Introduction

This book was written with the anime *Tenchi Muyo!* in mind. I try to honor and respect it as much as possible, and am not trying to rip it off or claim the ideas as my own. Admittedly, the chapters with the references in it were written long ago. As time has passed I steered the story away from it. Much was written out of the earlier chapters. What's left is what I felt was core to the story, and I wanted to leave unchanged. The theory I use is that different versions of the anime happened in the same universe as this book, in another universe, and as the television show itself. If you'd notice, the protagonist makes numerous references to it as if it was true history, and refers to the anime itself. I use the entire version of the anime that fits into its respective location and source, not just ideas or concepts from it, especially not claiming it as my own work, but referring to it in its entirety, so COOL IT! Enjoy!

-Seth Morley

Honeycomb of Life

Prologue

Time and space began with one universe, which was completely empty. The empty energy of nothingness gathered. As its density increased, there was a reverse effect, forming a positive energy, then an actual object from that energy. This was the Keyline, a wave of divine energy, which connected one point to the exact same point by a straight line in the curve of space along the universal horizon line. This Keyline had conscious thought, and was all knowing, it could even accurately predict the future. It also had a consciousness and as time passed even attained a personality.

Odin emerged from the energy of the Keyline. Odin created a planet on which to live. Over time, he grew bored, and to end his boredom, he created the God of Light: Gilgamesh, and Jormungand: the God of Darkness. At the time, they weren't thought of as Gods, but normal beings. One was purely good, while the other was purely evil. Gilgamesh decided to create a being to work under him, as he worked under Odin, so he created the Honeycomb of Life. The term used to refer to this position is Warrior of Light. Jormungand did the same and created Ragnarok, whose position was called Warrior of Darkness.

After a time, the Honeycomb of Life got bored with this universe, and pushed out, forming another universe, but since this required creating a fifth dimension, there could no longer be a set number of universes. Instead of one, an infinite number of universes were formed. This was the Big Bang of theory. The term used to refer to all of these universes was the Omniverse: which consisted of everything in all existence. The new universes were copies of the original, but the farther the universes went away from the original, the weaker the life forms and objects in them became, though it was all proportional to everything else in the universe, so one would only notice a change if one traveled to a different universe than his own.

When they were created, several questions were asked. Who would watch over them? And since they were just copies, and the divine energy that grants eternal youth cannot be copied, what would they do with the dying souls? Gilgamesh, the God of light,

honor, life, and purity, decided to watch over the other universes. Odin realized that the dying souls would return to the original universe, so they set up an afterlife for them.

After a long time, they realized the original universe would become "full", so they had other afterlives set up under the care of lesser Gods created by Gilgamesh. In a rivalry, and to maintain balance, Jormungand created his own lesser Gods to watch over them as well. They realized that these after-lives would eventually become "full" as well, and the idea of reincarnation arose, and was put into action, though it was not direct reincarnation. The soul would live in the afterlife for a millennium or so then be reborn in another body. They halted the natural creation of souls and instead rerouted existing souls in the many afterlives to that new being.

Just as everything was put into place, the Keyline foresaw a great catastrophe to come in the future, and that one of the children of these many new universes would be their salvation. Time passed and nothing came, so the tale was soon forgotten, but the Keyline kept an avid watch for this child, even looking into the future to see him.

Jormungand, the weak and foolish God of darkness, dishonor, death and impurity, grew jealous of Gilgamesh's position as watcher over the universes. Jormungand fought with Gilgamesh for the position. Gilgamesh honed all of his strength into a single blow and struck Jormungand with such strong energy behind it that it separated Jormungand's physical body from his spirit. His spirit wandered the universes for thousands of years, eventually settling into obscurity in a remote planet deep in the Omniverse.

Ragnarok became the God of Darkness upon Jormungand's death. Ragnarok fought Gilgamesh for revenge but more so for the same position Jormungand wanted. They fought across all of the universes in the Omniverse. This fight lasted for eons of time as the worlds evolved and changed from bacteria infested lava pits to the worlds there are today.

Many years passed and Ragnarok eventually killed Gilgamesh. This was thought to be the great catastrophe prophesized, but the child never arrived. The Keyline had been watching for this child, though, and the moment he died, Gilgamesh sent his own spirit into the body of a baby boy just before birth, one who had not yet been granted a spirit, in hopes of assisting him, for this boy was the one the Keyline had predicted would pose such a great significance. Upon Gilgamesh's death, The Honeycomb of Life was promoted to the God of Light. The Honeycomb of Life searched for the boy, but there were many odd circumstances surrounding the young boy's birth. Due to these

circumstances, the boy seemed to disappear, and where the boy is now is unknown. The Honeycomb of Life searched for this boy, wanting, as Gilgamesh did, to assist him in preventing the downfall of the Omniverse.

      This is that boy's story…

Chapter 1
The Laboratory

Spring – year 14

There is a boy, just fourteen years old, living somewhere in the eastern United States. This boy is Ethen Fox, son of Bruce and Elizabeth "Liz" Fox. Bruce was English, somewhat tall, but average looking. He was an archeologist who had just recently begun working at a new site that was just a few hours from home. Ethen was always interested in his digs, so Bruce would take him along on occasion. Liz, on the other hand, was a rather attractive half-Japanese woman who had, interestingly enough, lived her entire life in the United States. Her parents did as well, though their family tree could be traced back to Japan eventually.

Ethen had disheveled brown hair, lazily aimed backwards, but with some still falling down to the front. He had brown eyes, was average height, and average build. He didn't seem to belong to any particular race, but that was probably due to the many different places his genes could be traced to. He was originally going to be named Ethan, but due to a spelling error on his birth record, instead of Ethan, he was named Ethen. He was okay with this; it gave him some individuality, and had no intention of correcting it. Though he often had to correct others.

Since birth, Ethen has always had an unusually strong sense of justice and has been able to clearly tell the difference between right and wrong, yet still understanding that there are often many shades of gray. He would always stand up for what is right, without any regard for himself. As such he was always getting in fights trying to protect someone being picked on. Ethen wasn't very strong, but he had a great inner strength. Through sheer determination and will power he would persevere until the righteous had won. He fought the evil in people, but as he aged, it became more and more difficult as the evil around him grew, became harder to reform, and the many shades of gray got even grayer. Regardless, Ethen fought. He was often found unconscious in some corner, or in a restroom at school. Those he helped were eternally grateful to him, but it was all he could do. As soon as the offender would leave, his body would give out, having served its purpose. He would lay there greatly wounded until reported or found.

To date, Ethen has been hospitalized forty-three times. Even now, his head has a bandage wrapped around it.

"Ethen! It's time to go!" his father yelled.

"Coming!" Ethen responded from his room. A few moments later, he started trotting down the stairs. "What are we looking for this time, dad?" Ethen asked.

"Really anything related to this object we found on the last dig." The two went outside and got in the car. While they pulled out of the driveway and started down the road, his father said, "You might want to take a nap; it's a two hour drive to the site." Ethen nodded and lay down on the back seat to do just that.

A time later, a weary Ethen sat up, rubbing his eyes, "Are we there yet?"

"We've been here for a while; I just didn't want to wake you." He smirked. "Didn't you get any sleep last night? We've already been here an hour. The rest of the crew has already left for the evening. Come on, I need all the help I can get." Ethen pulled himself out of the car and followed his father to the site. It wasn't a far walk; the dig was just a hundred feet or so from the road. Ethen was a bit surprised at what he saw when he got out of the car, though. He saw a desert that went out to the horizon in every direction. He didn't know anything like this was this close to his house. He saw a single road that they had driven there on, but the road itself looked like it hadn't been used since roads were first invented, there was even a thick layer of sand over it. Ethen looked out towards the desert and saw a single palm tree next to what looked to be the dig sight. Other than that there wasn't anything but sand clear to the horizon.

"A palm tree?"

"I know; that's what led us to this place to begin with. Bryan saw some objects at the last sight. We studied them and found some link to this location. We didn't know where to begin looking though, but then we found that single palm tree. The rest of the crew got here first and they said they found all sorts of goodies. It seems they were all unnaturally broken, though, and recently at that: within the last year or so."

"What about the palm tree?"

"They never figured it out. Either way, I'm going to start looking at the area they looked at. It should be marked off and cleaned up already"

"Personally, I'm feeling something from over there." Ethen pointed, and then started walking off towards the area. His father was a little puzzled, but let Ethen investigate on his own. He instead made his way to the marked-off spot and buried his

nose in the relics already there. Ethen, on the other hand, got about another hundred feet from his father when, perplexing him some, he felt the soft sand under his feet become sturdier; there was obviously something hard not deep below him. Wondering what it was, Ethen started brushing the sand below him to the side. He found a sheet of metal; he cleared away a little more and found what looked like a door handle, even further confusing him. He pulled, and a hatch swung open, pulling the sand covering its figure into the dark hole it uncovered.

"Wow... To think something like this was here. I'll take a quick look inside before getting my dad." With that he slipped into the hole. Inside was a large cylindrical room that had been turned on its side. He wasn't expecting it to be on its side, and hit a few things while dropping. He tumbled and crashed on the bottom, which was technically a wall. "That kinda stung..." He stood up, holding his head, repositioning some bandages that were wrapped around it due to a scuffle he had recently gotten into. He looked around, but all he could see in the low light coming in the hole was a single large computer monitor and a table.

He climbed on a few things and started his search with the control panel by the large screen, deciding to press what looked like the 'on' button. The large screen lit up, adding some light to the room. It was an odd room, not only was it cylindrical, but the ceiling was smaller than the floor, causing the walls to curve inward. The screen was so large that it and the console below it were curved along the wall. It was probably for the better, so despite its size even at the top and sides the monitor was pointed at Ethen.

On the screen were several different options he could choose from. "This thing still works? Well, let's see what it can do!" He looked at the print on the screen, but he couldn't read any of it, everything was in a foreign language, and even the keys on the keyboard didn't make sense. Ethen looked closer at the keyboard and saw there weren't actually buttons. It was a flat display with characters and boxes lit up to make the keys. It was a touch-screen keyboard. "Now what…? Mash buttons until something happens?" He started mashing random keys, and after seemingly giving the computer an aneurysm, the screen changed showing a long list of words that he could apparently choose from.

He hit the button that he had decided was the down arrow and the screen scrolled down. After a moment, he saw a word he recognized as Spanish and another as German. "I guess it realized I didn't know what I was doing and brought up a language select." he paused, searching the list, "I don't know how many languages

there are on Earth, but I'm pretty sure there are a lot more listed here than there are countries…" He scrolled down the list and after five minutes or so eventually found what looked like common English. He was somewhat relieved it was near the top. Once selected, every displayed word changed to English. Even the characters on the keyboard dimmed, and English letters and numbers lit up in their place. Unfortunately, whoever made this must not have been too familiar with English. He had to struggle to make sense of some words. The keyboard keys appeared to be in a variation of the Dvorak format, which was designed for efficiency. His guess was that it was coincidence; they just made it an efficient layout all on their own.

"Well then, now that I can tell what I'm doing, let's see if I can figure out what this was made for!" There was an option on the main menu for processes. This opened up another menu with a respectable list in it. One of the options read "matter supplanter". "Does that mean I can switch things around, like teleporting things?" Selecting it, he saw the word "begin" appear in the corner of the screen, and a three-dimensional world map showed up. First he tried to zoom out, but couldn't. Apparently this device only had the range to operate on the planet it was on or at least that general size. He drew a box on the screen and it zoomed in. He continued going in until finally he was at the location of the site they were digging at. There was a second button on the edge of the screen he clicked, assuming that let him draw the actual box to move. He drew a square around the lab he was standing in, intent to get this thing closer to home so he could look around at his leisure.

The word in the corner of the screen changed to "end" and he did the same thing for his home, putting it underground, beneath his house. It was an admittedly selfish move, but for some reason he didn't want anybody else to know about this. His curiosity just got the better of him. He wanted to fully investigate this room before handing it over to someone else to study, more than likely never seeing it again. As he pressed the enter key he felt a slight rumbling and the room he was in was turned right side up; he fell over and onto what was now the floor. He stood up, rubbed his nose, and wheeled a chair over. The chair was leaning against a far wall, probably because the room had been on its side. He sat down and looked at the other options on the monitor. Apparently the lab was now under his home. "Huzzah for me."

He continued his search of the computer but eventually realized that he was trapped, the ground now blocked the door he came in. "I guess I could supplant myself out of here, but then I couldn't get back in… without digging a very deep hole, anyway."

Looking at the various processes, he eventually found out how to modify the room itself, and extend an elevator up and out. He didn't want to tamper with the house, but figured having the elevator come out in the back yard would make it hard to get to. He wasn't sure how the computer did it, something about different planes of reality, he didn't look too far into it, but he somehow got a full-size elevator attached to his closet, somehow fitting in a five-inch thick wall.

Remembering his father, he panicked and looked at his watch. It had been an hour. He quickly supplanted himself back to the dig site, to hear the sound of his father yelling his name.

"Ethen! It's time to go! Where did that boy go? Not like there's anywhere to hide out here."

"Coming dad!" he responded as he jumped down from one of the branches of the single palm tree thinking, "*I'm really glad that tree's here...*" He then said aloud, "Did you find anything?"

"I was wondering where you went off to. I should have figured you'd be up the only tree here. It seems like there's a lot of stuff here, so I'm going to be spending a week or so at the hotel in the town near here so the team and I can finish looking at the site. They should already be at the hotel, and since you have school tomorrow, you'll need to head on home. Do you mind taking a bus home once we get to town? I should have some change around here somewhere..." He started fishing in his pockets. Ethen could hear change rattling around. He had taken the bus home before anyway, so it wasn't that big a deal. "I'd take you home myself, but I wouldn't get back out here till 2am, and you know I'm not a morning person."

"Oh, it's no trouble. It'll give me some time to catch up on a few things."

Ethen spent a great deal of time in this laboratory, as he came to call it even though it was little more than a computer and a round table, learning just what it was capable of, and what it was intended to do. Among other things, one of the devices he found he could create was a hyper gravity chamber. At first he wasn't sure of the side effects of staying in increased gravity for extended periods of time, but as he experimented with it he discovered as long as it was done gradually there were no ill effects at all. The heart, the bones, the muscles, they all got a great deal stronger to adapt. There were also devices to assist in learning, and realizing the potential the two of these had in combination for the purpose of his wanting to defend people, and his

constant hospitalizations, he began teaching himself the martial arts, and weight training in the hyper gravity chamber.

"All I want to do is help people that can't help themselves, but I just can't do it on my own. I'm constantly troubling my parents as well with the damage I do to myself. With this… With this maybe I can be of more use to everyone." He quickly got a great deal stronger. With the help of the lab he became an expert at textbook martial arts. Due to his protective nature he had much fighting experience as well, but no real professional experience. He soon realized that he would stand out of he became too muscular. In the lab he found a way to train himself that would not increase muscle size, but muscle density. He was still quite visibly well defined, but for the most part a long sleeve shirt hid that. Over the course of the next year he got stronger and stronger, fine-tuning his abilities more and more. He began to wonder just what the limits of the human body were.

Chapter 2

Kara

Fall – year 15

By this point Ethen was essentially on the level or a professional martial artist. He hadn't really dealt with anything other than your standard schoolyard bully though, so he didn't have much high-end experience. His thoughts at the moment went to weapons. If anything happened to really endanger him, he didn't have much faith in his own hands, and so sought something to even the odds. Using the technology available in the lab he developed and made a solid-state energy sword. It was but a mere sword hilt, designed to look at least a little ornate. However, on pressing a button on the hilt a blade of plasma extended from it. The plasma was given a semi-solid state, so it would cut through almost anything, but it could also run up against something uncutable and react as though it were solid. The lab did the vast majority of the work, Ethen wasn't entirely sure how the plasma sword worked, and it actually scared him a little. He left it in a compartment in the main computer console hoping he would never need it. He often practiced with a dummy sword though, just in case.

At one point, Ethen came into the lab to see the message "receiving transmission" on the screen. "I'm doing what now?" He hit the accept button to see a large black image come up with text reading "no image available". Soon, though, a young woman's voice spoke.

"There ve go; I väs vondering ēf you vere going to änswer ät äll."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Kara, ēt's ä pleasure. Ēf you vänt to know more äboot me, I'd be häppy to tell you." She giggled in a way that made Ethen a bit uncomfortable. "Voold you cäre to meet ēn person? Yust gēve me the vord änd I'll teleport you here."

Ethen paused, more confused than anything. To try and contact the lab's computer she couldn't even remotely be a normal person. Was she even from Earth? "*This is all so unnatural… I'm just a normal person, how am I supposed to handle something like this…?*" He welled up a degree of courage, and, paranoid, grabbed the plasma sword from its compartment. "Go ahead, whenever you're ready." As soon as he

said it he realized just how stupid it was. She could be sending him anywhere, into any situation. In not but a moment he vanished. Almost instantly his vision changed. Everything was bright, and the transition hurt his eyes, coming from the poorly lit laboratory. When his eyes adjusted, he saw he was standing in a large grassy field under a blue sky. "Am I still even on Earth?"

"Over here!" a voice yelled from behind him. Ethen turned to see a small stone table sitting in the field with a few white, artsy chairs surrounding it. On the table sat what appeared to be the girl who had asked him here. As Ethen walked over he could make out more and more whom his host was. She appeared to be about Ethen's age, but in seeing her, the word voluptuous came to mind. She was extremely fit. Tight waist, wide hips, breasts as big as melons. She wasn't wearing much either. White shorts, very short, for that matter, but held up with a wide belt. She was also wearing a reasonably tight top, white, also short, exposing her midriff. Any shorter and you could probably see the bottom of her breasts. She wore a purple lipstick, but her lips weren't one of her more predominant features. She had long, pointed ears, the tips seeming to try to move as directly away from her head as possible. Her eyes were a little narrow, and red like the fires of hell. She had four beauty marks, two horizontally under the corner each eye, the outside one just slightly bigger than the inner one. Perhaps the most unsettling thing was her bronze skin and aqua hair. Her hair was very long, down to her knees, and straight, tied in a high ponytail, with long bangs hanging down past her chin, split in the center, framing her face. She was quite the vixen really, with a real otherworldly charm.

"I guess I'm not on Earth after all. Why did you call me here?" Ethen asked, hoping for the best.

Kara leaned back on her hands, crossing her legs. She was actually quite attractive. "I'm ä… treasure hunter, searching oot property thät I find ēnteresting."

"A thief." He wasn't comfortable anymore.

"Oh, don't soond so cold!" She seemed to pout some, but only smiled more. "There väs ä group of pirätes searching for yoor shēp. The… läborätory, you cäll ēt? Vell there väs ä bēt of ä scuffle, änd I väs the only one to see ēt cräsh on thēs plänet. I häd ä heck of ä time finding ēt, thoogh."

"So, you want the lab?" He didn't want to give it up, but at this point he was so uncomfortable he would do just about anything to feel safe again.

"Oh, I vänt fär more thän thät." She narrowed her eyes, smirking. This did not fill Ethen with hope. "I followed thät computer for ä good vhile. I vätched äs you foond ēt. I

vätched you äs you experēmented vēth ēt. I väs älväys vätching you." She spun around on her hips so she was lying on her stomach, her face propped up by her hands. She narrowed her eyes again, smiling with a very seductive look. "*Älväys.*"

"That's… a little disturbing." At this point Ethen wasn't sure if she was hitting on him or threatening to kill him.

"Von't you come vēth me? Ve'll häve so much fun together!"

"*What am I supposed to do? I shouldn't even be reasoning this, it's stupid. I've got so many reasons to say no, but the only reason I have to say yes is that I think she's going to kill me if I don't.*" Ethen kept a good poker face, but he was sweating. He was just a regular kid, what are you supposed to do in a situation like this? He welled up all his courage and stuttered out a "N-no. I won't leave. Please, just let me go home."

For the first time she looked genuinely sad. "I don't know ēf I'm more säd thät you von't come or thät you dēsäppointed me so much…" She pushed up with her arms, swinging her body through, taking her back to a sitting position. "Vell, I'm stēll täking the computer." She stood up, and held a hand high up into the air, pointing her exposed palm straight up. "Änd ēf you don't vänt to come, I'll yust kēll you right here." She smiled a cruel smile. It occurred to Ethen that this was probably the kind of thing that made people soil themselves.

A blue ball of light formed in Kara's hand. A ball of energy. Ethen uncontrollably shouted out a shocked "Wah-!?" She quickly threw the ball into the ground below her, where it exploded on contact, throwing Ethen back. He tumbled on the ground, eventually pulling himself up. Adrenaline rushing through him he quickly looked back at the source of the explosion. "What the-!? How is that even possible!? What is this, some kind of cartoon!?" Kara came charging out of the dust with an energy sword in her hand. No handle, just the blade. "She can make solid-state plasma from her own body!?"

Ethen grabbed his own sword as fast as he could, extending the blade just in time to block. "Ve coold häve so much fun together, Ethen!" Every bit of his training came back to him at once, as every counter ran through his head, every motion, every attack. Without any real experience, he was too overwhelmed and confused. He parried however he could and swung back, but Kara effortlessly blocked. He swung again and again, but she just kept stopping him, smiling, like she was playing with him, until finally she took a blatant opening and hit Ethen in the chest with her bare palm, knocking him far back.

He tumbled a number of times before coming to rest, and barely managed to stand back up. He did manage to glance up enough to see Kara slowly walking towards him. She formed another ball of energy in her hand and threw it. *"Can plasma counter plasma?"* Like a baseball star, he swung his energy sword at the ball, actually impacting it. Pushing with every ounce of strength he had, the moment of impact seemed to last forever before he managed to push it back, the ball flying back at Kara. "Did I do it!?" Kara jumped gracefully into the air as the ball flew below her, exploding somewhere off in the distance. Ethen watched as she went into the air, and continued watching as she slowed down and stopped, without falling back to the ground. She just floated there in the sky smiling at him with a seductive smile. "She can fly!?"

She formed another ball of energy and threw it at Ethen. It impacted the ground not far from Ethen causing another explosion. It threw him through the air, and when he managed to pull himself up he noticed a rather large rock had been tossed along with him. Panicking, he scrambled behind the rock. Hands on his head, pulling at his hair, he was already a bloody, bruised mess; he was at the end of his rope. "What do I do? What do I do? What do I do? I'm not even a martial artist, I'm just some guy, and she can throw freaking explosions!? She's stronger than me, she's faster than me, she's more skilled than me, she can fly, what am I supposed to do!? Just sit here and let her kill me!?"

This was perhaps the most defining moment of his life. He sat there for a moment, fidgeting, but he slowly calmed. Determination spread across his face, fear completely disappearing. "I guess it's time… I start acting like a man." With purpose in his step, he stood, spinning around to face Kara. "You're stronger and faster than me, but that doesn't matter! I can sit here and cower, but that accomplishes nothing!" He swung his hand out to the side defiantly, finding new purpose in himself. "You can knock me down, and box me up, but as long as I'm alive, I will continue to stand!" He pointed his finger into the sky, angrily staring at Kara, shouting out. "Just who do you think I am!? A coward!? All I have is my will, and it continues to push me forward!" He swung his hand down, pointing his thumb at his chest. "I am myself! I am Ethen Fox! I will not be defeated so long as my will exists!" In an instant he drew and extended the blade of his sword, and pushing off as hard as he could, leaping dozens of feet into the air after Kara. Having really only gone all-out in the hyper-gravity chamber, it was surprising just what he was capable of.

Kara's face lit up. Not a cruel joy, but genuine happiness. Ethen's sword struck hers, and with his momentum he flipped over her head, exchanging another blow. As Ethen fell, Kara charged after, forming another ball of energy in her hand. "You never cease to ämäze me! Even now you're mäking me häppier!"

"Fighting her head on is suicide. She always attacks directly. She doesn't seem like the type to prance around. I just have to catch her off guard." Ethen touched down and looked up in time to see a plasma ball closing in. "The type to overwhelm with raw power!" He quickly swung his sword from above, again hitting the ball, but this time knocking it into the ground nearby. It wasn't a direct hit, so it carved a trench in the ground before exploding some twenty yards away.

Kara floated down, landing to one side of the trench. "*I can't let her get close. If she makes this close-range I don't stand a chance."* As she slowly walked towards him, she formed and threw another ball of energy. Again Ethen swung from the top, this time forcing it into the ground directly below him. "This is my chance!" It exploded on impact, leaving little more than a crater. It kicked up a great deal of dust, and once it had cleared Ethen was gone.

Confused, Kara approached the crater. "Dēd thät reälly get hēm?" Ethen had leaned over the explosion so the force threw him into the trench. A distance away, out of Kara's line of sight, he climbed out of the trench and quietly approached her from behind. Kara saw the trench, however, and realizing what Ethen had done quickly spun around in time to parry Ethen's swing. "I reälly shooldn't underestēmät you!"

Ethen swung again, only to have it parried. He dodged to one side swinging. Parried. Dodged back. Parried. Leapt twice over, swinging twice. Both parried. He had, however, made his way back to the center of the crater, and the second leap put him a good five yards away from Kara. Expecting her to charge after him, Kara caught him off guard by instead quite quickly throwing an energy ball at him. Ethen swung with his sword to knock it back, but wasn't sure if he could make it in time. There was an explosion. In a moment Kara figured out Ethen's plan, turning away from the crater, towards the trench again. "Do you thēnk you cän do thät tvice!?"

A sword was run through her chest from behind. A bloody Ethen stood behind her, barely able to stand. He had taken the blow head on, not moving an inch. "Did I just do it? No, this entire time, you were forcing me to…" Kara slowly turned partway around, blood trickling down from the corner of her mouth and a sleepy look on her face, but she was still smiling. She put a hand gently on Ethen's cheek.

Suddenly the sky turned to static, then disappeared to show a white ceramic. Colored lights started flashing, and warning alarms went off. Was so much of the area a projection? The room was much smaller than Ethen originally thought. Kara mumbled out, "Thēs ēs my shēp. The securēty system ēs tied to my life signs. Ēf I'm dying, the shēp self-destructs." Smiling a pleasant smile, she at last said, "Go on, I'll send you oot of here." Ethen felt the same power teleport him away that sent him there in the first place. In an instant he was back in his laboratory. He couldn't put together a solid thought. He wasn't even positive all of that just happened. The only thought that breached through the chaos in his mind was: "*I need to put more lights in this room.*"

Just then, Ethen felt two arms reach around him from behind, covering his eyes. He felt a body press against him from behind. In his ear he heard Kara's voice, "Guess who." He didn't even stop to guess; he panicked and pulled himself away, stumbling across the room, clumsily falling over a chair where he landed on his back with a thud, facing Kara.

"But… Look, just take the lab, I don't care any more!"

Kara walked over to him, crouching down and crawling over him on all fours. "Vhen you teleported äväy, the bläde's energy got pulled oot of my voond. The reäction vēth the teleportätion healed ēt shut, good äs new. Ēt's thänks to you I'm älive. Änd I don't vänt the läb ät äll äny more…" Ethen had backed up as much he could, but he was against a wall, his movements did nothing. Kara was over him, and though she wasn't pressing down on him, he could feel her body touching him. She brought her face closer and closer, her lips brushing against his. "I… vänt… you…"

Ethen couldn't do anything but smile nervously, letting out a quiet whimper.

Chapter 3
Reason to Exist

Winter – late year 15

Around 6am, a school morning, Ethen woke up a bit groggily. For the moment he didn't quite have his bearings. He looked about, trying to find the clock. Seeing he still had some time, he relaxed. In putting his arm back down, though, it landed on something unexpected. It was soft, and gave a little when pressed, like flesh. In an instant his eyes shot open, he threw the sheets off of himself as he sat up reached to turn the lights on. Kara was lying there in his bed wearing little more than lingerie. She pushed herself up some, looking sleepily at Ethen. "Come bäck to bed, dear."

"You're not supposed to be up here at all! You have your own bedroom in the lab!"

"Oh, but thät's no fun, I vänt to sleep vēth you!" She tackled him, knocking off the lights in the process. He fell back down into bed, with Kara lying on top of him, squeezing him as close as she could.

"I can feel a great deal more of her than I'm comfortable with..." He let out a stressed sigh and tried to relax, knowing he wasn't going to get rid of her any time soon.

Kara's ship had exploded, so she no longer had a home. She was rather adamant about staying with Ethen, as much as he objected. He explained that the laboratory was supposed to be a secret, and that her staying there would only cause problems, especially if anybody saw the kind of destruction she was capable of. Kara simply stated if she killed everyone there wouldn't be a problem any more. Ethen took some time convincing her otherwise. Eventually he convinced her to keep a low profile. He built a bedroom onto the laboratory for her to stay in, which she promptly turned into the most extravagant bedroom Ethen had ever seen. His family couldn't see her outside the lab, but there was an elevator outside, so she could spend time under the sun as long as she kept a low profile. She wasn't inside often. Nay, she was usually following Ethen around. As uncomfortable as it was, as long as she didn't do anything too spontaneous, he was okay with it.

Ethen left school later in the day. For being early winter, it was warm out. Not a flake of snow on the ground, and the sun was shining. As he walked across the schoolyard, he saw a figure standing between the gates. The person was wearing a black cloak, and though he wasn't sure, he assumed it was a female due to the petit frame. The cloak shadowed her face, so he couldn't tell what she looked like, but as he got closer he could make out a little of what was in the opening at the front of the cloak. That couldn't be right, he saw more skin than cloth.

