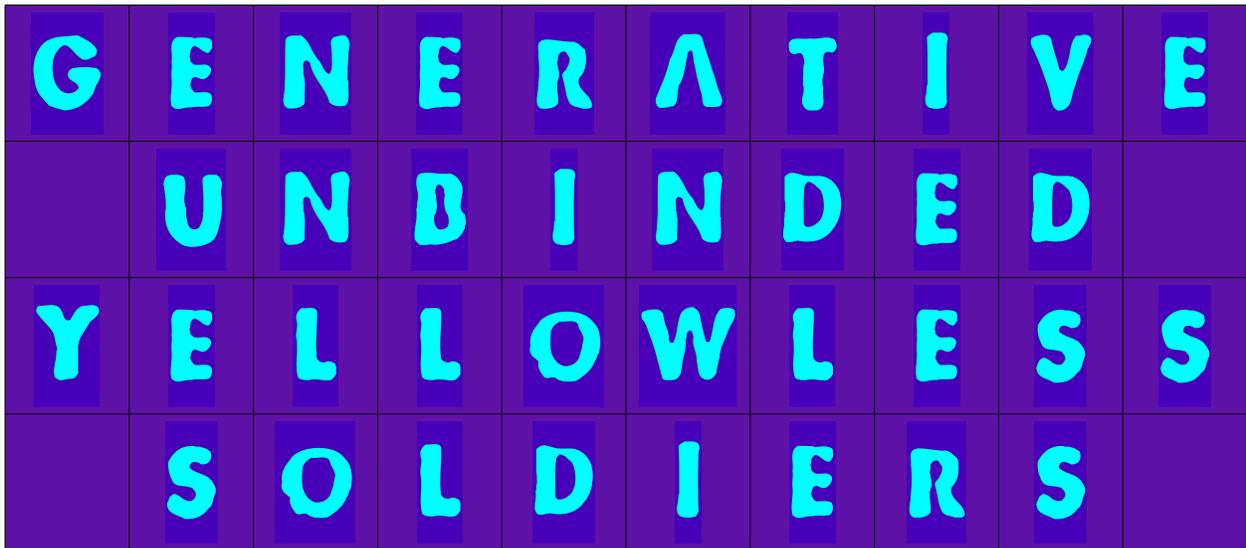




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GENERATIVE UNBINDED YELLOWLESS SOLDIERS

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GENERATIVE **U**NBINED **Y**ELLOWLESS **S**OLDIERS

Characters:

Furown, Rouge Squadron Leader

Fire Rockets, Second in Command

Fire Blast, Battleship Navigator

The Professor, Hotshot Mechanist

Dr. Tent, Villainous Biologist

Trunk, Treacherous Exfriend

The Sorcerer

The Devourer

and

the mysterious alley

Day One: Arrival

It was a cold, pale afternoon when a certain young man was walking up the road. The sun was up by now, but could not be seen due to the cloudy sky. It wasn't going to rain, he guessed, but it wasn't going to shine either.

He was a man with no clue where he was headed, why he was out here, or who he was. He was twenty-four of age, but that was a fact he did not know. All he knew was that he had a broken nose. He supposed that he had been in a fight which not only got his nose broken, but lost him his memory somehow. He could remember his acquired language, but nothing else.

As the nameless man walked the empty road, he hoped that a car would pass it. It was a long road, one which stretched and faded into the infinite, hazy-blue horizon. Fortunately for him he had a thin and healthy body: he was able to walk. Putting his hands into the pockets of his dusty cerulean blue jeans, he searched for credentials, but was unsuccessful. Aside from wearing knee-high brown boots and a dusty sleeveless white shirt, he had nothing.

Then, things changed. He spotted an eighteen wheeler coming his way. It was a dark blue convoy that would bring him more than he had expected. He stuck to the side of the road and rose his thumb with a wish that the trucker would pull over. He did.

'Where are ya heading, son?' The trucker asked as he leaned out of his window, scanning the hitchhiker. He noticed that he had no bags with him.

'Anywhere,' he replied. 'Anywhere but here would do.'

The trucker motioned with a tilt of his head for him to get in. He did. He sat next to the trucker and buckled his seat. The trucker smiled as he saw, for the first time in his life, anyone who would buckled a seat. It told him a lot about this young stranger's personality.

'Thanks.'

'No problem,' he said as the trucker continued driving. 'No where in particular?'

'No.'

'Usually anyone who'd be walking this path would be going somewhere or escaping from something.'

'Not me.' He guessed. He could not be certain.

'So you've got all the time in the world, huh? Well, I'm not going far myself. There's a little joint down the road. That's where I work. I just got a call from my .. employee – one who my carrier depended on – and found out that he was in the hospital.'

'Sorry to hear that.'

'Ah, these things happened,' he said coldly, then finally got to the point: the reason why he picked him up in the first place. He did so in the form of a hint: 'So anyways, here I am, without a man.'

'That's a shame,' he naïvely responded.

The trucker knew that this man he picked up wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. That was okay, because the businuss he was in didn't need wits. The trucker got direct: 'Say, how about you replace him?' Seeing the hitchhiker clueless, he added: 'You said you were in no rush to get anywhere, so why not make a few bucks of it. You're a bit scrawny, but you'll do. Of course it would be temporary .. we'll just see how it goes.'

The hitchhiker had no objection to the offer. His mind was blank at the moment, and doing anything would take his mind off it.

'Just out of curiosity .. what exactly is the job?'

'Don't worry about it. Everything will clear up when we get there.'

They arrived there in no time at all. It was a small wooden place with several trucks and motorcycles parked outside. It looked like a bar. The trucker parked and got out with his new friend and stright into the joint. They took the back door. It lead them stright into an office, presumingly the manager's office. The trucker sat in the chair behind the desk and placed his feet on the table. He offered a chair for his guest. He took it.

'So,' the manager said, 'how does ten KD a night sound?'

'Great,' he replied ecstatically and naïvely. 'What do I have to do?'

The manager gestured towards the window. His new employee got up from his seat and took a peak at the other part of the joint. Aside from customers eating and drinking, there was a platform in the middle. It was more like a boxing ring than a platform for performers and singers. Upon looking back towards the manager, a key was thrown at him. He grabbed it.

'That's a key to your locker. There's a suit inside. All you've got to do is put on that suit from six to nine and stand on that platform over there.' He said it with a smile.

'Why. What happens from six to nine?'

'Rounds take place.'

He understood that his job was to get beaten up for entertainment.

'So, you in or out?'

'Depends. Can I fight back?'

'Sure, but I wouldn't advise it. Acting macho would only piss off your opponent. The last guy who tried to be tough got a perminant place in a grave.'

'I thought you said he was in a hospital.'

'I lied. Are you in or not?'

'Why not.'

'Great. By the way you're gonna be taking the last guy's place so you're stage name's gonna be Fire Rockets from now on. Forget your real name.'

'Done.'

'That's what I like to hear,' he laughed as he stood up and placed his hand around Fire Rockets's neck. 'You know, kid, me and you are gonna go places.'

Fire Rockets went to put on his costume which was in his locker. It was red, he realized. It consisted of a sleeveless, bright red, spandexish jumpsuit with a matching mask. The mask felt tight and goofy: instead of eyes it had a huge star in the middle. On top of the spandex Fire Rockets wore a golden belt and white knee-high boots. This wardrobe was a lot cleaner and flashier than his last one. Finishing the outfit, Fire Rockets accessorized with Red shoulder blades to place on his bare shoulders. They carried symbols of black flames. He also had matching accessories for the sides of his boots. They carried symbols of black dragons.

Looking his part, Fire Rockets went to meet with the manager once again.

'That's what I'm talking about!' He exclaimed, 'the crowd is gonna love ya!'

'I can't breathe.'

'Don't worry about it. You'll get used to it.'

Two hours remained before showdown. The manager had work to do. He offered a chair for Fire Rockets to occupy until he's act would be on, but he was bored of sitting. Instead, he stumbled around the place. He kept on his performance suit as he wanted to get used to it. He did not plan on knocking out his opponent – if he could – but he also did not plan on becoming his punching bag.

Fire Rockets's exploring led him to the manager's convoy. It was a huge truck, he examined, and a beauty too. Walking along side it, he noticed that the back door was not locked. Curiosity led him to open it and walk inside. He closed the door behind him.

There was a lot of junk. The more he walked, the more various junk his eyes saw. As not to move anything, he walked carefully. He moved deeper into the darkness of the convoy. Then, a stench came about him. He smelt something that one would smell at a ranch. It appeared to be coming from a huge box or table next to him. He could not tell what it was as it was covered by a long sheet. He removed it. He fell back on the ground at seeing what it was. It was a cage of bar steels, but what was inside it was what freaked Fire Rockets. It was a white rhinoceros. It did not rage although it did in the past. Fire Rockets could tell by the scratches on the bars. It wasn't dead, he guessed, but asleep. There was easy accessibility to a water tank as well as leafs all around him. Understanding that the manager might be an illegitimate poacher, Fire Rockets made his way quickly out of the convoy and acted as he had seen nothing.

