**Chapter 1 - Choices**

All men are not created equal. I didn’t undestand those words until I was five years old. When I was beaten back in kindergarten. Unlike other children who gets their power when they’re five, it was still two years before I awakened my gift. In this world, not having a power is the same as a disability. As a result, I was the constant target of bullying by other children.

It was specially the case with this blonde kid and his gang. He had the power to crystallize light in his arms, forming powerful crytal-light gloves. His other mates can use electricity in their hands, the other can release explosive bubbles.

My parents taught me I should always protect and help the weak. So, when they were bullying a classmate with a weak power, I interevened.

It didn’t go as planned.

A dark haired and orange-red eyed boy laid there on the dirt of the playground, staring into the bright blue sky. That was me.

“Ha! That showed him!”

“Stupid Ethan! Should’ve just stayed down”

“Hey, I have the new Soga game! Let’s try it”

I felt the heat of the sand, the pain from my bruises, the buzzing of the insects, and the reflection from the playground. But as I laid there quietly on the ground, a sudden question popped in my head.

Why do I need a superpower to defeat anyone?

My eyes opened wide as I realized.

“… I don’t need to”

And at that moment, I made a Choice. Wiping the blood off my face, I quitely stood up. As the three of them walked away, I picked up a dozen stone from the ground.

And started throwing rocks.

“Aghh!”

I threw rocks after rocks. When they rushed at me, I simply ran away. Unlike them I didn’t awaken my power, so I learned to become the fastest kid in class. Half an hour passed, and things changed. The one that used to lay on the dirt was me.

Now it was them.

I stood above, witnessing them writhing painfully. They were beaten up, bleeding all over their body and one kid’s eyes were bulging wide.

“Enough. Ethan, we won’t hurt you anymore… uwahh!”

“Mommy!”

“Kugh… you powerless… weakling!”, grimaced the blond-haired kid.

Within those very moment… the innocent five years old me suddenly woke up to strange feelings. The feeling of dominating other people…

It felt good.

They still annoyed me, so I started kicking them in the stomach and in the face. Thinking back, I was quite the merciless little psychopath. Even as they beg and coughed blood, there was no stopping me. Eventually, the parents arrived, and they had to aggressively pull me away, as even from a far I was still throwing stones.

The adults couldn’t believe a powerless kid like me could do that. Even more so, a feeble looking kid. But as everyone asked me to apologize, I only told them to fuck off. Well, in a children’s limited word, that is.

Those memories… it flashed through my head.

Because that, was the first time I won against my best friend.

“…w… k… p”

The first time we were on equal grounds…

“Wa…ke…. p”

And the beginning of our brotherhood.

**“WAKE UP YOU PIECE OF SHIT!”**

The shout woke me up back to reality. The bleakness of the night shined into my eyes. Smoke and ashes were everywhere, as the bloody shade of heat and fire made my skin… shiver. I breathed roughly, my arms, bleeding, and my eyes, tired and ablur.

**“So, which one is it? Hehehehe”**, a sinister voice brimmed with pure malice echoed in front of me.

Paleness filled my skin. I was shaking. Afraid.

None of my powers worked.

All my training, all my fighting…. worthless.

**“Come on, Ethan…”**

That thing. It was a being shrouded in darkness, with an ebony, skeleton like body, covered by a layer of chitin. It held a golden-haired boy in its left and a brown haired, unconcious girl in his right. Both were bleeding.

**“Which one is it? The boy? Or the girl? The Best Friend? Or the love interest?”,** The strange anthropoid entity madly asked. I picked the pistol again, shivering, shaking. In my line of sight, I saw the cold bodies of my mentors. Ripped to pieces. I raised the gun, pointing at him. My brows creased. Mouth turned upwards. Eyes blurring.

“… Haah…. Hah….”, though I pointed the gun, I knew it was futile.

I don’t know what to say, nor what to think.

He’s giving me a choice.

One, impossible to make.

**“Come on!”,** the entity’s dark and deep voice echoed.

**“PICK! WHICH ONE?!”**

He tightened his grasp on the boy’s neck.

**“THE LEFT?! THE LIGHT CHILD?!”**

And then the girl’s neck too.

**“THE RIGHT?! THE HEALING CHILD?! WHICH ONE?! PICK GODDAMNIT!! WHICH FUCKING ONE?!!?!”**

That thing then stared right through my eyes.

“**PICK!! WHICH ONE ETHAN?! MAKE THE CHOICE!! HAHAHAHAHAH”**

As the Entity became more and more deranged, drowned by the rabid excitement of Madness, I also started to feel… myself... losing it…

“E…than…”, my best friend bemoaned.

“Choose her… choose Vanessa…. Choose her!!”, Kevin desperately shouted. The color of depair was painted on his wide circled, hollowed eyes. As I stared into those terrible eyes…

Something broke within me.

I stiffly looked in his direction. My eyes, blank.

“Eth…an… do it… d… it…”

And I….

I made the Choice.

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A year passed.

6:43 AM

"Ethan! You're going to be late for school!", a woman’s shout from the kitchen can be heard.

Morning light entered the old room, illuminating the dust particles, the peeling ancient wall paint, and the cracked windows. Junks, metal bars, gadgets, books, papers, guns, armors, and all manners of materials and other items littered the room. So much that hardly any space can be seen where one can step foot.

And within this very room, a boy was peacefully sleeping… on the floor, in front of the door.

A holographic laptop stood in his desk to his left. In its screen appears a console filled with loads of beefing lines of cryptic texts. On the walls of his room, a blackboard was nailed, plastered with all kinds of mathematical and chemical equations, as well as hundreds of atomic structures.