"Ethen Fox?" A female's voice.

Ethen stopped walking. "Yes, can I help you?" She dressed a little suspiciously, but there's no reason for him to be cold.

She lowered her head a little and smiled. It was hard to see, but he could swear she blushed a little. "I'm Amy Hakubi." She reached out of the cloak, revealing herself, and lowering her hood. She had almost shoulder-length, pinkish-red hair. *"Is she not human either, or does everybody I meet just like dying their hair?"* Not even remotely trying to hide herself, Ethen turned his head away, blushing slightly. She was wearing little more than a skimpy, strapless, two-piece bikini. There was very little of her he didn't see. Having spent as much time with Kara as he had, one of the first things he noticed was that unlike the well-endowed Kara, Amy was so flat-chested she might as well have been an ironing board.

Ethen wasn't too sure how to react to this. Was it a joke? A prank? Her hair could have been dyed that color, but he didn't think she went to this school. No, he was certain of it. She stepped forward and said, "I have something important to tell you. Could we go somewhere with… a few less people around?" There were a lot of people around, and though this was obviously a weird situation, he didn't have a reason to not go with her.

"There's a park not far from here, there probably isn't much of a crowd there." She nodded energetically, and Ethen started off towards the park, Amy not far from his side.

Once in the park, Ethen asked, "So, there was something important you had to tell me?"

"Yes! It's about your past. Why you were born."

"Why I was born?" Ethen was just a regular kid. He's lived a normal life with normal parents. The very idea raised more questions than he could comprehend. *"I*

guess she's not normal girl either. Between the Lab and Kara, I can't really consider myself normal anymore, anyway." Ethen opened his mouth to say something, but he heard a noise and stopped. *"Speak of the devil."*

"Vho do you thēnk you äre!?" He heard Kara's voice behind him. She quite quickly flew down next to Ethen, grabbing a hold of his arm, pressing against him, giving a mean stare to Amy. "Vhät do you thēnk you're doing täking my Ethen oot like thēs?"

Ethen let out a pretty heavy sigh. Amy stepped up, saying. "Well that's a bit imposing. I don't think he belongs to anyone."

"He's mine, änd thät's thät. I'm not letting you do änything to my Ethen!"

"I just wanted to tell him something. It's kind of important."

Kara started walking towards Amy in a huff. She formed an energy sword in one hand. "You're not telling hēm änything vhile I'm äroond! I'm not letting you do änything vēth my Ethen!"

Amy raised her hands defensively, almost apologetically. "If you want to fight, I give up."

Ethen quickly stepped between the two, holding out his hands. "Kara, calm down. She honestly just wanted to tell me something. I think. She seems to know something about why I was born." Kara gave a huff and backed down, still looking disapprovingly at Amy. Ethen himself turned to Amy and said, "Let's just go back to the lab, we'll finish this there." He felt at the very least she wasn't a normal girl; she wasn't shocked at all at Kara's energy sword.

Having successfully snuck Amy and Kara into the lab, and calmed Kara down, Ethen once again went back to Amy's statement. "So, you said you knew something about my past?" Ethen was a fairly trusting person, and though it could be reasoned that Amy was a regular girl playing a joke, Ethen was inclined to believed her.

"Yes, you see… in six months there will be an event you've lived your entire life for. Someone from another galaxy will threaten to destroy the Earth."

"Destroy the Earth!? If there's anything I can do to help, just tell me what to do, I'll do everything I can!"

"Not only can you help, you're the only one that can stop it."

"The only one? Of course I'll do everything I can, but why me? Aren't there people better suited for this?"

"Even now, you're a lot more powerful than you think you are. In six months, you could be more powerful than any force on Earth. It has to be you, though. You see, time is constant. The past has already happened, there's no changing it. So, if in the future you go back in time, since the past is constant, that means you have to go back in time in the future. This makes not only the past constant, but the future constant."

"Okay, that was a little over my head, but I think I get what you're talking about."

"It has to be you, because in the future you were witnessed doing it."

"And now you've lost me."

"Washu and Tenchi Masaki, six months from now, witnessed you saving the world."

"Wait. Wait. Wait. They're from a TV show, that doesn't make any sense."

"That's something else I should explain, I guess. Yeah it's a TV show, but it also isn't. There are an infinite number of different universes. So many that every story you've read or every movie you've seen is true in one of them, somewhere. It just so happens this universe is really close to the one portrayed in the show."

"So… let me get this straight. Tenchi really happened, and in six months I'll save the world." Ethen was a trusting person, but even he was starting to have his doubts, this seemed like a bit much. "How do you know all of this? Just who are you?"

"I said before that you lived your entire life for this coming moment. Well…" She looked away and blushed a little. "I've lived my entire life to help you. You see, I was created much the way Ryoko was. Washu combined her genetics with Tenchi's and the Mass's to make me. With accelerated growth, I haven't been around for too long, but I was made for the express purpose of being sent back in time to help you. With Washu's help, I've spent all my life observing you…" Amy stood up and reached back into her cloak, pulling out a small tool. She held it out to Ethen, who slowly reached for it, speechless, quickly recognizing the object. It was a handle to a sword, with a wood-colored, scaly appearance. It was the Master Key, the sword Tenchi. Amy added, "Tenchi wanted you to have this."

Ethen took the sword, unable to find any words. Just holding it in his hand, he could feel its power, as though it were trying to pull energy out of his body to form the blade. "Energy…" For the first time, Ethen could quite consciously feel his own energy flowing through his body. Perhaps this is what Kara used to fight. He let it flow into the sword, and almost immediately a glowing blue blade of energy formed. With the blade's coming, Ethen's mind cleared, and for the first time truly realized what life he had ahead

of him. He was not an ordinary person. Destiny had more in store for him than a calm, relaxing, average life, and it was time he embraced this.

Ethen reached for his beam saber, which was sitting on the nearby table, and grabbed it with his left hand. He extended the blade, now holding both it in his left hand and the extended sword Tenchi in his right. "Two blades…" It made sense to him. A single one-handed sword left your other hand with little to do. A two-handed sword always felt too slow and cumbersome. A blade in each hand just felt right. "I've got a destiny to fulfill. I think it's time I get a bit stronger." He turned to Kara, who had been sitting patiently, but quite restlessly. "Kara, could you teach me to fly?"

Kara jumped up, clasping her hands together with great joy. "Of coorse! I'll do änything you vänt me to, my love!" She got a sly look in her eyes. "I cän teach you fär more thän how to fly."

Ethen quickly diverted his attention so he didn't have to respond. "Amy, I'm guessing you don't have anywhere to stay?"

"Nope…"

Ethen let out a thoughtful sigh, then stepped over to the computer and started typing away, bringing up a matter creation program. "It's fairly intuitive to use. Go ahead and design your own room, you can stay down here in the lab with Kara." Amy nodded energetically, happily, and started looking over what the machine could do. Ethen turned to Kara saying "As long as you don't kill each other." Kara acted a little surprised, but obviously knew it was coming. Ethen gave her a serious glance, and the two made their way to the hypergravity chamber.

Later that night, Ethen emerged from the hypergravity chamber, holding a sleeping Kara in his arms. She had tired out hours ago, but insisted on staying in the chamber with him, eventually falling asleep against a wall. Ethen carried her to her bedroom, laying her down on her bed. He then walked over to the new door in the lab, presumably the entrance to Amy's bedroom. The door was cracked, but he knocked anyway. "Mind if I come in?"

He heard Amy's voice from inside say, "Sure, come on in."

Ethen opened the door, and Amy was standing there in front of him wearing as little as she had always been, just what appeared to be a thong and a small, strapless top. Ethen quickly looked away, blushing slightly. He still wasn't used to seeing her like

that. "Isn't it… cold in here wearing that?" He wanted to say something about it, but not sound like a pervert, and that was all that came to mind.

She seemed to stick her chest out some, saying "Oh, I don't mind at all if you even see me naked. I'm not very comfortable around other people, that's why I was wearing the cloak, but I lived my whole life just to help you. I'm comfortable wearing this, and comfortable here. I don't care how much of me you see."

Ethen was once again put into an awkward situation, and wasn't really sure how to reply. He let out a nervous sigh, but he still couldn't bring himself to look in her direction. She had all the tools in the world at her disposal, but the room she made was a rather simple one. A fairly ordinary bed, a bookcase with a few books in it. She seemed to live a simple life. *"Perhaps I can learn something from her. She tries to live a simple, peaceful life, but it seems fate had as much in store for her as it does for me."*

He paused, thinking. Amy leaned into his field of vision with a questioning look on her face. Brought to attention, Ethen started a little quietly, "Amy… A lot's been put on my plate today, and I guess it's taking some time to seep in. I just wanted to say I'm going to be counting on you a lot. You know what I'm in for, how to fight it, how to prepare. I'm probably going to be asking a lot of you in these coming months."

Amy, not giving Ethen much time to react, stepped in and put her arms around him, resting her head on his chest. Ethen, surprised but unable to really react, merely stood there, dumbfounded, and quite distracted by Amy's chest pressing against him. "Thank you, Ethen." She said quietly. "All I'm here for is to be of use to you." She smiled, happily. "Knowing I can be useful makes me happy. If there's anything I can do, just ask."

He wasn't sure what to say or do, but figuring he shouldn't stand there like an idiot, he put his arms around her as well, feeling her almost bare back only reminding him how little she was wearing. "Thanks…" He stepped back, starting to leave the room, saying as he left, "Are you sure you don't want to… Nevermind." He wanted to ask if she wanted to wear something else, but felt too awkward saying it. Realizing what he was going to say, Amy blushed a little, giving a mischievous smile as Ethen closed the door, it clicking into place.

Ethen let out a heavy sigh as he went back upstairs to his own room. *"I've got two interesting girls hiding out here now. Things just got a little more complicated. All I want though is for everyone to be happy, so I'll do everything I can for them. There's still a lot that I'm not sure about, but everything will work itself out in the end. I'm sure of it."*

Summer – year 16

The six months came and went. Ethen and Kara did everything they could to get more powerful and prepare themselves for the coming battle. Kara had little reason to help Ethen, but still insisted on helping him every step of the way. Kara got a great deal more powerful over this time, but Ethen's growth was extraordinary. His strong will kept him going long after Kara had tired out. By this point he was quite possibly the most powerful force on the planet. Realizing he needed some actual fighting technique, he trained himself quite extensively using the two swords at once. Kara taught him a number of tricks as well. With the sword Tenchi alerting him to his own energy, Kara taught him how to manipulate it to fly, though he didn't quite have the hang of making energy balls. Ethen later theorized he could pour the energy out of his body in a single, potent beam. Kara had some minor success with the technique. Ethen, however, had to create a device he kept on his wrist that could draw out his own energy, like a siphon, and focus it into a beam. This took a great deal of his energy, but was also exceedingly powerful. It wasn't as powerful as if he could do it naturally, but it was another weapon to add to his arsenal.

Ethen was also a bit lucky that Kara spoke English, though she did have a bit of an accent. There was no telling what her original language was. Anyone else Ethen was going to run into though would very unlikely be able to communicate with him. As such yet another device was made. A small pair of earrings for Ethen that converted brainwaves taken from the speech centers of the brain. One of the earrings took in foreign brainwaves and changed them to mimic Ethen's speech center. The other took anything leaving Ethen's speech center and changed it to any wavelength it could find in the immediate area. Judging from what Kara said, the only way to tell Ethen wasn't naturally speaking the other language was that his mouth didn't match the words.

Over the time Kara's advances on Ethen didn't slow down either. Originally she was much more powerful than Ethen, so he had little choice but to go along with it, but by this point Ethen had grown much more powerful than her. He still didn't stop her though, even though he now could. He wasn't entirely sure why, but he didn't really want to stop her.

When the time came, they had prepared themselves as best they could. Amy used her knowledge and the lab's technology to plot the enemy's course and determine

where it would arrive. Ethen and Kara waited for it deep in a forest, miles from anywhere. A rather large pod, as big as a house, came flying out of the sky. Ethen wasn't sure at first if he would have to stop it from crashing into the ground like a meteor, but it slowed down before landing. At least enough to only take out the trees in the way. Ethen and Kara looked around the large device for a moment trying to determine where the entrance was. One side eventually opened up, and the two rushed to greet their guest.

A humanoid figure stepped out. He was wearing an armor resembling muscles, and had a cape around his neck. His skin was tinted purple with two antennas sticking out from his forehead. "Ah, what hospitality. So, you've come to welcome my arrival?" Not even an accent. The earrings were working at least. Kara still had an accent, but that was because she was actually speaking English.

"Greetings." Ethen began, "Might I ask what business you have here?"

"Well, killing the two of you would be a nice start."

Ethen clenched his teeth. "I would be happier if you left without incident."

"Sorry, I can't do that. I have my mission, and I'm not going anywhere until I get what I came for. Or everybody's dead, whichever comes first."

Kara charged him, screaming. Ethen shouted, "Kara! Don't!"

The alien tore his cape off, drawing an energy sword, smiling, "That's okay, I was tired of talking anyway!" He quickly blocked her blow, then with overwhelming force pushed her back.

Ethen pulled out his two swords, extending the blades as he charged in as well. *"He's stronger than Kara. Probably stronger than either of us, but he shouldn't be much trouble against the both of us."* Ethen swung with one hand, but it was parried with ease. This parry led into a parry of Kara's next swing. Her swings were two-handed though, meaning the alien had to put more force into it. As he was parrying her blow, Ethen quickly swung with his other hand. It merely nicked his side, but it threw him off enough for Kara to swing again, putting a large gash down his chest.

The alien took the force of the blow and stepped back some. Breathing heavily, he sputtered out "Well, you're a bit more powerful than I expected…" He charged at the two and swung horizontally. They both backstepped, blocking in the process. Kara quickly formed a ball of energy, throwing it. It exploded, throwing the alien back. Ethen was right there waiting. He swung with all his strength, swinging both blades in parallel. It was a bit unsettling, he could feel the blades almost completely cleave him in two.

The alien fell to the ground, not moving. Blood poured out of him. He let out a garbled chuckle. "You two are in for a treat. I was only plan A." and he went silent.

"I guess thät's ēt." Kara walked up to Ethen.

"No, there's more coming. Let's head back to the house."

"I'm not sure what's going to happen next." Amy was running a few calculations on the computer. "When this initially happened, they saw the fight you just had. Nothing at all about a plan B."

"Plan A. The plan with the lowest chance of success, but the most favorable results. Blan B on the other hand, has the greatest chance of success, but the least favorable results. I wasn't terribly impressed with that plan A alien. Tenchi could have taken him out easy."

"I've found him. He seems to just be floating there on the edge of the atmosphere, like he's waiting. It looks like another alien, like the one you just fought."

"Kara." They both nodded, and started moving towards the door.

"Ethen…" Amy stopped him, though Kara continued on, leaving the room. He turned around to listen. "I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know what you're in for here. Be careful."

"Right." Ethen took but a moment to check his two swords, and that the energy siphon was attached to his arm and working.

"Also… Tell me, how do you feel about Kara?"

"Huh? Well, she's really powerful, and has been really loyal…"

"That's not what I meant. As outgoing as she is about it, it's easy to take it lightly, but she really does love you a great deal. I'd like to know if you feel the same way."

"Well…" It hadn't actually occurred to him. It was fairly obvious how Kara felt, but he'd just gone with the flow. He hadn't actually thought about it before. "I suppose…"

Ethen and Kara flew off into the sky, towards the waiting creature. They stopped when they exited Earth's atmosphere. They looked around for a moment, and found him. They floated over to him to find a reasonably normal-looking person in black and red armor with a red cape. Much like the previous alien, he had a purple tint to his skin, and two antennas coming from his forehead.

"Greetings friends." The man greeted.

"Plan B I assume?" Ethen asked.

"Ah, you two must be the ones that took out plan A. He wasn't very powerful. He was supposed to just find the artifact and bring it back. If he was defeated though, then more power is needed. Sadly, I don't have the finesse he had. I'll probably end up just destroying everything."

"I guess it would be too much to ask you to leave peacefully?"

"Oh, I'm not going anywhere."

"Do you even have a name? Or will 'Plan B' do?"

"'B' will suffice. Enough of the small-talk though. If you defeated A you've certainly got some power behind you. Killing you seems like fun."

"That's only if you can kill us."

"Oh, I can." At that, he charged towards Ethen. He was strong, Ethen tried to parry but there was so much force in the swing that it still grazed him. Kara quickly attacked as well, but B was parrying her attacks like she wasn't there. Ethen and Kara were used to fighting together. They danced back and forth in a near perfect harmony. B was simply too powerful. Even with their three blades being swung, B could manage to position himself so he could parry them all at once. He swung in such a way that it hit them both, at the very least breaking their guard. Things did not look well.

Ethen swung sideways with both swords, but B parried, pushing Ethen back. Not a single blow had landed yet. In the instant Ethen was a step away, a ball of energy came flying in, hitting B and exploding on contact. Ethen took advantage of this and shot off as fast as he could, trying to get some distance. B charged Kara, for the most part unscathed. She fired off another round, but B just smacked the ball to the side with his bare hand. *"By focusing his energy on his hand, he can deflect pure energy."* He was quickly closing the gap between the two, so Ethen fired off a shot from his siphon. It missed his mark, but it stopped B in his tracks.

B quickly turned and fired off a shot at Ethen as Kara shot once again at B. Ethen let go of his swords for a moment and focused his energy on his hands, trying for a rebound. The ball of energy hit his hands square-on. He could feel the energy searing his palms as his own energy fought to push it back. His own energy did win out, and the ball of energy bounced off, this time flying at Kara. "If I can do it, surely she can." Ethen took the opportunity to shoot off another beam at B. Kara merely created a ball of energy around her fist and punched the ball of energy coming at her, quickly knocking it back at B. Having pushed aside Kara's first attack, B now had two shots coming at him simultaneously, one of which was his own.

He smirked, and fired a shot out of each hand, one at each ball. They exploded on contact, masking B for a moment. His beams, however, continued on through the explosion. Ethen and Kara reacted like lightning to dodge to once side, but they still left a burn. When the explosion cleared, B had gathered a great deal of energy around his hands, and fired a full beam out at Ethen. Not a one-time shot as they had been firing, but a continuous stream of energy. Ethen panicked at the sheer amount of power heading towards him. He pointed the siphon towards it and let out a continuous beam, pouring everything he had into it.

The beams collided with great force, neither immediately overpowering the other, but B's beam was obviously more potent. Hard as he tried, Ethen's beam was getting pushed back. Kara raced to Ethen's side, charging up and letting out a beam of her own. The two beams combined, and together could almost stop B's beam. Almost.

Ethen could only pour so much energy through his single arm to the siphon. He grasped his arm with his left hand, feeding energy through both arms. He could actually feel the energy being drained out of him. It was as though all the blood in his body was pouring out a gash on his hands. His body temperature lowered, and his legs were going numb.

"No! I refuse! Not just for me, not just for my life, but for Kara! For Amy! For the planet you're trying to destroy!" He not only let the siphon draw out his energy, but forced his energy into it. As much as he could he poured his energy into the siphon and out into the beam flowing from it. More and more he pushed into it, he couldn't even feel the siphon pulling any more. Nay, it felt like as hard as he was pushing, only so much energy was coming out. "Was this the extent of my power!? Of my life force!?" The siphon was actually being so overtaxed, it was barely holding together, and B's beam was still overpowering theirs.

As Ethen tried to pour even more energy into the siphon, it couldn't take the force any more, and broke apart. Shattering, all the energy Ethen had been trying to force out came out all at once, no longer hindered by the forces of technology. An enormous wave of energy came out, the light almost blinding Ethen and Kara. It was far larger than Ethen thought he was capable of producing. It didn't last long, however, as Ethen's life energy all came out at once. The huge beam fired out, and completely overpowered B's beam, pushing it all the way back, catching him completely by surprise. He was completely encompassed by the beam, and screaming in pain, was carried off into the distance by the beam, far out of sight.

"That's it, that's all I've got." Kara cautiously put her arms around Ethen, supporting him. His body didn't respond any more. He couldn't move at all. All he wanted to do was go to sleep. "But… we got him though."

"Yä…"

They had but a moment of rest. They caught a light out of the corner of their eyes, and Kara pushed Ethen away from herself. A ball of energy flew by between the two of them. B had returned. His armor was in pretty bad shape, but he only looked mildly bruised himself. "Impressive. I think the time for fun's past though."

In an instant he'd created a ball of energy in his left hand and fired a massive wave of energy at Kara. She merely looked in Ethen's direction and smiled a pleasant, content smile, and as the beam passed by she was gone. Just like that Kara was gone.

"No!" At that moment, a thousand thoughts raced through his mind. Reality hit him as hard as her death. *"What do I do now? I'm all alone. Will I die? She's really gone. I know she loved me and I… Why did she have to die? What would have happened if she lived? What happens now?"* Ethen's mind went blank, and only one thought surfaced, *"I loved her."* He then turned towards the monster that killed her, with murder in his eyes.

With a possessed, furious look on his face, a deep growl came from the bottom of his throat. His hair started to float up into the air as if there was a strong wind coming from directly beneath him. His eye then started twitching; he was on the brink of insanity. "I won't..." his voice was quivering, but not from fear. "I won't… let you…" Lightning flew by them, then again, more and more often. "get away…" mists of dark colors floated by, speeding up and spreading. "with this…" His voice was no longer quivering, but instead was becoming a yell. His anger was going to be spent up all at once. He yelled again, "I won't let you get away with this!" As a blue glow encompassed him, it looked almost like he'd caught on fire. A warm fire that only empowered him, lending him its strength. It was a violent fire, a fire fueled by his rage. A fire born of his own energy. Three glowing shields, long and angular, placed in a circle, as though their bases were all connected, appeared before Ethen. "I won't let you get away with this!"

B, confused, but angered at the same time, quickly created and threw a number of energy balls at Ethen. All of them bounced off the shields like rain off an umbrella. The center shield rose up, and moved back, passing through Ethen letting off a great light. When the light cleared Ethen was wearing a noble cloth that seemed to be a futuristic version of a traditional Japanese outfit. He also had three glowing green arrows

on his forehead. Like wings, the remaining two shields fluttered. Ethen grabbed them, and they instantly turned into swords.

"You will pay for what you've done." The alien stood still, still a bit awestruck by the transformation. Ethen charged towards him so fast that even to that monster it looked as though Ethen had just appeared in front of him. Things seemed to move almost in slow motion as Ethen actually attacked. B watched, followed his movements, but could hardly move. Each arm crossing over, Ethen swung both at once, cross-wise, making an X. There was a flash, and Ethen was well passed the alien, post-swing. From a great X on his chest, light shown brightly, quickly eating away at him until he was gone. Plan B was gone, leaving only one last scream, which vanished as quickly as the attack.

Still filled with anger, Ethen just floated there. His thoughts still trying to catch up with him. Amy watched from the lab. Seeing him floating there, with those swords, wearing that outfit, she could only nervously cover her mouth in shock. "The Lighthawk wings… He's going to have a lot of questions when he gets back…"

Chapter 4

Separation

As he discovered, Ethen was not simply the one seen to save the planet that day. He was in fact Tenchi's son. Born in the future and sent back to save the world. To fulfill his destiny. His mother… Some time before this event, another great tragedy struck the Masaki household. Many of the girls, specifically Ryoko, Ayeka, and Sasami, were fused into one consciousness, a single being that was all three of them at once, and yet an entirely new person. Combined they overcame the obstacle, but were left as a single person. This was Ethen's mother. Within Ethen's blood ran Jurai royal blood, and the genetics necessary to create the Lighthawk wings. Though artificial, Amy shared enough genetics with him to be his sister.

Fall – year 17

Kara is dead; her life was sacrificed so the world could be saved. It has been one year since her death, Ethen knew that he would never forget the death of his dear friend, but after a while he managed to continue with everyday life. At present, it's nearing 11pm. It's a relatively uneventful night, Ethen and Amy are merely watching TV. Ethen glanced around the room, trying to stay awake, when he noticed something.

"What's that?" Ethen asked.

"What's what?"

"That." Ethen pointed to a pair of footprints in the corner of the room; as soon as he did they disappeared.

"I don't see anything."

"Funny… the carpet was depressed, like there were two feet pressing it down."

"You're just seeing things."

"You're probably right. It's pretty late, I'm going to go downstairs and get something to drink, and then we need to get some rest." Amy agreed, and Ethen went downstairs to get a glass of water.

He wasn't very fond of plain water, but there wasn't much else in the house at the moment. After he was done, as he was leaving the kitchen, out of the corner of his

eye he saw a person standing at the dark end of the hall. He looked over, and as soon as he did, she ran off into one of the rooms along the side.

"I've already seen you; you might as well face me." A woman in her early thirties with long, light brown hair wearing what looked to be a brown dress stepped out shyly. "Who are you? How did you get in?"

"I have always been here, since even before you were born. My name is Ashley Nurse, for eighteen years I've been here; this is the only place I know."

"Living here silently for 18 years? How young were you when you first arrived?"

"The same as I am now. I'm dead, I don't age." she looked away, somewhat embarrassed.

"D-dead!? So that's how you got in... Is there a reason you're here? A reason you couldn't pass on?"

"I'm not a traditional ghost. My spirit was separated from my physical body."

"How did that happen?"

"Nineteen years ago I was on a small cruise ship in Loch Ness. It was about eleven at night when a monster in the lake attacked."

"I'll go out on a limb. The Loch Ness monster?"

"No, but this might be what people thought was the monster. It destroyed the ship and killed everyone but me. This monster has the ability to separate the spirit from the body, it does this by eating the victim; it ate me."

"I see your dilemma. Tomorrow I'll go out and see what I can do about this."

"A-are you sure? Thank you!" She said smiling.

"Ghosts and the Loch Ness monster. I just can't relax can I? Could you come over here? In that light I can't even tell who I'm talking to."

"I can't, the more light that's on me, the more transparent I become." she said somewhat sadly.

"Oh. Well, in that case I guess tomorrow come get me and I'll look into this."

"Thank you!" once again smiling.

The next day, once Ashley tracked him down, the two of them and Amy assembled out front of their home. Amy and Ashley grabbed onto his arms, and as soon as he was positive they had a good grip he took off.

Once they landed a few hours later, Ethen turned to Amy, "It looks pretty dark down there. By chance do you have anything to light the place up?"

"I thought that might be the case. I brought this flare, it should pierce through the muck and light up the whole lake. It stays lit for a good while too, so you should have some time." Ethen took the flare and dove into the water.

"How can he breathe underwater?" Ashley asked.

"Same way he can breathe in outer-space. He can hold his breath for about an hour. You'd be surprised what all that training lets him do."

Ethen threw down the flare and the whole lake lit up. He then took out his beam saber and the sword Tenchi and extended the blades. "Now where is it?" Just as he said that, a transparent arm swung at him. Ethen barely saw the arm; he dodged and swung a blade at it. To his surprise, the blade went through it as if it wasn't even there, "What the…" Ethen began before another tentacle swung at him, hitting him in the back. Once he regained control of himself, he flew straight up and out of the water.

"What is that thing?" Ethen asked Ashley as soon as he landed.

"I'm so sorry, I meant to tell you, it's dead too."

Ethen's brow furrowed, he could feel a headache coming. *"Yes… I'm certain that was a simple thing to leave out."* "I guess that's why it can't be the Loch Ness monster. Now what are we supposed to do?" They thought pondering for a moment, before Ethen stepped up with, "I have an idea, living can touch living, so dead can touch dead."

"That makes sense, I certainly can't do anything about this though…"

"I have a plan." Ethen tossed his two swords to the ground then dove into the water, swimming towards the monster.

"He never thinks anything through…" Amy said quietly.

Ethen continued swimming towards it, dodging the tentacles he could see, and going straight for the mouth. He forced himself farther inside until he could feel an exceedingly strong energy. It was the contact with this strong spirit energy that forced your body and spirit to separate. He could feel his physical body separate and leave. Now he was ready for battle.

"Oh, no!" Ashley yelled, seeing Ethen's inanimate body surface and float, dead.

Ethen floated in front of the monster, staring at it. "This thing is even uglier when you can completely see it." He floated there for a moment, staring at the monster. It was like a small barrel that had an uncountable number of tentacles coming out from all sides except the mouth. Above that, each one was at least a quarter-mile long. "I guess

if one of its tentacles were above water, it could fool people into thinking it was the Loch Ness monster."

He couldn't very well take his swords with him into death, so he held his hands out in front of him. He used all the mental strength he could muster, and the three wings of the Lighthawk appeared and engulfed him. He then raised a shield in front of him and grabbed onto it, turning it into the Lighthawk sword.

He swung it back, and charged towards the monster, cutting off every tentacle swung at him. When there was nothing but a nub of a body left, he took a great swing cutting its body in half. All the pieces of the monster left seemed to fade away, he had killed it: death for the dead.

Once that was done, the Lighthawk faded off and he floated there for a minute. "Hmm… Now what? I hadn't really thought this far ahead…" Then he felt a tugging on him and he was suddenly sucked back to the surface, into his original body.