Upon emerging out of the convoy, Fire Rockets spotted a military tank coming down the road. It appeared to be going very fast for a tank. With two hours to kill, he failed to see the harm in standing there and watching it. He was wrong.

Unsuspectedly, the tank pulled over in front of Fire Rockets. It did so in a sudden manner. Out of the top a huge man in a military outfit came out. He had a handheld battle rifle in his right hand. He pointed it at Fire Rockets. Fire Rockets raised both hands in the air. Then, without saying a word, the tanker jumped out of the tank as if in an action movie performing a stunt, and sprinted towards the front of the convoy. He opened the door to the driver's seat and climbed on. Then, looking back at Fire Rockets who kept his hands in the air, he pointed his gun at him.

'You, get in!' He shouted.

Fire Rockets was confused as any would be, but he decided not to risk dying early by arguing with a madman in uniform. He ran to the front and took his usual seat. Fire Rockets kept his eyes to himself as not to attract any attention or bullets.

'Where' the keys?' He shouted with his gun pointed at Fire Rockets.

'With its owner.'

'You're not the owner?' He shouted in fury.

'No. I just work for him. Do you want me to get the keys?'

'No!' He shouted, then cursed.

Being in a haste, he hotwired the convoy and drove off. As he did Fire Rockets managed to steal a few looks at his kidnapper. Sweat rivered across his face and on his pink bandaid. He was in a hurry, that was certain. He saw two stars on his military jacket along with some decorations, so he thought he was a major general.

'Where are we going, sir?' Fire Rockets tried to open with a light conversation.

'None of your beeswacks!' He shouted as he drove and looked at the mirror as if to check if there was anyone on their tail.

'.. You're not with the military, are you?'

Letting go of the steering wheel, he grabbed his gun with both hands and shoved it brutally in Fire Rockets's face with a shout: 'Do you want to die? Is that it? Ask me another question, go ahead!'

Fire Rockets didn't. The criminal regained his previous position. Fire Rockets knew then that the criminal would not kill him, at least not yet. If he didn't need a hostage, he would have shot him and kicked his body out. Sweating like a pig, he took off his jacket and threw it out of the window. He was now wearing a bright blue tank shirt. Fire Rockets recognized that shirt. It was what inmates wore at the state prison. He knew that not only was he a convict, but a good one to have escaped in one piece with a tank and a battle rifle. Not only did he have brains to accomplish such a task, but also the body for it. His bare shoulders' muscles weren't just for show. They told Fire Rockets that he had been lifting weights for a very long time; that he wasn't a small player, but a tough cookie; that he depended on no one but himself.

'What are you looking at?' He shouted at Fire Rockets as he noticed him staring at his muscles. 'And what's with the outfit, freak? You some kind of fairy?'

'It's a job.'

'Not a manly one,' he criticized. 'It kept you as scrawny as a girl and cannot even get you a set of wheels.'

Feeling that the tension between them had dropped a bit, Fire Rockets requested: 'Could you slow down a bit?'

He looked at Fire Rockets as if he had just proven his point, then stepped harder on the pedal. Driving like a maniac did not gain attention from police as they were rarely on duty in these regions, but, however, it did wake up their third party. The two heard a sound come from the load. It was the rhinoceros. He had awoken.

'What was that?' Fire Rockets's kidnapper shouted in fear.

'I'm guessing the rhino.'

'You've got a rhino in the trunk?'

'Not me, my employer.'

He cursed again, then pulled to one side of the road. The sun had set, and it was way after six o'clock. Fire Rockets wondered what his manager would be thinking right about now. Probably that he hired a conman who tricked him and took off in his convoy.

'Get out!' He shouted.

Fire Rockets followed the order to the letter. Then, his kidnapper, with his battle rifle in hand, did the same. Pointing it at Fire Rockets, the two made their way to the

back. As they did Fire Rockets noticed that the shadow of his kidnapper was bigger than his, so taking him on would be insane. He also couldn't help noticing that he had nice shoes: they were green and army-like, matching his military pants perfectly. The two walked inside. Standing in front of the caged, rampaging rhinoceros, the convict cursed once more in a fright. Fire Rockets stood there awaiting orders.

'Alright,' he finally said, still in panic, 'here's what we're gonna do. I'm gonna go outside and wait there. When I give the shout I want you to open the cage.'

'Are you nuts? It's gonna tare me to pieces!'

'That's your problem.'

'Can't you just .. shoot it now?'

'What? I'm not gonna kill it!'

Just then, looking into his mad eyes, Fire Rockets understood what he was planning to do.'

'.. You're gonna set it free, aren't you?'

'None of your beeswacks. Just do as you're told!' Then he stepped out.

He was a brute, Fire Rockets realized, but had a conscience. Most convicts would not care for other lifeforms, but this one did. Maybe he did so because he knew how it felt like to be caged, or maybe he did it as a repentant for the hedious crimes he did in his past, or maybe he did it because he was wrongly acused – that he was in fact a good man who suffered due to fate. Whatever the reason was, it made Fire Rockets feel something for him. He did not know where he belonged in the world, but at that moment, if he was ever to be with someone, he wished it would be this kindhearted convict.

'Now!' The convict shouted from outside.

Hearing the signal, Fire Rockets knew it was his cue to open the cage. In an attempt to do so while keeping his life, he got on top of the cage and lifted the lock. The rhinoceros rampaged his way out by did not see Fire Rockets. Fire Rockets felt safe, until he remembered that the convict was outside and could be a target.

Fire Rockets rushed out and saw, as he predicted, the rhinoceros dashing his way towards the convict. Fire Rockets ignored the small technicalities between his kidnapper and himself – such as trying to kill him – and rushed to save him. He wasn't

sure how, but he couldn't sit by and watch the convict to get grinded. The convict himself was unsure of what to do. He had thought of the possibility of the rhino coming after him, and planned to pull the trigger if that were the case. But seeing it in reality, for a reason he would never admit, he hesitated to shoot. Fire Rockets ran as fast as his legs could carry him, but he was still far.

Then, the sky lit up.

It was as if a nuclear bomb had went off.

Both looked up.

The rhinoceros proceeded to march, but the convict failed to look as he was taken by the incredible sight. Upon the point of impact, everything changed. Simultaneously, at the same second the rhinoceros jumped the convict, the cause of the bright light was clear. It was a ball of energy, they both witnessed, a weird entity that would soon alter – or more precisely, mutate – their life and everyone else's around them as they knew it. It was what they would come to call a mute ball.

Day Two: Panic

By the time Fire Rockets woke up, the sun was already hitting his face. As soon as he opened his eyes and saw the wasteland around him, he remembered the last event of the evening. The strange light .. the impact it made .. all of them came rushing to him. His amnesia still blocked him out of his prior memory before yesterday afternoon, but he was glad as it did not block him out of yesterday's.

Getting up, he tried to take off his mask, but it seemed to be stuck. He had a look around and spotted the truck a mile away. He thought the blast he experienced last night blew him this far. As he started walking towards it, he tried to remove his mask once again. It still refused to budge, as if it had melted on his face. He figured he would bother with it later when he had a knife.

As Fire Rockets got closer, he noticed a body not far from the horizon line. He figured it was the rhinoceros's as there was no way the convict could have ever survived a horn going through his stomach and a blast from the sky. As he walked towards the body, he had a weak guess of what it was that hit them last night. He thought the military was doing an experiment and it blew up in their faces. He also thought of the possibility that it was no accident – that the military had intended on bombing them as he was harboring a class A fugitive. He also thought of the possibility that the military had

nothing to do with it – that aliens from another planet had come and caused the explosion. Whatever he thought, he had no evidence to back it up.

As he got close enough to see the body, his pulse slowed in horror of what his eyes saw. It was a single entity, he realized, but neither the convict's nor the rhinoceros's. It was both. As horrifying as it may seem, the two had mutated into each other. It laid in the shape of a man, but the head was that of a beast. The pink bandaid was on the same left cheek as it was on the convict's the night before. But it wasn't the same head, Fire Rockets thought, it couldn't be.

The skin of the mutant was grey and rugged as the caged rhinoceros's. On its chest he had the same blue tank top. It also had on the same military pants and green shoes. If there was anyone near them, Fire Rockets would've thought this was a prank – that someone came and dressed him up in the convict's clothing as to scare him. But this wasn't a prank.

On the left hand there was a piece of metallic object. It seemed to have melted by the heat of whatever hit it last night. On the right hand it was much worse. The battle rifle the convict had been holding onto had fused on his hands. Seeing how objects fused with organic parts freaked Fire Rockets greatly. Just then a frightful thought passed his mind. He thought his mask had fused onto his face in a similar manner. He tried once more to give it all he got to remove it, but it only hurt his face. Then, he felt sweat on his mask. It terrified him. He tried to take his cloth and accessories off too, but nothing would come off. It was all apart of him.