"Ethan! It’s seven already!”, the voice hurried.

”Isaac, go wake up your brother"

"Oh, okay mom"

The door opened and a little boy the age of eight entered. He was quite the cute boy with dark, curly hair and bright orange-red eyes. Wearing a white shirt in the morning, the little boy walked to the huge lump of cloth on the floor before shaking it.

"Big bro, wake up! Wake up!"

"… Ugh… five more minutes…."

"Big bro, isn't today your last day of middle school? And mom's going to get mad!"

"… Ughhh…. Fine…."

Ethan sluggishly woke up. His little brother chuckled, thinking he was like a wobbly jelly.

"Come on big bro, you only have fifteen minutes left!"

"… Uhhhh… o, okay"

Ethan stood up, with his little brother quietly pulling his hands. Little Isaac then pushed his brother to the bathroom, just next to his.

"Now go, clean yourself up!", Isaac commanded, taking his toothbrush, and filling it with toothpaste before giving it to him.

"Isaac, it's your favorite TV show", their mother announced, as a sound of dish washing can be heard from her direction.

Upon hearing this, Isaac's face lit up brightly, almost immediately rushing towards the living room. Within the bathroom mirror, Ethan stared at himself. Pitch black haired, orange-red eyes with a few bags underneath. A sandy beige skin tone, and a slightly above average face.

Ethan had an average body, neither thin nor buff. Some hard muscles were developed under his orange-red shirt. After moving back and forth his toothbrush, he dropped the foamed in his mouth and he started mouth washing with water.

He cleaned himself up and took a quick bath. Exiting the bathroom, he saw their small living room. It was a bit cramped, with a sofa facing the TV, the kitchen just two meters from it, and a small 4x4 meter space just before the door outside.

His beautiful mother raged at him for being such a slowpoke. But as he dries his hair with a cloth, he saw how his mother casually picked up some chicken nuggets, directly from the boiling oil.

"… the hell. Mom, be civilized. Use the spatulas"

"Ehh. It's a lot faster this way"

He then saw in the television what his little brother, Isaac, was watching.

It was a cartoon series based on the currently most powerful hero in the world.

Union Prime.

A man wearing a blue armored suit with a red cape. Handsome and tall, expressing his great muscles and well-toned body. The dark-haired man was known to be the Symbol of Peace.

"There's nothing to worry about! For I, Union Prime is here!", the kid's show went on with Union Prime showing his super strength, super speed, super reflexes, and basically an augmented superhuman.

The little Isaac was cheering it on.

Ethan just looked at it with half-closed eyes.

*'… So uncreative'*

"Ethan, why are you still in your bath towel? Go change now!"

"… Yes, yes"

He entered his room and started changing into his Junior Highschool uniform. Suddenly, Ethan saw that he, accidentally broke his rounded glasses.

It was seating there, lying on the ground. Crushed by one of the metal ingots from the bed.

"… Oh…", he picked up his glasses and sighed before putting It on the trash bin.

He opened his right palm and after concentrating for a few seconds, a new rounded glasses came out of it.

Ethan wore it. After trying for a bit, he lightly smiled.

"… Good"

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The City of Artem, like any other city, is filled with tall buildings and winding rail infrastructure all over the city. The risings smoke, and flying cars filled the air, as well as slow moving small airships plastered with screen advertisement.

Ethan quietly sat at the jam-packed train in the morning. He was casually sorting through his smartphone, encased with an orange-red colored titanium alloy.

A holographic projection of a television is fixated on one of the train’s walls. A female news reporter started announcing.

"Ten months have passed since the extremely cruel and violent vigilante, Unchained Predator went on a continental rampage and slaughtered thousands of criminals. To this day, no one still know who or what he is…”

As he browsed the internet, Ethan felt a sudden tremor, a sound of explosion.

Turning his back towards the train window, he saw something that made his eyes open slighty wide.

A man with large dark wings, wearing a dark armored suit, was flying through the sky. He was carrying a certain box. Behind him were rows of explosion one after another.

Another man suddenly appeared, wearing a green jacket and short pants, he gigantified, growing into a fifteen meters tall giant. A wave of his hand toppled a building, causing chasing heroes to stop.

"Woahh! Another again?"

"Damn, what about the people inside those buildings?"

"Villains sure are appearing a lot lately"

Cheers within the train can be heard.

"Look, it's Electric Falcon!"

A man with white wings, clad in a falcon like helmet and tight, leather armor slammed into the giant's face. Both of his hands were covered with golden gloves, emitting intense yellow lightning sparks.

The giant immediately lost consciousness, causing him to fall to the ground. But before he fell, a man in a dark shadowy robe came from the shadows. As he opened his eyes, shadowy light appeared, causing the falling giant to float in the air, preventing further damage to the ground.

"Oh!! It's Dark Caster!"

Ethan observed these as the train moved. The dark-winged man from before who was carrying a box, turned around with a frown in his face. His back filled with cold sweat.

He pulled out a cube from his pocket and then threw it to the ground.

As the cube fell on a city road intersection, the cube expanded and morphed. The people on the ground witnessed the thing, and almost immediately their face was filled with horror.

"What, what the hell is that?"

"Is that a monster?"

"Run away!"

"ARGhh!"

Screams followed as the people and vehicles around the intersection started scattering.

Ethan wanted to watch more but the train already left.

So, he turned to his phone to find the livestream.