He stuck his head up out of the water and took a breath, "If this happened to me… Ashley!" He dove back under and saw a lifeless body slowly floating towards the surface. He rushed towards her, grabbed her in his arms and rushed towards the surface. "So this is what she looks like." He said to himself, looking at the woman in his arms, "If her body was down there for twenty years she should have almost entirely decomposed. I guess her spirit rejoining with her body revitalized her physically... She's actually quite pretty." She was fairly average, but beautiful. A little shorter than Ethen, thin frame, hips that weren't wide, but not small, and breasts that also weren't small, but a bit smaller than average. She had a beautifully simple face, and long, light-brown, waist-length straight hair. He wasn't sure why her outfit would have been regenerated as well, but didn't question it. It was a simply one-piece dress, the same color as her hair, with a small red vest. The vest was open, and acted more to cover her shoulders.

Ethen floated down to Amy. Once he landed Amy started saying nervously, as she looked at the still body, "Is she…"

"She's fine I'm sure, just unconscious; her body was at the bottom of the lake, the water pressure got to her, that and she probably wasn't used to breathing. I'll see what I can do once we get back to the lab. Let's get going." He ducked down and Amy climbed onto his back. He took off towards home with Ashley in his arms, and Amy on his back. *"Now there's another person living with us. I guess I was right when I said that destiny doesn't want me to lead an average life."*

Chapter 5
Angel of Destiny

Spring – year 18

Ashley, Amy, and Kara. I never would have met any of them if not for the lab, it has led to each of them. If not for the lab, the planet would have been destroyed; I owe it a great deal of thanks for that. Maybe I was meant to find it, but all this is getting to me. I enjoy all the times I've had, but this is too much stress. I want to be a normal person again. I just want to kick back and relax.

Ethen was thinking while in the back seat of his parent's car while they were driving home from the mall. It was raining outside and the road was wet, nonetheless, Ethen was thinking. The light turned green and his father pulled out of the lane to go straight. Other lanes off to his right and left slowed down to let him and the cars behind him go.

Back at home; Ashley was in the lab watching Ethen on the computer screen. Amy walked into the room through the door that led to the hallway Ethen had built on. Having just come from the shower, she was drying her hair with a towel. "What's up?" Amy asked.

"Just seeing what Ethen's up to."

"You were watching over him for his entire life while you were a ghost, don't you get tired of seeing him?"

"Actually, when I first died, I could have gone anywhere. I could have done anything. Physical matter didn't affect me; I didn't get hungry or tired either. Originally, I didn't know what to do. All I had in my head was the location of this house, I still don't know why."

"Didn't you have a home? A family to go back to?"

"The truth is I don't have any memories before that cruise. It's as if it was during that cruise that I first started too exist. The only things I knew were the name Ashley Nurse and this location. That's why I came here. That trip took about three months. I didn't have anything else to do, so I waited around the house. About another three

months later a baby showed up. It had a note attached that said, 'your family seems to be able to take best care of our child, please raise him for us, for we can't do for him what needs to be done.' I became curious about this and watched over the baby. I watched him as he grew and changed, through happiness and sorrow, following him everywhere he went. After a while, my fondness for him… turned to love. I feel as though I was born just to fall in love with him. I must be in my early thirties… I'm probably fifteen years older than Ethen. I'm closer to twice his age than I am to his. Does that make me… weird? I may be a lot older than him, but I don't care. I love Ethen, and would never get tired of seeing him. When I became human again, I thought that we would finally have a chance of getting together, but then I realized that I was just another woman. I would have to fight my way past all the other girls in the world. Ethen wouldn't go for me anyway. I'm too old, and he needs someone special… like Kara." She paused, then clasped her face, blushing. "Oh, look at what I've blurted out, I'm so sorry! Could you not… tell Ethen about this?"

Amy was silent, not sure what to say. She gathered her thoughts, and just as she began to say something, Ashley gasped as she saw something on the monitor she was using to watch Ethen.

She saw a semi come barreling down the road. Just as the car Ethen was in entered an intersection, the semi skidded into the straight, empty lane to their right, but it didn't stop. The brakes squealed, and the truck slid on the wet road out into the middle of the intersection, it kept going still and the trailer was now in front of them. The semi was moving slow, but Ethen's car had the green light, it was moving far too fast. In the time it would take for Ethen to crash into it, the trailer wouldn't be out of the way, and they were too close to stop or even avoid it. They were going to crash into it; the back would go straight through the windshield beheading his parents.

Through the whole thing, Ethen still stared through the window not noticing what was going on, since he couldn't hear the squealing because of the wet roads. He finally noticed the semi out of the corner of his eye. He quickly looked up at it, and not even thinking about hiding his abilities now, in a flash of speed, he flew forward to the front seat with his right hand extended. Once he was confident that he wouldn't harm his parents, he let loose with a wave of energy destroying the front end of the car, and the entire trailer of the semi.

The recoil from the blast stopped the car where it was, and Ethen's momentum made him take a few steps out the front hole of the car. He saved their lives, but now his

secret was out. His parents sat there in what was left of the car, dumbfounded, confused. Ethen then turned away, and flew off, not going home, just going. "Our secret's out," Amy said, "Now what will become of us?"

Much later that night, after darkness had fallen, Ethen still hadn't gone home. Currently he's walking on a sidewalk in front of a large parking lot with some strip mall in the distance. He was trying to think of what to say to his parents. A strange man was walking towards him; like some kind of lawyer, he was wearing a full black suit, white dress shirt underneath, and a black tie. Wondering what such a man was doing wandering the streets at this hour, Ethen passed him, ignoring the matter.

"Are you Ethen Fox?" the man said from behind, stopping.

"How do you know my name!?" Ethen demanded, quickly spinning around.

The man took out a large golden pocket watch, flipping it open and checking the time. "The flow of time can teach a great deal. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Diem." He turned around to face Ethen. "It seems every time I see you you're in a completely different league of power than before."

"Have we met?"

"Well, I've seen you. I knew your friend quite well, but she's sadly no longer with us."

"Kara."

"She may have mentioned that she was the only one of a few that saw your… lab, you call it? Either way, I finally figured out where it went. Well, to be honest, I've known for a little while, I just wasn't entirely sure how to deal with you."

"So it's a fight you want."

He looked back at the pocket watch in his hand. "This little device will prevent any real fight. It came from that lab of yours. If this small thing was created by it, I can only wonder what else it can make. It took me some time to figure out how it works, but once I did I had all the time in the world to practice."

Diem gathered some energy around his hand, forming it into a sword. Ethen drew out his own two swords. Over the years he had become more and more a warrior. He rarely dropped his guard, and always had his swords handy. "You know what happened to Kara. I'll warn you though that I'm in a completely different league now than I was then. I could handle B without breaking a sweat. I could destroy the Moon with my bare hands. With the Lighthawk I could cleave the Earth in two."

"Ah yes, and for that very reason I have very little to worry about." He disappeared. Ethen pulled one of his two swords up as fast as he could, blocking a blow to his head on reflex alone. It was an awkward angle, and Ethen took a few steps off the sidewalk into the parking lot. He jumped back further to get some distance.

"What was that!?" He stared at Diem, who was still casually standing on the sidewalk, straightening his tie.

Diem held the clock in his hand up. "I warned you. Well, kind of. This little device can control the flow of time. Stopping time…" He disappeared again, reappearing just in front of Ethen, mid-swing. Ethen pulled up again and managed to block, once again getting pushed back. "…is one of the simplest things I can do." Diem began walking a circle around Ethen, counter-clock-wise. He got about a quarter turn around before stopping. "You were thinking about attacking me right there." Ethen was a bit shocked, but didn't show it. He had considered it. "I walked to the right a moment ago, and you attacked me. So I decided to walk to the left instead. Humans will always react the same way given the same set of circumstances. You can alter how they act by changing the environment." He fingered the clock with his thumb. "Something else I can do is rewind time, undoing an event like it never happened. If I don't like what you did, I just have to change that."

Ethen felt a blade put to the side of his neck and he froze. A hasty move and he could lose his head. It was coming from behind, and the blade looked like Diem's, but Diem was still standing in front of him. "Oh yes, and I can go back in time. That would be me from a few moments into the future."

"Pleasure seeing you again." The second Diem added.

"This is surprisingly easy." The original Diem started again. "Not that I expected much else. In fact, you know what? Just because I'm a nice guy I'll let you say goodbye before I kill you. Go off back to your home, say goodbye to your family, and then we'll meet again. Let's say… the center of Los Angeles, noon tomorrow."

Ethen kept a stern face. "Los Angeles? There's so many people…"

"Yes, it'll be fun won't it? You don't have to come if you don't want to, but you never know what'll happen if you don't." He paused. "Well, if you don't mind, I have to go back and hold a sword to your neck." He waved his hand and disappeared. Both of him. Ethen wasn't sure what to do at the moment. He just stood there trying to figure out what just happened. Ethen eventually started making his way home.

Ethen snuck into the lab through the back yard entrance. He still wasn't ready to talk to his parents. He was sure they'd understand, and wouldn't overreact, but at the moment he just didn't have time to deal with it. Diem on the other hand… Ethen didn't for a moment think of this as a time to say goodbye. It was a time to think. A time to strategize.

He entered the lab, and both Amy and Ashley were there to meet him. They were shocked, having seen the entire thing on the main screen. "I'll figure something out… We have to stop him though. I'd consider just giving him the lab, but I think it's fairly obvious he only wants to cause mayhem. He has to be stopped."

Amy asked, "Can you think of a plan at all?"

"At the moment?... No."

Ashley looked worried. She couldn't bring herself to say anything to Ethen. She wanted to though. She couldn't think of anything worse than something happening to Ethen. She tried to speak a couple times, but stopped herself. Knowing Ethen may not come back, she at least wanted to tell him how she felt about him. *"No. I believe in him. I know he'll be okay."*

Ethen continued. "For the time being, I need to get some rest. We all need to get some rest." He looked around. He couldn't very well use his own bed, but there wasn't a spare room down here. Ashley realized his plight, and again wanted to speak up. She wanted to offer her own room, but couldn't bring herself to speak. "I'll just have the lab conjure up a couple of blankets."

That night Ethen had a dream; it had been a long time since he had had such a vivid dream. This dream was a very clear dream; one he remembered to the last detail. He saw a person, glowing white. He could feel a tremendous power from him, and he was relaxed as well, so his true power was still unknown, and even then it was nothing like he had ever seen. He then heard a familiar voice. This voice said to him, "You have nothing to fear, face the unknown." He didn't realize it then, but this voice was his own.

That morning Ethen left without a word. He left for Los Angeles. He snuck out the back and took off flying at full speed. Getting there didn't take long. He wasn't sure where to look, but he could feel Diem's power. Despite his method of fighting, he was no weakling. Ethen could feel him a good ways off. They met in the center of the city. They just stood there staring each other down for a moment, on a busy street. There were a

lot of people walking by. You couldn't swing an arm without hitting someone. "You did this on purpose. I can't fight freely here."

"Where's the fun in it if you can go all out? This'll make you think." Ethen was hesitant to even draw a blade. He couldn't even throw a punch with this many people around.

At home, Ashley came through one of the doors to the lab. She saw Amy sitting down, with her head down and her eyes half-closed, lost in thought. Ashley asked her, "What are you thinking about?"

"Yesterday, I was going to say something but didn't get the chance. I wanted to tell you that you're wrong when you say Ethen could never love you."

"What?"

"Whenever he looks at you, I see a spark in his eye. He's confused, but I can tell he feels very strongly for you. I'm sure he does love you, Ashley; I know he does."

"How? Are you sure?"

"Positive." Amy stood up, putting a finger over a button on the console. "I knew he would pull something like this." She then looked back towards Ashley, who, for the moment, was speechless. "Ethen left earlier. He didn't see me, but I saw when he did. Originally, I wasn't worried when Ethen went off to fight Diem, even though Ethen is easily out-classed. Ethen has been in several of these predicaments before, and each time he has come out victorious. I realize now, though, that Ethen doesn't have any more secrets in his past, what he has now is all he will have. Ethen is going to lose."

"Isn't there anything we can do!?"

"Maybe… I just might be able to get him out of this." She looked back at the console; "I'm going there to help."

"But what will you do?"

"Don't worry about it; I'm sure everything will be fine. This is the last time you will see me, though… good-bye." Amy said as she hit a button on the console, and with the help of the matter supplanter disappeared.

"Amy! Amy…" Ashley immediately realized what Amy was going to do. At least the general intention. She slowly turned around and quietly stepped out of the room…

Back in L.A., Ethen and Diem were staring each other down, when Ethen heard, "Ethen! Wait!" coming from behind him.

"How did you get here?" Ethen said, seeing Amy rush up to him.

"The matter supplanter. I came here to help"

"Get out of here, I don't want you hurt!"

"No. I know how powerful he is, and you can't beat him alone."

"You have a better idea?"

"If we fuse together, your power will increase a great deal. We share the same father. We're close enough to be able to do it. Unfortunately, we won't be able to separate again..."

"Then no, I won't let you."

"I'm willing to go, and you don't have any other choice."

"But…"

"No!"

Ethen sighed. "Fine… let's do this." Amy stepped forward and put her hands around Ethen, gently resting her head on Ethen's chest. "I do care for you Ethen. So much… Thank you for everything." Amy glowed bright, like she became the very sun. The light merged with Ethen and when it cleared only Ethen remained. Everything that was Amy's now belonged to Ethen. Her memories, knowledge, everything. Ethen knew Ashley loved him, he knew Ashley didn't know her past, and his power increased exponentially. Their consciousnesses had become one. Ethen and Amy now possessed the same eyes. "Now… this is for Amy!" Ethen challenged, turning to Diem.

The light had scared a good few people nearby. There was a fair sized opening between Ethen and Diem now, and a small crowd gathering to watch.

Diem took out his pocket watch yet again. "You know, of all the times I replayed this scene, I always liked your reaction when you saw this." A second Diem appeared beside him, carrying in his arms an unconscious Ashley.

 "Ashley… What have you done to her!?"

"Oh, it's not actually her. It's merely a doll made in her image. I have, however, implanted all of Ashley's memories and emotions into it. It might as well be her. Why didn't I get the actual Ashley? I don't know. Maybe I just wanted someone left to suffer once you're gone. I guess that wouldn't be for long though, the first thing I'm doing is getting rid of this miserable rock."

"Ethen…" Ashley began, regaining consciousness, "It's so good to see you again. Ethen, There's something I want to tell you. I don't think I'll be around much

longer, and I want to say it before I go. I've wanted to tell you for a long time... now I can."

"What… is it?" Ethen asked.

"I… I love you. I always have and… I always will!"

Diem pointed and shot a beam through Ashley's chest, killing the doll instantly.

"Ashley! No!" Ethen reacted to her scream. He watched her fall limp, fraught with despair.

"Ah, that's the expression I was waiting for."

Rage grew within him. He stood there with his head down; his anger growing. The air around him began to rise in temperature, the air became fuzzy and steam began rising. "Why…" He tilted his head back and yelled, "How could you do something like that!?" He then looked at Diem, angrily, his eye was twitching and his voice quivered as he said, "First Kara, now Ashley…" he lit off a bright blue, as though he'd caught on fire. "How could you be so cruel!? Creating her just to kill her!" The Lighthawk tried hard to appear, but Ethen mustered what free will power he had to suppress it. He knew if he went all out he could easily destroy the planet himself by accident. "I don't know if I can, but if there is any way to kill you, I will find it!" In an instant he'd drawn both of his swords and charged Diem, who was standing there smiling, his own sword already drawn.

They traded blows only a few times before the second Diem joined in. Not one of Ethen's blows landed, and as the fight went on more and more of Ethen's blood was painting the area. By this point most of the pedestrians had realized this was no joke and run. The few that remained had moved a good distance away and seemed more frozen than really wanting to stay and watch.

Ethen was tossed back, but caught himself. He could barely hold himself up any more, he was covered in blood, and he hadn't yet landed a single blow. *"It seems I've been making nothing but poor decisions this entire battle. I'm a better fighter than that."*

"You seem confused." Diem said. "I've already explained I can rewind time. If I don't like something you did, I just rewind and manipulate you into doing something different."

"That's a dangerous ability. No matter what I do, he'll just change it if he doesn't like it. So what I have to do is prevent him from undoing it. I have to either kill him or get that clock away from him before he has a chance to use it."

"One of the very nice things about being me" Diem began, with a haughty attitude, "is that not only do I enjoy this, but I know what I'll do." As soon as he said it another two Diem's showed up. Four total. "I could easily just stop time and kill you, but where's the fun in that? I like to see you squirm."

"I couldn't handle two, now what do I do?"

"It's also nice to know with certainty that I'll win. You see, time is constant. If someone goes back in time in the future, they've already shown up in the past. That all four of us are here at all is proof I win, since I won't be going back until the fight's over. It's like seeing the future."

"There's a way to win. There's always a way to win. I refuse to believe the impossible exists. If I'm losing I just have to try harder! What do I do, though? With all four of them here, time dictates I'll never kill the first three. Maybe I could kill the most recent one, and feign my death so the others leave, back in time. Which one's the last one? Even then, I have to finish it in one blow. Either get the clock away or kill him before he has a chance to use it."

They were all just standing there, smiling, reveling in their own power.

"None of them have any marks or anything on them they may have gotten in the fights. Above that, all but the original have already seen the fight. They know what will happen and don't seem concerned. Maybe I could damage his clock, and he doesn't realize until later."

"Nothing left to do but fight!" Ethen charged into the mess once again. Things didn't go well for him. Two overpowered him, four at once was just overkill. As fast as he could move, he couldn't even get close to the clocks. "Maybe I'd stand a chance if I could go all out. But I can't in town. I can't use the Lighthawk near the Earth at all. I can't even break the sound barrier here without deafening everyone in the area. Maybe just once. Just once I can go that step faster for a moment, in the right opportunity."

He was soon granted that opportunity. He was positioned in just such a way as that a clock was just a few inches from his blade. The sound barrier and far beyond, he swung quickly. His blade cut nothing. The powerful sonic boom broke the windows of the buildings nearby and everything was silent for just a moment. The Diem he attacked had disappeared, stopped time to dodge. "Miss!?" Ethen felt a strong impact, and as he flew back any number of lacerations. He landed on the ground a bloody mess. He couldn't even pull himself up.

The Diems walked up, surrounding him. "Nice trick. Attacking the clock directly with a burst of speed. I'll admit it was a good idea, but it still won't work. You forget I can control time. Every aspect of it. I can even slow time down. When I can control how fast you move, it doesn't matter how fast you try."

Another stepped up. "I was simply playing last time, and let you live, but not this time, you've grown tiresome." All four of them held their hands towards Ethen. A wave of energy was fired from all four, a ball of destruction erupting around Ethen before a great explosion.

He was in a dark place. He could hear another mind; something else's thoughts. They said, "I've finally found you. Do not worry, I will not allow any harm to come to you." He could sense a warmth from the thoughts, as though it were someone's mother.

Out of the shadows of this place walked Amy, who embraced Ethen, then turned to light and disappeared. The warmth calmed Ethen, putting him at peace. Kara then walked out of the shadows. She walked towards Ethen and gently kissed him on the lips, then disappeared. With that, he felt all the wounds on his body go away. He then saw Ashley, who walked towards him and gently kissed his lips before disappearing. He then felt all his energy come back, good as new. He then saw an odd object appear before him. A bright, glass-like blue sphere with a white honeycomb pattern over it and a star-like burst inside. The Honeycomb of Life. He didn't know why he knew what it was. It... no, *she* floated towards him and melded into him, giving off a bright light. He felt his own strength double, triple, quadruple; his strength expanded getting higher and higher, higher than he could believe. Another bright light shone, and his world was bathed in white.

When the explosion cleared Ethen still laid there, not affected in the least. "How can you still be alive!?" Diem saw Ethen's energy pulse and it threw the Diems out of the crater. Diem got up to his knees and glanced back at the crater. He saw Ethen slowly walking out of it towards him, the smoke and fire in the crater lighting his back, creating a truly ominous scene. "How is this possible!? I've already seen this, you died right there!" The three green arrows on Ethen's forehead from the Lighthawk shone. They gave off a light that engulfed his entire body. When the light cleared, there stood Ethen, with no cuts, blood, or injuries anywhere on him or the Lighthawk cloth. His hair then shone a bright yellow. The pupil and white of his eyes then all turned to a glowing red, the veins by his eyes throbbing.

Finally, two great white wings sprouted from his back. Ethen instantly knew what had happened; he had become the one thing no one knew existed, the most powerful being in the universe, the Angel of Destiny. He reached out in front of himself and grasped the air, creating the Dimensional Blade.

"No!" Diem yelled before charging at Ethen. He easily blocked each of his attacks before taking a great swing and blowing him back. Diem regained control of himself and stood up; all four of them formed a ball of energy and shot a tremendous beam at Ethen. Ethen held out his hand and the beams slowed down, stopped before it hit him, and then just disappeared.

"Now it's my turn!" Ethen slowly crouched down, preparing to swing. All at once he let out a blindingly fast swing, cleaving all four of the Diems in two. "As I am now, I'm no longer hindered by the consistency of time. That clock of yours means nothing."

The original Diem managed to mutter "I see. This is why they didn't follow…" and with those words he finally died. Ethen picked up the pocket watch in Diem's hand. It was still whole and functioning correctly. He glanced about, and with a pulse of his spirit the remaining three clocks, as well as Diem's bodies, exploded into dust like they'd never been there. Ethen turned his back on the scene and began walking off, "I'm going home."

Once home, Ethen had returned to his original form and was searching the lab looking for Ashley, still just a bit worried. He seemed to look everywhere, but eventually found her crouched down in a corner of some back room. "Ashley…" She looked up, her eyes red from crying. She almost jumped up, throwing her arms around Ethen, squeezing as tight as she could. Ethen could feel her tears soaking through his shirt. "It's all right, Ashley, everything's all right."

"I… I was watching… Amy's gone… I… I thought you were dead… I didn't know what Diem was going to do, I…" She could barely get a complete thought out. She didn't need to see that, it was too much for her emotions to handle. "I…" She muffled her voice in Ethen's shirt, but he could still tell what she was saying. "I love you Ethen! I love you so much! I…! I…!"

Ethen squeezed her back. "I care so much for you Ashley… I want to be able to say I love you too, but… I'm just not sure. I care deeply for you. I want to love you, but my mind is asking too many questions. I'm sorry. It was just a doll, but I… I saw you die. I will protect you! I don't care what happens to me, I won't let you die again! I do care a

great deal for you. You're the most important thing to me in all the world. But I don't know… I just don't know if I love you or not…" Ashley wasn't sure what to say. She felt as though she'd been destroyed and strengthened at the same time. All she wanted was to be with Ethen, and this was something she could do. Just knowing she was important to him made her heart flutter. She squeezed him tighter. She was smiling, her eyes watering, truly happy. Ethen was a little surprised by this, but embraced her, giving her what comfort he could.

"I may not have any memories… but I'm creating new ones every moment I'm with you..."

"We can't very well live life normally now. Not only do my parents know, but most of L.A. does. I'm pretty sure that transgression was filmed as well, my parents may have even been watching live on the news. We can't do anything publicly any more. I'm out of high school, and wanted to go to college, but I guess that's not going to happen. I suppose a secluded life would be the most relaxing though."

Chapter 6

The past

Spring – year 18

       Ethen didn't want to just vanish. He wanted to at least say goodbye to his parents. Just before he and Ashley left, he met the two of them in a fairly secluded part of a park. His parents were going on a walk, and Ethen dropped by. They were surprised to see him, and not sure what to say. They had seen the fight with Diem on TV. Ethen explained what had happened in his life. That he had met Kara, Amy, and Ashley. That he had saved the planet at least three times now. That he had become more powerful than anyone else on Earth. That he had taken it upon himself to protect the planet, and that he couldn't live publicly any more. It wasn't a long meeting, but it was enough. His father wished him the best. His mother gave a tearful farewell. And Ethen was off. While he and Ashley figured out what they were going to do, they stayed living in the lab for a short time. Maybe a week after Diem's defeat.

Spring – year 21

       Ethen decided and Ashley agreed, they moved into a forest at the base of a mountain, in a small field by a cliff, in Japan, north of Shuzan in the Kyoto prefecture. Thankfully, there was a small section here, deep in the woods, that no one had been to or claimed, not even the government. There they built a small, very cozy, five-room, traditional Japanese house, complete with paper doors and tatami mat floors, and moved in. Ethen decided to come up with a more permanent solution to keeping the residence later. He originally only had the lab underground, but once the home was built he extended an elevator up into the bedroom. Ethen didn't mind, and it made Ashley happy, so they slept in the same bed.

       Ashley walked into the lab at one point to see Ethen sitting at the main computer looking at a few pictures on the screen. She walked over behind him, putting her hand

on his shoulder. She saw that they were a number of images of Kara. "Still thinking about her?"

"What we had of a relationship was over and done long, long ago, but her death still troubles me. I didn't even know her very well, but...she should not have had to die."

Ashley wanted to help, but wasn't sure what to do. She often helped without realizing it. She had a habit of pointing out the obvious without realizing it was obvious. Something Ethen often overlooked. "Couldn't you go save her?"

Ethen thought for a moment as a light bulb turned on. Why hadn't he thought of that? He stood up quickly, turning to Ashley, "Thank you so much Ashley!" He squeezed her tight and ran off to scrounge around through a few drawers to find Diem's pocket watch. Ashley wasn't exactly sure what just happened, but she was happy.

Having gone back to the past, Ethen waited a long distance away, far enough not to be seen. He suppressed his energy so he couldn't be sensed, and watched the events unfold before him as they had once before. He was in outer space, just on the edge of the atmosphere where he saw before him Kara, and himself. Ethen was spent, and B was nowhere to be found.

"That's it, that's all I've got." Kara cautiously put her arms around Ethen, supporting him. His body didn't respond any more. He couldn't move at all. All he wanted to do was go to sleep. "But… we got him though."

"Yä…"

They had but a moment of rest. They caught a light out of the corner of their eyes, and Kara pushed Ethen away from herself. A ball of energy flew by between the two of them. B had returned. His armor was in pretty bad shape, but he only looked mildly bruised himself. "Impressive. I think the time for fun's past though."

In an instant he'd created a ball of energy in his left hand and fired a massive wave of energy at Kara. She merely looked in Ethen's direction and smiled a pleasant, content smile, and as the beam passed by she was gone. Just like that Kara was gone.

At least she had to the eyes of this Ethen. The Ethen of the future didn't want to alter his own timeline, there was no telling what damage it could do to himself. Without using the Angel of Destiny, he probably couldn't have anyway. At the last moment, just before the beam touched her, he stopped time with the watch, quickly picked her up and shot off, as fast as he could out of sight. Neither of the two he left behind knew he had

been there. With Kara in his arms, he flew far away, to the other side of the planet in an instant. He wanted to be sure he wasn't seen.

He had cut it a bit close. The energy had begun so singe her. There was no real damage to her skin, but her clothes had been burnt. A number of places were brown and crisp, even beginning to flake off. She never wore much in the first place, a moment later and she might very well be naked. *"A lot has happened since this battle. When we get back I'll tell you everything."* He pressed a button on the watch and they both vanished.

They appeared in the main room of the lab, but Kara was cold. Very cold. Ethen rushed and set her on the table in the center of the room. "Is she okay?" Ashley asked, concerned.

"I don't know." He put his hand to her throat and checked her pulse. There was none. He put his hand on her forehead. "There's no pulse, but I can still feel some energy inside her." He moved to the main console and began typing. "That beam probably did more damage than I thought, and the time jump just complicated things. Her body's dead, I have to be quick and attach another shell to her for her spirit to move into."

A mechanical column lowered from the ceiling down a few feet above Kara's head. Then a much smaller column from that one, bringing itself down and lightly touching her head. An odd gel oozed from the tip, covering her forehead. Ashley was a bit panicked, "Is this going to work?"

"Heck if I know. I attached the computer mainframe directly to her consciousness, but the spirit isn't moving on its own." He paused for a moment, cursing that he didn't know how to rewind time with Diem's watch. "Here goes nothing." Two wings sprouted from his back, and in an instant he'd become the Angel of Destiny. He focused his energy on Kara, and with all the willpower he could muster forced her spirit out of her body with his own energy. It squeezed its way through, and in a moment Kara's spirit was no longer in her body. It was in the lab's computer.

Ethen sighed, and fell to his knees. That took more force than he was expecting. Glancing around, he saw the main screen of the computer. And on it, he saw Kara's flickering silhouette, the image littered with stray data. "It looks like she's still pulling herself together. I think she'll be okay though." The wings and cloth faded as Ethen turned back to his normal form. "Shall we go upstairs and get some rest?"

In another room of the lab, they placed Kara's body in a large glass tube, with a small engraving below it. "Kara, who's body died valiantly so that the current future could be born."

Some time later her consciousness formed around all the data in the computer. As much as was at her disposal, she was almost a God. It wasn't something her mind quite got a grasp on. She was also greeted with no longer having a body. Her body was dead and set into a display case. She found images, and videos of Ethen's life, and his time with Ashley. She was formed around cameras and surveillance watching the house. Watching Ethen's life with Ashley. Oddly, there was no ill will formed against Ashley. Her mind panicked though. It didn't know what to do. It was formed in a state of desperation, uncertainty, and loss of humanity. Her love for Ethen was at the forefront of her mind.