Then, he noticed movement. Whatever it was, it was still alive.

The motionless, seemingly-dead body's fulvous lips moved a bit. Next, Fire Rockets saw his huge, dark nostrils widen and narrow in a breathing manner. Then, all of a sudden, his eyelids opened wide and he jumped on his feet with anger. He stared at Fire Rockets with his teeth grinned in anger as if Fire Rockets was the reason of all his agony. His eyes were a bright red. They were demonic eyes. However, Fire Rockets saw someone he recognized in them.

'It's me,' Fire Rockets shouted in an attempt to calm him down. 'Your hostage.'

Fire Rockets believed that both of the convict's and rhinoceros's body and mind fused, hence, although he would be angry towards any man he sees for caging him for so long, but he would also remember Fire Rockets. The mutant grunted, then raised his right fist to knock out Fire Rockets. He did, partially, remember who Fire Rockets was,

but he did not need a hostage now. Everything was a mess and all he felt was pain. He needed to be alone.

As soon as he raised his right fist, he noticed the gun fused to it.

'What the heck happened to me?!' He shouted in a hideous, monstrous voice.

Upon noticing his hands and skin, he freaked out more

'Calm down,' Fire Rockets shouted. 'I don't know what happened to us last night, but let's not lose our heads.'

He couldn't help but panic and act out. Fire Rockets thought it was harmless so he just stood aside and awaited his emotions to settle. However, things had a way of not turning out as one expects. In his panic, he drove his horn into Fire Rockets's stomach. The impact felt as painful as if it were a real horn going through him. Fire Rockets fell on the ground with blood coming out of his star. He did not know how it was possible, but now was not the time to investigate.

Fire Rockets, still on the ground with his arms wrapped around his stomach, heard a sound. He lifted his head a bit and saw his attacker fell on his knees with his hands on his head. Fire Rockets understood that he was in physical and mental pain.

It has been time since the freak-show moved from his last pose, Fire Rockets noticed, and perhaps it would be better not to disturb him. Cautiously, Fire Rockets got up on his legs again and walked away. He started towards the convoy. After a few minutes of walking he turned around and saw him still in the same position. He didn't seem to care if he was left alone. Upon reaching the convoy, Fire Rockets realized that this transportation had lost its purpose of creation. It had become stationary. Whatever fused him to his mask and made a mess of the convict had also melted the convoy to the earth beneath it.

'Uh .. listen,' Fire Rockets said as he passed by the man in agony once again, 'the truck's grounded, so I'm just gonna start walking towards the city.'

His lips were, like his body, motionless.

'Yeah. So, if you wanna stick here and let the sun fry you, be my guest.'

Then, Fire Rockets left. He did so in no special haste as there was a long way to go. Partially, he did not want company, however, a part of him did. Because of what happened to them, he felt that both of them were now freaks and had to stick together.

As his thoughts ran, he heard something from behind him. He turned around and saw the convict following him. He waited a bit for him to catch up.

'Let's just get one thing straight: no inserting horns in stomachs .. please.'

'Shut up.'

'Deal.'

The two continued silently. Fire Rockets wanted to speak, but also wished to keep his blood and internal organs internal. He wanted to tell him that he too had become a mutant. Although he said nothing, his companion sensed his will to say something. He knew Fire Rockets wasn't half bad. He remembered him charging towards his other self the other night in order to save his life; he noticed the concerned look on his face when he came to this morning; he knew how much it bothered him to have left him in such a hot desert.

The sun was out this morning. It came strong as if with vengeance for being defeated by clouds the day before. On this day there was no cloud in sight: there was nothing to block sunshine from incinerating anything and everything in sight. For that reason the two wished to evacuate the desert.

'So,' he finally asked, breaking the silent. 'What do they call you?'

His voice was just as rugged, but his tone was calm, as if apologizing for his earlier thrust.

'Fire Rockets.'

'Cute,' he mocked.

'I was going to be the main attraction,' he bragged.

'In what? The circus?'

'Very funny,' Fire Rockets replied without smiling. 'It was a temporary job. I think before it I was a teacher. I keep having flashbacks of being in a class room teaching students. I also remember being with a woman .. a finance .. But I can't remember really ...' He paused for a short time, then asked: 'What about you? Got a name?'

'Two actually. But I won't use either.'

Looking at his eyes, Fire Rockets understood what he meant and his reasons for doing so. The first name was his convicted name, a name he shouldn't use if he wants

to avoid legal problems. As for the second name, it was of his other self – the rhinoceros's name. Whatever it was, it obviously would be demeaning to go by such a slave name given by a poacher.

'What should I call you then?'

'Furown.'

It was a strong name he admired, once which brought respect to his ears from its utterer. It was a nickname he got while he was behind bars. He got it by overthrowing the drug-lords who ran the prisonlife. They thought they could mess with him and control him as easily as the rest because he was a loner. Although he had no boys of his own, he proved them wrong and rose on top on his own. He needed no weapons as his mind and muscles were his weapons.

Looking at his right cheek's permanent bandaid, Fire Rockets asked: 'So, you're gonna tell me the story behind the pink bandaid?'

Remembering his little girl, Furown said smilingly: 'Not if your life depended on it.'

Fire Rockets smiled back without saying a word. Then, all of a sudden Furown stopped walking. His smile ceased as well.

'What's wrong?' Fire Rockets asked.

'Shut up. Look.'

Looking at the direction Furown's eyes were fixated upon, Fire Rockets saw tanks coming from the horizon. They were the army's. Believing that they were coming to him, Furown prepared to fight for his freedom. Not his life, but his freedom. He'd rather die than be behind bars.

However, just as the tanks appeared, they disappeared. They bypassed Furown and Fire Rockets and went stright into the city. Furown knew that something big was going down for this kind of military force to go into the city. He started sprinting towards the city. Fire Rockets joined him.

It took them a couple of hours of nonstop running before reaching the city, yet they didn't feel as tired as they thought they'd be. They would later learn that it was because of their mutation that their physical endurance and strength had increased tenfold. Upon entering the once civilized and well-organized futuristic city, they saw nothing but chaos and disorder. Institutes were either dystroyed, or in the process of becoming so; citizens were either dead, or in the process of becoming so. Those who

were still alive ran in panic and fear as doomsday had descended on the city. Furown and Fire Rockets were shocked by what they saw; confusion struck them. Then, upon seeing those who were in charge of delivering such terror, they understood. Mutants. There were a number of them. Whatever caused their own mutation, Furown and Fire Rockets realized, it had come to the city as well.

In such an environment, non-mutant humans became as primitive as savages, killing their rational judgment with basic instinct. By introducing the factor of mutated genes, homo-sapians had descended from their high position on the food chain. This setting might've been a dystopia, but to most mutants, it was an utopia. They were the ones in charge, and unfortunately for the good semeritains, most were lowlives. Fire Rockets was among the minority – he was a mutant but with a heart. Fortunately for him, Furown, beneath the rought exterior and beastly manner, was basically the same. For that reason, the two stuck together as they ventured deeper into the city.

Furown and Fire Rockets had no plan or any place they wished to go. Until they do, they silently agreed to stick next to each other in this new world. They would soon learn that it was one of the best choices they have ever made. They made no contact with anyone, not mutant nor human, until bullets started flying their way. It was the police. Their objective was to take out as many mutants as they can regardless of what a mutant might stand for. As they were targeted by the police, Furown and Fire Rockets had no choice but to flee. They ran a distance before they were cornered. With nothing but walls and armed cops surrounding them, they were left with no option but one. Like cornered animals, Furown and Fire Rockets tried to charge their way out, but the thousands of bullets fired at them were faster. There was no way they could dodge.

Day Three: Discoveries

The sun had gone down risen again, and setted once more as both Furown and Fire Rockets stood on their feet. Time flew faster when life is a rushing mess. The bullets came on them, hit their bodies, then fell on the ground like thrown pebbles. Furown, Fire Rockets, and the police realized with a shock that the bullets had not effected them as they should. They should've been dead, but instead, they were only hurt. Slightly hurt. It was as if, because of the mutation, their skins had a protective layer of some sort – like a bullet-prove vest. Knowing that, Furown and Fire Rockets felt invincible.

'Well. What do you know!' Fire Rockets exclaimed in disbelief mixed with joy.

'I don't know what we are, but it's sure better than being dead.'

Seeing bullets failing to pierce their skin, both Furown's and Fire Rockets's worried expression eased into a smile. Another sensation rushed through their bodies as they felt they had more power and energy running through their vanes than had been displayed. They could've walked right pass the police, but they wanted to know more about their strengths, and, the cops seemed to provide a good target practice.

