Backstory:

Los Angeles 2030, after an earthquake has split open Griffith Park Mountain. After being ruined, the city must be rebuilt, as it has been cut off by the rest of the country at the mountain range. The remaining survivors have been divided up amongst miners, who are policed by the Metro patrol, as well as researchers, and bureaucratic officials. Morects crystals were discovered underneath the rock layers. Two friends, Maleck B. Huntington III and Toby LaSalle, also known as the Co-founders, have now seized control of Los Angeles society. They oversee all of crystal mining operations from their headquarters located inside a repurposed Griffith Park Observatory.

\*What follows is a speculative and fictional account of actual locations, specific places and fictional characters.

The Legend of Dante Hiro

“The Miner’s Rebellion”

Prologue:

Their first Runyon Canyon hike of the season seemed to be paced just right, the cool Los Angeles morning carried a breeze from Santa Ana that unsettled the dust below Toby’s brisk footsteps along the ridge line. Directly behind Toby LaSalle was his close friend, Maleck B. Huntington III. As they trekked along the hiking path, the fresh air satisfied them in their pursuit to escape the densely populated city below.

“Look over there, you can see the entirety of the Los Angeles skyline from here.” Toby shouted.

Looking back over his shoulder, Maleck responded, “Beautiful, indeed. This city is absolutely massive, built up from here, all the way to the Pacific Ocean.”

As they pressed onward to the summit, the ground beneath them began to tremble.

“Earthquake!” Toby yelled, but it was far too late.

The ridgeline shattered in front of them, the terrain split open shaking all the while, and there was the deafening sound of rock scraping rock. Trees and rocks begin dropping into the soil as a hole opened and widened. Their eyes darting frantically searching for something to grab hold of to avoid falling.

Saturday, 7:00 PM, Spring, 2030

When Dante came to, his pockets were empty. He lay dazed, next to a dead body. The slow hum of his deceased cellmate’s smartphone filled the silent void of the cell. As his confusion dissipated, Dante sprang into action. He reached over and took the wallet and smartphone. The smartphone showed it was out of service and that the battery was very low, ten percent. He removed the contents of the wallet and slid the plastic TAP card along the frame of the cell door, he heard the latch click open, and he rushed out into the dark corridor. Scanning the hallway for an escape route, he was only able to find a frosted window ahead of him. He rushed over to it.

Lowering his shoulder, Dante propelled himself through the window, shattering all of the glass onto the street, and landed directly on his shoulder blade and scapula. The impact of his fall sent a searing pain along Dante’s body as the glass shards rained down. He lifted himself up and sprinted through the yard in the dark. Spotting a low fence, he grabbed onto the top bar, jumped up and climbed over the fence to get to the street. Looking around the intersection of Westmoreland and Wilshire Boulevard, he saw most of the other buildings in this sector had been ransacked or completely boarded shut.

The noise had alerted several Metro patrolmen who were located nearby the prisoner quarters. The patrol leader called out to his unit, “Omega squad! Don’t let him get away!”

The entire patrol squad raced after Dante through the neighborhood. As Dante passed numerous housing units, he could make out a subway entrance a few yards in the distance at *Wilshire/Vermont* in the darkness. Hopping down the subway staircase, and jumping the turnstile, he was able to board train just as the doors were about to shut. When he was finally able to catch his breath, he looked out of the subway car to spot the ten metro patrolmen who were pursuing him. Dante winced as he reached up to grab his shoulder blade. “Nothing broken.” He grumbled to no one in particular.

The gritty subway car shook to life, its lights sporadically flickering. This particular subway car had only a few other riders. Most of them appeared apathetic to Dante’s presence, so they too wouldn’t arise suspicion from the Metro patrol. As he looked through the length of the subway cart, Dante could spot a couple more Metro patrolmen in the next cart scanning the faces of the other riders. One patrolmen gripped the collar of the rider to lift them up into air and out of their seat. Dante saw one patrolman stop and reach for his radio. It was then he decided he must get off at the very next stop, before he was captured. Dante turned around to avoid suspicion.

Dante Hiro stood at just under 6’, looking at his reflection in the subway window, his tanned features gave way to piercing brown eyes. His hair was longer than he had recalled, which suggested he had been confined for at least the last week. He searched the pockets of his grey perforated leather jacket, his prized find from the era before the earthquake, for the smartphone. Pulling up the map he saw that a saved location was less than 2 miles from the next subway stop, he’d have to sprint. Dante filled out the grey moto jacket, his taut muscles would suggest a daily workout, but not the hulking frames of the patrolmen who were heavily armored with patrol gear.

Dante rushed out of the subway car as soon as the doors rang open. *Vermont/Beverly* the tall red and black sign read. Dante saw he was in the housing sector, glancing back while trying to blend in with the exiting subway riders, he was able to avoid the metro patrolmen that remained on the train. They were still searching the faces of the subway riders onboard.

Dante climbed the stairway to street level. Outside of the subway station the smartphone buzzed to life. Back in service. Dante glanced down and opened the map app on the recovered smartphone, he was still 1.7 miles away from the destination.

This was one of few housing corridors that was maintained even after reports of the rebellion. The lower housing sections throughout the city of Los Angeles had been ransacked and were later abandoned. NuLAb, the Co-founders’ company, oversaw the Metro patrol’s monitoring of Los Angeles. As acting police of Los Angeles, the metro patrol exterminated all immediate threats to the Morects crystal mining and the refined gems that were transported out of the Griffith Park quarry. Metro patrol also protects the NuLAb facility entrances, and the main hub of the depot.

The housing sector that Dante crept upon appeared to still be in pristine condition. The tall white facades with wooden inlays encased large expansive windows. This particular unit had eight adjacent apartments connected. As Dante approached the door, the smartphone chimed to life. Granting him access to his deceased cellmate’s apartment.

The supposed safe house had been emptied and overturned. Each cabinet had been opened, its contents lay askew on the floor.

“Guess patrol couldn’t bother to clean up,” Dante muttered under his breathe.

The bedroom closets and the home office drawers on the second and third story were all in the same similar state. Metro patrol was after something, and had no luck in finding it. Dante searched the entirety of the apartment. Scouring the mess of furniture and paperwork he found no particular clues as to what Metro patrol wanted.

He exited the safe house and approached the neighboring unit. The sign beside the entrance read “Dante Hiro, NuLAb official, *5126 Melrose Av*”

Apparently, he was home.

Dante tried the door handle. It was still locked, without his own phone, Dante was unable to open his front door. He searched the neighboring raided apartment amidst the mess.

Returning to his own housing unit, he hurled the lamp through the front window. The crash broke the silence around the desolate neighborhood. He removed his jacket and used it to clear the remaining glass along the window frame and hopped into his home.