*'… Monster summoning cube. A nasty piece of technology that's been developed by terrorist organizations east of Ostania'*

In the Video, Electric Falcon and Dark Caster had no choice but to stop. They prioritized saving the people from the rampaging, bull-headed bipedal monster with writhing purplish tentacle wings and a stone hammer.

The livestream was viewed from a drone.

"Dark Caster!", Electric Falcon shouted.

"On it!", and with a reply, Dark Caster's shadowy cloak expanded and enveloped the bull like monster who desperately struggled. Dark caster then expanded his shadow and pushed every civilian away from the scene.

"I'm sorry!", he shouted as he seemed to have kicked some people hard. But he had no choice, as not only he had to save them, but he also had to bind this rampaging monster whose every swing of him hit the ground so hard it created a few meters wide craters.

"Diee!", Electric Falcon shouted as a metallic pile drive appeared on the back of his right arm, piercing deep into the bull monster's head.

"Electric Shock!", and an electric wave pierced through the monster's brain causing it to instantly die.

Ethan with half closed eyes, could not help but comment: "holy shit dude, come up with more creative names"

Dark Caster slowly placed the monster to the ground, careful and trying to limit any possible damages to the area.

"Falcon! Do you see him?!"

"No, I think he escaped!"

"Damnit! HQ, this is DC, we need scouts!"

The livestream continued and it showed the two leaving the scene.

Around Ethan, many people were also watching the livestream within their phones. Flushed faces of excitement filled the train room. People were cheering the two and idolizing them.

"Damn! Those are A-Tier Heroes for you!"

"Absolutely cool! I wish I was like them"

"Man, my superpower is just a week earth skill"

"I wonder when Electric Falcon 2 the movie will be released?"

Ethan quietly observed the livestream again. Because the two were no longer there, most people no longer paid attention. But not Ethan.

He witnessed a few people crying on the ground, some were injured from Dark Caster shoving them away. There were even some who died from the building collapsing earlier. The ambulance and minor heroes started arriving soon to help those in the scene.

It was a typical sight, Ethan thought.

He could not help but be grateful he was in the country of Arlika. A first-world nation with an excellent hero defense force system.

Because in many poorer nations… such luxury…

Does not Exists.

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The classroom door opened, a young boy with dark hair and orange-red eyes casually entered and sat at the middle. Everyone quitely looked at him. Some glanced at him with raised lips, others with mocking eyes, most with indifferent expressions.

"Ethan Morales, you're late again!", shouted the teacher. He was a tough and muscular man, brown skinned with sharp eyes and spiky black hair.

“It’s the final day of school and you’re still late?”, the teacher sighed, glaring at Ethan.

“… Yeah”, but he simply just nodded, staring at the ground without any change in his face.

The teacher sighed, and the kids at the classroom simply laughed at him.

"Alright, for this last day, I'm going to be giving a final future career advises individually. But…."

Every kid in the room suddenly manifested their superpowers. Some can create wood, others can elongate their arms, some had sharp claws, others had a tail like appendage, etc…

"You're all going to try for the Guardian schools I see", the teacher bitterly smiled at the enthusiam of his students.

A while passed and it was Ethan's turn.

Within a partitioned side of the classroom, Ethan was seating right in front of his homeroom teacher.

"Ethan…", his teacher awkwardly looked at him, "Are you serious? But with your superpower"

"… Yes…", Ethan lightly smiled, but his eyes were without any expression.

“… I will succeed… That’s guaranteed”

He quitely observed Ethan. And from deep inside, his heart quitely tightened as he bit his lips. He slowly leaned closer, and started whispering, loud enough for only Ethan to hear.

“Ethan… “, a melancholy followed his voice, “I know a person that experienced great tragedy, when I see one….”

The teacher widely smiled, with pity reflecting his eyes.

As he heard those words, Ethan slowly raised his eyebrows.

“During the three months you disappeared, I was told you ran away”, the teacher clapsed his hands, slowly shaking it.

“And when you came back you were… a hollow… I want to know what happened”

Ethan heavily breathed in and out.

As the air left his body, he just lightly smiled, staring into the ground.

“… I’m sorry… I can’t tell you”

“I see… it’s okay…”

He lightly straigtened his back and made eye contact with Ethan.

“You know, I have a friend, well used to have one. He would always tell me that… human life is basically this. You get born, all kinds of stuffs happen, and you die…”

“…”, Ethan was suddenly taken aback by those words.

“He always tells that to me. So, when he died, I was laughing while crying at his grave. Hahahah. Can you imagine?”

“…”

“But the point is Ethan… the meaning of those words. Is that life is a complicated, chaotic, and messed up affair. None of us leave it unscathe. So, Ethan… I hope you make the most of your life. Enjoy your gifts. Life is short. And before you know it you’ll be dead”

Ethan’s eyes suddenly widned. He stared back at his teacher, whose eyes reflected a dark melancholy.

“… I see… “

“Alright, sorry if that’s the best I can give you. Hahahahah!”

He lighty smiled. Feeling the earnest intent behind his teacher’s words, Ethan bowed in front of him.

“… I will remember”

“Thank you”

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Ethan stood in front of the school's gate.

The final day, and hundreds of students clamored here and there, about to part ways for years to come. Many sounds of tears, cries, and joyful sound filled the air. There's a reason why the last year of junior high ends earlier compared to other years.

Because this is the time where students will diverge and chose their paths in life. Primarily, many will opt to become heroes by joining Hero Academies. Hence, time is given for them to prepare.

"Ahh! Let's meet again!"

"I'll never forget you!"

"Let's hang out one last time!"

"Alright class, let's go karaoke!"