Furown walked up to a police car, closed his left fist, then pounded on the hood of the car. It went through. Amazed by the sheer strength, some cops ran; others

planted their feet and held their positions. Wanting to try something he felt he was capable of executing, Furown placed his left hand as well as his gunned right below the car then lifted it up. To him, it was as heavy as lifting an armchair. With the car held high in the air with only two hands, the rest of the police escaped. Furown threw it as far as he could and it flew over a couple of buildings before landing in metropolitan ruins.

While Furown was discovering his abilities, Fire Rockets was about to discover his own. However, instead of feeling superior, he felt feverish and sick. He was burning up, he realized. His whole body felt hot. Placing both hands on his head, they got scorned. The star on his face was especially hot. That's when the police had successfully made their way closer to him. They had jumped him from behind and held him in place. His body was so blistering that the protective armor they had on was starting to melt. They endured. The cop in front of Fire Rockets realized that his facial star was no longer black, but a burning red. It gave the appearance of volcanic magma. Then, with intention as well as focus, Fire Rockets fired. The cop was blown away. The rest ran. Furown, having just thrown the car, stood confused.

'What was that?'

'I ... don't know.'

'Did you just .. fire your face?'

The shot that was fired came from Fire Rockets's face in the same shape of his permanent expression. What Furown saw was a separation of Fire Rockets's face from his head; the star seemed to have detached. Once airborne, it flew in a direct path hitting all that was in front of it. The cop, being in the center, was insinuated. Now that it was fired, his face was back to its prior state; his star was black and cool.

'It felt .. more like a sneeze than triggering a gun,' Fire Rockets tried to explain to Furown as well as himself. 'Weird .. yet natural ...'

'Hey, are you okay?'

'Yeah. In fact,' he said with a cheerful tone, 'I feel better than ever!'

Both Furown and Fire Rockets understood that the mutation that took place not only altered their physiques in appearance, but also provided them with abnormal abilities. Whether this was a blessing or a curse was too soon to determine, but for the mean time they were more than willing to use what they've got to their advantage. What they've not realized was that, on this night, their humanity suffered a severe blow. They had just taken human lives for the first time and had no remorse.

Just before they walked out of the scene, they heard clapping. It sounded as an applause, as if they had a hidden audience who enjoyed their performance. As they looked around to locate the source, a voice, presumably belonging to it, spoke.

'Well done, bravo.'

Furown and Fire Rockets continued to scan their surroundings for the watcher.

'I would like to say I could'nt have done it myself, but then, I'd be lying.'

Then, he jumped down. He had been sitting on the roof of a building. Revealing himself for Furown and Fire Rockets, both remained on guard. Although he was on their same level, his feet hovered above the ground by a few inches. He could walk, but why walk when he could hover. He had a relatively large head for his body. In fact, his head was larger than his body. His arms and legs were of the same height, but as thin as a scrawny eight year old's. They were dressed in a grey jumpsuit with red gloves and boots. He had an odd looking jacket – or a lab coat – that was yellow with orange squarish shapes. He wore a matching belt beneath it. His wardrobe was considered strange, but then again, presented with his huge head, it was nothing. His crazily-trimmed hair was brown; his huge eyebrows were as black as his satanic mustache and goatee beard. Between them laid a sinister smile. Pink lips and white teeth, but appearances are known to be deceptive. He had a demented face, and even a more demented smile. It ticked Furown off.

'Get lost, freakshow,' Furown threatened.

Smilingly, he replied: 'Come now, is that anyway to speak to one of your own kind?'

Furown and Fire Rockets were confused at first, but then he cleared it up. He dashed so fast by them to the other side that they didn't even see his legs move.

'What are you?'

'A mutant like you,' he replied in an introductory tone. 'They call me Dr. Tent.'

'Doctor?' Fire Rockets inquired. 'So you mean you know what's happening to us?'

Dr. Tent laughed.

'I'm afraid I'm not that kind of doctor.'

'Oh. A professor of universities, you mean?'

'No, no: I am a biological doctor, but not the kind that you were searching for. You see, my dear boy, you want answers, but I aim to take rather than give. And now, what I want – why I'm wasting time talking to you is because: I simply aim to take your lives.'

He said it with a mad laugh. Furown and Fire Rockets took caution. They understood that they weren't dealing with a physical freakshow, but a mental one as well. Whether the mutation had effected Dr. Tent phycologically or he had always been loony did not matter to them. If he was to come closer again, they would attack. He did; they did.

Upon dashing towards Furown, Furown punched thin air. Dr. Tent had evaded mysteriously in the nick of time and kicked Furown in the chest with both feet. Furown went flying through the building behind him. Seeing that happen, Fire Rockets understood that this was one mutant that could hurt them.

'Looks like rhino-boy isn't as tough as he appears,' Dr. Tent joked as he hovered.

Fire Rockets, seeing Furown as a friend and Dr. Tent as a foe, fired up. He shot a star at Dr. Tent. Dr. Tent easily menouvered. Fire Rockets shot another, then another, then another. He did so as he targeted the evading doctor as he flew around. Then, one of them finally hit him. Dr. Tent was blown across the field. Fire Rockets stopped firing. He could go on in spite of feeling dizzy after firing rapidly. For every star he fired, there was a recoil. His head yanked back as if it was punched hard in the face. But it was nothing in comparison of what effect his stars inflicted. The ones that missed and hit the walls brought dystruction upon it as if they were manmade launched rockets. Regaining prespective and clear vision, Fire Rockets saw Dr. Tent's body lying across the battlezone.

Fire Rockets walked towards him slowly. Seeing that he wasn't insinirated, there might be a chance he was still alive. Once he was close to him, he saw that his face was turned towards the ground. On the back of his coat, there was a symbol of a blue rhombus; a lozenge; a diamond. Kicking him to one side, Dr. Tent's body flipped over. His smile was still there. Fire Rockets knew that he was still alive. Upclose, the blueness of his cheeks as well as his huge forehead were just as blue as they were before. Bodies usually conducted heat, but this one was the oppisite. In Dr. Tent's case, being cold meant that he was still alive. Then, his eyelids jerked wide open. He jumped right back up and in Fire Rockets's face. Grabbing him with both hands, he flew up high with him.

'You wanna fight dirty? Fine, you got it.' Dr. Tent said as he flew up high with his opponent.

Fire Rockets thought of blasting his head since it was on point blank, but, looking down on the far and distant ground, he feared the fall. Looking stright into Dr. Tent's eyes, Fire Rockets saw them disturbed. They were of a mad scientist, he theorized, who had studied this phenomena – this whole mutation bussinuss – in his laboratory ever since it occurred two nights ago. He probubly took special interest in it as it had touched him rather than one of his mere subjects or specimens. Now, Dr. Tent was sick of theoretical studying and wanted practical application.

Down below, Furown came rushing back to the scene only to see that it was empty. Looking up in the sky, he saw Dr. Tent taking Fire Rockets upwards. Not knowing what else to do, Furown aimed his mutated battle rifle and shot at Dr. Tent. The shot that came out took the entity of pure energy rather than a metallic or metirrealistic bullet. Now that the weapon was a part of Furown, firing it meant firing a portion of his energy. The shot hit Dr. Tent and, as planned, Fire Rockets was released. Fire Rockets panicked as he started to helplessly fall. Furown had expected this, and was prepared. He awaited Fire Rockets to come within range for him to grab him before he becomes another casulty of this chaotic war. However, having recovered from Furown's attack, Dr. Tent saw what was planned. He decided to interfere by showing them his greatest gift his mutation had given him.

Dr. Tent lifted his right arm and, aiming it at Furown, he show a beam of white light mixed with pale blue. As it passed stright by Fire Rockets, he felt the coldness of it. It wasn't pure energy, he realized. It was too cold to be pure energy. As soon as it hit Furown's body, Furown turned into an popsical. He froze solid.

Fire Rockets, seconds away from hitting the ground, knew that it was up to him to withstand this fall. Just then, he felt his feet heating up. It was in the same manner as before – eager to fire – only in his feet instead of his entire body. He checked his boots with his eyes and saw the symbols of the black dragons on his footwear accessories had lit up. They were magmatic in appearance. Seconds before collesion and with nothing to loose, Fire Rockets directed his feet towards the ground and produced flames from his boots at will. The experience was beyond words. With flames coming out of his boots, not only was he able of reducing his falling speed, but he was able to fly around like Dr. Tent. But he still needed a lot of practice as he bumbed his way boostingly into a building. Seeing Furown frozen solid, Fire Rockets placed his hands on the ice and heated it up. It started to melt with his mere touch. As the ice melted into

water, Furown dropped to his knees as he breathed. He was alright. Not far from them, Dr. Tent came down.

'New moves I see,' Dr. Tent commented, 'you'd make a nice specimen, Fire-boy, how about you come with me.'

'Not a chance,' Fire Rockets replied as he rushed towards him.