“Where the hell have you been for the last two weeks? You look and smell like shit!” a voice inquired from the darkness behind him. Dante was initially struck by the light odor of her perfume. He turned around to see Denise standing outside of his home.

Chapter II

Saturday 7:41 PM, Spring, 2030

One of first things that stands out about Denise is that she is precisely a head shorter than Dante Hiro. Denise LaSalle resided next door to Dante’s housing unit ever since he was promoted to official in her division. She rarely had to work within the research compound inside Griffith Park because she was the younger sister of Toby LaSalle, one of the Co-founders of NuLAb. Her auburn hair shimmered in the Los Angeles moonlight.

“Your brother had me imprisoned all this time, for inciting a riot,” Dante stated.

“What were you thinking, of course he did. What did you expect would happen? Sounds exacting like something he would do,” She replied, shaking her head at Dante.

He caught Denise wincing out the corner of his eye. The odiferous stench struck him at that same moment as well. All of the protein supplemental packs had thawed and rotted in his refrigerator. The puddle had leaked from the base to stretch along the length of his kitchen floor.

“Toby had metro patrol cut the power to these units,” She said.

“Did you try to reset the local grid?”

“Of course! It was a no-go. Likely, this sector will be the next to be dismantled.” She replied.

“That’s smart of them, I’m impressed… how have you been getting along without power?” Dante inquired.

“I saved the energy reserve you gave me in the winter.”

“Hmm.”

“My unit had no issues all Spring,” She said.

“I knew it would work, that’s what Toby’s after, isn’t it?”

“That would be my guess, Dante. Are just going to hand over the refinement process plans?” She asked.

“What do you suggest? The protests have been gaining numerous followers, the mining teams have been uniting.”

Denise believed in Dante’s adept ability to lead the rebellion against the Co-founders and the metro patrol. However, Denise knew that Dante’s own arrogance would likely be the cause of the rebellion’s failure.

“Don’t be so hasty! Their force is massive and has been building since the last riot. Next time they capture you, Dante, I fear you won’t return,” She implored him.

As Dante approached her, he could sense her tension. She had looked on as Dante had ventured out to bring the Co-founders to justice for the terrible workers’ conditions in the Morects crystal mine. He reached for her, and felt her reluctance through their embrace. The warmth of Denise’s face met his body.

“It is good to see you again. Go rinse off, you, I’ll clean up this mess, but you really do reek,” she whispered.

Chapter III

1 week prior. *Felicia White*

Felicia White stood by Dante’s control station pouring over the holographic readouts, trying to pinpoint the mountain’s weak spot and pivot fissure. Next to her control station was a series of monitors that accessed the local area security south of the Santa Monica Gate in a bird’s eye view. No activity came up on the screen. There was a still a couple days remaining before Toby would return from New York City and pull into the delivery depot. The subway rails from the lower housing corridor showed a sparse amount of activity. Few passengers and even fewer patrolmen. Unbeknownst to her, Dante’s arrival would alter the very course of Toby and Maleck’s plan. A part of her was both glad Dante was sent away, and also infuriated that she wasn’t the person overseeing his complete demise at the Westmoreland facility. It was through the realization of her anger that she came to recognize what Dante meant to her. Perhaps her disdain in this moment helped her recall a time when she and Dante were close.

“Do you think it works?” Maleck asked as he stepped into Dante’s laboratory. He hastily scanned the entirety of the room.

“It seems Dante completed the refinement process. It’s truly fascinating,” Felicia replied, looking at Dante’s work with bewilderment.

Maleck studied Felicia briefly as silence grew within the laboratory. Without bothering to look at the control station, he inquired, “Does Toby know?”

“Does Toby know what?”

Maleck exited the laboratory. The sounds of the footsteps echoing on tiles made Felicia realize that she had revealed too much information to an extremely dangerous individual.

Chapter IV

Saturday 11:41 PM Spring 2030

Dante lay awake staring out of his second floor bedroom window. The music from JP Cooper’s track “Oceans 2” was playing melodically in the background softly. The synthetic guitars gently ringing each note. Denise slept soundly on his chest. Her auburn hair flowed down alongside her face. He replaced his pillow under her head as he quietly rose out of bed. Dante placed his hand on the desk across the room. Silently, a drawer slid out from under the desktop. Dante lifted the keyring from the compartment. A soft chuckle escaped him. Dante would’ve saved himself breaking and entering into his own home, if only he had these three keys. Now he clutched his unit key, his laboratory pass, and the key fob to his silver Audi TT.

“Don’t go,” He heard her say.

“Get some more rest,” Dante replied.

She was awake & sitting upright in the bed now.

“They know you’re coming, Toby told me that the last mine is nearly depleted,” She looked to him, “You should just find a Morects reserve and we can take it east, out of this God forsaken city.”

“If what you said is true, I’m concerned for the miners that are still underground in Griffith Park.” He replied.

Dante descended the staircase. Outside his home, he approached the Audi coupe. The car powered to life when the key fob initialized. Opening the passenger side door, he found a container with several vials of synthetic Torazadene. He activated the coupe’s trunk to find a miniscule amount of Morects crystal stored inside his lockbox. Surprisingly, everything was still where he had left it. As he was about to combine the synthetic reagents with the Morects crystal, Dante simultaneously recognized mounted yellow lights of a metro patrol unit approaching from the East, down Melrose. It was almost midnight.

Sunday 12:00 AM

The Metro patrol jeep pulled to an abrupt stop directly behind Dante’s Audi coupe. The two patrolmen stepped out of their jeep, the heavy tread of their Wolverine boots rustled the dirt beneath them. They each holstered their energy rifles as they approached the car. Adjusting his armored vest, the driver said, “Check this vehicle, let’s remove any ordinance and then dismantle it”

“Watch out for the leader,” a voice from the patrol’s radio warbled.

“Understood.” He replied.

They entered the garage, passing the car’s hood, examining the Audi’s empty driver’s seat. The metro patrol then noticed the slight glow emanating from the Audi’s trunk. The first patrolman walked to the rear of the garage and lifted the trunk lid.

On the bed of the coup trunk’s sat a small tray containing refined Morects crystal shimmering bright. Beside it was the credit card with a new value, the digitized readout showed 800,000 credits. The two patrolmen briefly glanced at each other in disbelief. The first one reaching down into the trunk to retrieve the card.

That moment Dante jumped out and struck the closest patrolmen with two quick punches. He then grappled the patrolmen back and landed a swift knee strike with the sharpness of his patella, that knocked him unconscious. The second patrolmen reached for his holstered energy rifle but found that the garage wall along the side was blocking his maneuver. It was too late, capitalizing on the close quarters between the Audi and garage, Dante rushed forward with a series of forceful punches in rapid succession, the jammed partolman. A single shot fired loudly, landing on the wall behind Dante’s back. Dante grabbed him by his upper body and flung himself up and over, using his own body’s momentum to hurl the patrolman out of the garage and into the street. The patrolmen collapsed unconscious onto the sidewalk.