Some classes with tight groups went out, others merely scattered. It was a typical sight, Ethan thought. And then, as he himself was about to leave, he felt a pat on his shoulder, and a hug on his belly.

"Big Bro!"

"Ethan-chi! Uwahhh!"

*'… ahhh'*, with half-closed eyes, Ethan's energy immediately pummeled down to Zero. Because right now, two of his nosy juniors were attaching themselves to him.

"… What?"

"Mmph!", the little girl pouted, "Ethan-chi is too discreet! You were going to leave without us! We can't see you anymore! Uwahh!"

The little girl cried, tightly hugging Ethan’s belly. He lightly heaved a sigh before trying to push her head away.

"… Idiot. I’m just going to highschool. And Clara, you're dirtying my uniform"

She was a girl with long wavy brunette hair, whose height reached below his shoulder. Although she was a cute girl, her childishness makes Ethan see her as nothing but an annoying little sister.

From below, her orange eyes stared at him, crying erantically.

"W-Well, that was mean of you Big Bro. You could've told us you were leaving!", the other guy to his right was a tall junior, taller than Ethan by a head. He was a black-haired handsome kid with a well-defined nose and sharp-piercing eyes. Despite his looks, he was too timid for his own good.

"… Get away. You two are annoying"

"Ethan-chi! Which school are you going, I'm going there too!"

"M-Me too!"

Ethan sighed. He really felt tired. These two were two of his pet-projects he did just for fun. They were his trial experiments.

And he succeeded.

Ethan quietly looked at the two of them. Sighing, he replied, "… UHA, I'm applying"

""Ah!"", the two smiled brightly.

“Yes! We're all going there next year! Right, Dan-dan!?”

“Indeed. My Dad insist I only go there. Hahaha”

“… I see”, Ethan rolled his eyes “... If you enter there, pretend you don’t know me. Two annoying juniors following me will just ruin my reputation"

"Ethan-chi is such a Tsun!"

A vein popped in Ethan's forehead, "… I'm not a Tsun."

"Hahaha", Daniel lightly chuckled.

"Alright, to celebrate Big Bro’s graduation, let's go to dinner. It's on me!"

"Wah! Dan-dan's the best!"

"… ugh…", Ethan groaned.

And then, they heard a very loud laughter coming from their back. A group of other 3rd year graduates passed them by. One of them, a boy with blonde hair and blue eyes glared at Ethan with raised lips.

"UHA? You? Keep dreaming kid!", with an aggressive voice, he sneered.

"Hey, isn't that too much? At least let him keep dreaming!"

"He actually wants to go there! Hahahah this is too funny!"

Ethan however, merely reacted… with indifference. But such was not the reaction of his two juniors. Clara disappeared and a water blade katana was placed underneath that blonde kid's neck. He suddenly lost his composure and almost stumbled.

*‘… Sloppy’*, Ethan observed.

The blonde kid’s two lackeys quickly manifested their power. The boy to the left expanding his arm’s thickness while the other created a rough stone skin on his arms. But the two were blocked, as a square barrier formed around them. They suddenly stared in that person’s direction, only to see Daniel with his right hand stretche forward. His face, carrying a pair of serious eyes and a deep frown.

That blonde kid tgrits his teeth. A crystallized prism-like yellow aura surrounded him. He quickly jumped forward, facing Clara. A fight broke out as the two slashed and punched each other. Their little fight begun to attract attention all over the place.

Clara moved her left foot forward when suddenly; they heard a loud clap. As they stared into Ethan's direction, they could see his indiffent eyes.

"… That's enough. Today is the last day of school. Do you want to spend the rest of it in the Guidance Office? Clara, Daniel, let's go"

"B-But. Ethan-chi, they insulted you!"

"That's right. They're always picking a fight against you!"

As the complaints followed, Ethan's eyes became dull. He glanced at everyone nearby, and with the coldest voice they’ve ever heard, Ethan spoke.

"… Let's go."

A shiver ran through all their spine. Even the blonde kid felt something frightening. Clara and Daniel were sweating buckets when they deactivated their superpowers. The two of them quietly followed Ethan.

The blonde kid was left there. He also deactivated his prism power.

"B-Boss Kevin?"

"You alright boss?"

He grits his mouth. Cold feelings of frustration and raging waves of anger filled his heart, mixing and colliding, making him feel unable to say or think of anything. He looked downward, tightly gnashing his teeth as a terrible look filled with his sight.

"Tsk…"

Kevin glared at Ethan’s back.

A certain kind of indignation flashed through his eyes.

*'A man like you… does not deserve to be a Hero… '*

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Ethan spent the rest of his day, unwillingly playing with his cute juniors. They played in bowling alleys, the arcade, in the park, then ate on Mister Krispies. There were many times where Ethan thought that they were annoying. But he was grateful for them for being friends with a loner like him. And such, when Ethan finally smiled, the two of hugged him in joy.

"Well, guess that’s it for today Big Bro”

"Ethan-chi! Uwahhhh"

Clara was clinging to Ethan's clothe as they stood at the train station. From here on, Ethan would simply walk his way home while these two will go take the train.

"… Let go Clara. "

"Uwahhhh! I can't! Uwahhh", Clara was crying at Ethan's uniform who, by now, was stained with her tears and snot. A vein popped in Ethan’s forehad.

"… Sigh… this little shit", followed by a quick grabbing motion of her head. Daniel then used his power and lifted Clara, trapping her in a floating air box.

"Ahhh! Dan-dan! You meanie! Let me go!"