That evening, a weary Ethen wandered into the bedroom. He heard a sound, and looked towards the doorway that took you down to the lab. Just outside the door he saw a figure. A female figure. She didn't seem to be carrying herself well, as though she barely had the presence of mind, or experience, to stand upright. The figure took a few steps out and into the light. Ethen saw her. It was Kara. At least he thought it was. She had made a mechanical body. Little effort was put into making it look human, but there were a few distinguishable features about it.

"Ethen…" She said. It was Kara's voice. She didn't sound well. She had a half-insane look in her eyes. Though not much was put into her, her face was quite clearly that of Kara. She had also put a great deal of effort into the genitals and breasts. She stood before Ethen now essentially completely nude. *"What in the world did your mind go through? And what are you thinking?"*

She raced across the room and with a surprising amount of force tackled Ethen to the ground. She squeezed him tightly and began kissing every inch of him she could get near. *"Is she trying to rape me!?"* Ethen forced her off of him, and stepped back.

"Ethen…" She had a desperate look in her eyes. "Ethen! I love you Ethen! Stäy vēth me! Be vēth me!"

"Kara, I…" Ashley walked in. She let out a gasp in seeing Kara, but didn't really know what was going on.

Kara shouted out at Ethen, "I'll do änything for you she'll do! I'll be everything she ēs!"

"Ethen, I…" Ashley was still a bit confused, but didn't feel well about having her love for Ethen questioned. They both came up to Ethen, a look in their eyes saying they wanted to prove their love, that they wanted Ethen to choose.

"Kara, I… Ashley… I… I…" He paused, panicking, both of them barely able to contain words, wanting him to speak. Never would he have thought this kind of situation would arise. "I don't know!" His shout startled them both enough that they backed off a few steps. "I just don't know! I don't know what's going on any more, I don't know what I'm supposed to do, I don't know what my life wants of me! I can't choose! I can't…! I… I…!" He turned and stormed out of the room, out of the house, saying "I have to think!" The two girls followed. They only made it to the front door in time to see Ethen in the grassy clearing in front of their house. In an instant the wings grew again and he shot straight off into the sky. Not even the slightest curve in his path, all he wanted was distance. All he wanted was time to think. Time to straighten things out with himself.

Ashley and Kara stood there watching the energy trail disappear. They glanced at each other without the slightest of ill will towards each other.

"Ethen…"

"Time to think…"

For some time, Ethen flew. He had no idea where he was going, he just went, at full speed. As fast as he could move, who knew where he was or how far out he was. He could be any number of solar systems over. His mind started slowing down, and he started to think. *"For two years things were going calmly. It looked like I was finally going to have some peace. I should really have known things weren't going to be that kind. I'm getting worked up. I need to calm down. I'm taking things too seriously. I just need to take things in stride, do whatever. No matter what happens, everything will work out in the end. I know it will. Through force of will alone, I'll make everything work out in the end!"* He worked himself up pretty good. He felt a lot better. It was a life lesson. It took long enough for him to learn it, but now he was ready for anything. *"Now then, I suppose I should figure out the answer I'm going to give those two…"* Ethen glanced up just in time to notice there was a planet in front of him. "Gah!" an instant later he'd hit the planet. He was far too close when he noticed it. At full speed he crashed into the planet.

It didn't do much damage, but was enough to knock him unconscious, taking him back to his regular form.

Ethen woke up a while later. When he did he noticed that he wasn't anywhere near where he impacted. He was lying on a bed in a room that looked quite alien to him. He sat up and looked around. By the door was one of the aliens that must have taken him from the crash site. It was a genderless creature with legs that bent backwards at the knees, like a chicken. It had three toes, one in the back and two in the front. Its skin was white, and the upper body seemed to somewhat resemble a man's. The head however had no nose or hair, and the ears were pointed at the tip. It had no clothes on, though it didn't really appear to have a use for them. Though it did have a clipboard, and had made note of a few things while speaking.

"I see that you are finally up." It said, looking at Ethen. "I am one of the doctors of this planet; thankfully, you almost weren't hurt at all from the impact. Now if you would follow me, the king wants to see you." Ethen stood up from the bed, still wondering what was going on and in a bit of a daze, and followed this creature down several halls and outside.

Upon getting outside, Ethen saw numerous towers and walls, all going up at least six stories. None of the material any of this was made out of was familiar though; it looked like it was made out of a solid piece of some alien rock.

"Go in the door over there." The doctor pointed, "The king's room is just inside." Ethen nodded and walked over to the doorway and went inside.

Inside, he found an enormous room, made out of the same material that was outside. It had a long red rug going from the doorway to the throne, which looked to be a quarter-mile away. Ethen walked the distance, and stopped several yards in front of the king.

"Greetings traveler!" the king greeted. "From this town you may not have guessed it, but we are actually an extremely intelligent race. We cured you in a very short time by your standards."

"I'm sorry to have caused you any trouble."

"Not at all, we may even be able to give you a bit of our technology to help you out. As I said, we are a very intelligent race, why, a number of years ago , with the Enlightener's help, we made a ship with a computer so advanced that war was about to

break out over it between all of the neighboring planets. So it wouldn't cause us anymore trouble, we jettisoned it into space."

"A comptuer? In a ship? Would you happen to know where it is now?"

"Sadly, no. We traced it to the Milky Way galaxy's Orion Arm, but lost track of it during a scuffle between a number of pirates. It seems to have been lost though, as it hasn't been heard of since. I'd imagine if it were found it would be causing a great deal of trouble."

"That's it! That's the lab I found!"

"You did? Surely it has caused you a great deal of trouble. We built it with the Enlightener's help, and there's been no end to the trouble caused."

"I've had my fair share of problems, but for the most part I think everything's okay."

"So, the computer is in your possession now…" The king then turned away from Ethen, and whispered, "He's the one who stopped us. If we remove him it's ours again." He said it very quietly so Ethen wouldn't hear, but so the microphone nearby him picked it up. The message was quickly sent to the king's counsel, who began making their plot against Ethen.

"I have one more question." Ethen said, the king then turned to face Ethen and smiled. "Just a minute ago you mentioned something called the 'Enlightener' what is that?"

"It is like a God to us, it has great knowledge and power. Would you like to meet it?"

"Yes, I would, actually."

"Okay then, if you would follow me." The king stood up and began walking towards a door further back behind the throne. Ethen followed. In the next room, they weren't halfway down the hallway when Ethen heard a blade swing at his neck. He easily ducked it, spun around, and shot out a burst of energy incinerating the creature that attacked him. It was a resident of this planet. He turned back to the king, who had a weapon pointed at Ethen. "Sorry, but your trip ends here." He fired off a shot, which Ethen easily dodged.

"Don't think for a second that I didn't hear what you said earlier. You created the lab. I don't know how you lost it, but you're responsible for sending Plan A and B to get it back. It's your fault Kara died. It's Your fault she's in the state she's in!" In an instant he had one of his blades drawn and had cleaved the king in two. *"This probably won't go*

over well, I should get out of here. I wonder just how many people that message was sent to?"

Ethen left the area and stepped outside. Everyone within sight was staring at Ethen quite uncivilly, brandishing weapons. These weren't just torches and pitchforks either. "A militaristic community. Every citizen is a member of the militia. I guess I'm not going anywhere any time soon." Ethen then lit off a blue glow, and started growling. Pebbles and dirt on the ground around him started to float into the air. A strong wind seemed to come from Ethen and electricity shot about randomly. It hadn't taken long, but it took Ethen a moment to gather all his power for use. He didn't normally walk around at full power.

The entire group of people attacked him. He dodged about their weapons, pulling out and swinging his own blades, downing person after person. There was no end to them, and every time Ethen tried to back off to give them a chance to stop attacking, they only attacked more ferociously. This was a small planet, but he could swear the entire population was attacking. It wasn't hard to down each, Ethen felt quite badly about it, but they refused to stop. If they could move at all they just got back up and kept fighting.

Ethen had eventually had enough. Thoroughly convinced they wouldn't stop until the entire population had been killed, he decided to put an end to it. As he spun about dodging blows, the Lighthawk wings passed over him, and the two great wings sprouted from his back. He continued fighting, having created the Dimensional Blade in his hand. With one mighty swing, a great blade of energy was swung that spanned to the horizon. In an instant every attacker was gone. The area was barren, only a few half destroyed buildings. If not from the previous fighting than from his swing. After the explosion cleared, one person still stood, and he continued walking towards Ethen. "How could he still be alive!?"

Unlike the others, he was wearing rather elaborate armor. The alien continued walking out of the flames, with a solemn, angry look on his face. He didn't look very happy about what Ethen had done. "I was the commander of these troops," he began, "you destroyed the entire army, the king, the entire race. Now, I'll carry out his last wish… to kill you!" he then appeared in front of Ethen, his speed catching Ethen off guard, and punched him in the side of the face sending him flying backwards he caught himself and stopped some twenty feet away.

"That guy is strong…" Ethen said as he got up and wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth. "Fine, I'll take you out yet!" The commander then drew his sword; they flew towards each other and clashed swords, the commander's sword was broken in two by the force. They then turned toward each other and relaxed to normal standing positions.

"That is quite a powerful blade you have." The commander threw the handle of his sword to the ground, and Ethen made his disappear. The commander then went into a fighting stance.

"Yes, but I won't take advantage of you not having a weapon." Ethen then went into a fighting stance as well. He wasn't nearly as experienced with hand to hand, but Ethen was just starting to enjoy life. He felt bad taking advantage of his weapon.

"You'll wish you had." They stood there for a moment, and then disappeared. They were moving faster than the eye could follow, even faster than light, much faster.

Because they were moving faster than light, the images they got in their eyes were unreliable. They moved and reacted by feeling each other's energy and the energy given off by the environment around them, letting them see a perfect image in their mind. They had even trained their eyes to see this energy, not light. A warrior of this caliber has true sight, a sight that sees through all deception. Because of their immense speed, the fight lasted only a few seconds, but to them it went on for hours, neither of them winning, neither of them weakening.

Eventually Ethen was thrown through a wall of a building, he managed to stop himself before he went out the other side; so he stood there, waiting for the commander to show up. He waited in a dark room, no door, no window, just a hole in the floor you were probably supposed to float up through. The only light in the room was coming from the hole he was thrown in through.

After a few seconds the commander floated in through the hole in the wall, blocking most of the light coming in, "You said you wanted to see the Enlightener, so now you can." He punched a square button on the wall and the room lit up. What he saw both amazed and disgusted him. There in the middle of the room was a glass sphere floating there in mid-air, and it was incasing another object, which was about four feet across. The inner object was a brain, an enormous brain, but spherical in shape.

A booming voice spoke. It seemed to come from the brain. "The commander has done a good job in his duties; he has been around a long time."

"What do you mean by that?" Ethen said.

"This entire race was created by me, he was the first I made, and I put all my efforts into creating him, which is not something I can do more than once, that is why he is so much stronger than everyone else."

"If he is the first, then why isn't he king?"

"He is powerful, ruling requires a completely different skill set."

"Just what are you, anyway?

"God."

"O-kay…Well, thanks for answering my questions. If you don't mind, I have some business to get back to." With that, he flew over and punched the commander in the face, catching him off guard and knocking him out of that building and into another. Ethen charged after him and the fight continued, both landing blows, both taking damage.

This fight went on for another few seconds, another few hours, but the commander was weakening, they were both being hit, but only he was affected any more. The commander was getting weaker and weaker.

The fight ended when Ethen and the commander were standing across from each other inside a tower, on a double helix of stairs. "You're done, give up already! If you let me leave in peace, nobody else will have to die. If the lot of you would get off your high horse none of this would have happened." Ethen said.

"I have been defeated, I refuse to give up though; I'll have to use my trump card!"

"Your trump card?" At that the alien lit off a chaotic, purple glow and flew to the top of the tower. He put his palms together and formed an unstable ball of energy. Ethen looked up at him, wondering what he was doing. Electricity shot from his body in all directions destroying the top of the tower.

"Take this!" the commander yelled, "A technique taught to me by the Enlightener itself!" a beam as wide as the inside of the tower shot down the middle of the stairwell. It passed by Ethen and continued on towards the ground.

"He's not going for me, he's gonna destroy the planet!" The beam was slow, but immensely powerful. Ethen raced down the stairs surrounding the beam, he flew as fast as he could, flying circles around the beam itself. He finally passed up the beam and landed on the floor of the tower. Not having enough time to react, Ethen put his hands up and the beam hit them dead-on.

He caught the beam, but the momentum and force it had, as powerful as it was, being suddenly stopped, had nowhere to go. It sent out a shock wave in all directions destroying everything in its way, the wave kept going around the entire planet turning the whole thing into a barren wasteland.

Ethen continued putting forth all his effort to keep the beam at bay, knowing that he couldn't escape the planet's explosion if it hit.

"It's too powerful! I… can't hold it… anymore!" Ethen tried to dodge to the side to get out of the beam's way. The beam hit the planet, piercing the crust and destroying the core. "My arm!" Ethen dodged the beam, but it still took off his left arm. Stricken with pain, Ethen looked at the hole the beam made. Lava was starting to rise up. "I guess this planet is more stubborn than I thought. From the looks of it, I'd say that the planet has another couple of minutes, but not long." The lava rose up and begin oozing from the hole; he then looked up at the commander who was already charging up for another blast. "He has enough energy to do that again!?" *What do I do now? The planet's already weakened; it'll blow for sure after another one. I guess I only have one choice to stop it.*

About a month ago, while Ethen was training, he developed a truly devastating attack. It is done by concentrating all the energy in his body in his hand to such an extent that the energy is actually visible. This should not be confused with concentrating the energy in his body *around* his hand, which has been done quite often. This can be compared to lighting something on fire; as opposed to this new attack, which would be similar to pumping so much heat into something it actually discolors red. If done, there is so much power in his hand, if he hits something living, it would rip the soul straight out of the body and destroy it, leaving no damage done to the physical body at all. This is no easy feat, though. It is nearly impossible to do, and uses so much energy that Ethen will no longer be able to fight afterwards. Also, this is a close-range attack, and because of the charge time it is very impractical in a fight. However, it can be used as a counter-attack move as well.

Ethen began running his energy through his right hand at an alarming pace. His hand began to glow white, and electricity started arcing out from his palm, like one of those novelty plasma globes. "I'll show you my own trump card…" Ethen was far from perfecting this attack, and had not yet named it. However, much later on, his enemies

would name it for him, at least those that witnessed him using it on someone else. The Tenbatsu: God's wrath.

"Take this!" the alien yelled, and another blast was shot at Ethen.

Ethen waited until the blast neared him, and rammed his hand into it as hard as he could. He stood there for a moment, holding back the blast with everything he had. Then all at once, the alien's blast exploded into many smaller balls of energy, the force bringing up a cloud of dust and magma hiding Ethen. These smaller balls spread out, and then each fired a fierce laser back at the Commander before disappearing. These lasers cut through the Commander several times over, dicing, shredding, and destroying his body. Just a small portion of his upper body and head were left. Then, Ethen launched out of the cloud of dust, Tenbatsu ready. He arced over, and came quickly down upon the Commander. He landed his hand squarely on his forehead. He pushed through, and ripped a transparent version of the Commander from him. He slammed this into the ground with great force. His physical body floated there for a moment before very quickly following the path of his spirit and crashing into the ground, and into Ethen's hand.

That was all Ethen had left, he fell back, face-up into the lava. That did it; the commander was dead; now Ethen had to get off of the planet before it exploded. Ethen managed to pull himself up and look around. There were just a few small islands of dirt left floating in the sea of lava. Without the core, the planet was going to explode any moment now.

"I don't even know where I am..." He then started to float into the air, but he looked up and saw the Enlightener floating over his head.

"You destroyed the entire race." The Enlightener began.

"*You* destroyed it!" Ethen interrupted, "A race that bent on destruction could only destroy itself! I would have left peacefully, but every one of them attacked relentlessly!"

"They are a superior race! My creations *are* superior!"

"Then why did I… *could* I defeat them!?"

"You… you are but a flaw!"

"I am not a flaw! I am the Angel of Destiny!"

"You are a flaw!" at that a thin beam shot out of the air, seemingly from nowhere, and through Ethen's tattered body. Those beams hurt. A lot. *"I don't have the strength left to fight. I can feel this thing's no pushover either. I've got to get out of here. Get away from it. Maybe if I tick it off enough it'll act less rationally."*

"You said you were God…"

"I am God!"

"You are not! You're only a demigod made to watch over this area!" He wasn't sure how he knew that.

"No demigod, I am God!"

"Didn't God create the universe? Wouldn't you have had to make everything?"

"I did make everything!"

"That doesn't even make any sense!" another beam shot him, "My very existence denies that! Because I know what did make it!" Ethen then felt something inside him tell him to say it; it was another voice, another mind, the Honeycomb of Life. "The Honeycomb of Life is responsible for making everything!" He was speaking for the Honeycomb of Life, with more knowledge than he had on his own; at least this told him what it had to do with the Angel of Destiny. Just then, four more beams appeared, piercing his leg, chest, wing, and remaining arm.

"I am God!" the Enlightener yelled again.

"But your race is gone, only I know you exist, and I'll be dead soon!" the beams continued, perforating his entire body, Ethen managed to move at least his head out of the way of them. "Who knows how many so-called-Gods there are!? There could be dozens more that nobody knows of, believes in; are they truly Gods!?" the beams continued, he now had holes throughout his entire body.

"I am God!"

"But will you still be God, even with nobody to see you as God!?"

"God!"

"But is God not perfect!? Is God not absolute!? Then why can't you control me!? If you are God, then why could I kill the race you created!?"

"…God…"

"They all died according to God's plans!"

"I… am… God!" beams shot directly from the Enlightener this time, several hitting Ethen, but engulfing the Enlightener, and finally, it exploded, the Enlightener was gone.

There Ethen floated, a dying man on a dying planet. "This planet has no will; it can't fight to stay alive, it can't help but die now. Ethen then looked up at the dark sky, apparently most of the atmosphere was gone already. "But… I will survive! Through force of will alone, I'll make it through this!" Ethen then lit off a weak glow and flew

straight up and out of what was left of the atmosphere. Just as he left, he could feel the crust collapse. What was left imploded and sent fragments flying out in every direction. He made it off just in time, but he didn't stop to look, he knew that his tattered body wouldn't survive much longer without some form of treatment. He flew on and on, desperately searching, but without any idea where to go.

Somehow he was guided in a direction. It must have been the knowledge of the universe that the Honeycomb of Life had that told him where to go. He continued flying by planet after planet, going towards that one destination in the back of his head, all the time losing strength, he couldn't last much longer. He was struggling to keep his body from shutting down, dying.

There it was... He saw it there in front of him; he was going as fast as his tired body would go. As he got closer to it, he went slower and slower, losing strength. "I've got to make it." He thought. He was now just outside the atmosphere, slowly crawling towards it. He struggled to stay awake, knowing that if he fell asleep he wouldn't wake back up. Inch-by-inch he got closer, "I have to make it!" He thought again, trying to force his eyelids open. Finally, he gave out, his body went limp and he drifted into unconsciousness, and there he floated, if not dead, then just outside of it.

He floated for a minute, his beat up body not moving, the holes in his body simply a mark from the past now. He orbited the planet for a moment, then the gravity of the planet slowly pulled his body into the atmosphere and down to the planet; he fell mile upon mile and finally crashed into the planet. When he hit he was no longer the Angel of Destiny, he was in his normal body. He finally made it, if you would consider this making it.

These aliens were a kind race, they gave with no thought of getting anything in return, and so they gave to Ethen.

His eyes slowly opened, "Am I… still alive?" He was lying on a soft bed, he forced himself to sit up and look around, though it hurt to move, and he saw the inside of an alien building. He looked down and saw three short, pinkish-red people standing there, they had round eyes, no nose, and a kind face. He had made it.

They generously gave food to Ethen and nursed him back to health. Somehow he got his arm back, it wasn't mechanical or organic and tacked on, it was as if

somehow he had never lost it, it was just the same as it always was. Thankfully Ethen's earrings still worked, but they didn't speak much. The race was a very emotional one, so they didn't often use words to communicate.

They enjoyed each other's company, and Ethen thanked then to no end for what they had done. Once he was back to health, before he left, they all gathered around him, the entire population (which was about that of a small village.) and one of them held up a beautiful ring embedded with five purple jewels, knowing that it could help him solve his problems. Ethen took it and thanked him for the gift. They all happily waved goodbye to Ethen, who crouched down, and in a flash of light had the Lighthawk cloth on, had grown wings, and was shooting off into the sky, just a blue light fading in the distance.

He landed outside his front door, "Now, what to say…" In all the time he had, he still hadn't figured out what he was going to do. He walked over and sat down on the grass, leaning against the front of the house.

He sat there for a few moments, his face twisting with thought, when he heard from the front door a voice. "E-Ethen!?" It was Kara. She had made a much more normal body. Her body had been restructured to be more Ethen's age than five years prior. It was more mature. She was much taller and thinner, with a body more similar to a supermodel. She didn't even have the breast size she had before. They were much smaller now, about as big as Ashley's. Ethen didn't think it was possible, but her outfit was even more revealing than before. A short, loose skirt, and a short, sleeveless top with the front completely open. A strong breeze and her chest would be revealed to the world. Now a mature woman, she was even more a vixen than she was when he fist saw her.

She rushed over, tackling Ethen to the ground. She rubbed her face in his chest. "Ethen…"

He put his arms around her. "Kara…" It was only this close he could tell she wasn't organic. She certainly felt organic. The only tell was that there were a few creases on her skin, where various mechanical parts underneath met. The lines were in large mechanical patterns, and actually added to her appeal. Maybe because she wasn't human in the first place.

"Ethen… I love you so much, but… you häve to be vēth Äshley." He was a bit shocked to hear this. "Ēt väs five years ägo for us. Äshley's been väiting for so long.

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She's loved you for so long." She moved herself up some and kissed Ethen passionately. She pulled back again and said, "Don't think I'm going to stop thoogh. Ēf you let off her even ä lēttle, I'll be right there to gräb you!"

"Kara… I do love you, I want you to know that. And thank you."

She stayed there though, only squeezing him tighter. "Cän ve stäy like thēs for ä lēttle beet?"

"Sure…" That little bit turned into a good while. Night fell, and Kara fell asleep. "Come on Kara, let's go." Ethen slowly sat up, careful not to wake her. He picked her up and walked into the house. It looked a little different. Just how long had he been gone? Despite being attached to the main computer, Kara seemed to wander around in the mechanical body often. *"I wonder if she sleeps anywhere?"* He walked into his bedroom and set her down on the bed. *"There you go, rest up."* Just as he turned around he saw Ashley in the doorway.

She paused for a second, and then ran over to Ethen throwing her arms around him, and they stood there for a moment. Ethen could feel his shirt getting wet from her tears.

"I didn't think you were coming back…"

"I haven't been gone that long, have I?"

"You've been gone a month! I didn't think you'd be gone for more than a few hours…"

"I guess I *have* been gone a long time… I'm sorry to worry you…" He smiled and put his hand on her head in a calming, consoling way.

"Look, your hair's grown longer!" She smiled, but her eyes were still watering. He hadn't noticed, but she was right, his hair had grown. "I'll cut it for you." She said, still smiling, wiping a tear from her eye.

He took a few steps back, keeping his hands on her arms to reassure her, and said, "Thank you. I'm back now, everything's okay." He looked back at Kara. "It's… nice to see you two were getting along."

Ethen put his hands in his pockets and felt the ring. He had forgotten he had it. He knew Ashley loved him more than anything. Ashley was more important to him than even his own life. He was still confused, though. He didn't know if he loved her or not. It was her age that confused him. He often found himself thinking *"If she were a little younger, I would know in a heartbeat if this is the same love she feels for me."* Even now, he didn't know. But looking into her unbearably cute, tearful eyes, he only wanted

her to be happy. He didn't know what possessed him to do it, his body moved on its own. He took the ring out of his pocket, got down on one knee, and held it up to her.

Chapter 7
Ragnarok

Fall – year 23

Ethen and Kara were often training together. It was very reminiscent of years ago when it was just the two of them. They were in outer space, just on the edge of the atmosphere. It was almost the same spot they'd fought Plan B so many years ago. The two were training, and rather enjoying themselves, but as time wore on, Ethen was getting tired. "Hold up, hold up, I need to rest."

"Äw, but ve vere yust getting stärted."

"I don't have the lab's resources keeping me going. I need rest from time to time."

She floated over to him, putting her arms around him. She pressed herself against him and looked with a very seductive look. "Ve coold häve ä lot of fun oot here."

"Kara, I'm married!"

"Oh, she von't mind."

"At the very least, I'll mind!"

She floated off, pouting, but with a smirk. "Oh, you're no fun." Ethen smiled. Kara wasn't really serious, though she'd probably be happy if Ethen gave in. She just liked teasing him.

A booming voice interrupted, "I'm sorry, but I can't let you get any stronger. If I do, I may actually have a little trouble killing you."

"Who said that!?" Ethen turned to where the voice came from, but all he saw was black space. The sun's light then flowed around the planet. The light hit Ethen from behind, warming his back. The light also shone where he was looking, and what he saw was not what he was expecting to see.

The light revealed what looked like a massive humanoid male, but was really genderless and had red skin. It was about twice as tall as a normal man and had a long neck, with a dragon's head. The fingers and toes also went to a point, not like claws, the

digits themselves were pointed. In an instant he'd waved his hand and a wave of energy tore Kara apart. Mechanical pieces went flying. "Kara!"

It wasn't a huge deal. Her consciousness was linked to the lab. That body was just a doll she liked to move around with. Back in the lab, her face appeared on the main screen. A garbled digitized voice said "Vhät hēt me? Thät must häve been the second time thät's häppened, änd ēt doesn't get easier."

Back in space, Ethen faced down this creature. "Who are you?"

"Wherever there is light, there is darkness. The Honeycomb of Life is not God, but *a* God, the God of Light. I am Ragnarok, the God of Darkness."

"Ragnarok? The Viking's end of the world?"

"The Vikings were close, but Ragnarok isn't an event that ends the world, it is a being that ends the Omniverse."

"Omniverse? If that's what you're after, then you're my enemy." At that, in a flash Ethen turned into the Angel of Destiny.

"Even with the powers of the Warrior of Light you can't beat me."

"Warrior of Light? I think you're mistaken, I am the Angel of Destiny."

"That? The Angel of Destiny? Don't make me laugh! The Angel of Destiny is just a myth! It's not real. Just a rumor made up by a few skeptics who knew something about diving energy. It's all nonsense. The form you are in is called the Warrior of Light; you aren't anything more than a lapdog for the God of Light. You don't possess any divine energy on your own. In fact, the Honeycomb of Life is so weak you can't even do it without her help."

"It doesn't matter what I am, it only matters what I need to do!"

"I would advise that you give up and let me kill you, it'll be more painless that way. If you don't, poor Ashley may come to some harm. But at least she wouldn't be alone in death!"

"What!? How dare you, you monster!"

"I'm coming." Ashley walked towards the door to answer it, having heard some noise outside, "Nobody knows we're out here, who could it be?" The moment she opened the door a small, freakish creature lunged at her. Kara had by this point put together a second body, and stepped in, quickly destroying the small creature.

"Ethen's ēn trooble. Something ättacked us oot there." She dashed outside the building into the front yard.

Just as she was gathering her thoughts, someone grabbed her arms and forced them behind her back violently, then put a sword to her neck. "Thät svord… Thät's the Dēmensionäl Bläde, ēsn't ēt?" She managed to turn her head around enough to see that this person looked like Ethen when he was the Angel of Destiny. "Someone else cän turn ēnto the Ängel of Destēny?" She said to herself.

"You are mistaken," he said, "I am the Warrior of Darkness."

"The Värrēor of Därkness?"

"Kara!" Ashley took a few steps outside, but the Warrior of Darkness glanced in her direction, and there was an energy explosion at her feet. She screamed as the shockwave blew her off balance.

"If either of you move, you both die."

"They don't stand a chance… huh?" Ethen had a sensation coming from inside him. The Honeycomb of Life then melded out of him and Ethen transformed back to his regular body. "What's going on?" The Honeycomb of Life floated over to Ragnarok then started floating up and down fast and violently, letting out an assortment of odd sounds. It seemed to be speaking to Ragnarok.

"You've been running away for a very long time. I think it's time we finally end this." Ragnarok said confidently with a smirk, "Let's get this started!" He said just before he swung his large arm at the Honeycomb of Life, who dodged it with incredible agility and responded by firing a wave of energy at Ragnarok's face. He seemed to recover and the fight continued. They were both so powerful and so fast that Ethen had trouble following their moves; this was truly a clash of the Gods.

The fight didn't last much longer, a few moments later the Honeycomb of Life fired a beam of energy at Ragnarok, engulfing his entire body and causing a huge explosion. Moments later, though, Ragnarok charged out of the explosion completely unscathed. He charged towards the Honeycomb of Life and threw his wide arm straight through her.

The Honeycomb of Life shattered, like broken glass.

"No!" Ethen yelled, having been forced to watch the entire battle. "How could you kill the God of Light!?" Ethen then lit off a large, blue glow, "I'll kill you!" Ethen charged at Ragnarok, the Lighthawk wings appeared mid-charge and passed over him. Just like that he had the cloth on and swords ready. He swung as fast as he could, moved as fast as he could, his rage propelling him. Ragnarok easily dodged all of the attacks, smiling,

and finally punched Ethen, sending him flying back. Ethen regained control of himself and stopped. He thought, *"If only I weren't so tired already…"* He then righted himself and stared at Ragnarok, who had a talkative look to him.