Fire Rockets, beginning to understand his potentials, raised his arms at Dr. Tent and produced two lines of flame at him. As predicted, his entire body was a vessel of fire. He could do whatever he wished with fire. He had yet to understand why it was fire instead of any other element, but since it worked for his advantage, why fix what's not broken. The difference in shooting flames from his hands instead of his feet was for offensive reasons instead of defensive. Aside from that, his shoulder blade's symbols lit up instead. Dr. Tent managed avoid getting burnt by Fire Rockets's flames, but it was no reason to celebrate. The fight was still young. Quickly mastering his abilities, Fire Rockets performed various combos. He fought as if he was a marine. At that moment he wondered if, before the amnesia, he was enlisted. As the fight went on between the two, Fire Rockets received some and inflicted some. The same went for Dr. Tent. Their attacks proved lethal on any one or thing that wasn't mutated. On themselves, their attacks were effective, but not deadly. As they fought Furown rose to his feet.

Seeing the two shoot fire and ice out of their bodies did not make him feel inferior. In fact, it made Furown want to fight. This was a new world, he realized, one which would be run by a hierarchy not of money, status, or political power, but of what one can literally do. He had decided to either be on top of the food chain, or not be in it at all. He dashed towards Dr. Tent and, by accident, received a powered-up attack. He was knocked hard out of the ring, smashing into the pavement.

Lying on his back, he faded in and out of consciousness. His mind shut out all the present horror and went back to a painful memory. "Daddy, your cheek is bleeding!" He remembered his eight year old girl saying. She had the cutest and most genuine concerned face he had ever seen. "It's nothing, pumpkin. Just a paper cut." He remembered lying to her. "Listen, daddy's gonna have to go away for a while, okay?" "Go where?" He couldn't tell her, and couldn't lie as well. "Can't I come with you? I'll be really good!" He kissed her forehead with a tear in his eyes. He smudged some of his blood unintentionally on her hair. Instead of whipping it, she took out from her toy purse a box of bandaids and undid one of them then stuck it on her father's cheek. "There. Does it feel better?" He smiled, then held her head against his, and said goodbye. "See you later, pumpkin, okay?" Then he left out of the window as police car sirens were heard.

“Daddy wait! Wait Daddy, wait!” Her voice faded away; the image of her face faded into a silhouette, then into Fire Rockets's face.

'Are you okay?' Fire Rockets asked as he stood over Furown.

Furown got up, and saw that Dr. Tent was there floating with a smile just as he was before he blacked out. He stood up.

'I think you better sit this one out,' Fire Rockets advised in a macho act. 'Don't worry about me, I'll take care of this pest.'

Just before Fire Rockets marched towards the enemy, he felt Furown's hand on his stomach. Fire Rockets saw it, then shifted towards Furown's eyes. They told him that he was going to fight.

'You can't be serious!'

'Stay away from this one. If I see you butt in, I will kill you myself.'

The seriousness in his tone made Fire Rockets comply. As Furown marched towards Dr. Tent, Dr. Tent smiled at his anger. He found it funny – the notion that Furown, just because he was pissed off, thought that he could take on a mutant as powerful as he was. Dr. Tent knew that he was cocky, but he wasn't about to let it be his Achilles' heel. If any, he considered it to be the key to his Pandora's box.

'Ooo, so angry! Am I suppose to be scared?'

'No,' Furown replied with a stable and deep voice, 'but you will be.'

In an instant Furown dashed towards Dr. Tent faster than he ever thought possible and, upon seeing with his demented eyes Furown's demonic eyes raging, he received a punch in the guts – one so powerful it wiped the smile right off Dr. Tent's face. Dr. Tent flew into the building behind him. He made a hole in it and did the same to the three buildings behind him. The blow was too powerful to block or withstand. By the time his body stopped, he realized that he was bleeding from every hole in his body. He had never once bled before his mutation. Furown had broke the record.

Dr. Tent was motionless; Fire Rockets was speechless. Furown might not have an element such as fire or ice, but they all realized that, because of his sheer power, he might be the strongest of them all.

'Wow.'

'Yeah,' Furown replied with the same schock in his eyes.

Examining his left hand which delivered the punch, Furown couldn't but wonder what it would've done if it was his right. His grey, beastly fingers were still intact; the joints seemed to be in place. On the back of his hand there was an X engraved. He wondered whether it has always been here, or received it recently during the fight. The metallic object around his left hand did not seem to have anything to do with his power as he felt it coming from inside. Looking back to the whole he made through the buildings, he saw Dr. Tent coming back. He was angry now.

'Before I kill you,' Dr. Tent said with confidence and anger in his tone, 'I will offer you what I offered your weak friend: a chance for you to become my guinea pig.'

Furown exhaled through his huge animalistic nostrils.

'Fine. Die then! I'll collect your body parts and study them after you're dead!'

After his shout, Dr. Tent dashed towards his rival. Furown did the same. Both of them had intended on giving it all they've got until one of them is dead. However, just then, he arrived.

He was standing on a roof like a phantom. Because he was there, everyone stopped. Furown, Fire Rockets, and Dr. Tent could not help but give him their undivided attention. They felt his aura. Everyone could see him, yet no one could see him. He was like a shadow in appearance. His mutation – for he was clearly a mutant – had made his appearance ghostlike. The only feature in him that wasn't hazy was his bright white eyes. He was silent, but they said a lot. He was a silhouette, but his energy was not. His presence was strongly felt, and they all knew that he wasn't a no body, but in the major league.

Needing an alley to overcome his opponents, Dr. Tent flew over to him. He did not budge.

'Say there, shadow-boy, looks like you're in luck. Those two mutants down there plan on overthrowing the authority and running this place. And I'm gessing people like us are not down the list. So how about we stick together on this one? They aren't exactly class A mutants so they should'nt be hard to beat. I'll let you take the easy one even. What do you say, eh?'

Staring silently, he shifted his white eyes at Dr. Tent. They were threatening.

'Hey now! What's with the look? I'm on your side!'

'No. You're not.' He replied in a dark and deep voice.

Dr. Tent's cheery mood was fractured with a worry. It was sent with high importance by the mysterious mutant's cold reply. Seconds before Dr. Tent understood what he said, he received a shadow punch. He was attacked with force in the guts, right where Furown had hit him. Dr. Tent fell on the floor like a fly whacked with a book. Dr. Tent would later learn that one of this mutant's abilities was to see the aura of a person. Dr. Tent's aura reeked of maliciousness and evil intentions. There was nothing honorable about him. On the other, Furown's and Fire Rockets's aura was genuinely good.

'Dr. T., looks like you're beat!' Fire Rockets taunted.

Dr. Tent got up with both hands wrapped around his stomach. He could not endure any more.

'I'll be back. When I do, I'll kill you both!'

Then he flew off. Barley.

'I could take him,' Furown gloated as he sized up.

'Furown!' Fire Rockets exclaimed. 'He could hear you!'

The mysterious mutant did hear him.

The mysterious mutant looked at Furown and replied: 'You could, but I will not fight back.'

Then, he was gone.

Furown and Fire Rockets didn't know who he was, why he helped them, or whether they would see him again or not. However, since Furown and Fire Rockets could not handle another villain, they took him as a mysterious ally and left it at that.

'Hey! Check this out!' Fire Rockets exclaimed at his discovery.

It was almost dawn when Fire Rockets found meat. They have been searching for hours for food as the fight with Dr. Tent had exhausted all their energy. All they wished for now was food. They could sleep later. The food they found was frozen turkey in a shopping mall. Like most shops and stores, it was empty and abandoned. There wasn't anything of use in it except for this piece of wrapped turkey which had fallen unnoticed behind the counter.

'Good,' Furown replied. 'Now I could eat. Give me that.'

'What? Why do you get to have the first bite?'

'Fire bite? What are you talking about? I'm gonna eat the whole thing!'

'Now I know you're trolling.'

'Look. I'm the one who fought more, so I get to eat it.'

'You fought more? Who are you kidding?'

'.. You wanna piece of me?'

'Look. We could share.'

'Hah! Funny. Haven't you heard? Rhinos don't share.'

'Rhino? You're more like a stubborn mule.'

'What did you say?'

'You heard me! – Wait! Where's the turkey?'

Quarreling, Furown and Fire Rockets failed to realize that the prize they were fighting over had disappeared right under their noses. They took guard.

'Somebody's here,' Furown whispered with caution.

Realizing that they weren't alone, both scanned the perimeter carefully.

'Whoever it was,' Furown said as he scanned, 'he couldn't have gone far. I can still smell that turkey.'

Following Furown's lead, Fire Rockets moved to the other side of the aisle. They planned to close in on the thief to flush him out. If it was a human, then he was a fool who had guts. If he was a mutant, Furown believed, then he picked the wrong brothers to mess around with. Then, the thief jumped out. Cornered, he had no choice but to reveal himself. Standing high on both feetless legs, he drew his sword out against them. Furown and Fire Rockets were taken by his odd appearance.