Realizing the ambush had succeeded, he dragged the two patrolmen’s bodies into neighboring housing unit. He kept the energy rifle and checked the gauge. Dante walked back over to the coupe and placed the energy rifle in the passenger seat.

Chapter V

Sunday 12:33 AM Spring 2030

“I heard the blast, did you kill them, just as they killed Solomon?” She asked, when Dante returned upstairs.

“How did you know that they killed our neighbor?” Dismissing her question. He realized those patrolmen were highly incompetent. However, he knew many more would come shortly.

“You were the only one that made it back.” Denise sighed, “Also, the miners’ force was uniting behind Gerald, and you two as well, until you both were captured. If worse comes to worse, you should evacuate the others underground, and collapse the mine yourself, Dante.”

“Toby and Maleck will be expecting my arrival,” He said, “you should make plans to escape without me, and head East.”

Quiet fell over the room when the realization that Dante’s return home was short lived. He gathered a few belongings: the key fob, laboratory pass, a vial of synthetic Torazadene, the 800,000 credit card and stuffed them all into the pockets of his grey jacket. The only sound he heard was her slow soft breathing as Denise looked over at him. Her look of sadness compelled him to lean over his bed and kiss her. Expecting this was surely goodbye, she spoke softly, “I’m glad you came back, I believe in you…”

She continued, “Find Gerald before it’s too late and together you two can bring an end to the madness.”

Chapter VI

Sunday 1:03 AM Spring 2030

Dante settled into the bucket seat of the Audi TT. He took a long deep breath to refocus. His virtual heads-up display reported that the silver coupes tire tread was low from racing. He was far too aggressive a driver, yet still trying to perfect his drifting technique. Melrose Ave was eerily clear, most of cars were empty and abandoned in the middle of the road as they had been discarded, their tires and wheels removed, to be placed on the last few operating vehicles. Mostly to replace parts on the metro patrol jeeps.

Dark clouds were coming in from the East, engulfing the city sky above Virgil Village. He turned off the electronic stability, mashed the gas pedal, and sped up, his wheels skidding all over the street as he dodged the stripped cars. He took a left onto N Vermont. The parking structure on Marathon was a wasteland, a car junkyard that was aflame, the bonfire jumped nearly twenty feet into the air. The Santa Ana winds spread the particulate air matter high above the parking structure. As he passed he spotted a couple of overturned metro patrol jeeps, he knew that it was the work of the local rebels.

Dante took a right onto Monroe and parked in front of a closed storefront, the metal door was sealed from the street. He knocked three times and someone from behind the metal door asked, “Who is it?”

“Dante, with news from downtown” He announced through the door.

After a brief pause, and several loud cranking gears, the metal door was opened. Dante had arrived at the headquarters of the rebellion. The interior was dimly lit, a few chairs, with several small groups sitting on the floor. Mostly young men and women no older than Dante.

“I’m here to see Commandante Gerald.” Dante said.

“Right away, Dante” the haggard miner replied.

From out of the shadows and the rear of the shop, an older man, shuffled forward. His wrinkled pale skin weathered by constant exposure. He approached the front and spoke loud and boastfully. “Dante! We’ve impatiently awaited your arrival!”

“Good one, Dad,” Dante protested.

Commandante Gerald Sean Hiro was the newly-named official leader of the rebellion. He leaned in and gave his son a forceful embrace.

“General Solomon didn’t make it.” Dante finally said, “I gathered his personal effects and his house was turned over by Metro Patrol.”

After a brief pause, Gerald said, “How unfortunate, he will be missed, but the movement, our rebellion must continue. He’d want us to free the remaining miners below Griffith Park with haste. Are you well, what took you so long?”

“Take it easy, I just escaped the Westmoreland prison sector, how are we doing with new recruits?

“Not enough, this is the only stronghold above ground, and this facility currently hosts sixty, including myself.” The Commandante responded.

“I gathered what I needed from my place, just before I was confronted by pair of patrolmen doing a house call, Denise seems to believe…”

“You, saw Denise?” Gerald interrupted, “What did you tell *her*? Her family is the very reason we are in this predicament now! Your foolish hubris! Toby LaSalle had both you and Solomon captured to squelch the rebellion, and yet you still lay with his sister!”

In the next instant, the metal door shattered in an enormous crash. A massive dust cloud erupted from the explosion. Several armed metro patrolmen stormed through the destroyed wall and rushed inside. The seated groups of rebels attempted to flee the scene, rush to rear exit only be to struck down by massive amounts of energy rifle fire.

“Ceasefire!” the patrolmen in charge yelled. Several rebels froze in surrender as the shock from the patrol’s surprise attack set in.

“Omega leader, find and kill Dante Hiro.” Toby LaSalle’s voice rang out from metro patrol’s mounted radio.

“Which one of you disgusting curs is Dante Hiro?” The patrol leader demanded.

“I am Dante Hiro! I hate..” Commandante Gerald Sean Hiro snarled.

Omega patrol leader stepped forward at the old man and executed him. Commandante Gerald Sean Hiro, keeled over onto the dusty rubble of the shop.

Dante Hiro looked on in horror and sheer disbelief as Gerald Sean Hiro sacrificed himself for his son and for the rebellion. Just as Dante Hiro went to scream, “NOO!” Another armed patrol knocked him directly in the head with his rifle.

The few remaining rebels that surrendered were unceremonious rounded up and placed in the rear metro patrol van. Two patrol men lifted up Dante, and dragged him to the back of the van, tossing him on the van’s floor. They drove away from the shop, heading up back on North Vermont to the Santa Monica gate.

Chapter VII

Sunday 4:39 AM Spring 2030

The sunrise woke Dante. The glint of sunlight crept through the laboratory windows of the Santa Monica facility just beyond the gate. From his seat Dante could see the guard tower above the gate and two metro patrol officers stationed on top, monitoring the city below.

His laboratory was white and sterile, almost exactly as he left it weeks ago. Felicia White was standing beside his worktable in the far corner of the room, examining several holographic Richter scale and Morects crystal stability charts simultaneously. Beside the central tabletop a robotic arm periodically clamped down on vials of Torazadene. The mechanism slowly, repeatedly feed the small pool of Morects crystals enclosed in the protected case on central worktable. The iridescence of the crystals glowed with fiery brilliance when it caught the sunlight. On a table beside the case was a short databank containing rows of stacked TAP and unvalued credit cards.

“Unrefined Morects crystal ore, really a magnificent sight to beholden, isn’t Dante. So much turmoil caused by such beauty,” Felicia said.

“What are you doing in my laboratory?” Dante finally spoke. The words triggered a sharp pain in the back of his head, where he was gun-butted by patrol.