Ragnarok looked at Ethen, and out of the corner of his eye noticed a cut on his right leg, *"When did that happen? This guy isn't half bad, best to nip this little problem at the bud before it blooms."* He then yelled to Ethen, who was a distance away, "You are a very formidable fighter. I wonder just how powerful you'll be without your precious Lighthawk!"

He laughed a maniacal laugh as blue lights were pulled from Ethen's body. Ethen then turned into his normal body, while Ragnarok absorbed the lights.

Ethen then tried to summon the Lighthawk, but nothing happened. "What's going on!?"

"Now this power is mine to control, I certainly can't use it like you could, but my power has grown an extraordinary amount, nothing can stop me now!"

"You're more powerful than anything I've ever seen. There's no way I can beat you now. You're going to kill me; you're going to kill Ashley; you're going to kill Kara." Ethen said all of this to himself, quietly, angrily, knowing he couldn't win, "You're going to wipe out the human race, no, destroy the universe itself, you're Ragnarok, the universe's end."

"So true, so true." He interjected with a haughty tone.

"I don't know how many times I've pulled a victory from the jaws of defeat. It doesn't matter how many times I have. It doesn't matter what my chances are! I'll break through the impossible and find a way to win!" Ethen raised his head with an angry look about him. He held is right hand out, palm up, grasping his forearm with his left hand. He started running energy through his hand at an alarming pace. Electricity began to arc out from it as his hand began to glow. Ethen knew he could never hit him with it, but this was his only shot, he was going to try the Tenbatsu.

"So, you have some fight left in you after all, but I can put a stop to that." At breath-taking speed, Ragnarok flew over to Ethen and grasped his neck in his large hand and started to squeeze.

"No… not… this…" Ethen mumbled between coughs. Ethen swung forward, hitting Ragnarok with his open palm. The energy in his hand hadn't fully gathered, and with such pain around his neck he couldn't concentrate and the energy dissipated. Nothing happened, it was like punching a wall. Ethen grabbed onto Ragnarok's hand,

trying to free his neck from his grasp. His legs were kicking through the air trying to hit Ragnarok, but it was useless. In not much time Ethen's legs stopped kicking. As Ragnarok's squeeze got tighter, Ethen's grasp around his hand became weaker. Eventually, Ethen's arms went limp, and as he let out a final sigh, his head went limp as well. Ragnarok let go of his neck, showing a large, purple mark around his neck. He grabbed Ethen by the forehead, and looked at him closely, feeling his energy.

"He's dead." Ragnarok finally said before throwing Ethen's limp, dead body away from himself.

"What's going on?" Ethen's body wouldn't respond. Thoughts were all he had. *"All I can see is white. My body seems to be walking somewhere on its own, but that's all I know. Wait. My body stopped. Where am I? What's going on? My vision's coming back. I can see."*

It looked like an old Greek temple sitting in a sea of yellow clouds. The building didn't have any walls, just stone pillars lining the edge and supporting a roof. He saw standing at the other end of the building a man. He was wearing what looked to be some kind of heavenly armor, he had a hood over his head and all Ethen could see inside was blackness. He also had large, white, glowing wings coming from his back, though they acted more like tentacles than wings, wrapping randomly around pillars like they had a mind of their own.

"Ethen…" His kind, powerful voice said, "I have waited a long time to meet you. I am Odin."

"What happened to me?"

"You lost, sadly. Ragnarok killed you." Ethen was speechless. He stood there with his mouth open, trying to form words, but still trying to wrap his head around the fact that he was dead. There was far too much going on in his head to voice a single thought.

Odin walked over to where Ethen was, and it was now that Ethen noticed that Odin was a full head taller than he was, "Gilgamesh's loss was a great blow against the light. With him gone, we were all hoping the Honeycomb of Life would kill Ragnarok. You are our true best hope, but you have yet to awaken."

"I'm also dead… Who's Gilgamesh?"

"Gilgamesh was the previous God of Light, and the Honeycomb was his Warrior of Light, but when Ragnarok killed Gilgamesh the Honeycomb of Life became the new

God of Light. Upon death, Gilgamesh used what was left of his power to put his spirit in a young boy's body; you are Gilgamesh's reincarnation."

Matters just got through enough to Ethen for him to realize what was going on. This was Odin, the God of Gods, the boss of bosses, king of kings. Saying that Ethen is Gilgamesh's, the Honeycomb of Life's superior's reincarnation. Ethen immediately straightened up, acting with much more respect. He did have a question, though. "Then have I gotten as powerful as I am because of Gilgamesh?"

"Not at all, his power is yet to be awakened. But we must worry about the matter at hand. You see… Ragnarok has been a thorn in our side since the moment he appeared. He is not content with simply being the darkness in shadows; he wants to get rid of the light so all is in darkness."

"What do you plan to do to get rid of him? No normal person could get rid of him, I'm already dead..."

"I am loathe to admit it, but you have become more powerful than even I. Next to Ragnarok, you are the most powerful being in the entire Omniverse, even without your abilities."

"Omniverse? Ragnarok mentioned that too."

"The term used to describe all of the universes, dimensions, afterlives, sub-dimensions, and the such. The Omniverse is everything."

"So this is bigger than even the universe, it encompasses everything. He still killed me, though…"

"You have great potential, perhaps limitless. And you still have Gilgamesh's dormant power. You are the Omniverse's only hope. Everyone has a destiny to fulfill; death now is not yours. You have to be brought back, but to revive someone, a great energy source is needed. For someone as powerful as you an enormous amount of energy is needed. I am the only one who can do it; I'll give up my very life energy to give you another chance."

"No! You can't die!"

"Death means becoming a soul in this place, I will not be so fortunate. To do this, I have to give up my very existence, my very soul. I will be completely gone, I will return to the Keyline. Perhaps I will be created again some day. But it matters not. If it means the death of Ragnarok, I would gladly give up my existence. Now go, warrior! Save the Omniverse! You are its only hope!" Odin began to glow white, and Ethen's vision

became white, that was all that he could see, but not because of Odin. Ethen could no longer feel the ground underneath him, and his vision slowly faded to black.

He realized that he was floating in outer space once again, staring at the inside of his eyelids like it had all been a bad dream. He managed to open his eyes and look around, but his neck still hurt. Ragnarok was in front of him about thirty feet away with his back to him, apparently he was thinking about what to do next, and it probably felt good to be around the corpse of your only competition.

"Ragnarok!" Ethen yelled.

An extremely surprised Ragnarok quickly turned around; he had a look of sheer disbelief on his face. "How!? How could you still be alive!?"

"Odin gave up his life so that I might end yours. I am the hope of the Omniverse."

"Haha! So the old fool did it! That's one less thing for me to worry about! I've killed you once before! I can do it again!"

"I'm just as strong as before, I don't see how I can win, but they have faith in me. I will kill you!" Just then, Ethen saw an image of his beloved Ashley, of the beautiful Kara, of the Honeycomb of Life, and of Earth itself, as though they were all cheering him on. Ethen yelled, "Whether I have a chance or not! Whether I'll live or not! I won't let the Omniverse go with only darkness as its guide!"

Then it happened, something snapped.

He again yelled, "For the human race!" He then lit off a violent, blue aura, "For the Juraian race!" For a brief moment, Ethen appeared as though he had the Lighthawk cloth on.

"No! How could this be!?"

"And for every living being who cries out for peace! Even If my opponent is God himself, I'll win no matter the odds! That is what makes a man! That is who I am!" A loud, brief growl came from Ethen, before he tilted his head back and yelled at the top of his lungs. When he yelled, his aura turned white and expanded greatly. It was so bright Ragnarok had to cover his eyes with his arms.

Still yelling, his hair stood on end, waving like fire, turning a bright white. The three green arrows appeared on his forehead from the Lighthawk. The pupil of his eyes dimmed and the pigmentation turned silver. And two great, white wings sprouted from his back.

The light cleared and Ethen quieted his yell. Ragnarok lowered his arms and looked at Ethen, his energy felt far different from anything he'd ever felt before. It was infinite, unfathomable. "What!? What happened!? Wait, don't tell me, it happened, it really happened." He paused, a look of disbelief and terror spread across his face, "Could you be… could you possibly be… The Angel of Destiny!? Don't try anything! If you do I'll have the Warrior of Darkness kill Ashley!"

"The Warrior of Darkness? He's dead." Ethen said in a calm voice.

"How!? Kara's not that strong!"

"I killed him."

"How äm I going to get oot of thēs?" Kara asked herself, still with the sword to her neck. Then, the Warrior of Darkness collapsed. She turned around and saw him lying on the ground with a large hole in his chest. "Vhät's going on?"

"There's no way! No way you could be that fast!"

"Oh, I didn't even have to try to do that." Ethen had a purposeful, disgruntled look on him, but he didn't seem overly angry.

"No!"

"I could do the same to you." A long cut appeared on Ragnarok's face. "You were going to destroy the Omniverse." Another cut appeared on his arm, "You were going to kill every living creature in existence." Another cut appeared, "Do you know how many people would have died? I could tell you, I could give you the exact number, but you don't care." Another cut appeared, "As long as they're all dead." Ragnarok growled; he had blood dripping from every limb on his body. "It's relatively easy to kill you; I could take off your arm." Ragnarok's left arm then spaghettied out behind him and disintegrated. "I could take off your leg." His right leg then spaghettied out behind him and disintegrated. "It still won't stop the killing, though, will it?"

"Die!" Ragnarok charged at Ethen and swung his remaining arm at him. His arm went through Ethen as though he were a hologram.

"How much do you want to kill me?" Ethen said, smiling, with Ragnarok's arm still through him. Then Ragnarok exploded.

The explosion cleared and Ragnarok was gone, only Ethen remained, completely unharmed, not even a smudge on his cheek. "I think it's time I head home… and maybe I can get some rest…"

Chapter 8
The God of Gods

Spring – year 24

Ethen's body changed permanently to his new form. He was no longer a normal person. This is what his true form was. He was able to, however, shape shift back to a normal human form. He looked like his old self, but it was only cosmetic. With that great power came a great awareness. His mind was opened to the wonders of the Omniverse. Recently he's been traveling out, seeing all the great wonders himself. During these trips he wore a long white trench coat. Which he had gotten more and more fond of over the time. At the moment he was on the other side of the universe, on a small planet on the outskirts of a galaxy. The planet was known for being a natural art Mecca. Beautiful stonework, waterwork, natural formations, and generally the kind of thing created naturally that you didn't think even intelligent hands could make. There was interesting lighting on the world as well, as there were two suns, one blue, one red. He wanted more than anything to bring Ashley along, but he currently didn't have a way to move her such a great distance. Ethen tried not to be away from home for long, though.

Ethen was walking amongst a group of tourists. The area was packed shoulder to shoulder, but moving at a fair pace. Something felt wrong, however. Ethen wasn't sure what it was, but there was something disturbing the air. He was constantly being brushed up against by others, as packed as it was, but one in particular felt odd, like it left an energy residue in the air he couldn't ignore. He stopped in his tracks and spun around, trying to find the person. There were too many people though. It was a bad feeling the person left behind. An evil intent, yet a familiar energy. It felt like he'd been feeling the energy since he was born. This was not the first time this had happened. It seemed he felt it for but a moment on every planet he'd visited.

He continued on. There was nothing he could do about it now. It wasn't terribly long after though, that he felt the energy again. This hadn't happened before. The energy grew and grew. It was getting dangerous, and yet kept growing. *"The planet'll be in danger at this rate!"* Moving at the infinite speed his new form granted him, he searched the planet, inside and out. The source of the energy was nowhere to be found.

He let time resume, and the energy only grew. The ground was shaking, the sky was turning colors, the very world was ending. *"But there's no source, no cause for this!"* Just as the planet reached its end, Ethen took off, getting off the planet at his infinite speed.

As he left, a figure passed by him, going the same speed in the opposite direction. He caught a glimpse of him, but only for a moment. He looked like Ethen, but with white hair, wearing a long black trench coat. He was grinning. A malevolent grin. Ethen felt the same energy, and knew that he was the cause of the planet's destruction. His name was Nehte. Somehow Ethen knew. He realized this in only the instant their eyes met. Ethen immediately stopped and turned around, but he was gone. To move so fast, he had to be as powerful as Ethen. How was that even possible? Since fighting Ragnarok Ethen had an entirely different kind of energy in him. A divine energy. He was infinitely powerful now, infinitely strong, infinitely fast, with infinite reactions, but Nehte was doing just the same. *"What's going on…"* Ethen turned around and left for home.

When Ethen returned, he walked into the house mid thought, "I just remembered- what!?" As he opened the door, he stopped short when he saw the kitchen table was busted in two; there had apparently been a fight. "Ashley!" Ethen yelled, taking a quick look around the house, hoping nothing had happened to her, but she was nowhere to be found. Back in the kitchen, Ethen saw that the small television was mercifully left on. On it, he saw nothing but static at first, but it came into focus. He saw Nehte holding Ashley's hands behind her back. The camera started zooming out showing a large base, it was an enormous ship, the camera just kept zooming out and zooming out, and just when you thought that was the entire base it showed even more. The image flickered out, and the TV shut off.

"You filthy-!" Ethen blurted out. A small transparent screen appeared in front of him. On it was Kara's face, but it was colored green and seemed to be struggling to keep itself together.

"I… I cooldn't do änything, I'm sorry." Her voice seemed to come and go, littered with static.

"Kara! Are you okay? What happened?"

"Ēt häppened so fäst… He yust cäme ēn, breäking everything ēn hēs väy. I tried to stop hēm, but he yust brushed me äside, destroying my body ēn än ēnstänt. I don't know vhät he dēd, but even the CPU seems to häve täken ä blow. He gräbbed Äshley änd took off, äs quēckly äs he cäme."

"It'll be okay Kara, I'll settle this."

"Get hēm, Ethen. I thēnk I need to go ēnto sleep mode for ä lēttle bēt änd run repäērs…" The image faded.

"Get some rest…" He ran outside and flew into the sky towards the base, he knew where it was already. Perhaps it was the divine energy that told him, but it was orbiting just outside the Earth's atmosphere. Ethen approached the base and found what looked like a dock, so he flew into the large opening; he found a door actually leading into the base he then went in. He followed this hallway deeper and deeper into the base, but never saw a single person. The entire base was abandoned. *"He killed the crew just to take the base."* He eventually came to a large room, mostly empty save a large dragon statue and some very angular walls, where Nehte stood facing him, still holding Ashley prisoner.

"Let her go!"

"You want her back? Here." He pushed Ashley towards him, she took a few steps towards Ethen, but a black pit opened up below her and she fell into it. Without thinking, Ethen dove into the pit after her. He made it just as the opening closed.

"Hold on Ashley! I'll save you!" Something must have been pushing her down; he should have been able to catch up easily. They were both falling, it was too dark to tell where or even how fast, but they could make out each other.

"Ethen!" Ashley yelled.

"I won't let you die, Ashley! Too much has happened between us! I care more for you than I do myself, I'll never let you die!"

Ashley knew that he wouldn't catch up in time; the space ship was big, but not so big that Ethen could move at full speed for more than a moment. This entire conversation happened in that brief time, it all happened instantaneously, neither of them actually talked. The entire conversation was done through their minds, by the connection of the two kindred spirits. Ashley immediately responded to what Ethen said with, "I love you, Ethen! And I have enjoyed every moment we have spent together. Thank you, Ethen, for everything you've done for me. I know… you were always confused. When you asked me to marry you, my heart was beating so fast… but even then; I knew how uncertain you were. We've been married, and you still aren't sure how you feel, but you did it for me… you did it knowing how happy it would make me… Thank you so much… Goodbye, Ethen. I love you…" At that a divider sprung out of the wall, cutting Ethen off from Ashley. Ethen slammed into the metal with such speed that he busted through it, but it slowed him down enough that a second divider came out and

caught him; though Ethen still had so much momentum that he bounced a good twenty feet in the air. At infinite speed those should have broken easily. There's no telling what Nehte was capable of. He landed, but seemed to be unscathed. He slammed his fist into the platform, tears flowing from his eyes, knowing Ashley was already dead. The platform rose up, slowly bringing Ethen back up to the surface.

Ethen was angry and impatient, and he didn't bother waiting for the divider to take him back up, as soon as he stood up he flew at full speed to the top, where Nehte was waiting. Ethen landed atop the hole, his movements aggressive. He yelled at Nehte without the slightest pause, "Why did you stop me, you bastard!?"

"I just want to fight you; she'd get in the way. I am Nehte, and you are-"

"Ethen Fox, the Angel of Destiny." He interrupted, too angry to wait for him to even finish his sentence. He wanted these pleasantries out of the way so he could tear him limb form limb.

"I know who you are. And I know what you did. About a year ago you killed Ragnarok and a Warrior of Darkness. There are very few people in the Omniverse with such great inner strength. You and I are actually the only two there are with an inner strength powerful enough to give us the opportunity to evolve. As you should know, when one of the original Gods born from the Keyline combines their power with someone with this great an inner strength, it draws the divine energy in the Omniverse together and creates a being of infinite power. But there is only enough divine energy for two. Gilgamesh gave his to you, and the moment Ragnarok was killed, he sent out his life force into his other pupil, the other Warrior of Darkness. I then became the Devil of Destiny." As soon as he said this, he revealed his true form. His pupils dimming and the pigment turning silver. His hair, already white, stood on end, waving about like fire. Two wings sprouted from his back, but they weren't the angelic wings Ethen had. They were dark and leathery. They were a devil's wings.

"We can't fight here, our abilities are infinite, whatever universe we fight in will be destroyed." Ethen added, trying to calm himself down enough to think rationally.

"You don't want to hear about why I wanted to destroy that planet, just for the fun of it? Or how I was following you around just to blow up whatever planet you fancied? Go ahead and check. All the planets you visited are gone." Ethen was quiet, his rage not subsiding. "Pity. If you want to be that way, then fine." Nehte floated into the air so he was in front of the mouth of the giant dragon statue behind him. "When the Honeycomb of Life expanded the universes from one to many, she created the Omniverse; which is

all of the universes and dimensions. The first universes had beings almost as strong as the Gods, but the later ones were weak. Still, none of the first ones had the divine energy that we possess. It's interesting to know that we are the only two beings left in the entire Omniverse that possess the pure divine energy." A portal then opened behind him in the dragon's mouth. "If we must, then we can fight here, this universe in particular has no life in it. I know that you will come fight me, because you know as well as I do that this battle is inevitable." He then floated backwards into the portal and disappeared.

"He's right, I could run now, but I would still eventually have to fight him. And now, more than ever, I want to kill him for what he did to Ashley…" Ethen released his own form, wings sprouting from his back, his hair standing up and turning white. He floated up and into the portal. Once through, he saw an endless void of dark purple, with a zigzagging two-dimensional platform of light purple that led into the distance. Ethen disappeared and reappeared in front of Nehte at the far end of the path.

"I want you dead-" Nehte began, "because when the Honeycomb of Life died you were promoted to the God of Light, and when Ragnarok died I became the God of Darkness. We can both command an army of Gods, but you don't seem to have bothered with that. Odin gave up his position so you could live, and now there is an opening for the God of Gods. Because the other still exists, neither of us can move to that position. Odin was born into that position and we are already more powerful than he, but could you imagine what would happen if one of us died? The divine energy the other possesses would undergo a drastic change. Can you imagine the power we would have? We would be all-powerful, though our abilities are infinite now, as the God of Gods we could walk through solid objects, revive the dead, and shape shift. We would become immortal, neither dying by natural causes nor by another's hand, not even yours; I would be able to kill you just as easily as you could kill an insect. Anything I could imagine would be mine."

"I don't care about power or abilities. All I want to do is make sure someone like you doesn't possess that power."

"You're a boring one. You truly don't care about power? Than how did you get as powerful as you are?"

"I know that I have solved every problem so far with violence, but if at all possible, I would like to avoid fighting. I am yet to be granted with that opportunity. I got this powerful because fate had destined it. At the time I had no other choice. I just want to live a peaceful life. But people like you threaten peace, and I cannot allow that."

"You do understand that fate does not exist. The Keyline can alter things to fit an original plan, but it has no control over will, but I understand what you mean. Very simply, you had to get more powerful at the time. What a spirit!" He said sarcastically, "Helping others! Save the future! Do you know how idiotic that sounds?"

"I don't care, all I know is that it is the truth; and that my life, the horrors I've been through, is far from funny." Ethen then used the energy in his body to create a sword in each hand. This is what he had to do since a physical sword had a set strength, but their abilities were infinite. It wasn't very impressive looking, just a beam of energy, but it was effective.

Nehte then said, "This battle is somewhat ironic. I knew the day would come when I had to fight another for control of the Omniverse, but I never believed I would be fighting myself."

"What do you mean?" Ethen said a little annoyed.

"You mean you don't know? Each universe is a copy of the one before it, but with slight differences. The more copies were made, the more the original picture blurred; much like taking a photocopy of a photocopy. Albeit a number of universes away, I am you in another universe." Nehte said this with a smile showing he was quite pleased with himself.

"To think that I had the potential to become someone like you. However, that doesn't mean I'm going to change now. This is even more a reason to erase you from the Omniverse!" Ethen pointed his blade towards Nehte angrily, motioning to kill him.

Nehte created a sword of his own, though it was a single sword, it was large. He obviously favored power over speed. "And so the battle, the final battle between the two most powerful beings in the Omniverse, the Gods of Light and Dark, will take place here, and now. This will decide the destiny of the Omniverse." Nehte went into a fighting stance.

"Let's get this fateful battle started." And Ethen went into a stance himself. He thought, *"My trump card truly is situational. Since I'm left all but dead after I use it, it can only be used to finish a fight. In a strict swordfight, by the time he's open enough to use it, I won't have half the energy I need to do it. At least I can rule it out now, so I'm not worrying about it later."*

They both stood there for a while, staring each other down, waiting for the other to attack first, but neither did. Realizing the other wouldn't attack; they both attacked at the exact same time, attacking in much the same way. The two were so much like each

other, just on the opposite end of the spectrum, that they would both make the exact same move at any given time. They both stopped short and tried to block the other's attack. It was then that they realized they would both just continue to do the same thing.

"He's so much like me we even fight the same way. Making the same choice at any given time. Well, in that case all I have to do is react to what I would do were I in his position." This time, Ethen attacked, but Nehte, ignoring his impulse to attack the same way, instead, decided to block for the attack he would have made, and blocked Ethen's attack perfectly. They both had a perfect system to fight the other. Like this, they could read each other's movements perfectly. The difference in weapons would certainly change things later on, so it was lucky to figure this out when they did. From there, they both fought. With each swing, a rip of black would appear against the purple void. With each swing, they were tearing this universe apart. Because their speed is infinite, the battle was instantaneous, but to them, seeing the fight through their eyes, this battle lasted hours, even days.

Finally, they both floated opposite each other, against the blackness of nonexistence. They stared at each other; both having so many cuts and severs on them that amongst the blood, they could hardly see any flesh. They both decided, and knew that the other was thinking the same, that this would be the final blow; they didn't have the energy for more. They readied their swords and paused. After a moment, they charged at each other. They didn't try to block the other's attack, just complete their own transaction. They flew towards each other, and at the same time, stabbed their swords through the other in the exact same spot. The force threw both of them back with the same speed they charged at each other with. As they both flew back, they both died, and the force of the energy released caused a great, white explosion, and though the matter in the universe itself was already gone, the force of their deaths caused the universe itself to be destroyed. They were both gone now, and as Ethen had predicted, they took an entire universe with them. It was over, the fight was done.

"All I can see is white…" slowly his vision faded to normal. He was standing in what appeared to be a Greek temple, sitting above a sea of yellow clouds. He noticed that his hair was still standing on end, and was still white, and his eyes were still silver as well, but his wings were not as they were before, they were great, glowing wings that acted more like tentacles than wings. They were like Odin's wings. "It would appear that I landed my blow first, just before his. I have been promoted. I am the God of Gods."

There he stood, the victor of the endless battle. After the long fight between the two Gods of good and evil, it was finally decided, and there he stood, the victor of the endless battle: Ethen Fox.

"And so, it would appear, that I am to rule over the Omniverse; and that I am to live here. But I do not wish for this life, I will accept the position, and fulfill it to the best of my ability, but first, I shall revive my beloved Ashley, who sadly died from the fall. I may still be a bit unsure of my feelings for her, but I still want nothing more than to live with her at my side. I shall carry out my duty alongside her, but in my own house, on planet Earth." Ethen was sure to correct every wrong Nehte had done. He recreated the planets and lives he had destroyed, and moved their dislocated populations back home. He revived his beloved wife, and together with her, could live in peace.

"I am Ethen Fox, the God of Gods..."

Chapter 9

Keyline

Winter – early year 38

I

     It has been roughly fourteen years since Ethen became the God of Gods. Seeing how unprofessionally the deities had set up the afterlife, the hierarchy of Gods, and the original universe, Ethen decided to improve on this and clarify things. He turned the original universe into its own official universe just for deities. It still acted as the afterlife did, where only deities even know of its existence. It became a thriving universe, with its own worlds; its own citizens, which were of course, the deities. He made this where their residence would be. Two sub-dimensions were created; all of heaven was moved to one, all of hell moved to the other. He didn't like the idea of it all being right next to each other, in the same universe. A third, small sub-dimension was created, which its only purpose was to be where the "God of Judgment" passed judgment on the spirits of the dead.

     The whole area was a bit more up to date now, not as archaic as it was before. It was an official city, complete with offices, streets, highways and skyscrapers. Everything wasn't just thrown about like before. In the heart of this universe stood the largest city, deemed the divine city, Welgaea. This was the main headquarters, where all the decisions were made. At the center of this city stood the largest building. In this building is where the Deity Council did business.

     Ethen also cleared up the hierarchy of power. The hierarchy was already well known, but Ethen decided it needed a little clarification since many were confused as to exactly where they stood. The God of Gods resided above all. Below him were the chief Gods of Light and Darkness. Below each of them were the individual Gods of Light and Darkness that resided over each universe. Also below them, and on par with the individual Gods, were the Warriors of Light and Darkness. These were more or less apprentices to the chief Gods, and were first in line to promotion should something happen to the chief God. On another branch was the Deity Council. The Council was under the chief Gods and God of Gods, but above everything else. It was designed to

work in Ethen's stead, since he preferred not to have such responsibility, yet still be below the top three, so there was a kind of inner-circle of power. Below the Diety Council was the array of Gods that ran maintenance on everything, primarily made of the residents of Welgaea. These were the Gods that kept everything running, and did all the paperwork, like the "God of Judgement."

Once content with this, Ethen continued his secluded life on Earth, yet still kept an eye on the events of the Omniverse. Both Ashley and Ethen are living happily, and since Ethen had granted Ashley with eternal life, neither of them has aged a day. He could not yet turn back time, but could override its progression. Ashley still appears to be 36 though she is actually 54. Ethen, on the other hand, appears to be 23, though he is 38. Their young daughter Faye is being home-schooled by Ashley and she is now seven years old. Ethen has decided to wait until she is at least 18 before he gives her eternal youth. As time went on, Ethen got more comfortable around Ashley. He never became certain, but determined that he was in it for good, and as much as he cared for her, he might as well do what a relationship does and enjoy doing it. As the two of them aged, yet didn't age, the confusion slowly left. The certainty never came, but Ethen no longer felt object to the idea.

At home, Ethen is walking about their house. He stepped into the kitchen, seeing Ashley sitting down at the table watching the little TV they have. Ethen took one step into the room, but something stopped him, it was as if he froze. He couldn't move; not even his eyes. Only by looking out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that Ashley wasn't moving either. Even the image on the TV had frozen. It would appear that time froze, and Ethen's consciousness is the only thing that didn't.

Ethen started to panic, *"Why didn't I see this coming!? I already know all that is going to happen, why didn't I sense this!?"* After a moment, time returned. Through his efforts to move, Ethen stumbled some when time returned.

"Ethen?" Ashley said, seeing him stumble. She got up and walked over to him, "Are you alright?"

Ethen got his bearings back and said, "Did that just happen to you too?"

"What do you mean?"

"Forget about it, you'd know if you had." He paused, "Wait a minute… there's a planet missing!" Ashley had a puzzled look on her face. Ethen promptly disappeared.

He reappeared in the middle of nowhere; there was only empty space around, nothing at all was here. Ethen took a quick glance around, and then focused his

attention on the area where a planet was supposed to be. He didn't know why it was gone, but he knew it was supposed to be there, so he held his hands out in front of himself. He paused for a moment then exhaled strongly as if he had been holding his breath. *"What's wrong? Why can't I recreate the planet? The only way something could stop me is if another being with a divine energy level equal to mine destroyed it and put a block on the planet. That can't be, though. I'm the only one left with a divine energy level at all, much less another equal to mine…"* There wasn't any information left for him to go on and he couldn't do anything else at the moment, so he decided to head home and let it work itself out in time.

