

### **Dreams and Nightmares**

The protagonist stands again where he once stood in his toughest challenge yet—one he still carries the scars on his back from. The source of these scars stood in front of him, an unwantedly familiar figure looking at him. Dress shoes, slacks, and a long-sleeve button-down shirt rest on the figure, all of which used to be white but are now ripped up and marked with the gray dust of the concrete they were punched through. Their silver gray curls were blown back, covered with a thin layer of dust. Their hockey mask was broken right around their right eye, now showing their bloodshot eye, their blue iris glowing in the darkness of the bankteller stand they were in front of. The characters both stared into each other's eyes, both using their eyes to tell the other how determined they were to put them down. The protagonist, his back still burning from the explosives the beast in front of him threw at him, stood up straight in his tattered clothing. His breathing was labored, and he was barely able to support his own weight on his two feet. He slowly brought his right arm up and opened his right palm to the beast, aiming it right at his chest- where a fist imprint was already present. The magic he had wanted all his life—the one passed down from his family for generations—the ability to create shockwaves was finally in the palm of his hand. His palm began to glow a royal purple, pulsating like a heartbeat as it built up another shockwave to be released. He remembered the pain the beast in front of him caused, both to him and his mentor, who still sat somewhere in the street behind the bank, unconscious with a bloody forehead.

“Ran out of jokes for me, Adonis?” The beast said this, tilting its head to the right.

“This,” Adonis said, pointing at his right hand, “is the only thing I have to say. Back down and let us leave Dr.Genesis.” The desperation that was slowly building up inside Adonis started leaking out with that last sentence.

Suddenly, Dr.Genesis dashed towards Adonis. Adonis, caught by surprise, tried releasing the shockwave, but before he could, Dr.Genesis grabbed his right forearm, forcing his palm to release the shockwave towards the ceiling. They continued gripping Adonis’ forearm, tightening it as they pulled him up off the ground, close to their face.

“You,” Dr.Genesis started between heavy, harsh breaths, “have severely overestimated yourself and underestimated me, Adonis. Regardless of whatever power you gain or how strong you grow,”

Dr.Genesis grip tightened even more.

*CRACK!* Adonis yelled in pain, both bones in his right forearm having been crushed in Dr.Genesis’ left hand.

“You will never be able to escape me.”

Adonis’ forearm throbbed in unyielding pain, his vision beginning to blur. The little energy he had left in his body was crushed alongside his forearm. There was no way out.

*WAH! WAH! WAH! WAH!*

Adonis woke up suddenly, sitting up quickly in his bed, gripping his right forearm with his left hand, expecting to see it flimsy and feeling the throbbing pain again.

He sighed, thanking the usually dreadful wailing of his alarm clock for bringing him out of his dreamy state. He looked over to his left at the black digital alarm clock that sat on his brown wooden nightstand. The red digits on the alarm clock read: 6:26.

He sat up on the side of his queen-sized bed, throwing his gray weighted blanket off of him. He tried to shake it off, but he couldn't seem to get that scene from his dream out of his head. He had been beaten twice, failing to not only protect himself but also his mentor. How could he shake off the feeling that if his mentor hadn't called for help as he was fighting Dr.Genesis in that bank lobby, they both would have been abducted- or worse? He rubbed his eyes, trying to get himself out of the grogginess.

Adonis shuddered as he walked into the training room, which was colder than usual this morning, while walking around in a black compression shirt and black sweatpants- holding his arms in his hands and wishing he had brought a jacket. The training room resembled a mental ward that had its color flipped, with the rubber walls and floor of the cubic room being painted a matte black with white LED lights running diagonally across the ceiling. The only different wall was the one in front of Adonis, which had a one-way mirror high up on it, through which his mentor was overseeing his training.

"Fresh set of hours, Adonis." Roger said this over the practice battlefield intercom. He brought his white mug full of coffee to his lips, drops of the coffee ending up on his black mustache and beard. He tried furrowing his eyebrows to focus on his desktop screen, wincing as he forgot about the bandages he still had on his forehead, covering the nasty gash on his forehead that he was healing from. The gash was an expression of Roger's commitment to being a good mentor, as Adonis reflected. It reminded him of how quickly Roger's role in his life had changed but still maintained importance, from teaching him about the particles that allow humans to use magic to

being part of the operation that transported Adonis and his friends to the safety of the glorious Saint Savior University.