Felicia White took in a deep breath before she responded, “In actuality, I’m glad to see you made it out Westmoreland alive. Toby and Maleck seem to really have it out for you. Particularly Toby.”

“Your husband has always been my biggest fan,” He said sarcastically.

“The patrol may have fallen for your dad’s gimmick. I sympathize with Commandante Hiro, in his heyday he had the mind of brilliant military strategist, but just simply lacked the proper manpower. However, I immediately recognized our patrol’s error of mistaken identity and had you transferred to me.”

“What is to come of the others that were with me inside the patrol van?” Dante asked.

“You needn’t worry yourself with these trivial matters right now, Dante.” She replied.

“How can you be so cold? I remember when you used to be so full of passion and optimism.” He urged.

“Stopping prattling on about morality. Don’t be so naïve Dante. Yes, at one point in our history, there was perhaps a connection, but it was a long time ago and you have to let that go,” she responded turning back to the readouts.

“Does this mean you’ll let me go? This chair was never particularly comfortable.” He asked, checking the tension on the ties that wrapped his hands behind his back.

“Of course not,” she dismissed. “I want you to start at the beginning.”

Chapter VIII

Sunday 5:02 AM Spring 2030

Dante recalled a time before Felicia White had married Toby LaSalle. She would likely deny it, simply to prevent having to relive a time in her past where she wasn’t as carefree as she was now. The relationship between Dante and Felicia was tumultuous at worse, professional at best. He knew his time was limited in this situation, because as soon as he explained himself, he would be ultimately expendable. He had to rouse her anger if he was going to make it out of his own laboratory alive.

“How does it work, Dante? Explain the refinement process” Her green eyes did not waver from him. Her stare measured him precisely. He could tell from her demeanor that she was going to get exactly what she wanted needed to know.

Luckily Dante had disconnected the automated refinement loop in his laboratory before being captured. He could see what she was missing.

“Didn’t Toby figure it out? He seems mildly intelligent, if not all together psychotic” He retorted.

“It’s not his specialty,” She said.

“Too busy bathing in megalomania, I take it?” He asked

“Look who’s talking, Dante,” Felicia responded, “He’ll return from his negotiations in New York City shortly. Continue though.”

Dante realized that NuLAb has full communications capability, if Toby’s transmission connected here.

She squinted at him, momentarily perplexed, until finally saying, “Why were you at Monroe with the rebellion? You still think you can save the miners?”

“Of course.”

“You know that won’t succeed,” She said.

“Someone has to stand up to them.” He responded, preparing to plead his case to her.

“Dante, always the optimist.” She replied.

“If I can make it out, sure,” he continued, “It seems like certain death.”

“Either they take you down with the rebels, or they stop you at the observatory.”

“How many do you think are still in the underground mine?”

“Just shy of two hundred, from the last count.” She said.

“It’s not enough.” Dante replied, “Can you call in the other sections?”

“Dante, I’m sorry… but I’ve already told you too much about it.” She said, “Besides, Maleck knows.”

“Knows?” He inquired.

“About you and I,” She sighed.

Silence.

“What is the issue that you are having?” He asked, looking at the crystals encasement and then over to the databank.

“Two things: the values haven’t been loading on to the new cards that are empty, and the Morects crystals reserve will be wiped out soon.” She reached into her lab coat pocket and placed her own card on the tabletop. When she approached Dante, she reached into his jacket to remove the card that had been replenished at home. She walked back over to the worktable and placed the two cards into the top databank shelf and saw that the values had combined. Dante watched as the value now showed 2,800,000 credits.

“What do you plan on doing with all of that, Felicia?”

“That’s certainly none of your business, Dante.” She responded, pausing to look directly at the new value for a long time before finally placing it in her pocket.

“I’m sure Toby must be extremely envious of me right now, since he probably hasn’t seen you *this* excited in a very long time.” Dante said.

“Enough out of you!” She yelled as she stormed over to his chair and slapped him hard across the jaw.

The furious hit sent Dante and his chair crashing to the floor. Dante turned his head to prevent himself from landing on the back of his head. As he did, the rest of the Torazadene fell out of his jacket and shattered. The solution spilled all along his sleeves.

The next moment two unarmed metro patrolmen stepped into the office.

“What’s going on?” the first patrol asked.

“Nothing, leave us now!” She demanded. Her face was reddening.

In the commotion, Dante found a long shard from vial with his hands and slowly began slicing the tie that held his arms behind the chair back. His upper body laid motionless as he felt the tie snap apart, and his hands finally being released.

Chapter IX

Sunday 5:31 AM Spring 2030

“But, Ms. White, the reinforcements you’ve requested have arrived to the Santa Monica sector.” The patrolmen informed her.

Felicia, already perturbed, looked over at Dante laying on the floor. She smirked and slowly regained her composure.

“Fine. Dante, I have no compunctions leaving you in your laboratory. If anything, I am disappointed that you won’t be able to get to work.” She announced out her frustration as she left.

Dante slowly brought his hands to the front and lifted himself up. He removed grey jacket, and examined the Torazadene soaked sleeve of the right elbow. Placing the jacket on his chair, he got right to work.

Dante switched the aerial security monitors from the lower housing units, to the prison cells below the Santa Monica Gate facility. He saw that there were two patrol guards manning the lockup that held a dozen of his father’s rebels. He examined the entrance staircase on the monitor, and then turned off the display.

Walking over to the databank, Dante place his palm print on the unit. It whirled to life in activity. One card began to move up the tray. Once the card reached the top of the databank, Dante ran over to control station and input his credentials. All he needed now was to add the Torazadene and increased the encasement’s flow of pure oxygen.

Once he completed the loop, the Morects crystal began to immediately degrade, the shimmer faded out while the databank shook to life. When Dante finally looked over, the value on his new card showed 3,000,000 credits, likely still not enough to exchange for the lives of the miners trapped underneath Griffith Park. He found a neck lanyard in his desk and placed the card inside, slipping it over his neck, and inside his shirt.

From the control station, he turned the security monitor back on to display the miners’ cell. Grabbing his jacket and a metal case from the table, he decided to head downstairs to release them, before the reinforcements prevented his infiltration of the delivery depot.

Chapter X

Sunday 6:01 AM Spring 2030

He could hear the distinct sounds of Felicia’s voice reviewing the commands outside in the dusty driveway by the Santa Monica gate. Dante slowly walked the stairwell to the basement of the facility towards the cells. He stepped softly on the outside edges of his feet to dampen the noise as he approached the security point. The two patrolmen guarding the cells were boasting loudly.

“It’ll be any moment now that we’ll be able to take leave and switch off this shift,” He could overhear.

“I heard that the rest of us that cover this building and the observatory get triplepay over the subway shift!” The other responded.