The next day, Ethen was in their front yard, leaning back in one of the lawn chairs with his feet up on a table and watching the scenery. He noticed little Faye open the front door, looking outside and thought, *"Crap! I'm not supposed to have my feet on the table!"* he attempted to put his feet down, but just as his feet left the table time froze again. Everything was just as it was last time: everything froze except Ethen's mind. This time he was frozen balancing the chair on two legs. Knowing that there wasn't anything he could do, he relaxed and decided to wait this one out. Ethen was caught off-guard when time returned and the chair Ethen was leaning back in toppled over carrying him to the ground, "Whaa!" where he landed on his back with a crash. Little Faye quickly rushed over to him saying, "Daddy, are you okay?"

"Just lost my balance, don't you worry little Faye." He replied. He then got up and said, "Another planet's missing!" He disappeared and went to the place where the planet was. *"Just like last time, I can't recreate the planet… I'm just as stuck as I was before. Apparently the time freeze has something to do with the planet destruction, that's something… What else do I know? Wait, I get it, it's during the time freeze that the planet is destroyed. For that to be the case, since I can't move but my mind is awake, whoever this villain is, their divine energy level must be at two and a half. If it were three, my mind wouldn't be awake, and if it were two like mine, my body wouldn't freeze. I've figured that out, but I still don't know who is doing this… And how do you gain half a level? Divine energy just doesn't work that way."* He thought, then stopped and said, "No sense in worrying about it now, this can only reveal itself." Deciding to go home, he disappeared.

In the infinite speed that he was moving home in, just outside the planet, something else with infinite speed acted. Time froze again when he was just passing the

moon. He floated there motionless staring at the Earth waiting for the time to pass as it had before. This time, something happened. Unable to act, he watched as red-hot cracks spread about the Earth. They grew and expanded until the entire planet was glowing red, then in one brief moment; the Earth, his home, where his parents were, where Kara was, where his young daughter was, where his beloved wife Ashley was, where his life was; exploded. He was forced to watch as it was destroyed, as the explosion cleared, and as everything he knew faded into nothingness.

When the explosion cleared, time returned. Forgetting where he was going, it wasn't until he was on the other side of where the explosion was that he stopped. He turned around and stared at the void where the Earth was. "Mom, dad, Kara, Ashley, little Faye… They're all dead! All of them! Whoever you are, I'll find you! And when I do you'll wish you'd killed me too!" Tears ran down his face as he regained control of his rage. From here, he spoke normally, completely in control, but the entire time with tears still running down his face. "I have to kill it now. There isn't anything I can do, though. I'm just as stuck as I was before… There's only one thing I can do. I have to go to the Keyline, the creator of the Omniverse. It's pure divine energy; it's the only thing that could possibly have a divine energy level high enough to know what I should do next. I don't know how its divine energy could be any higher than mine is now, but it's my only chance…" At that, Ethen sniffed, wiped his eyes, and disappeared.

He reappeared in the original universe, the one from which all were born. He appeared in front of the Keyline in the blackness of space. When Ethen set up the original universe, he had made sure everything kept its distance from the Keyline, he wanted it to stay in its motherly position, not become something everybody stared at constantly and eventually began to disrespect. The Keyline before him now didn't look quite like he expected, though. The Keyline had always been a beam of energy that seemed to melt off into its surroundings. It was a golden yellow and was gentle on the eyes, pleasing to look at. What Ethen saw was very different. It was a dark purple and though still like a wave of energy it was very violent, it seemed it was barely holding itself together.

"What's wrong? Is there anything I can do to help? To fix this?" As Ethen was asking, and motioning his want to help, a leg-like energy tentacle extended from the Keyline. In one swoop it hit Ethen from behind and pushed him into the Keyline. Once Ethen entered the Keyline, he blacked out.

When he woke up later, he realized he was floating in an area that seemed to be the same dark energy that made up the Keyline. The energy went on for an eternity in all directions and there seemed to be a dark mist floating through as well. *"This must be a sub-dimension inside the Keyline. This isn't good, that means that I'm on its turf. And from the way it's acting it would appear that the Keyline was the source of all the troubles. The Keyline? The mother of the Omniverse is behind this? Something really is wrong here. I have to figure this out now at all costs."*

II

Ethen searched mentally for what he could, and sensed a large power a distance away, all he could do was fly towards it. He flew, and it took a minute or so, it was very far away. The clouds around him slowly became lighter in color, eventually turning to a bright yellow. The clouds were still so thick he could barely see his hand in front of him, though.

As he drew near the reading, he burst out of the clouds into a large, spherical opening. He looked around, inspecting the area, then towards the center of this area, and saw a woman floating there. She had short, jet-black hair, and dark gray skin. She was wearing what appeared to be dark-purple shorts, and a purple sleeveless shirt with a deep v-neck opening. She had an evil smile, one that made Ethen want to keep his distance from her. He knew she was the one that had done all of this.

As he floated up in front of her, she said, "You are in the way…" still with that smile… Her voice sounded familiar, but spoke in a harsh way, making it only sound evil.

"How so?" he responded angrily, floating up so he was across from her.

"The goal of all evil is not ruling or controlling, but destruction. I plan on destroying the whole of the Omniverse, but there's no way you would let me do that, now would you?"

"I don't get it! Why would the mother of the Omniverse want to destroy it!?"

"It's really too bad I must kill you, you really are handsome, just like she said…"

"What!? Who are you talking about!?" Without a moment's hesitation, from there, Ethen froze; time froze again, with Ethen's mind awake. This Dark Keyline charged at Ethen, and started beating him senseless. He could do nothing…

"No! She's half a level above me! But how do you gain half a level!?" She continued to attack, with nothing Ethen could do. *"I've got it! It's a simple concept, one of the most basic of fighting! Let your mind take over, you don't think about moving, you just move… I've become divine energy, it's all I am. I'm making it think in normal methods though, I'm not thinking with divine energy. It's not that she's half a level high, I'm half a level low!"*

Ethen closed his eyes… the Dark Keyline pulled back, and then swung full-force at Ethen. Just before the blow hit, Ethen's hand shot up and caught the fist. Ethen opened his eyes and showed an evil smile right back at her. His energy pulsed, and

threw her a distance away. She stopped herself, then looked at him and said, "So you've caught up? This may get interesting yet!"

Ethen went into a fighting stance, ready for her now, but surprisingly, she relaxed for a moment. She held one hand out in front of her and grasped. Quickly, like a growing crystal, a sword materialized in her hand, a long, pitch-black sword. *"What's she thinking?"* Ethen thought to himself as he formed an energy blade in his hand, *"A physical blade can't possess divine energy, and its power must have a set limit, it won't stand a chance against mine…"*

She charged at him and swung, Ethen swung as well, and their blades hit, but the Dark Keyline's blade cut cleanly through Ethen's, thankfully he was back far enough not to be hit. He backed off for a moment, "What just happened!? How did she do that!?" He looked at his own sword. Its tip regenerated itself. *"I get it… She crystallized her divine energy. That way it has the power of the divine energy, and the edge of a physical sword, which is now infinitely sharp…"* He turned around, looking up at her; she was apparently waiting for him. *"I don't know why, but she's giving me time, I have to figure out how she did that…"*

He held the sword out horizontally in front of him and closed his eyes. He rocked back and forth, reached up into the awesomeness above him, reaching into his own divine energy. His hand groped, disappeared; he watched it as it vanished. His fingers fumbled in empty space, a million miles into the emptiness, the hollowness above man... he continued to grope on and on, and then, abruptly, his fingers touched something. Touched, but did not grasp. *"I know it's there"* he thought, *"I can feel it."* He said aloud, "This is where the battle begins!" Into his empty hand was placed something hard and heavy. He grasped the handle; he could then feel the energy from his own body expand into the sword. He opened his eyes and the energy crystallized, forming a long sword. Its white blade was a good three feet long, and it had a golden-yellow handle. "I've reached the next step, and generated the divine sword, the Sword of Kether." He said as he pointed the blade towards her. He grabbed the hilt with both hands, and in what looked like a slight of hand, spread his arms apart, now holding a sword in each hand.

"Let's have some fun!" The two charged at each other and the swords clashed. They spun around and they clashed again. Ethen quickly redirected and swung up from below, She parried it and swung from the side. Ethen blocked, and then pushed her back, so she was farther away from him. He threw an energy ball at her, but slightly to

her right. Ethen flew towards her in an arc from her left. As expected, she dodged to the left, without looking, straight at Ethen.

He swung horizontally; she dodged somewhat, so it only cut her slightly, across the stomach, really nothing more than to put a rip across the entire front of her shirt. Unexpectedly, she quickly spun around, the torque ripping her shirt the rest of the way, so now skin from her rib cage to her waistband was now completely visible. This quick blow cut Ethen diagonally across the chest from his right shoulder, cutting his shirt as well, fraying the edges of his coat.

Ethen quickly regained control of himself, and swung from the left. She parried and swung from the right, Ethen swung as well, hard, hitting her blade, with the intent to push her back, not damaging her, which it did. Ethen formed several balls of energy, and threw them straight at her. She easily dodged them, but by then Ethen had formed about ten more and threw then in arcs towards her, confining her movement. She would have dodged backwards, but saw that Ethen had stopped the initial balls behind her, leaving her with nowhere to go.

With the ten new balls coming around her, and the old ones behind her, she could do nothing. Ethen charged straight towards her, in the center of the circle of the orbs he had just thrown. She thought quickly, and did what she could to parry Ethen's stabbing blade, but it still hit her left upper-arm good, leaving a deep gash, and clearly showing that she still had red blood.

His momentum threw him past her, and he turned around on her other side, having already made his own energy balls disappear. Though mostly unable to dodge, she had readied a counter-attack. Before Ethen had time to react, she fired a great blast. Ethen dodged to the lower left, but it still hit him. It disintegrated most of his shirt, but he had managed to only take a slight burn to his skin. Most of his shirt and coat gone, he grabbed what little was left and tore it off, tossing it aside. It would only get in the way.

The two floated apart from each other, ready. Again they charged at each other, but this time put much more force into this blow. Their swords impacted, and tried to overcome the other's. They tried hard, with all of their strength, and the small area on their swords where the blades were impacting turned red hot, actually discoloring. The blades cracked, and then all at once, they both completely shattered.

Not wasting a moment, the Dark Keyline threw a punch at Ethen, which he struggled to catch with his left hand. He quickly regenerated his sword, and cut her

horizontally across the chest, just above the breast. The cut spun her backwards, but she quickly regained control and stopped herself. Ethen noticed how her shirt was cut this time. It was cut horizontally, the entire way from the left shoulder to the right, disconnecting both "straps" that hung it up from her shoulders, essentially turning it into a tube top. It was at least a tight enough top to stay up, though.

She had quickly recreated her sword and charged at Ethen, who had recreated his second sword. He got ready to parry, but she quickly shot off to one side just before impact, the image of her disappearing. "An afterimage!?" He looked to his left, and she was about to land the blow. In an instant, he realized that the sword's weight lag would prevent him from parrying in time, and he couldn't dodge.

He let go of the swords, which due to the area stayed afloat where they were, and moved both hands up. He caught her blade between his palms, stopping it, but this was not a position he could hold for long, and the Dark Keyline knew that. She continued forcing the blade down, knowing Ethen would give soon.

While not taking his eyes off her, he focused his thoughts on one of his blades, floating beside him. Moving it slowly with his mind, he pointed it at her, and then at full speed, threw it towards her. This caught her completely off guard, slitting the right side of her abdomen, and forcing her to break the conflict.

As Ethen quickly dove across the arena and grabbed his swords, he thought, *"Curse my poor aiming, that could have ended it right there!"* Still without slowing down, they both spun around, to face each other, and without even righting themselves completely, they charged towards each other. This time not only did they put all their force into the one swing, but they expanded all of their energy into the blade so no matter the length, they wouldn't break.

Their blades impacted, and they both put everything they had into overcoming the other. They were yelling, blood pumped, muscles strained. Before long a great energy formed around the two of them, electricity started shooting in every direction; the entire area started shaking violently. The two of them lit off, their energy moving violently, their two auras shortly combined into one large white, violent orb encasing them both. Beams of energy shot out from this, shot out from them. Beams firing out quickly and often, there was a brief pause, and then one large beam fired out from the center, seemingly coming from each of them at the other.

When this energy cleared, all was calm. The two floated back to back, about twenty feet away. Ethen clenched in pain as his left arm floated by. The Dark Keyline

righted herself and turned around. She still had that evil smile, and began to laugh. She then paused and looked down at herself. A large white cut appeared across her chest diagonally. As she emitted one final scream, this cut ate away at her and disintegrated her completely. She had been defeated.

Ethen stood upright, with a relieved look on his face; he tilted his head backwards and exhaled. He pointed his left shoulder out to his side, and his arm regenerated. He healed the burns on his upper body, the internal injuries, and the cuts and severs about him. He cleared off the blood and dirt from the air and physical impacts. He regenerated his shirt and coat, fixing up his clothes so he was as good as new. This was not something he could do during battle, for it requires infinity to take over, which means not moving at an infinite speed. Moving out of infinity during a fight like that would be like stopping and not moving in the least for the rest of eternity.

He put his arm back to his side, and said to himself, "That entire time, one false move and that would have been it for me. Though much harder, at least that fight left me with more freedom than the fight with Nehte. If I hadn't tried to use the Tenbatsu technique on the sword I don't know if I would have won. As much time and effort as it takes, It's getting frustrating how little I can use it. Once I get home, even if it takes me a thousand years, I'm going to master that ability, and that estimate pry isn't far off..." he paused, "It's over, finally over… There shouldn't be anything left in the whole of the Omniverse that can prevent peace now, and that was the strongest evil yet preventing it, I'm really glad that's behind me." He slapped his face with both hands, and then punched straight up, "Alright! That means now I should be able to regenerate the planets; and Ashley as well!"

III

He turned around to see a woman, about 5' 2", almost angelic in appearance, with a familiar face and pleasing smile, with long, thick, unrestrained hair down to her feet, diving towards him with her arms extended. She threw her arms around his neck and hugged him. "Thank you…"

Ethen blushed somewhat, and stuttered, "W-what?" She was young, maybe nineteen, and short, she only came up to his shoulders, and unbearably cute.

"Oh, I'm sorry." She giggled. She smiled and let go of him, backing a foot or two away. "I am Fiona, the Light side of the Keyline."

"The Light side?"

"Just as every mind has two sides to it, so does the Keyline. That is how darkness came into being in the first place." She then smiled that cute smile again. "I can't express my gratefulness for destroying the Dark Keyline. The Omniverse has been generally peaceful up until now because I had been suppressing her. After so long, she built up enough power to take over…" She then looked down slightly, depressed.

Seeing this, Ethen couldn't help but think how cute she was. And at the same time, how familiar she was. Ethen put his hand on the top of her head in a consoling way, she smiled again at this, "It's no problem; I defeated her, so now all should be at peace. On top of that, her divine energy moved to me once she had died, my divine energy level moved up to three." He said to her with his eyes closed, and a bright smile on his own face. "The Omniverse is now at peace… I should be going now, I need to recreate those planets, and bring my wife back." He paused, *"The Deity Counsel is going to have a field day with this…"*

"I'm sorry, but… that's something you cannot do…" She said, looking sad.

"What? What can't I do?"

"You can't bring your dear wife back."

"Why not!?"

"She is already alive… kind of."

"Huh!? What!?"

"Um… Ashley… you see… is me."

"Ashley… is you? Ash… ley…" He paused, awestruck, looking at her. Even when they first met, he had never seen Ashley so young. *"If only she were a little younger, I would know how I feel in a heartbeat."* The thought returned to him from years past.

Looking at her… this was Ashley, his most beloved Ashley. All of his memories together with her raced by. In only a heartbeat, all doubt was gone, all confusion was gone. He grabbed her abruptly, wrapping his arms around her. He held her close, embracing her with his own heart. His eyes watered as he smiled. The happiest he had ever smiled. "Ashley… I do love you… I love you more than the world, more than life itself. Ashley, I… I…"

Fiona was surprised at first, but put her arms around him as well. The two floated there, in a loving embrace. Fiona was happy, smiling as brightly as she ever had. "Thank you, Ethen… Thank you…" They floated together for a moment, content simply holding each other. Fiona quietly said, "Ashley… couldn't remember anything before that cruise?"

"Um… yeah." Ethen responded.

"That is because… she did not exist before then. From the beginning of time, I could look forward in time, not because existence is predetermined, but because by examining even the smallest of details I knew which path would be taken at every fork in every road, everything can be judged with enough information." Her face was no longer happy, but solemn, and somewhat embarrassed, as if hoping that Ethen would approve of her. "I saw you that early on and… I fell in love with you…" she paused for a moment, it seemed as though she were about to cry. "When your time actually came, I wanted to be with you, be near you, but I cannot leave this place. I took part of my own spirit, and created Ashley." she paused, "Funny, huh? To think that the Keyline has a spirit as well." She smiled that cute smile, but still seemed to be about to cry.

"No! It's not funny at all! The spirit is what makes all things live! If you didn't have one, you wouldn't be alive!"

She wiped her eyes, "Yeah. You're right." She again smiled with that happy, cute smile. "I didn't mean for all of that to happen to her. I wiped her memory, so she could live happily without confusion, and gave her the name Ashley Nurse. I didn't know Jormungand was in that lake, and the Dark Keyline was already taking over, so I could only approximate the time and location to bring her into existence. I messed up… Since we are one, everything she saw or experienced, I did as well, and whatever happened to her, I experienced the trauma for as well." She squeezed Ethen tighter, "Though it let me be somewhat closer to you, it also made it worse, in that I was only looking through an extension, and not actually there." She paused, neither of them sure what to say, "Do you know where the name Ashley Nurse came from?"

"Um, no." Ethen said with interest.

"Ashley was the name of a girl you had a crush on in third grade. The only girl you ever had a crush on. She was quiet and cute, and always kept to herself. And you always thought of nurses as being very cute. I would have made it Librarian, but that doesn't make a very good last name." She smiled and giggled again.

Ethen blushed at this, just the thought of someone paying that much attention to him.

"Ashley had been killed before, but she went to the afterlife much like any other spirit. When the Dark Keyline killed her however, her spirit rejoined with mine, I only hoped we would finally meet, Ethen!"

Ethen smiled warmly to her.

"I would like to let you speak with Ashley again… but you already are… We have become one again. I know she is happy because we are one, and I am happy. I know I'm not exactly the same as her. The tragic event upon her creation made her much more open. I'm much more timid and shy than that…" She again looked somewhat sad.

Ethen put his hand on her head again, "Don't worry, that just makes you even cuter..."

"You mean… you don't disapprove of me?"

"You are my beloved Ashley; Fiona. How could I not." She smiled very warmly, and her eyes began to water. She squeezed Ethen as tightly as she could, resting her head on his chest, he felt her tears soak through his shirt. Ethen happily embraced her as well. He was finally at peace with himself. The two floated there for a moment in each other's arms, content simply being with each other.

She moved away from him, but only a foot or two, still holding onto Ethen's hands. She said, "Though I am the Light Keyline, I don't hold a position nearly as important as you. I may be the mother of the Omniverse, but you are its King."

"You keep order, and created everything as we know it. Everyone greatly respects you for that, more than they respect me. I am the God of Gods, the Omniverse's ruler, but if you are my dear Ashley…" he then put his hand on her head again, "Then I shall make you my Queen." He said with a smile. She smiled back at him, and he said, "Come on, then, we have a daughter waiting for us at home."

"I'm sorry, but I cannot leave this place. This great Keyline is a part of me, it would be like separating the mind from the body, and without me, this place would cease to live, it would send the Omniverse into peril…"

"That is a slight problem, then. Let's see how powerful I have become, now that I've gained this new divine energy. With it I should be able to overrule any divine energy, even one as strong as this Keyline." He put his hands on Fiona's arms, "If you wouldn't mind moving a bit of a distance away from me, this won't take but a moment, and I apologize if this startles you."

"Um, okay." She then floated away from him so they were about twenty feet apart.

"Thank you, this will be over shortly." Ethen then went into the standard crouching position to gather energy. Ethen did not need to do this; this could have all been done instantaneously, completely skipping the energy-gathering phase. Divine energy works under a different set of rules, and does not need to be gathered before use. It works under a different set of rules because normal energy is only contained within the body, and must be used by the body, but divine energy is the body. Ethen has no physical body or energy reserve; he is made up entirely of divine energy. It didn't immediately do this, however. After he defeated Ragnarok it was still only contained in his body, and after Nehte it was half and half. Ethen has mentioned that the reason he still does this is because, "This looks cool." Ethen has much more power than he often shows, simply because of that reason. After all, what's the point if it doesn't look good?

Ethen's muscles tightened as he started yelling and letting out a tremendous amount of energy. Energy started shooting around him in temporary arcs and the area began shaking. The entirety of Ethen's eye turned to a glowing white. He quieted his yell and stood upright, still with the energy and tremors, and pointed his right hand at Fiona.

She was not quite sure what to make of this, but in one quick burst, and a quick yell from Ethen, a wave of energy raced by her. She quickly closed her eyes, flinching, as a white light encompassed her.

Fiona was a little surprised, but nothing seemed to happen. She opened one of her eyes from her shocked position and saw she was outside of the Keyline. He had done it; he had gotten her out. She quickly looked at the Keyline, which was now back to its original calm, yellow color, to see a bulge coming from its top.

The bulge grew, and began splitting open on the sides. It was as though it were struggling to keep something inside. Through these growing splits on the sides, she could see Ethen forcing his way out.

In a flash, Ethen had outstretched his limbs and blew away the energy attempting to hold him in. Ethen did not look like normal, but was now showing what his

form was at this new divine energy level. His hair was silver in color, and long. It was wild and disheveled, and down to his knees. The pigment of his eyes was also silver. He now had a glowing yellow vertical halo behind his head as well. But by far the most extravagant change was that he now had six great angel wings coming from his back.

His form faded to his original body, and Fiona rushed over to him, again throwing her arms around him. "You did it!"

He embraced her as well, and said; "Now both of us are out, and can live in peace. You don't need to worry about the Keyline below us; the Omniverse can be left to grow and change on its own, and if anything needs to be done, I will do it myself, through that we can avoid turmoil. I left the Keyline there to serve as a figurehead, to show the mother of the Omniverse…" Just after he said this, Fiona looked up at him, smiling. She hopped up, kissing him, throwing her arms around his neck. They floated, kissing each other happily for a moment before they disappeared.

They reappeared in the universe home to Ethen, by where the Earth was supposed to be. The two let go of each other, and Fiona moved off to Ethen's left side. Ethen held his arms out to his sides, and pulsed. "There, all of the destroyed planets have been recreated." He then pointed his right hand forward, and the Earth appeared. He pointed his left hand forward and the moon appeared. With a quick flick of his wrist, the moon was sent in an orbit around the Earth once again, and with another flick of his right wrist, the Earth was sent back in its orbit around the sun.

He looked towards Fiona and said, "There, everything has been fixed, it's like nothing ever happened. Everything has been brought back, except Ashley." He put his hand on Fiona's shoulder and the two smiled, "-because she's right next to me. Let's go then, little Faye is waiting for us."

"Right!" she responded quietly, happily, but enthusiastically. And the two of them disappeared.

IV

The Deity Counsel is a group that Ethen set up to rule over the Omniverse. Since Ethen doesn't want such responsibility, just to live peacefully, it was set up to take his place. It consists of eight lesser Gods, the Gods that would normally rule over an individual universe. Ethen has become the God of Gods, directly under him would be the chief Gods of Light and Darkness. The chief God of Light would then rule over the individual Gods of Light that control each universe and the chief God of Darkness the same. What Ethen did was create the counsel that works directly under him and the two chief Gods, and rules over all, however it holds no ties to the Light or Dark side. It is on a separate branch than the Gods of Light and the Gods of Darkness, but presides over them. However, when Ethen intervenes, his word is law.

"This is getting really tiresome."

"All of this work we're getting in all points back to him."

"It would seem that the vast majority of the work we're getting in is because of Ethen." The eight members all sat at their table, in a large office building, in the heart of the divine city, Welgaea. They sat contemplating their newest problem. A secretary walked into the room and set a paper down in front of the presiding member. He picked it up and read it to himself.

"What is it this time?"

"Three planets were destroyed. No trace as to why."

"I'll bet this can be linked to Ethen as well…" The secretary came back in and set another sheet in front of him.

He read this one and said, "And now the three planets have been recreated. I'm going to die at an early age if this continues..."

"I understand he means well, and he always fixes everything that happens, but the chaos created as a result is unfathomable!"

"We get lawsuits and paperwork of every kind just because of him. If not for the trouble he causes, this job wouldn't be nearly as stressful."

"On top of that, he insists on living in seclusion. Since the majority of this deals with him, we must have his input to accomplish anything. He insists on living on some planet in the middle of nowhere, so we can't find him. We have to wait until he shows up here before we can do anything."

"So even more work piles up as we're forced to frantically grope about trying to get a hold of him."

"The work we have because of him is increasingly large; nothing here is nearly as troublesome as him." There was a brief moment of silence among the counsel as they all sighed.

The preceding member then came forward with something, "I have an idea. This will solve our problem with Ethen, and make it so we no longer need his appearance for such matters."

"You have? I'd like to hear this."

From there he reached forward and picked up the microphone in the center of the table. He pressed a button at its base where it connected to the table. Then pressed the button on the microphone itself with his thumb and spoke into it, "Attention all Deities and residents of the divine city, Welgaea. From this moment on, we, the Deity Counsel, will no longer be accepting any complaints concerning the Deity Ethen Fox. This is because from this moment on, Ethen Fox is classified as the first localized living disaster, proclaimed by the Deity Counsel. I'll repeat: Ethen Fox is now classified as the first localized living disaster, proclaimed by the Deity Counsel. Any affairs concerning him, from here on out, are now being classified as natural disasters, and will be dealt with accordingly. Thank You." From there, he went back to his chair and sat down, "There, that will solve that."

"The first localized living disaster, eh? This will solve our problem, and prove to be most interesting."

V

Back on Earth, Ethen and Fiona appeared in front of their house. Fiona was still clutching Ethen's right arm. He noticed she had a habit of grabbing onto him for security, even when nothing was wrong. To him, though, it just made him love her more. They stepped forward and opened the door. They saw little Faye there, in their kitchen/living room, watching their little TV. Kara was as well, leaning back with her feet up on the table. Kara waved as they came in. Faye turned and saw the two, then happily ran over to where they were standing, "You're home! But mommy changed, she looks a lot younger now." The two stepped inside and closed the door.

Though not embarrassed, Ethen smiled in an embarrassed way, and thought, *"I should probably explain what happened to her…"* before he could actually do anything, he sensed something, and came to attention.

"What is it, Ethen?" Fiona asked.

"I'm not sure, I'll be right back." From that he stepped outside and closed the door. He already knew what happened, so he was cautious as not to let them see what was just outside their door. He quickly closed the door, and stepped forward where a large chunk was missing out of the ground. It was like a crater, but more like someone had just gouged out a big hole with an ice cream scoop. He quickly corrected it, without any movement at all, and looked around for the cause. It had hidden itself, even from him, which means it is at least equal to him in terms of divine energy.

A black orb appeared in front of him, but it was half transparent. Within this orb, a white figure appeared. "The Dark Keyline…"

The figure, as transparent as the orb she was in, laughed, and then said, "I'm not done with you yet. Come fight me if you wish to stop me!" She began laughing again, as both the orb and her disappeared.

"I can't believe it. All I succeeded in doing was destroying her body. I was wondering why I only gained one divine energy level from killing her. Her spirit is still alive. As the Keyline, she doesn't go to an afterlife, she doesn't have the same limitations other spirits do. Her spirit will have all three energy levels at its disposal. The spirit needs a body to exist, though. If she has found a place where the spirit can exist without a body, then the Omniverse is in great peril." He paused, and then looked up at the sky, *"I know where she is, my connection to the Omniverse lets me know. Even if she is just as powerful as I am… I still only have a 50% chance of winning. The same as*

when fighting her before, and fighting Nehte. I've lived through too many fifty-fifty chances already. I don't think I'll live through this one…" At the very least he could follow and fight her. With this most recent divine energy level, Ethen no longer had a physical body, so to speak. He was the divine energy itself. It could be said all he was was energy, a spirit.

He turned around and went back into the house, with a very serious look on his normally happy face. He stepped inside and closed the door. "What was it Ethen?" Fiona asked.

"I'll tell you shortly, there is something I have to do first."

"Okay…" she replied, looking sad and very worried, also noticing his serious expression. He noticed Kara wasn't in the room anymore. Ethen quietly walked down to the lab.

He reached the lab, and walked up to the main screen. It turned itself on, and Kara's image appeared. She looked at him and said, "Ēs something wrong? You don't look vell."

"Kara, I must apologize for everything I put you through."

"Huh?"

"The torment of bringing you to a time when you're supposed to be dead. Being forced into the computer mainframe because I wasn't powerful enough."

"Vhät's thēs äboot Ethen? You know I don't cäre, äs long äs I cän be near you…"

"I've been able to do this for a while, but I never have." He raised his hand and snapped his fingers. There was a flash, and Kara was standing in front of him in her own flesh and blood body, she had been pulled from the computer. "I have been able to overrule time since I defeated Nehte."

"But Ethen, I prefer being ēn the computer, you dēdn't häve to do thēs, vhät vēth Äsh- er… Fionä, my häving ä body voold yust cäuse trooble."

"I am about to participate in a fight that I will not live through. I want you to live your own life, not hindered by me."

"Vhät!? Ethen, you cän't!"