"You have a combat assessment coming up tomorrow," Roger said, "so today's session will be a simulation of the potential obstacles and challenges you'll face during it. Remember what we always say: a clear mind is a what?"

"I'm not saying that nursery rhyme ass shit man." Adonis tells Roger, sticking out his right hip and resting his right hand on it, his left hand massaging his temples.

"I won't start it till you say it!" Roger exclaimed, trying to hide a chuckle behind his words.

"Fine." Adonis sighed. "A clear mind is a sharp mind, and a sharp mind is a clear mind. I really don't get why you make me say these affirmation-like statements all the time. I already know I got this shit!" He says, motioning his palms downward as if to try and calm down Roger.

The first round went rather smoothly, with Adonis dodging most of the cactuses that were launched at him with a cannon, with the exception of one that hit him on the left butt cheek. It is safe to say that Roger, unfortunately, is now more familiar with Adonis' rear end. The second round went pretty well too, with Adonis being able to break all the floating targets with his shockwaves while Roger, unknowing to himself, sang a very off-key and off-note rendition of "The Final Countdown" by *Europe*. Adonis' fits of laughter flustered Roger a bit. The last round was a close combat scenario, with Adonis' opponent being a metal robot that looked like Bruce Lee. The Bruce Lee robot, or, as Roger likes to call it, the Dragon Bot, had super strength and was controlled by Roger via his Xbox 360 controller.

“Let’s see what you got, old man.” Adonis said, beckoning the robot with four of his fingers on his right hand.

“I’m only thirty-six!” Roger yelled back through the speakers in the robot’s head as the robot threw a blindingly fast baseball at Adonis.

*Whoosh!* The baseball flew by Adonis’ right ear and made a crater in the black rubber wall behind him. Adonis dashed towards the robot, determined to take it down without receiving a single blow. As he approached the robot, the robot dug its fingers into the floor, pulling up a chunk of the rubber floor and the tan earth that lay beneath it.

*Uh oh.* Adonis thought to himself.

Roger’s devious giggles were audible through the robot’s speakers as it threw the chunk of earth at Adonis, the chunk around the size of the greatest car known to mankind: a Honda Civic. Adonis, the bottoms of his feet glowing purple, used a shockwave to propel himself upwards, jumping over the robot’s projectile and landing behind the robot, their backs facing each other. Adonis starts to turn towards the robot over his left shoulder, his right fist glowing with a purple sphere surrounding it. He punched straight towards the back of the robot’s head, determined to shut Roger up once and for all. His fist swung through the empty air, leaving Adonis confused as to why he didn’t feel the robot’s head on his knuckles. A shadow cast over Adonis’ face, Roger began to chuckle.

“Not bad for an old man, eh?” Roger teased as the robot flipped and lifted its right heel in the air, falling quickly towards Adonis.

Adonis lifted his arms up in an attempt to protect his head, but it was too late.

*CRACK! BOOM!* The robot's heel broke through Adonis' arms, breaking the bones in his right forearm, hitting the back of his head, and sending his body crashing down into the floor. Dazed and confused, he managed to push himself up on his shaking arms, slowly crawling backwards. He was looking in the direction of the robot, which stood in the crater Adonis' body made, waiting for him to stand back up. Adonis' eyes began to widen, his breathing becoming more labored, his shoulders rising and falling. He no longer saw the robot standing in front of him. He saw Dr.Genesis again, looking down on him after beating him down again, their right bloodshot, blue eye revealed by their broken white hockey mask, continuing to stare him down. Even if he could recognize that this wasn't actually happening, the fear that paralyzed his body and mind felt too real. He was powerless. Frozen. Trapped. Alone.

"Adonis!" Roger yelled, grabbing both his shoulders with his hands and shaking him out of his trance.

Adonis looked around, seeing the robot on standby and Roger having come down from the surveillance room, his eyebrows and jaw tense from concern. Adonis looked at his right forearm, surprised it wasn't hurting anymore to find it glowing dark purple, turning into a bright red as a result of Roger's bone-healing ointment. Adonis sat up with his legs crossed and resting his elbows on his knees, putting his head in his hands, ashamed of the episode he had just had.