As he got within a few yards of the cell gate and security point, Dante tossed a metal case on the floor beside the checkpoint. The crashing sound startled the guards. The first patrol picked it up, while the one closest to the stairs charged towards Dante’s direction. Just as the patrol reached the stairwell, Dante jumped up, grabbed the bar above. Swinging both feet directly in the patrol’s chest knocking him back. Dante let go and tumbled to the basement floor. The second guard immediately opened fire. The blasts nearly hitting his face. Dante rolled back and grabbed the downed patrolman, using his body as shield, as the next blasts struck the guard in the back, instantly neutralizing him.

Tossing the patrolman aside, Dante used the guard’s own energy rifle, striking the patrolmen with exacting precision. He knew time was running out before the reinforcements would charge into the facility and hunt him down.

“Let us out! We want to fight!” The few surviving rebels shouted from inside the cells.

Dante removed the key card from the metro patrol’s pocket and rushed over to the cell doors.

“Thank you, thank you!” a few managed to say as they charged out of the tiny cells. Their excitement gave Dante the encouragement he needed to press forward in the absence of the other leaders.

Without the proper equipment, he knew these unarmed miners wouldn’t make it out of the Santa Monica Facility, let alone the heavily guarded depot or Griffith Park Observatory.

He tried to quickly recall his knowledge of the rest of the facility.

“Should we search for an armory, General Hiro?” A miner asked.

“Who are you? Yes, but we are severely outnumbered right now, reinforcements have just arrived.” He responded.

“I’m Sophia, I spotted a supply room on the way down here, we can raid that,” She replied.

He led the twelve of them back up the staircase carefully. Retracing their steps through the facility. Collecting the gear and vests from the downed patrolmen.

Chapter XI

Sunday 6:41 AM Spring 2030

Inside the closet supply room, Dante found protein rations, emergency kits, vests, a couple crowbars, and a few spare energy rifles. A group of miners collected all they could carry, while one stood lookout, checking for the patrol.

Dante scanned the room and found a vent in the corner.

“Let’s pull this cover and try get out of this facility,” He said.

The other miners reviewed the measurements and nodded their heads in agreement.

“How far do you think the exit is?” Sophia asked.

“I think we can take this to the subway entrance, and try to group up with the others, I hope to reach the depot once we gather enough men.” He replied.

Her eyes widened, seemingly understanding the massive task that Dante was suggesting.

They pulled the grate off of the wall and placed it on the floor beside the vent’s entrance. The cramped square hole only fit one person at a time. One after the other the twelve miners squatted down and entered the vent’s tunnel. Dropping their newly found equipment before crawling through the hole. The person behind them had to pass the equipment along the floor just so they could slide and crawl forward. Dante could only hear incomprehensible chatter when he listened by the supply room entrance. There was control box on the wall containing the wiring for the power grid. Dante reached into it and pull all of the connections out to disable the power to the facility. Then he shut the entrance to the armory and sealed the door from inside the room. He rushed over to the vent entering the crawlspace, knelt down and pulled the vent grate closed.

The vent system ran beneath the Santa Monica facility for several yards before it connected to the metro station at the *Vermont/Santa Monica* subway. The trains would only be running intermittently at this hour of the morning. They crawled the length of the vents and eventually dropped down into the mezzanine level of the station. Both the mezzanine and platform level were surprisingly empty. The only sounds heard were the air being feed into the station, and the occasional announcement emotionlessly reporting the next train’s arrival.

The miners holstered their rifles and split up into groups of two, preparing to line up to enter into separate Metro Redline cars. Their makeshift disguises would have to hold up long enough to make it to the next stop, *Vermont/Sunset*. At least there, they could try to rendezvous with another network of miners before storming the depot.

Dante knew that if he could gather the all two hundred of the miners, his force could be strong enough to take on the Co-founders and their legion of mercenary metro patrolmen. It wouldn’t be easy, but he knew it wouldn’t be entirely impossible.

Chapter XII

Sunday 7:12 AM Spring 2030

The empty early morning train pulled to an abrupt screeching stop at the *Vermont/Santa* *Monica* metro station platform. Each team walked into their train carts together, looking through the train windows to see themselves all loaded up. The struggling lights flickered as the subway doors closed. The train jerked forward into the subway tunnel.

Even after the earthquake had split open the Griffith Park, the subway, luckily was still able to operate between the different sectors, though without the same efficiency. Dante found it weird that none of these train carts were under surveillance by metro patrol. He figured that Toby had requested Felicia to pull the entire force to begin hunting the remaining underground rebels.

“Do you know how to find the others underneath the station?” asked the miner standing awkwardly beside Dante in the cart. The swaying of the subway cart on the bent tracks made it difficult for him to maintain his balance.

“Once we arrive in the station and this train leaves, I think I should go retrace my steps. I had seen their hideaway once before in the fall.” He replied, digging in his memory the route in the dark of the subway tunnel.

Exiting the cart, the miners regrouped.

They passed Dante the crowbar, while another miner hooked the latch on side of the manhole cover and lifted. They slid the thick iron cover over to the side and shined a light down into the hole. Nothing but darkness.

They each jumped to the ladder below and climbed down the length of the hole. Dante found a murky river below the subway tracks. Solomon’s smartphone showed that the entrance was less than fifty yards down the tunnel. As the rest of the disguised miners entered the tunnel, the echo of splashes and footsteps filled the cavernous void.

Reaching the entrance, the twelve men grouped together behind Dante.

He rapped on the iron door with the crowbar. Behind a thin sliding compartment, Dante could see a pair of eyes peering out from a dimly lit interior corridor. Upon quick visual verification of Dante, the person behind the iron door hoisted the iron door open to grant them access into the underground base.

Chapter XIII

Sunday 9:03 AM Spring 2030

“Good to finally see you again Dante, we thought you were as good as dead. I took over operations for this group after Solomon was captured, I heard about what happened to your father, my condolences” The first rebel said to Dante.

“You are Boulder, Right? Thank you, I haven’t even gotten over the initial shock. I know that the Co-Founders will use this opportunity to try and crush us, now that both him and Solomon are gone,” Dante replied, taking a moment to finally absorb all that had already transpired.

Boulder was massive in size, his frame barely fit the armor vest he had removed from some unlucky patrol. He stood nearly a foot taller than Dante, yet he appeared to carrying himself with a friendly demeanor. Dante had recalled his father mentioning Boulder’s many smaller victories early on in the rebellion, before ultimately fortifying this underground base for men that had escaped the mine.

“What are you planning?” Boulder asked.

“First off, how many are you here?” Dante requested, quickly scanning the base, the remaining rebels were scattered amongst various tables, occupying the small offshoot alcoves. The entire space of the underground base was only slightly larger than his own office.