"Goodbye, Kara, I wish you the best of luck." Before she could say another word he vanished.

He reappeared high in the sky, alongside Fiona. She was a bit shocked at the move, but understood what Ethen wanted. She asked what the matter was, and Ethen

put his hands on her arms. He said, "I'm sorry, but I wasn't able to kill the Dark Keyline completely."

"So she's still alive?"

"Only her spirit, but she has found a place where the spirit can exist without a body. Without the body as a hindrance, she is as strong, if not stronger than me. Nevertheless, I must attempt to kill her, or the whole Omniverse will be in peril. I've lived through too many fifty-fifty chances already; I will not come back from this alive. If nothing else, I will kill her along with myself, I will not let her live after defeating me. The power I gained from defeating her body is something I cannot describe; it has put me much closer to being absolute. If she kills me and gains my power, I am afraid she would be all-powerful, all knowing, omnipotent, absolute, with no rules or restrictions whatsoever. She wouldn't have to bother destroying the Omniverse; it would simply cease to exist. I will not let her defeat me, but I will not live. I'll take the middle road in the fifty-fifty chance, and destroy us both. I wanted you to know how much I love you, and that I will not be coming back. Please, could you explain what happened to little Faye? And explain that her father won't be coming back…"

She was already a little stunned by this, and she could do nothing. Ethen embraced her, and gently kissed her on the lips. He let go of her and took a few steps back, then disappeared.

Ethen appeared in a place that was nothing but gray. He could feel something odd below him, as though he were standing on the ground, but at the same time nothing at all. Before him was the Dark Keyline. She stared back at him with that same evil smile that she had before their first fight.

She began speaking, "Many people confuse universes with dimensions. They will call the individual universes where they all live dimensions. And they will call the five dimensions that govern the layout of the Omniverse universes. Many people will simply use the terms interchangeably. There is a difference. Dimensions are not universes. The first dimension holds only one degree, and can be portrayed as a line. The second dimension holds two, and can be shown with a square. The third dimension holds three attributes, and can be shown with a cube, this dimension shows all space. The fourth dimension holds another attribute, time. And the fifth holds a final dimension, the universes. Where we are now is the fifth dimension, we are currently standing in every location, at every moment in time, in every universe, all at once. This means that if I fire a beam in one direction, it will destroy everything that ever did, or will exist in that direction, in every universe, at once." She then held her arm up to her left and formed a ball of energy in her hand.

"No!" As Ethen dove towards her, he used his infinite speed. The scenery around them seemed to change, as though it had just been moving very fast and was now slowing down. It settled in a field, and time in it moved as though Ethen weren't using his infinite speed. He didn't pay this any mind, and barely noticed it. He dove forward and punched the Dark Keyline in the face, throwing her back. Just after it, Ethen formed a ball of energy in his left hand and attempted to throw it at her, but the second it left his hand it froze.

Ethen stood upright and moved out of infinity. The scenery sped up and moved back to a gray. The ball of energy then continued to fly, and Ethen canceled it out. The dark Keyline stood up and brushed her hand over the corner of her mouth, as though to wipe away blood.

"If you intend to use your infinite speed here, then you won't be able to do that. In this fight, we will be unable to use energy, swords, or even fly. Because these things are outside of our bodies, the moment they leave our energy reserves, they are acted upon by this dimension and cease to move or do any good at all for that matter. And I'm

sure you noticed the scenery change? To exist in all places and times at once, this dimension moves at an infinite speed as well, or at least that is how we perceive it, we, who aren't supposed to exist here to begin with. Once we speed up, we catch up to it, so to speak. On top of that, you will notice the scenery will change periodically once we are enveloped in it."

"So this is a straight-up fight, then." He looked purposeful, staring directly at the Dark Keyline, "This will finish it. There is no need for any conclusions or anything to wrap-up after this fight. This will end it; this fight will end it all. Come, I'll show you what the power of my will can do!" With one movement with his hand, he grabbed his white coat and pulled it off, tossing it to the side. They both moved into a fighting stance, and moved into infinity again. The scenery around them changed, shifted, to a set ground. From there, the two charged at each other and the fight began. The two traded blow for blow for a long time, and the fight continued, the two a perfectly even match.

Ethen threw a punch and the Dark Keyline back-stepped it. At that the scenery quickly shifted to another location, they were both now standing by a forest, on a small stream. Without loosing a beat in the fight, Ethen ran across the surface of the water to the Dark Keyline and continued to fight. Ethen grabbed the Dark Keyline and attempted to throw her to the ground. Halfway through the throw, the area changed again so that they were both standing on the surface of an ocean. Ethen threw the Dark Keyline into the water, and then dove down after her. This fight continued under water, until the scenery changed again, and the fight continued still.

At the Deity Counsel, they were just introducing the next subject for debate, but they were interrupted. Ethen and the Dark Keyline broke in through the window, destroying the wall and laying debris around the room. Ethen spun around and grabbed the Dark Keyline by the collar. He pushed her up and slammed her into the wall. He put a hold on her in just such a fashion as to immobilize her, Ethen could do nothing offensively, and this was not permanent, he knew his hold would break shortly.

While holding her up, Ethen turned his head towards the preceding member and yelled at him, "Why did you deem me a localized living disaster!?"

The member stood up from the floor, which all of the members were thrown to the floor and their chairs nearly crushed upon Ethen's arrival. He stuttered, "I-I'm really sorry, sir. But we had no choice. The amount of work we had to do was too much for us

to handle. Without your constant input, we could hardly get anything accomplished, since you were the cause of many of the issues."

"So you deem me a disaster!? Do you just view me as some kind of monster!? Just destroying things to make your job more difficult!? I'll have you know that I would much prefer to simply disappear from everyone's eyes, but the Omniverse is not so kind! If I didn't act, the whole of the Omniverse would have been destroyed a dozen times over! I'm not causing trouble because I want to! I'm only doing it because I must!"

The member seemed to relax some, as if he had just realized something very important that has lifted a great burden from him. "I'm truly sorry, I understand now. We only viewed you as a cause of trouble, and didn't realize what you were going through. I realize now, that you are here protecting us all. You are not a disaster; you are the Omniverse's savior."

"Thank you, I'm glad you understand I'm not just some monster." Ethen seemed to have calmed down.

"Would you mind if we kept the proclamation, though? It's only because of that that we can complete our jobs correctly. And it will keep you from having to busy yourself with these problems."

"I see. Sure, keep the proclamation." The moment he said that, the Dark Keyline broke free and punched Ethen square in the face, knocking him straight back through the floor, destroying the table in the center of the room, and then chased down after him.

"He is the Omniverse's hero. Even now, he's risking his life to keep everything at peace." He then smirked, "And we'll have to rebuild this room as a result."

The area changed again, and they found themselves on a maintenance platform high up inside the Tokyo Tower in Japan. Ethen punched, but the Dark Keyline parried it, and kicked from the side, Ethen jumped over it, but the Dark Keyline grabbed his foot and pulled him back down, slamming him into the ground. He pushed up, and managed to grab her collar, they stepped back a few steps, before the Dark Keyline flung Ethen to the ground again, breaking some thick wires, sparks and electricity shooting out everywhere.

Ethen kicked her in the stomach, pushing her over his head, and off the end of the tower. Through the air, the scenery changed again, to where Ethen's head was off

the edge of a small cliff about fifteen off the ground, and about thirty from where the Dark Keyline landed.

The ground under Ethen gave way and he fell down, he covered his head to brace for the impact. Just after landing he opened his eyes and saw the Dark Keyline charging towards him. He quickly pushed off the ground and flew in an arc so as to land behind her. She had already turned around, Ethen landed and the two charged towards each other. Their fists collided, and Ethen went on the offensive, but was blocked by the Dark Keyline, who counter-attacked.

Back at his house, standing out in the front yard, Fiona had explained everything to little Faye. However, she had faith in Ethen, and she expressed that faith to little Faye. Kara raced out the front door. "Ēs Ethen stēll here!?"

"No, I'm sorry. He left already to fight, but he'll come back. I know he will." Fiona then looked up at the sky, and said to Ethen, "The odds of you winning three fifty-fifty chances in a row are one in eight, but you just have to remember that regardless of the previous fights, you still have a 50% chance of winning this. Come on home, Ethen. Everyone's waiting for you…"

The two were fighting in a forest now, the Dark Keyline lunged at Ethen, but he sidestepped. She quickly swung sideways at him, which he ducked, moving into a back-handspring to gain some distance so the aggressor could be redetermined. She charged at him, and he parried. He attacked and she parried. She kicked from the right, and Ethen ducked, moving into a trip, which she jumped over. She tried another kick while still in the air. Ethen blocked, which pushed him sideways some, but he stood up and threw a punch as she landed. She parried as she landed and threw another punch. Ethen blocked and kicked from the left. She blocked and it pushed her back some. Ethen charged, not letting there be any distance between them, and the environment changed.

It changed quickly. The Dark Keyline threw a hard punch, and Ethen blocked, but it pushed him through the wall of the building they were by. Ethen flew into a classroom, over the desks, and into the opposite wall. All of the students yelled and gasped. The Dark Keyline flew in and attacked again. Ethen blocked, and then punched hard from the left. This threw the Dark Keyline through another wall, and pushed Ethen sideways some, so he was on the opposite side of the room. Ethen quickly stopped

himself, and ran across the desktops towards the hole he had knocked the Dark Keyline through. They were in another classroom, and without slowing down the two charged at each other. The environment then changed again.

This time they appeared on an alien planet, atop a large mushroom, five stories high. The two punched, and hit each other cleanly in the face, but this did not slow them down, they quickly recovered and continued. They continued fighting there, and at the next location, and the next, for a long time. These two did nothing but fight, and this fight lasted, for them, minutes, hours, and days. They did nothing but fight for days on end.

They eventually wore each other down. They were losing strength, and were barely able to fight. They were in a dark, gloomy area. They were both on a platform that appeared to act as a lift. Ethen did what he could to throw a punch at the Dark Keyline, but he was tired. She managed to dodge to the side, but she was obviously tired as well. They both stumbled backwards and collapsed against the two raised control consoles. They were both breathing very hard, and were having trouble catching their breath.

The Dark Keyline thought, *"This isn't good, that punch just grazed me, but it knocked me off balance. I can't even defend myself now; if he attacks I'm dead."*

Ethen then thought similarly, *"Just throwing that punch knocked me down, my vision's going blurry, and I can't even get up. There's nothing I could do about it if she attacked now."*

They both sat there, the consoles supporting their weight, panting, and staring at each other, trying to figure out what to do next. The lift started, and it began moving them up. Ethen thought, *"As soon as this lift reaches the top, I'm going to attack."* The lift moved up, not terribly fast, which was good for the both of them. It also went a long way, it was taking them up very high, and neither of them had the energy to look up to see where the top was.

The lift reached the top; it had taken them to the roof of a structure shaped like a flying saucer on top of a tall tower. The metal forming this saucer was wet, as though it had rained, but it wasn't raining now. They were high in the stratosphere; there was a thick layer of dark cloud above and below them, and nothing could be seen past it. There was a lightning storm going on, and they were gifted with the sound of thunder crashing quite often. This was obviously not a pleasant place; it was almost evil. When the platform reached the top, it became flesh with the rest of the slick roof. The two

consoles began lowering to the ground, and Ethen forced himself up, thinking, *"Here goes nothing…"*

"Blast, he's getting up." And the Dark Keyline forced herself up as well. Ethen's hand ran along the wet metal as he stood up, and the two were upright. They began slowly circling each other. The consoles lowered to the ground, becoming flesh with it as well. There were now no obstacles protruding from the roof. The two completed a half-circle, and at the same time, they both snapped.

The two charged towards each other. Ethen punched the Dark Keyline. The Dark Keyline punched Ethen. The Dark Keyline parried Ethen's punch, and Ethen caught her punch. He held it still, and the two pulled back their free hands.

"This is it."

"I'm putting all my strength-"

"Into this one-"

"blow!"

They both swung with everything they had, forgetting everything else. Every moment collapsed into that one blow, those two fists. This was for everything. The two fists both hit their mark head-on. There was no defense; they both hit full force. Ethen's grasp on the Dark Keyline's fist released as the two were flung backwards. They both slowly went down, and the environment slowly changed. The area changed to a great field. There was a bright blue, cloudless sky, and nothing but flowers stretching to the horizon, the world's most beautiful flowers.

The two landed, and all was quiet. Neither stirred. The lack of movement fit with the peace of the scene. Ethen's leg twitched. He brought up his legs, and forced himself upright. He attempted to stand, but fell backwards. He attempted again, and managed to right himself. Ethen stood; he had stood up.

"I… won?"

He completely righted himself, tilted his head back and smiled a tired, truly happy smile. He took a deep breath, then exhaled strongly.

"I've won…"

He had a most genuine expression of happiness on his face. An expression of great relief. He looked back and forth, taking in such a grand sight. He then looked up, at the beautiful, cloudless sky. At such a beautiful scene.

Chapter 10
Knockin' on Heaven's Door

Note: A lot has happened between this chapter and the previous that I'm yet to explain anywhere at all. Once the Lost Chapters and the RPG are finished much of this will make more sense. Enjoy the finale; this is the end, the last of my book, the end of the story.

Ethen has been the God of Gods, with omnipotent power, with his beloved wife Fiona at his side for more than a hundred thousand years. Due to Ethen's actions, the Omniverse has nearly reached a state of absolute peace and goodwill. One by one over these past hundred thousand years, Ethen has been influencing lives and purging the Omniverse of evil. Due to his actions the Omniverse has also become more aware of the Gods' existence. They still know and understand next to nothing, but they know it's there, and they know Ethen leads them and the move for peace. Ethen stopped it at that, he preferred the normal residents know nothing more than this.

After so long, Ethen has finally come so near to reaching his goal of absolute peace and goodwill. Over the past few years he has even begun to relax. He had not worn his white divine coat recently either, though he still wore the outfit he had under his coat. This being his dark blue vest, darker blue pants, and brown dress shoes. Tonight was a special night. After a hundred thousand years, this was the first night Ethen had actually gone to sleep. He had become relaxed enough in recent years that this night he actually let his consciousness shut down and truly rest, for the first time in a hundred thousand years. For a single night, Ethen slept. For a single night, the Omniverse went unguarded.

That night, the moment Ethen had fallen asleep, the moment he had drifted into unconsciousness, they made their move. Every God of Darkness in every universe across the whole of the Omniverse acted. They all led a preemptive strike. Completely unanticipated, every God of Light and resident of Welgaea was killed, and the Deity Council destroyed. In a matter of minutes it was over. There was nothing left of the Light except rubble and corpses.

Ethen awoke partway through the night in a cold sweat. He knew something was wrong and quickly got out of bed. The moment he stood up he was no longer wearing the boxers and tank top he slept in, but his familiar blue vested outfit. As he stepped out of the bedroom he saw a red glow coming from outside. He quickly opened the front door and looked to see what it was. The entire forest they lived in had been set ablaze. He slowly took a few steps outside, shocked, before he heard a voice.

It was a long, drawn out, maniacal laugh. Just as it quieted Fiona stepped outside, still wearing the panties and large white button shirt she slept in. Ethen knew she was there, but the voice spoke before he could do anything. "It's been a long time, Ethen..."

Ethen recognized the voice immediately. He fell to his knees, then forward to his hands in shock. Fiona raced out to him. She kneeled down and put her arms around him, embracing him, trying to comfort him any way she could. Ethen muttered beneath his breath, "Nehte..."

Ethen could feel the emptiness in the Omniverse. He knew every God of Light had been killed. He was the only being left with any real power fighting for Light. There was nothing left, nothing. Ethen was alone. He never thought the era he had built over so long could be destroyed leaving absolutely nothing in a single night. Leaving only Ethen and an overwhelming evil. "We have a score to settle... I'll be waiting for you in the fifth dimension. It'll be... nostalgic." He began to laugh again, his voice slowly fading out until he could no longer be heard. Ethen stayed still, embraced by Fiona. Rage grew within him. Purpose.

"No…" Fiona looked and saw that Ethen wasn't depressed or hurt. He was angry. Ethen pulled himself to his feet with renewed determination. Instantly the fire went out, leaving only a charred forest left behind. "I don't care what happens. I don't care what he does. No matter the odds, I will stop him and set everything right. I don't care if I *am* the only light God left." He paused, thinking. *"Nehte must have been planning this coup since I killed him so very long ago. No, before that. I would have noticed if he had done anything since then. At the time I remember him saying I hadn't bothered dealing with the Light Gods. Could he really have anticipated and planned for this even then? He had one level of divine energy then, but since his body no longer exists he would be at two. Since he killed all the Gods of Light while I was asleep, I was not conscious to accept their energy. What divine energy all of them had would put him*

at three. At three levels, he brought himself back to life, but since he's in the fifth dimension he's still just as powerful. He also has an army, infinitely large, of Gods of Darkness. He gave up a single energy level to give all of them a kind of fake divine energy level. Each of them has the power of a full level, but there's only one collective level of energy between them. I didn't think any of them were capable of this. I don't know how Nehte persuaded them to do this. He thought this through to the smallest detail... Since they all have one level, I can't simply smite them from the Omniverse. I would have to move into infinity and kill them personally, but since there are an infinite number of them I would never kill them all. Since I would never leave infinity, time would compress. The Omniverse would end, just like that. He's certainly backed me into a corner…"

Fiona put her arms around him and gently put her face against his back. "My dearest Ethen. I love you so very much. I have been by your side for so very long, and have seen you through so many troubles. You have seen every one of them to its conclusion. Everything you've done has turned out better than we could have hoped. You're stronger than you think. No one else would have been able to do what you have done for everyone. The Omniverse needs you one more time; I need you one more time. We need you to do what only you have ever been able to do. You can do it, I know you can." He turned around, embracing her, calmly holding her for a moment.

With a purposeful look, as he gazed slightly upward into the morning sky the entire forest was reborn, as beautiful as ever. "Thank you... my most beloved Fiona." He was calm, collected. He was stronger, confident. He was Ethen Fox. "There is still a way. I need an army of my own, meet him head-on, and then we'll have a chance. With all the Gods of Light gone, there's only one way I can think of to make an army equal to his. I'm going to have to ask for help." Ethen turned and walked into his house with power and purpose in his steps, Fiona following, quickly getting dressed as they passed through their bedroom and went down into the lab.

Over the years Ethen had added more and more to the lab. It was easily its own complex now. One of the more prominent things he had done was attach it to its own sub-dimension. This sub-dimension consisted entirely of an outdoor field. A grassy field, a forest, a mountain, a lake, wildlife everywhere. It was the size of a small planet, and of the utmost beauty. It was here that he personally brought honorable souls when they passed on. A good soul went to heaven, but Ethen hand-picked very tragic deaths, and honorable lives. Beings that he thought had earned, or deserved an eternity in paradise.

Not just humans, but beings from across the Omniverse. There were more non-humanoids than there were humanoids. There were giants, there were dragons, there were aquatics, every conceivable being there was. The cream of the crop, the best of the best.

They made their way to paradise, and as they entered Ethen sent out a message to everyone there. *"Gather together, everyone. I have something important to say."* Ethen enjoyed a good challenge, so he would make the most of this.

One by one, they all came. They gathered in a massive grass basin, over a mile across, with Ethen at its center. It filled up completely and you couldn't even make people out at the far edges. As many people as there were, they came and gathered surprisingly fast. They must have realized the importance of this; since they knew Ethen had never done this before. Ethen had even called little Faye to come as well. He wouldn't let her participate, but he wanted her to know the situation. Ethen knew exactly how many there were here, and was glad they all came. "There are so many..." Fiona said in amazement. She knew Ethen was always bringing more honorable souls here, but she had never bothered to count.

"Seven hundred forty two thousand, three hundred ninety six to be exact." Ethen said this slightly smiling, but he couldn't get much pleasure out of it knowing the situation. Before he began, someone stepped forward from the crowd, "Ortega!?" Ethen shouted, "Ortega! You're alive!?" Ortega walked over to Ethen, a pained look on his face. Ortega lived in Welgaea with his wife Skye, and two children. Ethen knew what happened to Welgaea, and was shocked to see him. Many years ago Ethen and Ortega met. They had quite the adventure together. They were the best of friends. They were so close they were almost family.

"Yeah... I wasn't in Welgaea when they attacked. I came back to a sea of blood and corpses. Everyone was dead. They killed everyone... they killed... Those bastards killed Skye! They killed my...!" Ethen could see both the rage and great sorrow in him. Hearing this news, Ethen grew angrier as well.

"They'll pay for this mistake, I guarantee it."

"It was all I could do to stop myself from going against that army on my own and getting myself killed. I hid myself and made my way here, to ask for your help, but..." he turned and looked at all the people there, "it seems you're already making a move."

"I'd never let something like this go unpunished, especially after they've taken your family from you. They'll regret this."

"Thanks. They'll pay for this. I'll give my very life to be sure of that!"

Watching the crowd, Ethen noticed they were all ready, so he began, projecting his voice out to even the far corners, "Everyone, I've brought you all here because I have something very important to tell you. In the time all of you have been here, I have avoided influencing your lives or asking anything of you. I've intended for all of you to live your lives as you see fit. I regret to say I have to break this pattern. I've come here today to ask for your assistance. Nehte has returned. Some of you may know about him." There were some gasps and some murmuring among the crowd. "He has amassed an army of Gods of Darkness, all with divine energy. This is the apocalypse; the end of the Omniverse is here. They all sit perched, waiting to begin their onslaught, wiping the Omniverse clean in a sea of red. I cannot fight against this force on my own. I have come to ask all of you to be my army. This will be a long and trying war. I do not expect all of you to be willing to participate. You all are free to stay here; this is only a request. I need as much help as I can get. Nehte's army is infinitely large, all made up of different beings. I may be able to make an army out of a single person, but with no variety it will be easy to outthink and defeat. The more people I can get to assist me the stronger we will be. If anyone is unwilling to come, I suggest you leave now. The events I will speak of will only trouble you more if you stay. I understand many of you are not fighters, many of you have much to live for, and I cannot guarantee your survival. There will be no harsh feelings or ill will if you do not come. As I said before, this is only a request."

The murmuring was gone, and Ethen stood silent, clearly waiting. Everyone stood still a moment before Catherine spoke up, the very first person Ethen brought to paradise, "I may not be a fighter, but you brought me here after saving me from a horrible death. I owe you my life, so it's only right should you need it I give it to you. There has to be some way I can help you, and I can guarantee I'll be right there giving my all for you." The whole group started an uproar, declaring their loyalty and respect for Ethen. Not one person left, they were all determined to come, Ethen couldn't convince them otherwise if he wanted to.

"Thank you..." Ethen said, bowing to them all. He stood upright, crossed his arms, "Now we have to talk strategy." The crowd grew quiet, listening to his every word. "I may possess the power to kill Nehte easily right now, but I cannot touch him. He's the only one keeping that army in check. He's waiting for us, and should I kill Nehte, they would all move, starting the apocalypse, which is not an option. This must be stopped,

however. Though Nehte is not pure evil, in many ways he is worse than pure evil. Pure evil's ultimate goal is nonexistence. It would be content with having the Omniverse cease to exist. Nehte has the same goal, but a different means of getting there. Since he possesses some light, he understands it, instead of working only for evil. He gets enjoyment out of death and destruction because he understands our appreciation for life. He would be sure that every person would suffer a long and painful death, and would drag out the apocalypse as long as possible. He thought this plan out well, the only way for us to counter him is to match him on even ground."

Ethen paused, partly to gather his thoughts, partly to catch his breath. "First and foremost we have to match his army in size and strength. This means I will be giving all of you a divine energy level, and making an infinite number of copies of each of you. However, this universe has a set size, and could not hold everyone, so I will be doing that last. When I make the copies, I will put one copy of everybody in each universe. Take note of what universe you arrive in, I will be referring to squads grouped by universe. We cannot speak much about strategy at the moment, since we know nothing about the battlefield, Nehte's formation, or strategy, or if he even has either at all. When we arrive in the fifth dimension, I will immediately give orders to counter what I learn."

Again, he paused. Ethen has a habit of rambling on, spewing forth unnecessary information. He knew this, and started to think he had said too much. So he got to the point. "Now then... If everybody is ready, I'll commence with the empowerment and move out. As I said before, many of you are not fighters, but the power you gain will reflect your personality and capabilities. Do not fight it. There are a large variety of people here, and you will be able to cover each other's weaknesses. I apologize for that long-winded speech, I'll begin." He then said quietly to himself, "Since none of you possess any divine energy at all, I'll have to give up two of my own levels to bring you all to one."

He held his hands out in front of him, palms toward the crowd. His eyes were closed, concentrating. After a moment a great power ran through everyone. Everybody gasped with this newfound strength coursing through them. No sooner did this happen then what appeared to be black electricity shot through Ethen's body. He clutched his chest and fell over in pain, yelling out. He slowly brought himself to a kneeling position, still clutching his chest, sweating and panting. Fiona rushed over to him, grabbing his arm. He looked towards her to see a pleading, desperate look on her face. Not looking

directly at her, and thinking out loud, he gasped, "Is that... really what... it feels like... to give up... divine energy...?"

"Are you alright!?" Fiona asked with great concern.

"Yeah, I'm fine." He stood up, the determined expression back, "But that was rather unpleasant. Not something I would wish for another to go through." Fiona took a step away as he turned back to his army and projected his voice out to them, though obviously still feeling some pain from the electricity, "As you have noticed, I have given you all some of my power. With this, we are now on even ground with Nehte's army. If all of you are ready, all that's left is to make copies of you and move out. Since you will be spread about all of the universes, feel free to speak with any loved ones before you go. When you're done, come to the universal origin point. There, I will have created a portal to the fifth dimension. It will be planet sized and you will be able to see inside it to the center of the fifth dimension where Nehte is. It's hard to miss." He paused, changing his thought, "You may be thinking that Nehte has the advantage. That he has diversity and experience we do not. Don't be mistaken. Many of the Gods of Darkness are just as inexperienced as many of you. We are on almost equal ground." He paused again, "Is everybody ready?"

Ethen looked through the crowd to see many people nodding. Nobody objected, they all stood still. "Okay, then, let's move out." He once again held his arms out in front of him and muttered beneath his breath, "I have to give up another level to make an infinite number of copies. I only hope everything will be all right with me a level below Nehte." He hadn't intended her to, but Fiona heard him say this.

She rushed to him, grabbing his extended arms and forcing them down, looking into Ethen's eyes with a desperate look. Ethen opened his eyes in surprise to see this look. She pleaded almost commandingly, "You can't!"

Ethen relaxed some from the surprised look he had and put his hands on her shoulders. "I don't have any other choice."

"I'll do it, then!" her eyes were beginning to water.

"I won't let you do that. This is a horribly painful process I would never wish upon you. Above that you would be at a single level. You'd be too vulnerable, and I could never allow any harm to come to you."

"But if you do it yourself, you'll surely die!" A tear ran down her cheek. This tear pierced Ethen's heart. He quickly embraced her, holding her close.

"If I am causing you so much pain, then okay, if you feel that strongly."

"Thank you, my dearest Ethen." She put her arms around him as well. She felt safe there, like nothing could ever happen to her while in Ethen's arms. She squeezed tighter as the black electricity ran through her. They both closed their eyes, and Ethen squeezed tighter as well, trying to shoulder as much of the pain as he could. He could feel the energy running through their bodies. The energy cleared and they both stood, still embracing each other. After a moment, Ethen heard Fiona say, "Um... Ethen? I... I can't breath."

He quickly let go; he had nearly been smothering her. They both looked at each other smiling, and then began to laugh. Ethen stopped, bringing his attention back to the matter at hand. Nobody was left in paradise but he and his beloved Fiona. The movement had begun. "It's started. There's no turning back now." He turned his back to her, "I'm going. I'd offer some last words, but this isn't it. I swear I'll come back to you."

He took a step away from her and was about to disappear, but nearly stumbled when he heard her say, "I'm coming too."

"What!?" he proclaimed, almost comically.

"I'm coming too. All I've ever been is a burden to you. So many times now you've been through pains and trials because of me. So many times you've struggled and had to fight because of me. I want to repay you for all you've done. Whether you want me to or not, I'm coming. I... I want to be useful to you..." She looked sad, as though she were about to cry again. Ethen walked back to her and put his arms around her again.

"I can't argue with that... It would only pain you more. Come, we'll put an end to this together." She buried herself in him, smiling that cute, innocent smile, and crying tears of happiness. Together, the two of them disappeared. Destined for the battlefield of the fifth dimension.

Across the whole of the Omniverse, lights were seen shooting across the sky and through space. It was said that these lights were people. Gods, legends, friends and relatives long thought dead. The residents grew worried and anxious about this. They followed the lights deep into space, curious as to what such an omen would bring with it. They found all the lights had gathered at a single point. A point where a new, mysterious object had appeared: a monstrous portal. Inside was a massive plain, with a fissure splitting it, horizon to horizon. On one side a barren wasteland and dark sky. And an army. An army of evil. On the other a glorious meadow and bright sky. Approaching this army was a single man. They knew him. It was Chronos the Squall, Ethen Fox, come to

combat the darkness. Behind him others approached. Honorable souls, legendary beings, warriors from beyond. This was a war between the forces of light and darkness. They were all watching; firsthand, television, radio, telescopes, clairvoyance; they were all watching. The Omniverse grew quiet with anticipation, they knew the apocalypse had come, and Ethen was the only one who could stop it.