The thief stood firmly although he was feetless. Both his feet seemed to have been mutilated – chopped off – prior to his mutation. Now he stood on the end of his legs. Little did everyone else know, this worked to his advantage. Because of this, he was capable of moving swiftly like a ninja. His gold and black spandex showed how

muscular his body was, and the pose he took showed how skillful he was. He had a black mask on, one which covered all of his face except his mouth. On top of his mask he wore a matching pilot cap; on top of his suit he wore a qamardini belt. However, his useful accessories were in his hands. In his left hand he held a relatively huge shield. It projected a face of a mutated skull. Its eyes were dark red, giving Fire Rockets the illusion that it was watching him. In his right he held a sword. Its length was that of his shield, but would do more offense than defense. Aside from the blade, the sword consisted of a tall grip with no pommel. Its crossguard, however, was fairly tall. It was as red as the color of blood and had two golden rings on each side of the quillion. The thief's height was that of most women, but, as Furown and Fire Rockets would soon know, he was ten times the man as the average joe. Then, Furown smelled the turkey. It came from his lips.

'Boy! Why'd you take my dinner?' Furown roared.

"Cause it's food, fool!"

Having eaten his dinner and insulted him as well, Furown refused to keep his anger bottled up anymore. He charged blindly with his horn towards the thief without knowing his moves or weak points. Fire Rockets joined in. Seconds before collision – which would be painful due to Furown's horn – the thief disappeared out of sight. He did not vanish into thin air, but evaded faster than the eye could keep up. Fire Rockets managed to stop in time before attacking Furown, but Furown, in all his anger and glory, failed to do the same. His horn went in Fire Rockets's stomach. Upon looking at the blood he spilled, Furown realized that it was his friend's.

'Rockets!' Furown exclaimed.

'I'm okay,' Fire Rockets lied as he fell on the ground.

Furown, sensing that the thief was behind him, shifted his sight and saw the thief standing still.

'Now I know why they say patience is a virtue,' the thief remarked. 'If only you weren't so rash, maybe you wouldn't have stabbed your friend in the guts. And here I am willing to talk this matter out. O well.'

'.. You're dead.'

Day Four: Trust

The sun came up on the empty shopping mall, glittering in Fire Rockets's blood. The sunshine's warmth and brightness awoke him from his sleep. He thought it had been a while since he was alone, but in fact, he had not slept for more than five minutes. He wanted to rest, but he had to find Furown and see if he was okay.

Rushing out of the mall, Fire Rockets saw Furown and the thief. They hadn't left, but their battle had been moved to the spacious parking lot outside the mall. Fire Rockets joined in.

The fact that he had a sword and a shield made him look outdated. They underestimated him. While Furown and Fire Rockets did most of the offense, the thief seemed to evade rather than attack. But whenever they got close enough, he blocked with his shield, then slashed them with his sword. From the way he moved, Furown and Fire Rockets could see clearly that the thief was blind as a bat. However, his hearing was sharper than his blade. Because of his ears, he knew exactly where they were hence could attack easily. But didn't. Furown and Fire Rockets realized that he was toying with them rather than fighting them for real. Furown stopped all together.

'What's going on here? Why aren't you fighting?'

'You have a death wish, pal?' The thief replied.

'This is a fight to the finish, and you're just hopping around!'

'Sorry,' the thief replied, 'but I'm not into killing. Regardless of who you are.'

'Oh great, a thief with a code!'

Furown was right. He did have a code. In fact, he had more honor than both Furown and Fire Rockets had put together. He stole only what he needed to survive. Taking lives isn't a necessity for his survival since he could evade. Furown failed to realize that, but Fire Rockets did. Upon his realization, he suddenly stopped. He had a vision that involved all three of them.

'Wait,' Fire Rockets spoke to the thief. 'You're not a psycho mutant?'

'...?!'

Fire Rockets took the thief's puzzled look as a no. Then, shocking both Furown and the thief, he raised both hands and simply walked towards the thief in a peaceful manner. The thief remained on guard.

'Relax. You're cool,' Fire Rockets said, shocking all that were in his present.

The thief shared the confused look that rendered Furown speechless as well, then asked Furown: 'Ahh, is he right in the head?'

'I'm still trying to figure that one out myself,' Furown replied.

'Look. We're not freaks like the other mutants,' Fire Rockets explained. 'We don't lust for bloodshed or anything like that. The only reason we came onto you was because you took out dinner. But clearly you were just like us, hungry and desperate. So we don't blame you for taking the turkey –'

'I do,' Furown interrupted mumbly.

'He doesn't mean that – he's just being a jerk. So, look. What I'm saying here is: come with us. You're clearly not like the rest of the freaks out there and there's no reason to be alone.'

'Nice speech,' Furown commented again. 'But in case you haven't realized, this is the real world, not a fairy tale.'

Furown thought Fire Rockets was going off more than just a limb, but was off his rocker. He laughed at the idea that he would win the thief over with nothing more than words. But then, the thief lowered his sword. He walked closer to Fire Rockets with

ease. Fire Rockets stood his grounds without raising his guard. He trusted the thief. Raising his hand, the thief put it on Fire Rockets's shoulder, then tapped it twice.

'You're alright,' the thief judged.

Fire Rockets smiled; Furown was impressed. At that moment hostility was no longer in the air. The conflict was resolved.

'The name's Fire Blast,' he introduced himself.

'Another Fire something?' Furown commented. 'What is it with these names?'

Fire Blast was confused. Fire Rockets explained by raising his hand and saying his name.

'Well I don't know about you, but that's what my pilot co-workers called me. Because I blast through the sound barrier,' he gloated.

'What's your real name?' Fire Rockets asked.

'It died the moment I turned into this. I don't know about you two, but for the last couple of days my life has turned upside down.'

Fire Rockets knew the feeling, but what Fire Blast meant was that everything in his life had turned upside down. Two nights prior to this he was a respectable F15 pilot who, as a result of a work-related incident, was to occupy a bed in a hospital for time to come. Both his feet were unsalvageable hence they were separated in surgery. He was told he would never walk again. The mute ball that altered his physique changed him completely. Had his wife been alive, she wouldn't have recognized him.

Furown refused to talk about his wife; Fire Rockets failed to remember whether he had one or not; Fire Blast tried not to think about his. Because of his current state, he was ashamed of himself. She was perfect in every way. He was perfect as well until his – and a million others' – mutation took place. In the chaos, she was killed by a mutant. That was the breaking point for Fire Blast. Because of that he woke up and became aware that all his prestige, status, money, and honor amounted to nothing in the new world. Force was the only credit. He had to become a loner to survive. When he first felt Fire Rockets's offer, Fire Blast thought he'd reject it. But the sincerity of his offer was one in a million. If he had made an enemy out of Fire Rockets and Furown he might've been a loner for all his life. This was more than just a mere chance to around a person like him, but a second chance to live and let go of his previous life. His wife would've wanted that, he told himself.

With Fire Blast on their side, Furown and Fire Rockets were promised food. The next meal he would find would immediately be redirected to them. Fire Rockets needed no promises to see the goodness in Fire Blast, but for Furown it was different. Fire Blast had to earn his trust, a task he would sooner than later pass with flying colors.

It was around noonish when the lights went out.

'What the ...?'

Furown, Fire Blast and Fire Rockets were walking outside so everything getting dark would naturally disturb them. It got from a bright cloudy sky to a dim nighted one in a second. It was so unnatural that they knew it was effected by the recent events. On top of that, all three of them felt that something bad was about to happen.

'Another mutation wave?' Fire Rockets wondered aloud as he glanced up the sky.

'Or a freakshow,' Furown replied in a confident tone rather than a guess.

As he seemed sure of himself, his reply attracted the attention of both Fire Rockets and Fire Blast. Both looked at him and saw that he was looking stright in front of him with his guard on. Turning around, they saw a mutant walked towards them with a crooked smile. It was clear to them that whatever was going on was because of him. He wasn't only a mutant, but one whom could generate his own territory. Furown felt his aura, and knew that whoever he was, he was no pushover.

The mutant walked in a funny way, as if he was a stumbling drunkard. He had long legs, but zero arms. He had on the oddest outfit – his wardrobe consisted of a midnight green spandex, long lemon-colored boots, and a jeans cape on his back. Around his narrow waist he had a lemon-colored belt, but what attracted eyesight was the huge skull frontier he had as his belt buckle. It appeared to be a real human skull. On top of his head he had a huge triangular hat that of the same color as his boots and belt. As he came closer his face was revealed. He had a complexion as dark as chocolate and a black trimmed beard. His eyes were much darker. In fact, they seemed to – or at least give the illusion to whoever stared at them long enough – radiate darkness.

'You did this,' Furown asked.

'Guilty as charged,' he said smiling.

'Why?'

'Why else,' he replied, then elaborated after a short dramatic pause: 'to have fun.'

The way he stood before Furown was clear. It was a challenge. He demanded a fight. Furown demanded a reason.

'Why?' Furown insisted.