*First the dream, now this?* Adonis thought to himself, *What is going on?*

"Are you still thinking about that day?" Roger asked, crouching down so that he was at eye level with Adonis. Adonis couldn't muster up the courage to respond; he simply looked up at Roger's forehead, looking through the bandages at the gash that

Dr.Genesis left on Roger. Roger being found by the Mystical Police he had called earlier for backup, being healed by them, and leading them to find Adonis, hanging lifelessly from Dr.Genesis' grip. Fortunately for them, Dr.Genesis teleported away the moment Roger and the Mystical Police arrived, fearing not only being locked up but also the possibility of the Mystical Police finding the warrant for his arrest on 26 charges of tax fraud.

"I know it's tough, man," Roger started, massaging my right shoulder in solace. "But you have to put that behind you. You lost; it's a simple but hard thing to accept, especially with a great power like yours. I don't know what is going on in your head right now, but you can't let it weigh you down, man."

Roger stood up and put out his hands, which Adonis reached up for so that Roger could help him up.

"You have your combat assessment tomorrow evening, so before that, I need you to ask yourself. After losing so badly, what do you still have?" Roger said sincerely, his hand resting on Adonis' left shoulder, "Do not forget that you were one of the select few who were considered strong enough to be brought here. Never forget where you've come from and why you're here. Keep your chin up." They dapped each other up, doing their usual intricate 1-minute long handshake. Adonis averted his eyes from Roger's, scared to show Roger that his confidence was even more crushed than his forearm had been recently.

Adonis walked out of the white, modern cubic building that held the training room. With his chin down and arms crossed against his chest, Adonis tried to distract himself from the pain in his left forearm by losing himself in the beautiful sights of the Savior

campus on his walk back to his dorm. The dark green lawns sat to the side of the gray brick path he walked down, the campus sprawling out as far as the eye could see on both of Adonis' sides. Even if the campus was only about 125 acres, to Adonis, it felt like his little bubble. He passed the huge blue and white adobe style buildings that housed all of Adonis' favorite foods, pupusas revueltas, and the strong smell of maiz and cheese that would usually send Adonis floating their way. Only right now, Adonis was paying attention to nothing but his own thoughts, staring blankly at the blue and white building that usually brought him so much comfort.

*Left foot forward. Right foot forward. Damn, my forearm still hurts. Left. Right. Ow. I hope the medications Roger gave me kick in soon. Right. Left.* Adonis was in his own world, even refusing to lift his chin to marvel at the beauty of the Arabic villa where he lived and its sleek white and black detailing. From a distance, a friend of Adonis, Dave, was watching over him through a window in their dorm's hallways, noticing that Adonis did not do his usual sigh of relief and dance to indicate his joy of finally getting back home. In the 14 years that Dave and Adonis had known each other, Dave had never seen Adonis so deflated. He decided it was best that he go talk to him, try and figure out what was going on in his homie's head, worried that Adonis would be beating himself up in his own head as Dave knew he had a bad tendency to do.

The water was cold, spraying out the silver metal shower head down Adonis' back in the communal shower of his residence hall, Ciudad View. Adonis was staring blankly into the dried white brick in front of him, his forehead resting on the shower wall.

*"I tried so hard, and got so farrrrr,"* Adonis sang in a mutter, trying to console himself by singing *In the End* by Linkin Park, *"but in the end-"*



*"IT DOESN'T EVEN MATTER!"* A familiar voice spoke to his right, scaring him upright. Adonis looked over the shoulder-height walls between his shower and the shower to his right to find his friend, Dave, his black curls filled with water droplets. He laughed, his rimless rectangular lens glasses dotted with specs of water that were dripping onto his mustache and goatee. Adonis hadn't even heard him enter, even though Dave had slipped on a puddle and faceplanted when he first entered the communal shower room, as evidenced by the big red lump on his forehead. Maybe the sulking just made Adonis zone out that much...

"What's up, bro?" Dave started, taking off his glasses after realizing that he still had them on. "I haven't seen you since class last week. How you been?" A loaded question for Adonis, as evidenced by his change of facial expression, turning away from Dave to the shower wall again, and letting the water run down his short, wavy hair.