“Now we have a total combined force of just over two hundred, with equipment enough for just as many. However, our food rations are nearly empty. Reports from the most recent communications from the Morects crystal mine have suggested that only forty men remain inside the mountain.” Boulder responded, “And it seems their conditions have worsened, some of them taking nearly triple shifts, while doing the work of several men, even though it’s clear that the resources will be depleted before the end of the spring.”

“Do we know how many patrol guards are stationed at the depot and the observatory right now?”

“I can’t know for certain, but it’s likely that we are outnumbered two, or even three to one”

“Hmm, direct confrontation is inadvisable, how close can we get to the depot utilizing these tunnels?” Dante inquired.

Boulder thought for a moment, trying to review the layout of the underground passages between the base and the depot. Finally, he spoke, “Our forces should be able to infiltrate the south entrance of the depot, but if we are outnumbered, we’ll need to create a diversion in order to get up the side of the canyon and into the observatory.”

“We’ll have to draw enough of them out of the depot first.” Dante said, thinking out loud.

Sophia presented a layout of the depot blueprint and a map to them. It showed the southern entrance that had access from N Vermont. On the structure were two massive gated doors for the all of the metro patrol vans to arrive and depart. Behind the depot was the path that lead up to both the crystal mine shaft and to observatory.

“It must be the most heavily guarded location in this entire city. How in the hell are supposed overtake them with only two hundred?” A miner asked.

Dante reviewed all of the information laid out before him and Boulder. He knew that the metro patrol would be secured within the depot, and they would be loading the crystal containers in the vans periodically throughout the day. Once the rebels returned above ground they would be immediately exposed. The simple fact that no metro patrol had reached this subterranean base was surprising enough.

“Do we have access to anymore remaining vehicles?” Dante asked Boulder, observing the road leading to the south entrance.

“There are some, but certainly not enough vans for all of us.” Boulder replied.   
 “We only need a few to break through metro patrol’s initial defenses.” Sophia said, pointing to the entrance.

“That’s true, however the depot is so heavily fortified, that even a full on assault will not rouse their forces into retaliation. Unless we make patrol abandon their posts,” Boulder said.

Dante looked over the topographical features of the road that lead to the depot, there was just slightly less than one mile between the underground tunnel exit and the depot itself. Boulder pointed out where the storage of remaining operating vehicles was located.

The path showed various ravines and ditches, as well as sparse foliage amidst the dusty sand cliffs, and rocky ledges. Dante could see that marching the rebels up the road would be a surefire way to quick defeat, without a solid and nuanced plan of action once metro patrol mobilized.

“Do we have access to the ventilation schematics?” Dante eventually asked.

Chapter XIV

Sunday 10:10 AM Spring 2030

Sophia and Boulder mapped out the air ducts and ventilation system that fed the depot from the roof. There were two small units located near the back and then a main central unit in charge of the cooling system fit with a massive vertically standing turbine with a wire-gated cover.

“That will be our target.” Dante stated while the other two nodded in agreement.

“It’s off at this time, but by this afternoon, the sun will heat up the depot and that turbine will become operational, cooling down the entire facility for the remainder of the afternoon,” Sophia added.

Boulder carefully reviewed the all of the information, and asked, “How will we use that to get access?”

“I want to try to draw as many of them out of the depot and onto the entrance road.” Dante said, trailing his finger along the road leading up to south entrance, “They’ll be expecting us as soon as we all exit this tunnel.”

“We could use the remaining drones,” Boulder stated.

“How many are there?” Dante asked.

“Half dozen in operation,” Boulder replied.

“If we fit them with Torazadene, we should be able to get them to evacuate the depot,” Sophia added.

“This is true, but we’d need to coordinate quickly, and set up around the entrance in time, we need to reach the highest vantage points possible in the span of time it takes for the drones and remaining vehicles to make contact,” Dante said, illustrating the to the others the requirement for a highly synchronized attack.

“Agreed, let’s get everyone equipped.” Sophia said, as Boulder nodded in agreement.

Chapter XV

Sunday 10:15 AM Spring 2030

As Toby entered the southern gate of the depot, he was able to observe the swarms of metro patrolmen hoist the containers of Morects crystal into the vans prior to departure.

“Pull into the East side here, I want to make sure nothing has gone amiss,” Toby directed the driver of his Audi A8. His chauffeur adjusted in his seat by straightening his posture, and eased the car into the space.

Toby attempted to radio the other facility with his phone.

“I can hear you, Toby, how were the negotiations in New York City?” Maleck’s voice asked on the other line.

“Seemed to go fine, our profits will not be effected even if the mine is depleted, so long as we get our hands on the refinement process. What news do you have to report in my absence?” Toby inquired.

“It seems we have continuous issues within city,” Maleck said dryly.

“Where is Dante Hiro,” Toby growled, “I asked patrol to dispose of him *immediately*. He continues be to a thorn in our side.”

“Perhaps you care to ask your sister..” Maleck suggested.

“What does Denise have to do with anything related to this latest uprising,” Toby asked, his fist clenching and frustration growing.

“She and your wife, Felicia were the last to see Dante before the raid on the Monroe sector. It seems he escaped with a group of rebel miners and shut down the Santa Monica gate facility” Maleck responded, hearing Toby’s irritation building, over the line.

Maleck comments were met with silence.

“Do you think he has it?” Toby finally asked.

“Of course.” Maleck answered, “However I’m fairly certain he is currently enroute to the Observatory. Perhaps you’d care to question him yourself, Toby.”

Toby LaSalle scanned the interior of his depot and did a quick headcount of the metro patrolmen there, “Then we’re going to need to bring him in alive. Mark my words that I’ll see to it, to have these attacks squashed and the entirety of Dante’s forces crushed.”

Chapter XVI

Sunday 10:35 AM Spring 2030

From Dante Hiro’s vantage point, he could see that the Griffith Park Observatory was lit up and bright white in the cloudy morning sky, he could make out the gigantic domed structure. It was surrounded by metro patrol vans. He could see the vast fault line and the entrance to quarry just beneath the mountain surface. On the surface the drill rose up above the mountain several feet. This last quarry was being actively mined around the clock, though nearing depletion.

Just slightly further south, Dante was able to make out the delivery depot in the distance. The high gated doors were now currently closed and shut tight. From the outside he could view a slight wispy smoke plume lifting up into the atmosphere escaping the central air vent on the roof.

He utilized the phone’s optical zoom to show Sophia the distance between their current location and the depot entrance.

“We’re just out of range here,” Sophia said as she looked around the ravine, and then at the depot.

“Agreed, we’re going to have to regroup closer to the gate.” Dante replied quietly, motioning to Boulder and his group just below the ridged vantage point.

Boulder raised his arm and signaled to the rebels stationed just behind him. They collectively lifted out of their sandy ditches, and slowly made their way up the ridge path. A dusty cloud formed as the dirt unsettled beneath their feet. As he climbed to the precipice of the ravine towards Dante’s location, Boulder reached up and clenched the closest roots of the dried trees to lift his massive body up the dirt path. Dante shifted his body to turn around. He and Sophia powered on the drones and sent them climbing into the atmosphere. Dante watched them as they soared across the sky, approaching the depot’s roof.