'Tell you what,' he replied, 'beat me like you did to all the others who stood in your path, and I might share.'

Furown and the armless mutant stood their grounds while Fire Rockets walked around. He wanted to see if having someone behind him intimidated him. It didn't. Their challenger was sure of himself.

'What's with the traffic cone?' Fire Rockets mocked. 'You felt the urge to accessorize so you grabbed the first thing you saw off the street? I mean seriously, with that stretch and cape and colorful boots .. you look like a hobo who's trying hard to appear as a lousy superhero!'

'Rockets,' Furown warned. 'Now's not the time. Keep your trap shut.'

'Oh no, I don't mind,' the challenger remarked. 'In fact, I would like both of you to come at me at once.' Then he noticed Fire Blast. 'Who're you? Never mind. You can join too.'

'Pretty sure of yourself.'

'I know all of your moves. How can I lose.'

'I don't know who you are or what you want, but I can tell you this: unless you make like a tree and leave, you won't live long enough to explain yourself.'

'Talk is cheap.'

Taunted long enough, Furown charged towards his adversary. Fire Rockets joined the battle. However, Fire Blast was smart enough to stay back. Like any smart strategist, he planned on studying his foe before going to battle and making a fatal flaw.

The battle was underway and the outcome seemed easy to predict. It was a two against one match, and, while both Furown and Fire Rockets were on the offensive, all their opponenet seemed to do was dodge. Since he was armless, the precentage of actually inflicting damage on him or even touching him was small. The two thought he

was an easy kill because he was outnumbered. It was true that they were worn out as a result of not having food in their stomachs to digest or sleep for their spirits to relax, but he didn't know that. As long as they put on a good show, he would think that they were on top of their game. What they didn't know was that he knew all of this before he even spoke to them.

His attack came when they least expected it. He had waited long enough for his evasive tactics to be seen as a routine, and then stroke them with a shadow kick. His yellow boots were covered with dark matter as he delivered powerful kicks in their stomachs, on the side of their ribs, and on their faces. Being active and awake, every attack he gave made him feel alive. It didn't tire him one bit. It didn't take long before both Furown and Fire Rockets were on their knees. Having not eaten anything for days, they had no strength to carry on fighting a human let alone a strong mutant. Regardless, they struggled to get up again, only to receive a harsher blow. Furown, barely able of seeing straight, saw Fire Rockets get knocked out cold. Then, he saw his foe's boot coming in his face. Seconds before he blacked out, Furown understood his foe. However, it would not do him any good for this round. Like Fire Rockets, he was out.

From his witch-like powers Furown understood what he was and why he had come. It was obvious that he was a sorcerer who had been watching him and Fire Rockets for a while, presumably from since they set foot in the city. He had seen him take out the police, villainous mutants, Dr. Tent. And now, he wanted to try him out himself. He wanted to know just how much he could endure after going through such battles. That was why not sheer strength nor blistering stars could harm him. He had cheated; he had an advantage. He knew all of their moves.

Just before he had his way with their unconscious bodies, Fire Blast stepped up. What the sorcerer just realized was that Fire Blast had an advantage. The sorcerer hadn't seen his moves yet.

'Go,' Fire Blast ordered the foe. 'And I won't hunt you down.'

'Funny.'

'I'll say it again but for the last time. Leave now before it's too late.'

Fire Blast was serious. The sorcerer's smile faded into a serious look as well.

'You want them? Come and get them.'

'Just remember that I asked nicely.'

Fire Blast had not intended on taking this fight personally, but in a way he did. Furown had nothing to do with it, but Fire Rockets did. Putting the similarity in names aside, Fire Blast felt a connection with Fire Rockets – he felt as if he had to protect him. As this was not the time to get sentimental, Fire Blast casted his feelings aside to focus on taking the sourcerer out. Since he depended on cheating for a win, the sourcerer didn't seem to be that powerful of a mutant. Still, Fire Blast did not get cocky; he never underestimated any opponenet.

Fire Blast and the sourcerer charged towards each other, eaching knowing little about his opponent. Before he had came here he spied on Furown and Fire Blast's earlier fight hence knew of his ninjastic agility and swordsman skills. From observing his fight with Furown and Fire Rockets, Fire Blast knew about the sourcerer's quick speed and shadow kicks. However, both of them knew that what the other has demonstrated of power was just the tip of the ice burg.

It didn't take long for the sourcerer to realize that Fire Blast was winning this round. Both of them were fast, but his speed was from his magic, while Fire Blast's agility was purly skill. Receiving more than inflicting damage, the sourcerer got angry. His eyes radiated with their darkness – not only his, but his skull's eyes as well. His cape seemed to blow harder as if there was a current of wind coming out of him. Then, he shot out a semi-transparent wave of a dark nature. Fire Blast sensed it and immediately hid behind his huge shield. Luckily for him, his skull was big enough and his body was small enough for him to hide behind. The wave did massave damage on everything around the sourcerer within a mile. Fire Blast wasn't effected. Then, Fire Blast seized the moment by jumping out at the sorcerer and wielded his sword virtacally. The sourcerer was knocked across the battlefield. Being unconscious, the territorial field minimized into nothingness. The sky was back to normal.

Not desiring to kill him or take him on for a second round, Fire Blast grabbed Furown and carried him on his back. He was not as heavy as he had thought. Fire Rockets was put on top of him. Then, Fire Blast disappeared from the scene.

'Where are we?' Furown exclaimed as he came to.

'Relax.'

Fire Blast was the first one Furown spotted as his voice was the first he heard. Fire Blast was sitting on a broken cupboard. Furown was on a insuffecient, outused mattress. In fact, looking around him, Furown saw that the whole place was a dumb. It was obvoiusly a room in one of the many abandoned apartment buildings. It was a good

hiding place to reevaluate, he believed. Looking at his left side, he saw Fire Rockets lying there. He pushed him and he got up. Furown was relieved that Fire Rockets was glad as well though he didn't say or do anything to show his feelings. The thanks Furown gave to Fire Blast came in the form of a slight smile flashed at him. Fire Blast took it. At that moment Furown and Fire Rockets knew they could trust Fire Blast with their lives.

While he remained lying on the mattress, Furown looked out of the nearby window. It was nighttime. How night it was was unknown to him, nor did it matter. He felt a little better, but needed some more rest to get back into top shape. He went to sleep again.

When he came to once more he smelled food. Sitting upright, he saw a variation of food ranging from mushrooms to chicken nuggets to canned tuna.

'Where did you get this?' Furown asked.

'Around,' Fire Blast replied. 'I know this doesn't exactly amount to a decent meal, but it was all I could find. So dig in.'

'Did you steal this?'

'No, I charged it with my credit card. Of course I stole it. You think money still has its value in a world like this? – I'm going out for some fresh air.'

Furown was silent. He knew Fire Blast was right. Furown felt stupid and naïve, yet wanted to believe that morals mattered. He felt torn, but also very weak. He had to eat. He woke up Fire Rockets and, together, they emptied all the cans and boxes. They were so starved that they didn't even cook the uncooked food. By the time they were done Fire Blast had returned. He went over to his cupboard and got on top. He thrust his sword into the ground. His shield, however, seeing that it was mutated on his arm, was a part of him hence could not be laid aside.

'You ate?' Furown asked.

'Yeah. And you better get some rest.'

'What time is it?'

'Around midnight.'

Furown, feeling he could use a three or four hours sleep, went back to sleep once more. He did not know when would be the next time he would get a chance to

sleep. Furthermore, he felt safe enough to rest with Fire Blast watching over them. However, Fire Rockets did not as easily fall back to sleep. He was puzzled.

'What about you?' Fire Rockets asked Fire Blast. 'Aren't you going to sleep?'

'I don't sleep.'

'Everyone sleeps.'

'Not me. Not anymore.'

Hearing his dark tone, Fire Rockets felt that he wasn't in the mood for a conversation hence he laid back down. But then, he got up again.

'You do sleep. You're just acting tough,' he said goofily.

In irritation of the ridiculous comment, Furown turned around to his other side. Fire Blast did not dignify what Fire Rockets said with a reply. Instead he remained silent. Fire Rockets got the hint and laid back down. However, he did not sleep. Instead, he kept looking at their motionless guardian. Staring at him, Fire Rockets could not be sure whether he was sleeping or not. His eyes appeared as black and shut as he was in battle.

'What?' Fire Blast finally shouted in annoyance of his stare.

'Sorry,' Fire Rockets said, then said what was on his mind: 'Just how .. blind are you?' Furown turned around to his other side in irritation. He felt like hitting Fire Rockets but didn't. Fire Rockets and Fire Blast could sense that Fire Rockets's questions were getting on his nerves, but Fire Rockets continued nonetheless: 'I'm only asking because I read somewhere that nine out of ten people who are blind are not absolutely blind: they could see with foggy vision or something like that.'

'.. thanks for the info.'

'So are you?'

'Yes. I cannot see anything.'