"Then, I'll say goodbye to you, Big Bro. It was great today"

"… Yeah, whatever. Take care both of you…"

Ethan waved them both goodbye as Daniel brought Clara with him to the train station. He became lost in thoughts as their train left. The day he met each of them flashed through his mind. One was a timid kid that always hid in the library, only using his useless power as an air fan. The other was a depressed loner who didn't have any friends and was merely used as a drinking water girl.

Ethan could not help but lightly smile.

*'… The potential within us all…',* And Ethan… broke into a wicked smile.

*'… It is, beautiful…'*

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Ethan started walking home. Passing through the central plaza, he saw the bright billboards flashed with advertisement, the myriads of busy people walking about, and the fuzzin of the electric cars passing through the intersection. At the side walk, he saw floating drones, displaying a hologram

*“Rhea’s Drink! Nothing like the love of mother nature!”*

*“Axis Armory! A protected body is a protected future!”*

Ethan walked past them. Although the drones were playing pre-recorded human voices, it felt monotonous. From a corner of his eyes, he saw a group of highschool students standing before a bending machine. They were wearing clean and black uniforms. Their red neckties seem to gleam at the morning light and their shoes were all well made.

Ethan observed how casually they threw their half-eaten burger at the trash bin, and the cheerful expressions on their faces.

Once exiting the beautiful interiors of the train station, Ethan came out on an open area. Pots of plants, a row of trees, and streetlights filled the area. To the right of the station was a row of tricyles. Ethan saw that the constant arrival of passengers made their business quite good.

But before he left, he noticed one of the drivers suddenly shout.

“Hey, what did you do to my vehicle?!”

“Ah! It turned to dust! I’m sorrrry!”

“Pay for it!!!”

Ethan started walking through the pedestrian crossing. It was then that he saw something he’s always seen every single day.

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Ethan walked back. The sun was already setting as he spent too much time today playing with his friends. He was browsing his phone as he walked down a street leading back to their apartment. On his way, he passed by many people whom some he recognized were also residents nearby.

"The middle-east nation of Jorsen just experienced a terrorist bombing. The authorities are still investigating it. The rise in recent terrorism within Jorsen has greatly damaged the country's economy who primarily relies in its tourism industry for its GDP"

'… uwah… what a bunch of lunatics…', Ethan squinted

Ethan switched to another news, and saw a rather interesting one.

"The UHD now announces that there are disturbances within the Dimensional Shield of Earth. A large scale dimensional invasion may occur within southern asian-countries"

'… United Humanity's Defense against Otherworldly Beings, or UHD'

He could not help stare into the sky, where a faint, net-like, hexagonal grid covered the sky.

"… That's right. There were a lot of countries in the past. And seven or so continents… but that's been reduced to ashes two hundred years ago when the world was invaded by monsters"

Ethan moved forward once more. Lost in his thoughts.

'… And now… we achieved peace to some degree. But for how long can we maintain it?', he breathed out as he think about it. For everything he's been hearing from the news lately were nothing but increasing instability and chaos.

'… Who knows. If only the Elucid King did not disappeared fifty years ago and remained with us….'

Suddenly, Ethan remembered the ticket that his teacher gave him.

Taking it out of his wallet, the ridiculous looking child-drawing, white kitty costume ticket appeared.

'… No doubt. Only members of the First UHD Corps who fought in the Second Great Invasion owns this. Teacher was actually a retired member. Goddamnnm, he's literally a living legend'

'… Though… how much does this cost if I put it up in EWorld?', Ethan suddenly had some blasphemous thoughts. If his teacher new he was going to treat his golden ticket like this, he would have strangled Ethan's neck.

Suddenly, Ethan turned around and realized something was wrong.

The street he was in was wide, surrounded by residential houses and apartments. But something was wrong. There weren't any people.

But more importantly…

The sky, and the surrounding buildings… was etched with a shade of pink.

Ethan sharpened his eyes.

He immediately hid the ticket and kept his wallet. Then he took out a silenced pistol from his shoulder bag.

He jumped to the side and hid on a tree by the side walk.

That was when he saw it. A huge explosion occurred by the road up ahead. Smoke and ashes filled the air up ahead. From the smoke on the T-intersection head, a man with bulging body, dark wings, and dark armored suit appeared.

And Ethan, without a doubt, knew who that was.

'… It's the same bastard from before! Shit. Though he looked beefy now, he's definitely the same guy!'

Suddenly, as the smoke clears, a blue armored suit had his back was turned towards the dark winged man who was struggling to stand up. That man in blue armor had his red cape widely held by his right arm, shielding a student boy shaking in fear underneath him. The boy seems like he attends a nearby school that Ethan knew.

"You okay kid?", the man coolly spoke. With his idol in his sight, the scrawny and curly haired short kid smiled brightly.

"Yes, Union Prime! I'm okay!"

"Don't worry, we'll get out of this mess."

"Yes!"

"Hoh… ", it was a seductive and charming, high-pitched female voice, "… I did not expect THE Union Prime to appear here of all places"

That dark haired, handsome man frowned. He turned around and saw a woman with bewitchingly skimpy pink dress. The small upper jacket tightly covers her arms and the area just above her neck. The dress underneath was revealing the centerline of her body from the middle of her breasts down to her belly. Her reddish-pink hair flowed smoothly with light bangs on the front, finally, nine stripes of clothes formed a skirt around her belly.

"Navella…", Union Prime grimly spoke.

'… wait… Navella?... Navella as in the Cursed Dimension Princess?', his jaw dropped.

'… Isn't she a high ranking executive in a world renowned terrorist organization?!'

As Ethan witnessed this from a far, he could not help but coldly sweat so much. As he hid underneath the tree, he tried his best not to shake in fear.