Adonis thought about everything going on in his life recently. The nightmare he woke up from earlier this morning. The really satisfying morning crap he had. The flashback he had in the middle of training caused him to lose what normally would have been a slightly challenging duel. Having had his right forearm broken twice in the last month. Feeling like he isn't doing enough. Not strong enough. Too scared. He was too consumed by his own thoughts.

*Weak. Anxious. Frozen.* Adonis thought to himself, words to describe how he currently felt about himself. He was hesitant to tell Dave about this, even though he had been his closest friend for over 10 years now. Talking about it out loud and to somebody else would be to come to terms with these insecurities, things that Adonis just wanted to

push down his own throat and hide in his chest for all of eternity. He remembered the question Roger left him thinking about.

*After losing so badly, what do I still have?* Adonis thought to himself. He looked at Dave, swallowing his pride, and started venting about everything. About how he felt like he had failed everybody. Himself for not beating Dr.Genesis. Roger for losing his duel with the robot and Dr.Genesis. His family, for being the only one in their lineage in a hundred years to have an ability as strong as being able to create shockwaves on earth, water, or air, yet still constantly losing his fights. Dave, for having avoided him all day because he didn't want him to see how upset he was.

"Damn, bro, it sounds like you've had a lot going on today. I'm glad you stopped avoiding me and finally told me what was going on; I was worried about you." Dave told Adonis. It felt bittersweet for Dave, for he was sad but grateful to see that Adonis felt vulnerable enough to share his problems with him.

"But it also seems like a lot of this pressure is self-inflicted." Dave said it honestly. "I mean, have you even heard anybody or seen anybody tell you this to your face?"

Adonis thought to himself of all the interactions he had with Roger, himself, and Dave. The only interactions where he ever felt doubt, disappointment, or shame were those with himself. The interactions with Roger and Dave were more filled with concern and a desire for Adonis' health and strength to improve than any sort of criticism.

*Maybe*, Adonis thought to himself, *I have been too harsh on myself*. He looked over at Dave, who was hitting the Dougie to entertain himself, while Adonis was still sulking and reflecting.

“You’re right.” Adonis said, looking over at Dave. They dapped each other up, each smiling at the other. “But next time, don’t give me a pep talk while we’re both showering; it felt a little too intimate.” Adonis put on his white bathrobe and slippers, turning off the speaker that he was playing his sulking and sobbing playlist through.

“I know you’re not talking!” Dave yelled back as Adonis walked out of the communal shower room.

“You’re right! You’re right! I just get too flustered when I see yo handsome Squidward ass face.” Adonis yelled back, jokingly blowing his friend a little kiss and winking at him.

Adonis returned to his room, slipping under his cool, gray weighted blanket, preparing himself to fall asleep. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, calming his mind by emptying it with every exhale. His chest rose, inhaling all the worries that plagued him. His chest fell, exhaling these same worries, for they would be resolved one way or another. In. Out. The ocean of his mind, which was choppy and raging, was now still, with not a single wave apparent on its surface.

A helicopter hovers over a cream brick coliseum, the coliseum’s rings of white wooden steps lining the interior of its circular-shape. The bottom of the coliseum has a light brown dirt floor with a large square cement battlefield sitting in the middle of it. The coliseum roared alive, and tens of thousands of people below were along the steps were excited to see the combat assessments of the students from Saint Savior University, the same university that Dave and Adonis attended. A Jumbotron was hung up on the north side of the stands of the coliseum, showing the randomized matchups

for each student's combat assessment. On the Jumbatron, there was a randomized, rainbow color wheel with two square frames on the left and right sides that would be spun to see which two students would face each other. Sitting at a table in the stands, looking over the battlefield, the announcer was none other than Roger. This time around, he was wearing a fancy white blazer and slacks and a black jacket and dress shirt on under, with silver sparkly gloves to really encompass that Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album cover aesthetic he was going for.

"For our first matchup of the day," Roger started saying into his bedazzled microphone, his gloves and mic sparkling from the sunlight, "we have no other than two students in the top 15 of their class: Adonis King vs. Dave Ace! A clash of titans, #6 in their class and the first Worldshaker this century has seen, and the Wind Wizard, #13 in their class, who has been making an impressive effort to carve his name into the top 10 of their class' rankings." The crowd roared in anticipation, excited to see what should be a close match.