“Do you think we can get this close enough?” Dante asked, watching the screen of the phone.

“I think so, we just need to steer it above the air vent,” She replied, observing the birds-eye view of the ravine on the drone’s camera.

Boulder settled beside Sophia, placing his equipment on the ground. He again motioned his hand forward to the group below.

Several of the miner’s vehicles moved forward along the rocky path leading to the depot’s southern entrance. Dante briefly looked behind him, and counted a dozen sedans lined up on the dirt road. When he could see that the drones were right above the rooftop vent, he gave a single wave at Boulder beside him.

“Send them up,” Boulder signaled to the drivers below.

All the sedans lurched forward simultaneously. Dante looked on as they rounded the back of the ravine and up the dirt road. He looked back on his screen for the drone’s view and lowered the unit to the vent. He pressed the drone’s release on his phone. Sophia did the same for her drones.

The vials of Torazadene fell from the drone clamps into the air vents wire-gated cover on the depot’s roof. As soon as of all the Torazadene was released, it would only take a few moments in the Los Angeles’ morning heat to react with the atmospheric oxygen within the depot. Once that accelerated reaction reached the stored containers of Morects crystal, the refinement process would cause immediate combustion.

Boulder grabbed his equipment, and rushed down the ravine hill towards to the depot. Sophia and Dante switched off their control of the drones and picked up their energy rifles following Boulder’s lead.

“Go, go, go!” Dante shouted. The two hundred miners raced down from the high vantage point into ravine and towards the path. They chased the all sedans that were racing up the path.

Chapter XVII

Sunday 11:50AM Spring 2030

Dante watched as the large metal framed door of the depot opened. The creaking sound of the mechanical door filled the ravine as the miner’s sedans raced straight towards the entrance. He could see the light emanating from below the door as the refinement process was actively accelerating inside the depot. The bright powerful overflow of iridescence filled the cloudy sky. Their calculations for the precision drone strike with Torazadene were true.

Together with Sophia and Boulder, he raced forward towards the entrance. They led the charge on foot, following the cars driving along the dirt path. Nearing the door, the drivers leapt from their vehicles and sent the sedans careening straight through the depot entrance.

Grabbing the nearest driver and lifting him back up onto his feet, “Let’s go, let’s go!” Dante shouted.

BOOM!

All of the sedans crashed directly into metro patrol transport vans parked inside the depot. The patrolmen that had been inside were already rushing out as the oxygen was being sucked up by the refinement process that was simultaneously underway. Sophia had timed the drone strike perfectly. The patrolmen inside were both instantaneously blinded by the Morects crystal glowing sheen, as well as suffocated by the Torazadene.

As the air was quickly replenished inside the depot once the gates opened, the rebel miners entered. Sophia made first contact, barreling through the entrance and slicing through any patrolmen in her range. She lowered her body and aimed her energy rifle, checked its charge and then began unloading each calculated blast. Boulder followed closely behind her. Dodging the blasts as he sprinted into the depot, Boulder grabbed the closest patrolmen and tossed him aside. He rushed through the depot door, bashing through their defenses, and jumped up on top of the closest van. The miners quickly raced inside the building, targeting all of the metro patrolmen with deadly precision. Dante joined in the ensuing firefight. Dante spotted Boulder and tossed him an additional energy rifle from the floor and continued inching forward into the depot. The metro patrolmen returned fire, scrambled into various alcoves and ducked behind the depot pillars, attempting to survive the rebel onslaught.

Dante noticed that in this instance, the metro patrolmen were in fact the ones that were outnumbered. The combined forces of Sophia, Dante, and Boulder’s army of miner rebels appeared to easily defeat the patrolmen stationed in the depot. He kept his eyes trained on the rear exit of the depot, while continuing to move forward. Dante Hiro ducked behind the crashed vehicles for cover, while the remaining miners flooded into the depot. He could see all the blasts striking the overwhelmed metro patrolmen who were trying to retreat through the rear exit of the depot towards the path to the Griffith Observatory. Dante charged forward through the rubble and conflict to meet Sophia. She was very carefully preserving her rounds unlike Boulder, would was attacking the patrolmen inside full-on. Once their entire force crowded inside, the miners seemed to get the upper hand. Dante quickly calculated the remaining metro patrol force, however it seemed that he had underestimated the number within the facility.

“Boulder! Lead them forward—get to the observatory!” Dante tried shouting through a barrage of rifle blasts whizzing passed him, “Sophia, push forward & give cover!”

Boulder immediately dropped an empty energy rifle and charged off the van to melee a group of nearby patrolmen. He landed several successive concussive blows to down them. Rushing towards the rear exit amidst the battle, Sophia hopped up over the vans carefully targeting metro patrolmen that were trying to hide, aim, and fire from behind the pillars.

As the miners’ complete force entered the depot, Dante could see that victory was in sight. All they had to do was get to the rear exit doors of the facility and they had a clear ridge path to the Observatory.

Taking his eyes off the miners pushing forward, He suddenly noticed the volley of energy rifle fire drastically increased. By the time Dante turned back around, it was far too late.

“Shut it down!” Toby’s deep voice rang over the loud speaker, echoing through the depot. Dante recognized it immediately.

BOOM.

In that instant, the auxiliary metal gates slammed shut behind the advancing force. The rear exits were now flooding with metro patrolmen storming into the structure, picking off the miners. Dante’s forces were about to be decimated; they had grossly miscalculated the patrol force stationed inside the depot. Dante couldn’t believe it, but he had walked into a trap set by Toby LaSalle.

A firefight ensued. Dante looked towards the exits and saw Sophia in close quarters combat, knocking out one patrolmen and jumping over him to take on two patrolmen simultaneously. A rifle blast fired out from the onrush of Toby’s backup forces and struck Sophia. Dante watched as she fell to the depot floor.

“Noo!” Boulder roared, as he tossed a patrolman into a large group stationed behind the pillars.

Boulder rushed back to the spot Sophia collapsed, leaping over the downed bodies and crashed vehicles. Dante also tried to run over to her location as well.

Toby’s force had outnumbered the miners inside the depot structure. Now there was nowhere for the miners to hide. The rebel force’s numbers dwindled with no space for retreat.

Boulder reached for Sophia beside the vehicle. Dante was nearly steps away when he saw Boulder’s body crumble. Boulder has been struck in the back, his large frame collapse beside the vehicle next to Sophia.

There was no use, they had entered the depot only to be ambushed.

“Next to the “Boulder”, the leader, bring him!” Toby’s voice echoed over the loudspeaker.