So many things were occurring at the same time that Ethan could not chose which one surprised him. But there was one thing in specific that really does.

His life is in danger!

'… Holy shit, I hit the fucking Deus Ex Devilus! Goddamnit!'

Ethan quickly created a gas mask from his right hand and quickly wore it. Then he created two filter canister and equipped them on the mask.

Behind the tree, he took off his uniform and hit it in his bag. He then created fire resistant dark nylon pants and a hooded jacket.

As Ethan was doing that, he heard explosions up ahead.

Union Prime smashed the air in front of him, causing the dark winged man to stumble and hit a column.He then blocked with his body a barrage of reddish-pink energy blasts from Navella.

Ethan continued and created a white hair spray. He colored his hair white. Remembering his eyes, he took out his mask and as he created a pair of black contact lens. He wore the mask after equipping the contacts.

The reason why Ethan was doing this was very simple.

'… We're stuck in a hidden space, and since Navella is from an international terrorist organization, there is a chance this is a secret setup to kill Union Prime or some other hidden agenda that should not be known. If they've seen my face, even if I manage to get away, they can still find me based on description…. And kill me and my family!'

Ethan grit his teeth, then he created a fire grenade inside of his bag, with the string trigger poking out.

'… In case I got caught, I must at least destroy any evidence towards my identity'

That scrawny kid up ahead was well protected by Union Prime. He can protect the kid well even against two enemies.

But Ethan? He was far away. If one of those guys even managed to hold Union Prime by a few seconds, one of those two can appear and capture him alive!

Now he's become a burden, a free real hostage.

'… And these lunatics are absolutely insane! They all hate Union Prime. Even if this isn't a secret setup, they will definitely kill me right in front of him simply out of spite once they got what they need. FUCK!'

"Oh my, did you miss me, Darling? To be honest, I did miss your Hard, majestic… phalic thing…", that Navella woman brightly smiled while seductively licking her lips.

'… What?', Ethan tilted his head.

"That was a mistake, you wretch! I cannot believe I trusted you!"

"Hahahah! You should be grateful to me! If it weren't for me, you would've stayed a deadbeat virgin you wimp!"

'… what? What? What?', the scrawny kid ahead opened his eyes widely.

'… the fuck?', Ethan dropped his jaw.

But Union Prime did not get embarrassed. While he was momentarily flustered, he merely glared at the two of his enemies.

While Navella was busy buying time, the dark winged man besides her who had a black mask on his face, activated a box in his right pocket.

'I can't move carelessly… ', Union Prime quietly thought. '… With this kid at my back, a wrong move and they'll aim for him. That dark haired man has been eyeing him for a while'

"And so, if you want to have sex with me, you can just call me, Darli-"

"Enough! I know you're just buying time"

Union Prime's eyes shined a blue light.

"Oh, that's… scary…", and Navella took a step back.

"Return back the box you stole", Union Prime took a step forward, causing the rock in front of him to break.

"I'm afraid not", the dark winged man unleashed a laser sword in his right arm while Navella started forming circles with mystic formations around her.

Witnessing a fight about to break, Ethan tightly held his silenced pistol with both hands, quietly observing the situation. He hardly breathed, and he did his best to not appear.

'… Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. Please don't notice me. '

"… So be it", Union Prime heavily uttered.

But suddenly, a bright pinkish light and smoke appeared, and a sudden roar followed. Union Prime stood closely in front of the boy, ready to fight any that would harm the boy.

And as the scrawny boy witnessed that, he could not help but bite his lips and clutch his heart.

'I'm useless. If it weren't for me, Union Prime could have captured them. I'm so useless!'

As the smoke faded, a giant monster with six human-like feet, four beastly ripped arms, and a fat and hairy body with a large mouth in the middle appeared.

"Grr!", Union Prime grumbled as the beast intently aimed for the boy. He raised his arms, blocking it's attacks.

The two enemies already left, but Union Prime dismissed the thought as he had a boy to save.

But while that was happening.

Ethan's eyes was wide opened.

Because in that instant that the smoke and light appeared, somebody appeared, running besides Ethan. As he glanced to his left, his eyes made contact with Navella who opened her eyes widely too. But Ethan noticed something.

There was fury in her eyes upon seeing him.

Navella's eyes shined brightly, before disappearing in a space ripple together with the dark winged man. The pink shade of the world also disappeared, causing Ethan to think that he must have returned back.

After that, he witnessed the monster appear ahead, two of its arms smashed towards Union Prime who blocked it.

As for the poor Ethan, he experienced what could have been the most frightening and heart skipping moment of his entire life. His heart literally stopped as he made eye contact with Navella.

'…. HOLLLLYYYYY SHAAAAYYYYYYYTTTTTTTTTT!'

Ethan breathed in and breathed out so deeply he felt like he was going to hyper ventilated.

From the front, he suddenly felt a huge bang. The monster up ahead. Disintegrated as a huge hole was left in its body, before it fell backwards. People from within their residential houses and apartments came out or peeked in their windows after hearing what happened.

Ethan immediately reacted and quickly hid his gun in the bag.

'… This is not a registered firearm after all…'

He stood up, then quickly ran away from that place.

Although he had an exciting story to tell, Ethan will keep it a secret. Because he browse the internet a lot, he knew well what these dangerous people are capable of.

And he was not having it.

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"Hah, now that that's over…", Union Prime turned around and smiled at the kid.

"You okay, boy?"

"Y-Yes Union Prime!", the boy smiled brightly. But quickly his face crumpled into a sad look and he bowed down.