The opponents walked out from opposite ends of the floor of the coliseum; Adonis from the north entrance and Dave from the south entrance. They both wore white and maroon tank tops and sweatpants, with Adonis wearing his favorite white running shoes while Dave wore his black Nike Air Force 1s. They jumped on top of the rectangular chunk of cement they were using as their battlefield and met in the middle to give each other their pre-match handshakes.

"I'm gon' go full power just to whoop yo ass real quick, even though I could probably do it without trying!" Dave teased Adonis, winking at him as they both walked backwards to their spots.

“I know you’re not talking! Keep cussing at me like that and I’m gon’ tell yo momma when I go back to your house to pick up my tooth brush!” Adonis said, wagging his right pointer finger at Dave.

Dave’s jaw dropped, and he walked back to his spot, thinking, *now why the hell does he have my mom’s phone number?*

Once they arrived back at their designated spots on the battlefield, Roger rang a bell three times, marking the beginning of their battle. *Whoosh!* Dave pushed his hands behind him, propelling himself towards Adonis with the use of his wind magic. Adonis propelled himself towards Dave, releasing purple shockwaves from the bottoms of his feet to move even faster. Dave sliced his right hand to the left, releasing a crescent of blue wind at Adonis. Adonis looked up and used his shockwaves to jump high in the air, avoiding the wind crescent that ended up leaving a crater in the side of the coliseum walls behind the battlefield. Adonis stuck out both his arms in front of him, aiming at Dave. He grabbed the air and pulled it back, creating a shockwave that pulled Dave towards Adonis. As Dave was being dragged in the air towards Adonis, he hid his right fist behind his back, building and condensing a sphere of high-speed wind scythes. Adonis, thinking he got Dave right where he wanted him, put his hands together- a purple sphere encapsulating them. As Adonis raised his hands in preparation for his lethal blow to Dave, Dave, who was finally within arm’s reach of Adonis, pushed his right fist forward, aiming for Adonis’ chest.

*Shit.* Adonis had underestimated Dave. Before Adonis could lower his arms to protect himself, Dave’s sphere of high-speed wings hit his chest, cutting up his top and

leaving multiple long scratches on Adonis and causing him to fall down to the cement battlefield.

“OHHHH! And it looks like Dave deals the first impactful blow—a surprise fury of wind scythes to the chest that is lethal enough to cause some serious damage to anybody. Adonis is currently down on the battlefield, but we’ll see how he recovers from this!” Roger announced, and the audience shrieked at the first serious blow. Adonis stood up from the crater he made where he crashed, touching his right fingers to his chest, looking at his own blood.

“Don’t think I’ll let you off that easily!” Dave yelled, landing in front of Adonis, his left fist pulled down near his left hip, wrapped in a multitude of wind currents. Adonis, reacting too late, tried to sidestep to the left. Dave’s uppercut punch was too fast; however, he made perfect contact with Adonis’ chin, releasing the sphere of wind currents simultaneously to send Adonis flying upwards in the air. Dave flew up above Adonis, pulling his knees to his chest. Adonis looked up but didn’t find who he was expecting to see. He saw Dr.Genesis, his busted up white slacks rustling in the wind. Dr. Genesis’ legs shot down, hitting Adonis in the stomach as he heard Dave’s voice in the distance.

“I told you I would get your ass!” Dave said, his voice sounding like it was coming from Dr.Genesis’ body. Adonis went flying into the cement battlefield again, this time his stomach bruised up pretty badly. He supported himself on his two shaky arms, his breathing ragged. Dave flew down, landing gracefully to Adonis’ right. Adonis looked up, first seeing Dave, his figure switching to Dr.Genesis’. The hairs on Adonis’ arms rose, his eyes widening, goosebumps taking over the surface of the skin on his arms. But

even through all this fear, Adonis began to feel a tugging sensation in his gut—something wasn't adding up.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it seems like Dave might have shocked the world today. Is he about to deliver the final blow to Adonis?" Roger announced, trying to hide his concern.