Dante looked up, knowing the patrol were going to try to capture him. Around him, the miners were falling, taking direct blasts, and dropping to the depot floor.

When he was struck, Dante felt the pain immediately. His body stung immensely, muscles and tendons pulsing and firing on his was down to the ground. His legs froze in place. He had been hit, not in the chest, but the pain seared along the whole left side of his body. He lay on the ground in shock. For a brief moment, he closed his eyes, shouting out in agonizing pain.

Chapter XVIII

Sunday 1:05PM Spring 2030

Dante could feel his body being lifted off the cold concrete floor of the depot. After his ear finally stopped ringing he could hear the shuffle of the patrolmen boots, but the noise of the battle had finally subsided.

Snapping to consciousness, he blurrily looked around to see two patrolmen dragging his body along the dusty ridge path to the Observatory. The distinct aroma of Torazadene had faded from his senses, as they got further away from the Depot. Dante felt a deep sadness sink in when he came to realization that all his compadres had fallen during the battle. Their planning had failed to recognize the trap that Maleck & Toby set long before they had arrived above ground.

Dante was unable feel any sensations in his legs. His nerves had long since stop spasming after being hit. Severe pains coursed through his spine and his shoulders, along his neck all the way to his frontal lobe behind his eyes. He was unsure that he could gather enough energy to manage an escape from his current situation; Outnumbered, captured, and without backup.

When the burning sensations dissipated from his eyes, Dante was able to finally able to acclimate himself to his surroundings. He discovered he was within the central command center of Griffith Park Observatory. There was large window angled to facing down, giving a panorama below the mountain surface and into the cavern of the mine. Dante was just barely able to see a rock ledge across the chasm through his daze. Around him were several metro patrol guards monitoring his every movement, while others manned the control center consoles that operated the cities wide scale video surveillance system.

“You are one tough son-a-bitch to find, Dante!” A voice boomed behind him.

Dante felt his inner ear and head pulsing in agonizing pain at the sheer sound. The pain traveled and resided directly behind his eyes, his brain was seemingly sore.

“How did you know we were coming through the depot?” Dante meekly responded. He struggled to lift himself up, only to find he was tethered to a command center chair. His hands and arms locked into position. He quickly counted how many patrolmen were there. Three around him, four more operating the surveillance, and Toby.

“Don’t bother Dante,” Toby grumbled, “I have something to show you, before the real festivities begin.”

Dante dizzily lifted his head and adjusted his eyes to the darkness that was the cave in front of the command center windows. He was only able to slightly see two figures approaching the ledge across the cave. Finally, he could make out the face. Denise had been captured and was brought into Griffith by Toby.

“We had her picked up shortly after your escape,” Toby said boastfully.

Dante immediately tried to jump out of his seat, but to no avail. The tethers had his wrists locked into place, and only dug deeper into his wrists during his struggle. Dante’s tattered joints ached from being hauled through up the mountain path. The pain seared through his body and he could feel it behind his eyes, as he tried to squint to see Denise.

Across the cave, Denise struggled to free herself from the Metro patrol officers guarding her. Studying the blank and unwavering empty stare from the officer restraining her on the ledge, it was clear to Dante that escaping this predicament together (or unscathed) had fleeting hope.

From behind Dante, the door into the command center slid open. Maleck entered and briefly assessed the situation. Then Maleck finally spoke, “I was like you Dante, I was once an optimistic idealist as well. I also saw firsthand the suffering of this city, once a sprawling luminous metropolis from the shore to this very mountaintop, and I wanted to make a stark change for Los Angeles and the entire outlying area. However, after the quake, even the upper class were suffering, despondent; food storages and supplies were dwindling, this city was cut off, poverty and anarchy ruled the day.” Maleck continued, “Morects crystal was all that was of any significant value. That first quake was extremely disastrous to the city, this second eminent event will be the final collapse of the society here in this dusty landmass.”

“Dante, you have failed to comprehend the larger picture here..” Maleck continued, “You’ve lost and this weak rebellion will soon follow; this mine will collapse shortly, burying all of those remaining miners.” Maleck continued, “Your research and all of your labor will have been for naught. The logic quickly disproven, the formulas lost forever—You cannot win.”

“All that time wasted, all this war, for what? To what end? Did you think that you could overthrow the strength of NuLAb and all its immense resources? With our numbers far greater, our technology so vastly superior to your meager band.”

Toby chimed in, “He’s right you know Dante, you cannot fathom the both the resources & time we’ve utilized to keep order and protect my wealth. You are a real nuisance”.

He sensed an immediate change in Maleck. As was though he had snapped. Dante watched as Maleck’s demeanor nearly boiling over, just as Toby slowly stepped towards the panoramic window.

Suddenly, Maleck burst in a fiery rage. He snagged a crystal secured on the table and gripped it in his hands. Lunging at Toby, from behind, Maleck shoved the Morects through Toby’s lower back, the glow of the stone seemingly stealing away the very life energy of Maleck’s once-trusted accomplice.

“WHY” Toby yelled.

“Your wealth? Keep it, savior it, bask in all its glory, Toby!” Maleck laughed.

“All you ever cared about was the value of the Morects!”

Maleck braced himself for a moment and then summoned all of his strength in one instantaneous motion, threw Toby, his body crashing through the command center’s window, plummeting to the cave below.

Dante looked on in shock, taking in the entire scene.

Dante felt the dank emptiness of the caves rocky floor, the searing pain returned in his shoulder, letting out a groan, he rolled only to look over to find Toby’s body laying lifeless beside him. Dante rolled Toby’s lifeless body over, and dug his hand into the bloody mess of his back, from his spine, Dante removed the splintered Morects crystal. With what little remaining energy that Dante could muster, he reached for the empty launcher in his holster, and loaded the final Morects crystal into the chamber. The faint but audible ‘click’ gave Dante a sense of relief despite his overwhelming exhaustion.

The few remaining miners, gaunt and hungry, hobbled over to Dante from amongst the shadows of the cave. They were unfamiliar faces to Dante. One knelt before Toby’s mangled body, reached under his arms and began dragging him in back into the dim recesses of the cave’s mine shaft. The sound of Toby’s boots being dragged along the ground was the only noise Dante could hear. He coughed up a cloud of dust and his lungs ached. The other miners, in their weakened state, helped Dante to his feet. As he regained his balance, stood erect, and shook off both the weight of all that had transpired, and the pain of his fall, Dante slowly began the ascend up the mine shaft.

His climb up was treacherous, nearly all of stones ledges were completely unsecure. As he got closer to the top, he could faintly hear Denise still shouting at top.

Dante Hiro: Classic hero, who, even when facing insurmountable odds, utter defeat, relentless foes, heavy losses, being completely outnumbered, will seek to do what is ‘right’. Even when the plan & the back-up plan (or the back up to the back-up plan) falls apart.