"I'm so sorry!"

"Eh?"

"If it weren't for me. You wouldn't have to hold back! If only… If only a powerless like me didn't ran towards that kid, and tried saving him… then, then-"

A huge amount of people was starting to gather. And witnessing that Union Prime was here, a commotion was starting to broke out. Union Prime then took the boy and flew away.

"Eh?", as they soared through the sky, he ensured to fly at a slow rate and just a few hundred meters above the air.

Finally, after flying for a minute, they arrived at the flat roof top of a sky scraper where Union Prime safely landed the kid.

"Eh? Um? Why are we here sir?", the scrawny kid looked at Union Prime with a creased eyebrow.

He stood in front of him. Union Prime smiled.

"Because we couldn't take properly if we're down there with all the commotion and stuff"

"Oh, ah, I see…", the kid shyly rubbed his hair.

"Tell me, why did you saved that kid before? I mean, we met before already", Union Prime sighed.

"You don't have any superpower, you will only endanger yourself"

"T-That.. That's because I….", the scrawny kid bit his lips. And then, finding his resolve, he stared straight forward towards Union Prime with wide eyes.

Despite his shaking body, he spoke it.

"M-My body just moved on its own. B-Because I thought… that kid needed help. A-And there was no one around. I just thought that… that was the right thing to do!"

Union Prime's eyes opened widely. He could not believe there was actually a kid this stupid out there who would sacrifice his self for such a reason.

'No', Union Prime shake his head, '… I was also exactly like this stupid kid. It was this exact reason that my master chose me'

"Hey kid… no… Akiyoshi…"

"Huh?", Aki stared straight into Union Prime's eyes.

"You said you wanted to be a Hero, right?"

"Y-Yes!"

And with great kindness, he spoke the following words.

"You can become a Hero"

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Ethan was running around alley ways. As he passed through walls after walls, he deeply clung to his bag. He grit his teeth, running around and escaping.

Ten minutes passed and Ethan managed to get hundreds of meters from the sight.

'… She saw me. Navella fucking saw me! Damnit!'

Ethan, at that moment, realized the situation.

'… She was angry. She suddenly became angry when she saw me! Why was she angry? Why would you get pissed that some external nobody observer saw your secret battle in a secret space against Union Prime?'

Ethan gritted his teeth even more. With a deep frown, he kept running. He started feeling even more suspicious.

Suddenly, he stopped.

"… Wait, maybe…"

'… I should've ran to Union Prime?'

Ahead of Ethan was an alley leading to a very populated market district. A few more steps and he'll be there.

When suddenly, a shadow was cast up ahead.

Ethan felt like his world stopped.

Because up ahead was a dark winged man with dark leather armor.

'… I'm dead…'

He reacted by raising both of his palms forward.

"… P-P-Please don't kill me! I'm just a random by stander!"

"Hoo", it was a deep and menacing voice.

"An innocent bystander yet you have white hair AND you slipped inside Navella's Dimension?"

"… I-I-It was an accident! I'm just an innocent kid!"

"You think I'm stupid? You think I can't tell a Denizen of Eden when I see one?"

'… What denizen of fucking eden?! I just used White hair cause the Elucid King once had it later on! I'm literally just a larper gaddamnit!'

He started walking forward. His right hand suddenly became blackish, and long razor sharp claws appeared. His dark eyes and dark wavy long hair stared forward towards Ethan… with a murderous intent.

Ethan took a step back.

He grit his teeth and he pulled his silencer from his shoulder bag.

"Die!", the dark winged man rushed forward to slash Ethan. But as he ran, he suddenly felt weak… and he fell at the ground.

His vision clouded, the world became wobbly and he started feeling nauseous that he puked.

"W-What did you do, you bast-"

It was a quiet flick.

And Blood splattered on the floor.

He pulled the trigger again and again, spilling the dark winged man's brain matter all over the place. Ethan heavily breathed in and out. He then created a silver-like chemical compound liquid and poured it straight down the bullet filled brains of the already dead dark winged man.

Ethan breathed in and out. Sweat filled his forehead.

He was about to run away, but he stopped. He stared over his gas masks.

"… Tsk. I can't let anyone just walk in here"

With all his concentration, he created a glove for his left hand. Then he immediately produced an aluminum pole which he stuck on the ground with a stand, using his left hand. Afterwards he use created a placard with the following words which he attached to the pole.

[STAY AWAY! CHEMICAL HAZARD! Lethal Dosages of Hydrogen Cyanide, floating here. May Cause DEATH]

Ethan then created red-yellow tapes. He wrapped it around the garbage cans, window rails, and whatever hook he can attach it to in order to wrap the path.

He then quickly ran away, leaving the corpse of a dead man behind. As Ethan ran, he created a can of hair spray cleaner and started washing his hair.

'… Goddamnit!'

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

As the sun sets, dyeingthe sky with its peaceful shade of orange, a young man was breathing roughly, seating on the ground, panting underneath the darkness of a bridge.

Ethan reached for the river stream as he removed the last bits of the white color from his hair.

'… I knew Hydrogen Cyanide's lethal dosage is 2 milligram. I was a gamble to choose that chemical since some people are resistant to poisoning'

Ethan remembered himself waving his arm around earlier. As he spread excessive amounts of Hydrogen Cyanide all over the place. Him pulling the silencer was to trick the man into rushing at him, making him breathe the air.

'… I still feel guilty leaving that chemical hazard behind. Someone innocent might get killed, possibly a child. Nevertheless, I didn't have a choice. My combat skills are obviously not on par. Hopefully, they don't have zero permanence skill and see the warning sign'

He took out his dark jacket and pants and he switched back to his uniform. He was located at a rather obscure part of town where few people walk.

