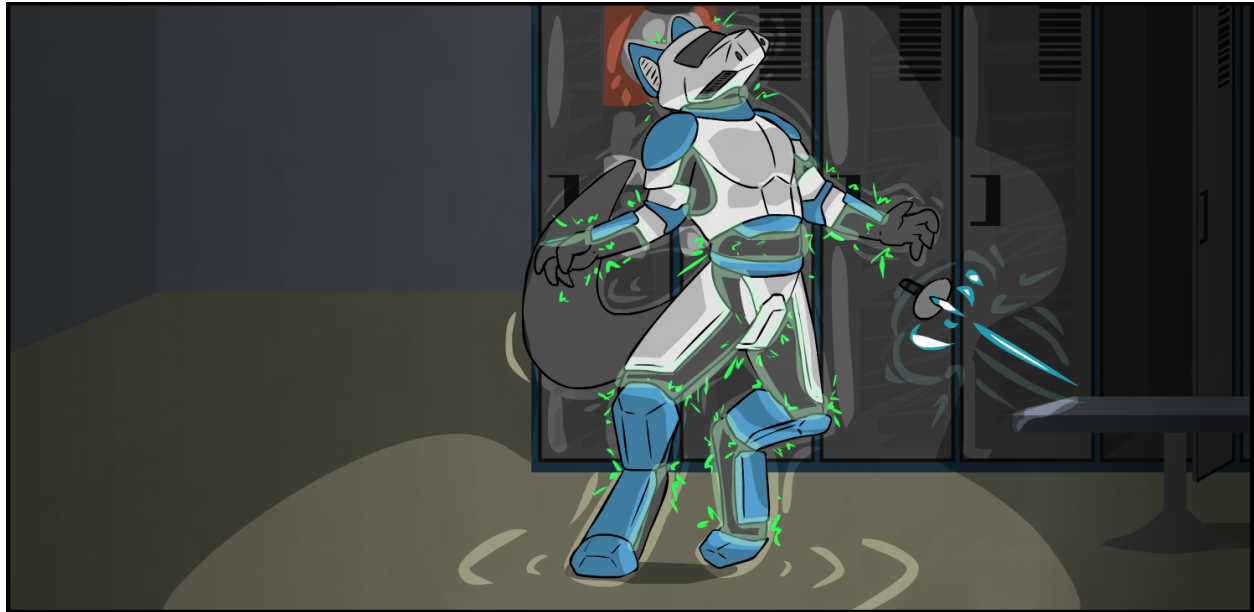
He had completed all the poses, and there was only one left: the figure stood in the middle, and what looked like teeth around the edges of the icon pointed inwards. The Calibrate button lit again, inviting him to press it. Mark did not know what this would do, but he did not like the implications of the icon. He gritted his teeth and pressed Calibrate.

Mark felt a slight tingle all over his body; the sensation lasted about a second. After a pause the tingle returned, slightly stronger, and different somehow, but again for about a second, then nothing. The sequence continued, the tingling getting stronger every cycle. It tickled at first, and as the intensity increased it began to feel quite nice. The timing was unpredictable, and he was always surprised by when the stimulation happened ... but it was stronger every time. It was beginning to get painful. He jumped with a burst. He gritted his teeth and waited ... and just as he relaxed, it zapped him again. His heart began to race and he grit his teeth. An intense zap make him bark involuntarily.

In the background, he could hear the announcer saying something about armor size and pain calibration, but the periodic electrical stimulation was

distracting him. He braced himself for the next shock. It came about when he expected; nevertheless it was quite strong and he barked again. He did not know how many more cycles he would have to endure.

“Son. Of. A. Bitch! OW!”



He hooked at the panel again.

The “Open” button was illuminated. He felt foolish as he hadn’t noticed it before. How long had it been on? Quickly he stabbed at it ... and the next shock did not come. Another door opened. His heart was pounding and he was breathing deeply. He looked all around: a corridor led to the arena, and blue lights illuminated the way.

He emerged into the combat ellipse; across from him another fighter in red and white armor was waiting for him.