Nehte stood at the front of his army, on the edge of the fissure. His army stood behind him in no particular formation, just lined up along the edge, stretching to all three horizons that side of the fissure. A distance away, Ethen could be seen walking towards him, Fiona not far behind. One by one others appeared behind him until there was another army stretching the other three horizons, making its way to Nehte. On arrival, Ethen gave orders for everybody to line up as Nehte had, with Ethen at the forefront. As he walked, he took notice of the environment and thought, *"The fifth dimension takes on a form reflecting the wills of those within it. Last time it was only the Dark Keyline and I. Understanding little, my will didn't influence it, but she was the Keyline after all. The dimension reflected her will, how the Keyline is constantly watching over and keeping in mind all aspects of the Omniverse. That's also why it moved at the same speed as her. There are so many wills in this dimension now; the only thing emerging from it is light against darkness. And the dimension reflects that. Divine energy works differently here as well, since it's above time and space. I can easily kill someone with one level, but there's no such thing as infinite speed or strength here. We'll all be fighting together, regardless of power."* Deep down, part of Ethen was happy. Ethen is a fighter after all, and it had been over a hundred-thousand years since his last serious battle. He finally had the opportunity to cut loose again without worrying about restraint. He could finally let out all the stress that's been building up all this time. It felt good to have the opportunity to let it all flow. Especially that he gets to cut loose on Nehte of all people.

They made their way to the side of the fissure and lined up opposite Nehte. It was silent. Ethen stood out front, all of them staring down the other army. Nehte and Ethen boring into each other's soul with their eyes. They knew the entire Omniverse was watching breathlessly. The final war was beginning, prone before all of the Omniverse.

At Ethen's house, little Faye sat on her bed in her bedroom, her husband Hibiki at her side, both watching on her television. Faye leaned forward, making a fist, her eyes glued to the screen. "Get 'em dad."

The two stood facing each other, Nehte smiling that evil smile Ethen hated. "I've been waiting a long time for this, Ethen."

"Don't underestimate me, Nehte. I'm not the naive boy I was last time we fought." In a flash of light and a wind that seemed to single Ethen out, he was once again wearing his white divine coat. He was reborn as himself. Ethen had indeed changed. He was no longer the inexperienced boy of old. What he needed was something that reflected who he really was: the God of Gods. It was about time he stopped limiting his own powers, hiding information from himself. It was time he truly accepted his power, and used it to the fullest of its capabilities.

"It would appear you *have* gained a bit of experience since then." Nehte said sarcastically, almost laughing.

"That's a serious understatement." They stood silent again. They had nothing to say to each other and wanted nothing more than to rip each other's throat out, yet both were hesitant to start. Many times in the past Ethen had faced an opponent that he wanted revenge on, or wanted to punish. An evil opponent that need be destroyed to save lives, or to avenge a great loss. However, this is the first opponent Ethen personally hated. He truly hated Nehte with all his being. "Let's go!"

The two armies charged each other, disappearing into the other, surrounding the two in chaos. The sound of war encompassing them, Ethen and Nehte stood still, staring at each other until they could no longer see each other through the fighting. Ethen could see various airborne troops fly through the air above him, laying siege to the enemy from above until they were intercepted by Nehte's own aerial force. The war surrounded them, even engulfing the sky. With Nehte out of sight Ethen changed his focus to the war. His two bayonets shot out from his sleeves into his hands. Since fighting the Dark Keyline, Ethen has refined his abilities, and remodeled the Kether swords into long bayonets. He swung them to each side, killing two Gods of Darkness. He spun around, killing another two. He saw Kara just to his right struggling to hold a God back. He quickly dashed over and killed it, freeing her, then rushed on into the crowd. He constantly monitored the situation on a large scale and gave out orders to everyone mentally. Backup, first aid, whatever one squad had that another needed. Moving them about strategically, waging a hundred wars simultaneously.

For days the war raged. Neither side decisively stronger than the other, but Ethen's forces had been pushed back to the grassy side of the fissure. If things continued as they did, the Light would surely lose. Ethen grew angrier with each passing minute; he had seen his friends killed before his eyes a hundred times over. *"If we're going to have any chance of winning, I have to kill Nehte. I lost track of him a while back in this chaos. I've got to find him again. I was separated from Fiona as well, I have to get back to her; I'm scared something might happen to her."* Ethen could tell where everyone was for the most part, but Nehte's higher divine energy hid him. Fiona had given up a level, but it was only the raw power that was given up. As such, her position was also hidden. He continued giving orders to his troops, trying his best to keep everyone alive. Not another moment later though, Ethen heard something that terrified him to the very core of his being.

A scream, an ear piercing scream. Ethen froze dead in his tracks. His eyes got wide and a single tear ran down his face. Even among the sounds of war, Ethen heard the scream as clear as day. It was Fiona, something had happened to his beloved wife. Completely ignoring what he had been doing, he rushed towards the scream, tearing through, pushing or killing anyone who stood in his way. He came through to see her lying on her back. Nobody was too close to her, to them she was just another corpse, and even in war nobody liked stepping on a corpse. Ethen rushed over and kneeled down next to her taking her in his arms. There was a hole in her chest just above her left breast, and blood trickling from the corner of her mouth.

She slowly turned her head so she could see Ethen. She looked at him and smiled a sad, painful smile. She had a blank gaze, as though she were already dead. Even now, she was still Fiona; she was still his shy, cheerful, optimistic, beloved wife. "I'm glad... that I can see you... one last time... my dearest Ethen..." She struggled to say it; it must have hurt greatly just to speak.

Ethen was openly crying as he said, "Don't talk like that Fiona, you'll be fine! Everything's going to be fine! Just hold on, Fiona. We'll get you healed up as good as new. I'll always be here with you, together with you forever!" He was trying to hide the obvious truth, even from himself. "This is all my fault. I never deserved to have someone like you. I couldn't even protect you at a time like this!"

"It's I who doesn't deserve you, my dearest... This isn't your fault at all... This was unavoidable... no, I'm the one to blame... I'm so happy I fell in love with you... I'm happy for all the time we spent together... Goodbye... my dearest... most beloved

Ethen... I will always... love you..." She closed her eyes, and her body relaxed. Even now she was still smiling that cute, innocent smile.

Almost hysterical, Ethen said, "Fiona? Come on, Fiona, open your eyes!" Ethen was crying uncontrollably, he couldn't believe this. "...Fiona? Fiona!?..." He was silent as no answer came. Ethen lowered his head and gently set her on the ground. Ethen's tears were still flowing freely, but his bawling had stopped. He diverted his emotion to anger. Ethen stood up quickly, tilting his head back and screaming at the top of his lungs, "*FIONA~!*"

His scream had so much emotion behind it, so much love and hatred that the war stopped dead in its tracks. It froze. Nowhere was a word uttered. Nowhere did a sword swing or first fly. Everybody just stopped, paralyzed by the sound. Just as everybody began looking towards Ethen, a column of white energy a good twenty feet across erupted from the ground around Ethen, disappearing far into the sky and obliterating anything within it instantly.

The white light quickly cleared, and everybody looked at Ethen, standing over the body of his beloved wife. The look of anger on his face struck fear into anyone who could see it, and immediately people in the crowd began shouting at each other things like, "Who the hell killed Fiona!?" and "Whoever screwed up just doomed us all!" The sky had become dark. Lightning struck near Ethen. The air became humid and warm; one could almost see the heat rising up from Ethen.

Another wall of that white energy erupted from the ground, disintegrating everyone and everything between Ethen and Nehte. Nehte was somewhat surprised by this quick reveal, but quickly regained his composure and stared back at Ethen with his usual evil smile. Ethen spoke calmly, solemnly, but with great power behind his voice, and still with that murderous expression. "I'm done. I'm done fighting this trivial, pointless, very sad war."

Nehte responded in a haughty tone, "But it's begun! It can't be stopped! Death and destruction are the only things that lie before us now! Or did you plan on taking to your pacifist nature and protesting this war with picket lines and signs? So your wife gets killed and you give up? You truly are patheti-"

So quickly it almost cut Nehte off, there was another eruption of white energy. This one encompassed everything. It destroyed absolutely everything. The only area it didn't touch was the path between Ethen and Nehte. The energy lingered for a moment,

only long enough for Nehte to look at Ethen, and for Nehte to truly realize what Ethen had done.

The energy cleared and there was nothing left, only Ethen, Nehte, and Fiona lying by Ethen's feet, all in a barren wasteland beneath a dark, hate-filled sky. "I *said* I was done fighting this war." He paused, an even angrier expression appearing on his face, "But I'm *far* from done with *you*!"

Nehte, quite startled, subconsciously took a step backwards and thought, *"Tha- that's impossible! There's no way he could have done that!"*

"I just did, worm."

Nehte shouted back, "You can read my mind!?"

"You don't seem to realize just who you're screwing with." Still standing erect, not having moved, both of Ethen's hands erupted with energy. Both hands glowed brightly, a strong wind coming from them, and electricity arcing out to anything nearby. Ethen had instantly created a Tenbatsu on each hand.

Nehte was yet to look directly at Ethen, but he just had. He saw Ethen's face. The murderous look of bloodlust... for *his* blood. Looking into Ethen's eyes, he could see his own death. He then perfectly understood the expression "Looking into the eyes of the Devil." For a brief moment, Nehte feared for his life.

Ethen forced his hands into fists. With fists he couldn't grab, however, this injured both the spirit and the physical body when hit, letting Ethen torture Nehte before killing him. Earlier in life, Ethen wouldn't have been able to do this. The sheer amount of energy running through his hands forces them to an open palm, grasping position. In all this time, Ethen has perfected the technique. The Tenbatsu directly injures the spirit. If you're killed with it, your spirit is destroyed. No afterlife, no reincarnation, nothing. This weighs heavy on Ethen's conscience, so it is reserved only for those who have committed such a heinous act that they have forfeited their right to a second chance at existence. He began slowly walking towards Nehte, who was paralyzed in fear. Just as he began regaining control of himself Ethen disappeared in a wake of energy.

Nehte barely saw the fist in time to move his head out of the way, but almost immediately a second fist landed deep in his stomach. Three more fists hit his chest, then a roundhouse kick to the head flung him several yards away. He tumbled for a moment before stopping, then pulled himself to his knees and coughed up blood. Ethen was again walking slowly towards him. By the time Nehte managed to look up at Ethen he was standing next to him. Ethen kicked Nehte in the neck, bringing him a few feet in

the air in front of Ethen. Then he punched Nehte hard in the torso, again, launching him several yards away.

Blood sprinkled the ground where he slid, but Nehte somehow managed to right himself slightly faster than before. He looked up to see Ethen walking towards him. "I'll *kill* you for what you've done, Nehte!" Ethen opened his hand, bringing it back to a grasping position. The energy in his left hand dissipated, his right hand glowing even brighter than before. He ducked down some, lowering his center of gravity, then took off running, charging Nehte. Nehte's eyes grew wide; there wasn't anything he could do, not a single move he could make. This would kill him.

Just a few steps short of Nehte, that black electricity ran through Ethen's body again. He stumbled and fell, skidding next to Nehte. The energy in his right hand dissipated and he screamed out in pain, clutching his chest. Nehte smiled his evil smile and stood up, seemingly uninjured.

"That took longer than I thought." Nehte said as he brushed himself off. He looked down at Ethen to see him glaring back up at him with wide, furious eyes, still clutching his chest in pain. "You're probably wondering what just happened." Nehte kicked Ethen in the back, throwing him a few yards away. "You destroyed everything just now, so all the divine energy was redistributed to us. I gained back the level I gave my army, plus another level from the collective energy they already had, putting me at four. You on the other hand gained the three back from your army. You also gained a fourth level from that detestable wife of yours, putting you at six. Had I not anticipated this, that would have been it for me." Still with that evil smile, he walked over to Ethen and kicked him again. Ethen was still feeling the effects of the electricity and could do little.

"You see... when one person with divine energy kills another with divine energy, you taint their soul, giving you right to their energy should the person he wants his energy to go to not be there to accept it. This is why the victor gains the energy of the defeated instead of it spreading about the Omniverse. I simply took this a step further, purposely tainting the soul so I would gain the energy regardless of whom it was willed to. We're even now, five-five, but you're in no shape to fight!"

Ethen's eyes grew wide; he clenched his teeth and began to growl. His rage grew as he began to realize what Nehte had done. "*I* killed your detestable wife and tainted her soul!" He put his hand on his chest, "She's with *me* now!" He started laughing a loud, maniacal laughter.

"You *BASTARD!*" Ethen's tone of voice caught Nehte off guard. The sound he just made was not a human sound. It seemed to not even be sound, echoing through the very recesses of his own soul. A little surprised, he stopped laughing and looked at Ethen. He had righted himself, but he was standing on all fours, like some kind of animal. His brow was furrowed so far he had broken a blood vessel. His eyes looked like they were about to come out of his skull. His teeth were clenched so hard his gums were bleeding and a tear of blood ran down from his left eye. "*PUSS* spewing *WORM!* I *GUARANTEE* you; your death will be as *LONG* and *PAINFUL* as I can *MAKE IT!*"

Nehte had to shield himself from the strong wind that burst from Ethen. The sky changed, instead of dark, to a deep purple, filled with clouds and rage. Lightning began striking the ground more and more often. The dry, dead earth below them cracked, showing red below, molten rock only inches below the ground, lava gushing up into spouts. Ethen's muscles were getting tighter, starting to tear, and his image started to distort. "*GIVE HER BACK!*" In the past, Ethen has grown furious many times. His fury has pushed him to the brink of insanity many times. Yet even when he became Chronos the Squall when he had lost his memories he always retained a part of his humanity. This time however, he had completely lost it. There was no humanity left, he had gone completely insane.

Nehte managed to look through the wind to Ethen. His image further distorted. His coat wrapped around his body, appearing to become part of him, and all of him turned a parallax white, as though he were the portal to another plane of reality. To appear as he did, it made little sense that he wasn't glowing. His eyes had no pupil, and were a bright blue. His ears each became like three feathers pointed back. His hair and head stretched backwards making what almost appeared to be a long ponytail. His fingers became claws, his feet like a dragon's, three more feather-like objects coming from each side of his ankles. A large spike extruded from his shins and forearms. A long tail grew from his back and six long, almost fin-like wings sprouted from his back. Two glowing vertical halos appeared, one behind his head, and a much larger one behind his entire body. This was the fifth divine energy level's true appearance. "*GIVE HER BACK!*"

His appearance was almost beyond human comprehension. Nehte saw this and thought, *"He no longer has the rational thought to mask his appearance with a human form..."* He reached out to his side and a long pitch-black sword crystallized in his hand.

Ethen started moving, running on all fours like an animal. Moving in a large circle around Nehte, moving faster and faster, screaming "*GIVE FIONA BACK!*" Nehte didn't

turn to follow Ethen, but moved his eyes and head watching him run the large circle around him. At the completion of a full circle, Ethen again disappeared in a wake of energy. Countless afterimages appeared and disappeared, all circling Nehte.

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*"

"*GIVE FIONA BACK!*" The voice seemed to come from everywhere, Nehte immediately thought *"My God, what have I done...? At least he was* human *before!"* Ethen dove at Nehte, the afterimages disappearing, clawing at his chest. Nehte dodged as fast as he could move, but Ethen's claw still grazed his chest, spraying a small amount of blood on the ground. In that instant, Nehte knew he would die shortly.

Ethen landed and skid a few feet, spinning around to face Nehte. He dove again as soon as he had a strong enough footing to. Nehte spun around, swinging his sword at Ethen. His blade hit Ethen's extended claws, bouncing Ethen into the air. He landed a few yards away and once again dove as soon as he could. Nehte regained his balance and spun around swinging. It only caught Ethen's right hand this time. Ethen pushed up, forcing the blade higher and Ethen to the ground at Nehte's feet. With his left hand he swung up, grasping, as though he were trying to grab something from Nehte, "*GIVE HER BACK!*"

Hitting dead-on, Nehte was flung back, blood spraying the ground, *"I can't keep this up, he has no strategy, no technique, he's a mindless killing machine! To even hold my own I'd have to be like him. To fight like him... like a monster."* Nehte flipped through the air and landed on all fours, letting out a great amount of energy. Even Ethen's basic instincts were enough to tell him not to blindly charge in. The energy cleared a second later. Nehte and Ethen both stood staring at each other for a moment. Both of them standing like wild animals. Nehte had released his appearance, he looked like Ethen, but a parallax black with glowing red wings.

They growled at each other, "*GIVE HER BACK!*" and charged. They collided, throwing the other, then charging again. They grabbed hold and rolled along the ground, kicking, clawing, tearing at each other, fighting like two rabid dogs.

They collided in the air, clawing, grasping, trying to pull each other apart. They managed to grab each other's left arm and spun around because of momentum. They came crashing to the ground, but landed on their feet. They thrust their free hands at each other's chest, their claws landing deep, their fingers digging into each other, forcing their hands deeper. Black electricity began to pour out of their chests. Still pulling, the electricity erupted from them, the force hurling them away from each other.

They landed in their human forms, hitting the ground hard and bouncing a few times before skidding to a stop where they both laid motionless. The environment had quickly changed again, calming itself down. It became a field of dead, yellow grass and a cloudy sky, bright blue peeking out from time to time. Ethen grabbed his chest and smiled a tired, painful, truly happy smile, "I can feel your warmth, I know it's you. We're back together, Fiona. Nothing will ever come between us again."

He could almost hear her soul speak to him, "Thank you. I'll always be with you my dearest Ethen. I will stay by your side forever." She was right there, standing next to him. He could almost see her, they were together again at last.

Several yards away Nehte was coming around as well. He put his hands on his chest, "It's me... I've gotten back the part of me Ethen stole all those years ago."

Their strength was slowly coming back to them. With effort they pulled themselves up and stood. By the time they were up, their strength had returned, they were ready for battle. Almost simultaneously they turned to face each other with hatred on their faces. Nehte crystallized his long, black sword in his hand and held it at his side. Ethen created a bayonet in each hand, holding them to his sides. They stood there upright without even going into a stance, staring at each other. A slight breeze blew by, blowing the tails of their coats and weaving through the dull, grassy field they stood in, under the cloudy sky.

"I swear I'll kill you, Nehte. I'll make you suffer like you've made me, my family, friends, and so many millions of innocent people suffer!"

"I can't stand you. Every ounce of your being makes my skin crawl. Just seeing you makes me hate you even more. It disgusts me to think we were born from the same shell!"

They dove at each other and swung, the clash throwing them both back. When they landed, they both shot off like lightning, disappearing. They were moving faster than the human eye could follow, even in such a place as the fifth dimension. The onlookers could only see blurs, hear the clangs of metal, and bright blue sparks flying

through the air. To be able to move this fast in the fifth dimension would mean their five divine energy levels put them on even ground with the dimension. A single level more and they would surpass it, the dimension and all it encompassed bowing to their will. Their inner strength truly knew no bounds. It was because of that they had pushed themselves this far. Because of that they had become far more powerful than their divine energy alone would allow.

Their blades collided again. Nehte forced Ethen's blades to one side to open him up, but Ethen quickly spun around and continued the attack. Nehte barely managed to parry, and back-stepped some to avoid the second blade. Quickly he made a repost, swinging with all his strength. Ethen swung both blades parallel doing the same. The collision pushed them back several yards apart.

Without losing a step, Ethen charged Nehte again. Nehte stomped the ground with one foot and a wall of earth shot up, separating the two. Ethen skid to a stop to avoid hitting it, and before he could make another move Nehte broke through the wall swinging down at Ethen. Ethen struggled to block in time, but the strength of Nehte's single sword threw him a good distance away.

Ethen landed, quickly sheathing his left sword and making a sweeping motion with his free hand. A strong wind blew, tossing Nehte into the air. Ethen charged again, but as Nehte landed he stabbed his sword into the ground and made a sweeping motion with both hands, bringing them together in front of him towards Ethen. Two trails of fire raced along the ground towards Ethen, who sheathed his other sword then spun around fast a few times. A sphere of wind spun around him, blowing out and shielding him from the flames.

He stopped spinning and brought both palms high into the air. A giant wave of water, buildings tall and stretching for miles erupted from the ground, towering over them both, racing towards them. Nehte brought his hands into the air as well, as though he were pulling something up from the ground. Behind Ethen an enormous wall of earth shot up from the ground, arching over them. The wave crashed against the wall, the impact spraying water into the sky and all was calm for a moment.

Ethen redrew his two blades and stomped the ground with his foot, causing the great wall of earth behind him to come crashing down, a wind blowing the pieces away from Ethen to the side. A mist, almost like a rain came down from the sky, rejuvenating the dieing grass, turning it to a bright green again. The brief rain stopped, and light penetrated the clouds. Beams of light coming from between the clouds lit up the ground,

but the bright blue sky could still barely be seen. Ethen paused for a moment, then charged Nehte again.

Nehte brought up another wall of earth between them, but without losing a step, while running Ethen stomped the ground, the wall exploding off to the sides. Nehte made a sweeping motion with his hand, a stream of fire racing at Ethen, who, with sword in hand, also made a sweeping motion, a wind shooting along the stream canceling the fire.

Nehte grabbed his sword from the ground and swung at Ethen, who blocked completely and shouted, "You will die!"

Nehte shouted back, "I wanted to kill you with my bare hands, anyway!" They broke the stalemate and Nehte swung again. Ethen flipped the sword in his left hand around so the blade was on the pinkie side of his hand instead of the thumb. This was so he could put more strength into blocking, and he stopped Nehte's sword dead. He quickly dropped the sword in his right hand and made a Tenbatsu in his open palm.

Ethen's focus on creating the Tenbatsu was just enough for Nehte to spin around and swing down hard at Ethen. Distracted and completely off guard, the swing cut deep into Ethen, nearly severing his upper body in two. Blood pouring from his mouth, he thrust his Tenbatsu into Nehte's chest. A white electricity ran through Ethen's fingers and tore through Nehte's body.

The energy released flung their bodies far apart, where they landed limp, like rag dolls. The clouds got darker and a light rain began falling, the light still shining through. Both bodies laid there for a moment, cold, dead. At home, little Faye's eyes still red from her mother's death, started crying out again, and buried herself in Hibiki. His arms around her, he was trying his best to be of some comfort to her, but he was just as pained as she was, and only through willpower and his want to console Faye was he not crying himself.

Her head shot up from his lap, shocked at what she then heard come from the television. A somewhat transparent Ethen sat up from the dead body on the ground and yelled, "I'm not *done* with you yet!"

A transparent Nehte sat up from his corpse as well, "Neither am I!" Still not content, the two's souls had pulled themselves up from their physical bodies. The rain quickly cleared and the clouds turned white again. They created their weapons while pulling themselves up, and charged each other before they had even fully righted themselves, their steps splashing in the wet ground.

Ethen flipped his left sword around as he had done before and blocked Nehte's swing. He swung sideways himself, and Nehte back stepped. Nehte spun around, swinging horizontally, and Ethen parried it with his right weapon, quickly attacking with his left, which Nehte evaded due to the shortened reach of the way it was held. Nehte continued spinning, swinging again, and Ethen ducked under it, then kicked Nehte in the stomach from the ground. It didn't hit hard enough to do any real damage, but it put some distance between them. Ethen spun around on his palms, going into a handspring to right himself. They both recovered at nearly the same time and charged again.

The two were already tired, but continued to push themselves harder and harder. For a few hours the fight continued, the entire Omniverse on the edge of its seat, glued to their every move. "He's losing..." Faye said aloud, without taking her eyes from the fight. "This is the first time I've seen him fight a serious battle. The only other one I was alive during I was too young to know what was going on... but... dad's losing. He... he knows he's losing. He doesn't care at all about himself; he doesn't care what kind of pain or hardship he endures. He's doing this for us. For mom, me, Hibiki, for everyone in the entire Omniverse. There is nothing he doesn't cherish, nothing he wouldn't give his life to protect. He's fighting for us. He knows he's going to lose, but he still keeps fighting for everyone anyway. It's like… he knows he'll win, even though he knows he'll lose. No, he doesn't know he'll win. He knows he has to win, and refuses any other outcome." She paused, Hibiki looked at her, realizing how stressed she was and how serious the situation was. "The middle ground in the fifty-fifty chance..." She stood up, "I... I need to think." She got up and started to walk off, out of her room. Hibiki glanced back at the fight, confused, then chased after her.

For another hour and a half the fight continued. They were losing more and more energy, they barely had the strength to stand, but they continued to fight. They had to rely on momentum to swing their swords. They were both panting, sweating. Their coats had long since been discarded, ripped to shreds, their bodies covered in blood, but they continued to fight. The moments merged together, everything was a blur. No one could tell the difference between past, present, or future anymore. However, everything came to an abrupt end. The entire Omniverse froze in shock. The entire Omniverse became dead silent. Nowhere did a baby cry, nor a pin drop or a bird chirp. One could swear rivers stopped flowing, fires stopped burning, and wind stopped blowing at the sound of metal cleanly piercing flesh.

Ethen and Nehte stood still, almost leaning on each other. Nehte's sword was run completely through Ethen's chest. He coughed up blood, in a great deal of pain. Nehte began to smile, but his expression quickly turned to pain as well as he coughed up blood as well. He looked down to see that Ethen had jammed his open palm into Nehte's stomach, his fingers dripping with blood, digging into him.

Though in pain, Nehte smirked, looked at Ethen, whose face was only a few inches away, and said, strained, "Trying to hit me with one last Tenbatsu? You don't have the energy left, I've won!"

Ethen smiled a confident, purposeful, almost malevolent smile. A smile that could truly appreciate the consequences of what he was about to do. "Never underestimate the power of my will!" Fear spread over Nehte's face as he realized what Ethen was doing. Ethen painfully screamed, his voice cracking with pain, bubbling up through the blood in his throat:

"I give unto thee my very existence, so that I might end yours!"

White electricity raced through Ethen's body, tearing his insides to shreds. The electricity blew out his hand and into Nehte's body, tearing through it and shooting out his back, arcing out to the ground and sky. The clouds clearing, showing the blue, now almost cloudless sky.

It dissipated quickly, leaving the two warriors there. Slowly, their bodies went limp. They fell forward onto one knee, then again onto each other. They didn't stir, just two bodies kneeling over, leaning on each other with vacant stares. Ethen still impaled on Nehte's sword, and Ethen's open palm still grasping Nehte's stomach.

All was quiet. A slight breeze blew by, racing through the bright green grass, under a beautiful blue sky. It was over. It was finally over.

Ortega stepped forward and stood, staring at the fallen warriors. Skye stepped up next to him, eyes on the two corpses. Kara stepped forward, then Catherine. Every single being lost to this apocalypse stepped forward, standing around Ethen and Nehte. The millions of people lost stood surrounding them, leaving an opening around them.

Ortega lowered his head and kneeled down to him, to Ethen. Skye kneeled as well, Kara following. One by one, every single person kneeled to him, thanking him, looking up to him, respecting him. Ethen stayed still, leaning on Nehte, surrounded by

the countless people he fought so hard to protect, honoring his strength and courage, in the vast, beautiful meadow, under a gorgeous, blue sky.

Little Faye sat on her bed, eyes buried in Hibiki's lap, crying and crying. Hibiki's arms around her, unable to stop crying himself. Faye felt a hand lay gently on her shoulder and looked up at it, shocked, face still wet with tears, her eyes still red. She saw a familiar hand and the tip of a white coat sleeve. She looked up quickly; emotions racing through her head, to see the face of the man this hand belonged to. But nobody was there. "He was there... I know he was..."

Ortega and Skye now stood alone in the great meadow of the fifth dimension, looking towards the two empty shells still leaning on each other. "I don't believe it." Ortega muttered to himself. "I refuse to believe he's gone." Skye understood how he felt after all they had been through together.

Unsure why, Ortega remembered he had a few old United States coins on him, and had a strange urge to look at them, as though he were being told to. He took out several fifty-cent pieces, which he had scrounged from his various pockets.

Ortega took a good long look at the fifty-cent pieces. Very definitely, the coins were not as they should be. *"Whose profile is this?"* he asked himself. *"Who's this on all three coins? Not the right person at all. And yet he's familiar. I know him."*

And then he recognized the profile. *"I wonder what this means."* he asked himself. *"Strangest thing I've ever seen. Most things in life eventually can be explained. But… Ethen Fox on a fifty-cent piece?"*

It was the first Ethen Fox money he had ever seen.

He had an intuition, chillingly, that if he searched his pockets, and his wallet he would find more.

Ortega realized what was going on and tilted his head back, laughing a loud, happy laugh. "He would do something like this!"

Skye looked at him confused, "Hm?"

He tossed the coin to her. "Have you ever read Ubik?" he asked, still chuckling.

"Never heard of it." she replied, inspecting the coin.

"Ethen never was very good at drawing himself." he stopped laughing and looked up at the sky. "There were ten levels of divine energy out there. That's all there ever

was, all the divine energy in the entire Omniverse; that *was* the entire Omniverse. Do you honestly think we could even comprehend a being with all ten levels?"

Everywhere, on every planet, in every solar system, in every universe. Across the whole of the Omniverse, all at once, every phone began ringing, and every screen lit up with Ethen's smiling face, Fiona's just behind him.

This was just the beginning.