Bundling up the dark clothes, Ethan placed them on the rocky ground before burning them up.

As the fire reflected up his face, he could not help but recollect the past.

'… Second time. Like that time with Kevin'

A sardonic smile formed over Ethan's face, followed by a cynical chuckle.

'… Is this what the Elucid King dealt with on a daily basis?', Dullness then filled his eyes.

Ethan sighed. He created a long, dark brown wig, which covered his head and face. He left the under bridge and started walking away.

'… I did better this time. I made smart choices. I didn't fail'

He slightly grit his teeth. A melancholic gaze appeared up his face as he stared at the ground, clutching his heart.

As the vision of his recent murder flashed through his mind, his heart started getting faster and faster. A few moments later, Ethan exhaled. His heart calmed down.

He looked into the distance, towards the setting sun.

It was the same time back then, the same scenery. Flashes passed through his mind as he remembered a painful memory, of three kids playing heroes, of one kid having to choose between his two friends…

And of his very own impotence and failure.

'… I must never fail again'

Ethan started walking home.

‘… I must become a Hero… so I can become stronger… so that one day… ‘

His face contorted into an ugly sight.

Fury was etched, with a deep frown and a furious arch upon his mouth.

‘… I will be able to murder that being. And take back what he stole from us’

◇ ◇ ◇ ◇ ◇

Ethan entered the apartment they were staying in. He already threw away the wig.

"… Mom, I'm home"

"Ah, Welcome back!"

His mother greeted him. Seating by the sofa, watching television. She had dark hair like him tied in a low side ponytail. Her eyes were bright red and her skin was silky whit, and agreenhouse dress.A beautiful and young woman, that was what one would initially thought. Although she's already in her 30s, she was still looking young. The advancement of technology allowed for such products to exists.

At the medium sized apartment, the Morales family lived in here for the past few years.

"… Mom, when is dad coming back home?", Ethan asked as he sat on the front door, removing his shoe.

"Ah, your dad said he'll be back next month. He said he found a good deal and he'll be able to buy us a house once it's done", Mother Morales kindly smiled.

"… Ah, Dad sure is hard working"

After removing his shoe, Ethan stood up. He stood there for a while, in front of his mother. He was lost in thoughts. The battle of Union Prime, the two S-tier enemies, as well as his murder of one of them. It continuously played through his mind.

'… I did my best to conceal my identity… but in the off-chance they learned of it…', Ethan frowned.

But, as Ethan recalled, he did not just felt fear.

It was rush.

A rush of excitement, of putting your life on the line. Of an intense focus without any care. Simplicity in its finest. Fight and survive.

Ethan opened his eyes widely upon realizing that. His mouth shivered, but he closed it. He stared at his mom's eyes with seriousness and he spoke his mind.

"… Mom, I'm applying to UHA"

"No!", his mother frowned, deeply rejecting him.

"Look at the world Ethan!", Mother Morales pointed at the television. A school was being attacked by villains and heroes were coming to the rescue.

"Being a Superhero means risking your life every, single, day, Ethan! Do you have any idea how much I worry just letting you go to school?"

"… Tsk", Ethan frowned in annoyance.

"… And you want me to give up my dream for your own selfish reasons?", Ethan howled.

"Yes! I'm selfish, I know it!",his mother stood up, "It was my fault Ethan! I shouldn't have shown you that video years ago! I-If that was the case you wouldn't have developed your power to such an extent!",

"… Damnit Mother! You've always been like this! Why are you telling me this now?! Wasn't it you who encouraged me to improve OUR USELESS family power!"

"I didn't mean it Ethan!", his mother shouted.

Ethan stood in silence. From a corner, he could see his young eight year old little brother across the room, peeking at them from the door.

"I was just… a confused, 18-year-old young mother who knew nothing, trying her best to save her son. So I said what I had to say! I, I, do you have any idea, how many friends I had who lost their children because they all wanted to become heroes?!", his mother started to cry. Tears ran down her face.

And Ethan was silenced. He could not help but feel a guilt bud from his heart.

"Do you have any idea, how much blood, sweat, and tears I went through to raise you and Isaac! We moved houses after houses, trying to rise from our poor, meager life! We barely had food, much less dinner, we only had salt and rice! We had to avoid loan sharks, cartels, criminals from the ghetto! Moving from our country from Desteria to here in Arlika took everything we had, Ethan!", slowly, his mother calmed down.

And slowly, she went forward.

"Me and your Dad… did everything we could, to protect you both and give you a better life…"

"… "

"And now, you're telling me you will jump straight into the fray, into the world that we tried our best to stay away from? Ethan! I already almost had a heart attack over that accident half a year ago! I can't, I can't handle this! Do you have any idea, how much my heart broke when I learned that you, Kevin, and Vanessa were doing Vigilante work? I don't want you to become like her!"

"…", he gnashed his teeth.

"Your power… your ability to create anything you wish… I've seen what countries did with very exceptional supes Ethan. They turned them into nothing but tools…"

She raised her hands, gently holding his face.

"I don't want you, to end up like them. A mere shadow of who you used to be. I just want you to grow up into a nice young boy, with a good profession in society. But not like this Ethan… please… Not like this"

Ethan's eyes became teary red. He remembered what happened earlier. Had he made the wrong move, had he been slightly lazier and didn't memorized all sort kinds of chemicals, he could have died.

Maybe by now, his mother would have been crying already…

He tightly clenched his fist.

He didn't know what to say.