Waves were crashing in the ocean of Adonis' mind, clashing memories and experiences. The version of Dr.Genesis that stood in front of him was using wind to lower himself, which was Dave's magic, not his. But he looked so identical to the Dr.Genesis he saw in that bank lobby—the same one that broke his forearm and confidence and wore all white clothes. His vision started to flash erratically. Dave, no, Dr. Genesis, was walking closer to him. Dr.Genesis, no Dave, reached his left hand out to pick Adonis up by the ankle, holding him upside down in the air.

"I'm sorry to do you like this, bro." Dave and Dr.Genesis' voices seemingly merged into one, walking over to the edge of the cement battlefield and hanging Adonis over it. Dave let go of Adonis' ankle, letting him fall down the side of the battlefield.

*After losing so badly, what do you still have?* Roger's question, which had echoed in Adonis' mind for the past day, stopped. The ocean of Adonis' mind was still once again the answer revealed to him.

The crowd gasped. Dave put his hands on the back of his head, his eyes widening with shock. Roger brought the mic up to his hand, stuttering out of shock.

"Members of the audience, I can't believe what I'm seeing. It seems as if Adonis," a zoomed in live feed on Adonis' body was shown on the jumbotron, "has managed to save himself from what was thought to be the end of this fight!" Roger exclaimed,

grinning with pride for his student, as Adonis released a shockwave from the top of his head, sending him flipping through the air and right back into the middle of the battlefield. The crowd cheered at the top of their lungs, on the edge of their seats, excited to see this matchup living to its full potential.

Adonis turned to Dave, who had recovered from his shock and had already prepared to fight him once again- his blades of wind running down his forearms and calves. No words needed to be said, for both men looked each other in the eyes, excited to see that both were fully prepared to hit each other with all their might. Adonis shot shockwaves out of his feet again, flying towards Dave, his arms glowing a royal purple. They clashed, the impact of Dave's wind blades and Adonis' shockwave arms meeting, sending sparks flying into the sky and shockwaves so strong that the audience began to feel the remnants of the force of their impact.

"I'm back, motherfucker." Adonis told Dave, activating the shockwaves he loaded around his arms, breaking the wind blades Dave had on his arms, and sending him skidding across the cement back-first. The shockwaves had hit him right in the shoulders and chest, forcing his entire torso back. Dave got up quickly, flying back to Adonis and roundhouse kicking towards his face with his left calf wind blade. Adonis caught it with his right arm, the purple aura of his shockwave magic still glowing on his arm. Adonis returned the favor, kicking towards his face and hitting him right across the right side of his face. Dave was now becoming increasingly frustrated, with blood running down his mouth and neck. He backed up and threw a fury of wind crescents at Adonis, two of which Adonis was able to destroy but one of which hit Adonis in the chest- reopening his wounds. Both, tired yet enjoying the challenge of fighting each



other, were determined to come out victorious soon. Dave, the more impatient of the two, was ready to unleash his final move. He flew up above the battlefield, opening his hands in front of him until his finger tips were facing each other, almost as if holding a ball. He began generating a tornado, starting small in between his palms and growing to half the size of the coliseum. He threw the tornado down at Adonis quickly, attempting to catch him off guard and overwhelm him. The audience gasped, stunned at Dave's power and confused about why Adonis wasn't moving as the tornado made its way to him. Adonis, as calm as the ocean of his mind, threw a purple sphere up to meet the tornado in its trajectory. The purple sphere exploded, releasing a downward spiral of shockwaves so strong that it completely neutralized the tornado, making the audience, Roger, and Dave's jaws drop. Adonis lept up to Dave, his palms glowing purple. He reached Dave, releasing the shockwaves built up in his palms and sending him flying into the ground around the battlefield, sending dirt, wind, and grass into the air.

The clouds of dust and dirt slowly began to clear, improving the audience's view of the battlefield. Dave lay in a crater in the dirt around the battlefield closest to the announcer table, his pose resembling the infamous pose of defeat for Yamcha in *Dragon Ball Z*. Adonis landed softly on what was left of the battlefield, his chin and hands up, soaking in the warm sun rays shining down on him and the glory. Roger cleared his throat, announcing, "Adonis is this battle's winner!" The crowd roared, ecstatic to see the conclusion to a battle that kept them on their toes from start to finish. Adonis started walking towards Dave's crater, happy not only to have whooped his ass but to also start feeling like himself once again.