'How sad ... you'll never know what I look like.'

'How will I ever go on?' Fire Blast said sarcastically.

Then, quiet returned. Fire Rockets laid back as to go to sleep; Furown seemed to be already asleep; Fire Blast remained sitting upright with both hands behind his

head. Just when they thought that they were going to sleep, they heard the annoying voice speak again.

'So what's with the sword?'

Furown shifted in his mattress once more. He tried and succeeded in refraining from hitting Fire Rockets.

'I mean, why do you even own a sword? You're a pilot, not a medieval knight!'

'What's with twenty questions.'

'Just making conversation. Jezz! No need to be defensive.'

That's when Furown had enough. He got up and hit him on the head.

'Ouh! What was that for?'

'What's wrong with you? You're a man: act like one! Men don't do small talk, they talk in silence.'

'That's it,' Fire Blast exclaimed as if he understood a mystery. 'That's what I found so strange about Fire Rockets. He's not a man.'

'Hey!'

Furown said nothing. He was enjoying where this was going. It was time to annoy Fire Rockets for a change.

'Seriously,' Fire Blast went on. 'From the moment I met you I felt protective of you .. like you were ..' he paused shortly to select his words carefully, 'less capable of protecting yourself.'

'Watch it!' Fire Rockets threatened.

'You know, it all makes sense. I mean you are the weakest among us.'

'I could kick your butt any time!'

'Maybe, but you wouldn't. Because such rash impulses come only to guys, manly men.'

'Take that back!'

'See what I mean: talk. That's what you're best at. You hate getting physical and sweaty. It's unladylike.'

'That's it!'

Fire Rockets sprang off the floor and onto Fire Blast. He resulted to holding him down instead of fistfighting him. He wanted to show him who could dominate who without hurting him. Both Furown and Fire Blast smiled at this attempt as they knew how to push Fire Rockets buttons. He was alright, they both agreed.

Day Five: Treachery

Furown, Fire Rockets, and Fire Blast got up with the brake of dawn. All three of them were refreshed and ready to go on with this crazy new life. For this day, however, they had an agenda. They decided to visit a legendary man known as the professor.

The professor was an urban myth born with the rebirth of this city. No one had seen him, but rumors of his marvelous talents spread faster than Furown's reputation. He was said to be a man of many talents, one of which was the ability to built any mechanisim in an unreasonably short period of time. He needed no factories or workers, only his two hands and scraps. What attracted Furown more was the fact that he was said to be like him – a man of morals. Furown had to find him.

Walking down the moringing-scented street, the three saw only weak mutants roaming the streets. The tough ones, appearently, only came out at night. Humans, however, were out of sight. They were either in hiding, or dead. A number of mutants who spotted the trio hid in fear. Appearently Furown and his gang were recognized. However, there was one dashing man who did not seem to be firghthen. He ran directly towards them and jumped at Fire Rockets with joy.

'Hey! Get off!' Furown shouted at him as he placed a distance between the two.

The man's cheerful expression died out.

'Johnny, don't you .. recognize me? It's me, Trunk,' he told Fire Rockets with hope in his eyes.

'Johnny?' Both Furown and Fire Blast exclaimed at the same time.

'Yeah. Both of us were schoolmasters in the elementary school before this mess took place.'

'Well, Johnny, do you know him?' Furown asked Fire Rockets.

Fire Rockets scanned him from head to foot: He had wild, anime-like hair that was bright yellow. His face was not familiar as it appeared to be like any other. The look in his eyes told Fire Rockets that not only did he know him, but that they were best friends. Moving down Fire Rockets saw that he had a blue suit with a white vest and matching ugg boots. Overall, he appeared to be like any other human.

'So, do you?' Furown asked again.

'Nope.'

'What?' Trunk insisted in a pleading voice, 'Come on, we were best of friends until you disappeared last week and was reported missing.'

'Get lost before you lose more than a friend, pal,' Furown warned off.

'No wait,' Fire Rockets replied. 'I .. might know him. You see, I had amnesia before my mutation, so I don't know anyone. But I keep having these flashbacks of me with kids around me. I think I was a schoolmaster.'

'See.'

'I could be Johnny, I don't know.'

'I knew you'd remember,' Trunk replied happily.

'But,' Fire Rockets added, 'how did you know it was me? You've never seen me in this suit.'

'But I could feel it was you. The moment I saw you I knew you were my buddy!'

Then, Trunk grabbed Fire Rockets's head and fought with him. Furown was alarmed at first, but then Fire Blast placed his arm in front of him in prevention. It wasn't real fighting, but playing around – something Furown had not seen in a long time. The two fooling around seemed so innocent. It was odd that in such a dangerous world

innocence still found a way to survive. Furown thought of telling Trunk to beat it – that this was no place for humans – but seeing how much he and Fire Rockets were alike, he could not separate them. After all, he wanted to find the professor as he wanted to be with someone morally-aware like himself.

'Okay, fine. You could come along.'

Trunk accompanied them. He told them about his horrors about what it felt like to be hiding all the time in fear, and how he had no where to go. Hearing his stories excited Fire Rockets and made him feel close to Trunk. Fire Blast was happy because Fire Rockets was happy. However, Furown seemed to be annoyed. Fire Blast was the only one who picked up on that. He ran upfront to Furown for a private conversation.

'What's wrong?'

'Nothing.'

'Fine,' Fire Blast replied. He knew something was bothering him.

'It's just that I don't think it's safe to be making all this noise and racket in a neighborhood like this.'

'Relax, they're just having fun.'

'Until someone gets hurt.'

'Besides, I thought you were the strongest there is.'

'Whatever,' Furown grunted.

'Somebody's jealous.'

'Somebody's gonna get hit. Don't go there.'

'Fine. Suit yourself.'

In silence, Furown had a time to introspect. Deep down he was a bit jealous. Fire Rockets was suppose to be his friend, not some school teacher's. However, he'd rather die than admit that. Meanwhile, Fire Rockets seemed to have bonded with Trunk as if they were childhood friends. Although their memories were not something they shared, they had a lot in common.

Time flew by as the four spent the entire day in search of the professor. They found no clue. Fire Rockets seemed focused less on finding him and more on making Trunk laugh and vice versa. This annoyed Furown.

At around sunset tougher mutants started to appear. The four minded their own business, but the mutants started talking. They had no beef with strong mutants who stick together, or even mutants who have a code, but to see mutants hanging out with humans was just plain sick. They started looking dangerously at them.

'Maybe you should leave,' Furown told Trunk.

'What? Why?' Fire Rockets objected.

'Cause we got enough trouble as it is,' Furown replied.

'No body's bothering us now,' Fire Rockets defied.

'Uh, guys,' Fire Blast tried to intervene.

'Shut up,' Furown silenced him, then turned back to Fire Rockets.

Fire Blast felt that this was going to get ugly, but he could do nothing except watch them duke it out. The sun was down now. It was dark, but could get darker.

'When they attack,' Furown went on, 'everyone will have to carry his own. But you won't. You will be too busy protecting that soft weakling.'

'Look at them! They're just peeping freaks. They won't dare lay a finger on any of us. Chill out, man, you're freaking over nothing.'

'What a time you chose to grow a spine.'

'For a right cause, yeah, I'm willing to fight,' Fire Rockets planted his foot. He was dead serious. Furown had never seen him like this before.

'You sure you want to do this?'

'I'm sorry, man. I'm not backing down.'

'Fine,' Furown said in Fire Rockets's face, then walked away. 'You're on your own.'

'Furown ..'

'Having a human only stinks up the bunch.'

Fire Rockets, being angry himself, said nothing.

Furown, realizing that he was walking away alone, stopped and looked at Fire Blast.

'You coming?'

Fire Blast was torn, but did not move.

'Figures. Who needs you anyways,' Furown said as he walked away.

'Same here,' Fire Rockets replied, then walked in the other direction with Trunk.

Furown disappeared out of sight in one direction, and Fire Rockets and Trunk disappeared into another. Fire Blast wished he could go with Furown – what he really wished was that they wouldn't split up – but he knew that Furown was strong enough to survive on his own. Fire Rockets, on the other hand, wasn't. And the fact that he found himself a non-fighting friend meant that he would be more vulnerable. He needed protection now more than ever.

Catching up with Fire Rockets and Trunk, Fire Blast noticed that they were surrounded by a number of mutants. It was an ambush. They were too afraid to attack earlier because Furown was with them. Now that they were alone, they didn't stand a chance in front of so many mutants.

'Stay behind me,' Fire Rockets instructed Trunk. He did. 'Don't worry about this. Me and Fire Blast could take them out easily, right bro?'

'No.'

'What?'

'Not with someone to protect. I'll go get Furown.'

'Are you crazy? Let him go. We can do this on our own.'

'Yes we can. On our own. But we're not on our own, are we?'

Fire Blast was smart enough to see the outcome. Sure he and Fire Rockets were strong enough to whack a dozen of second class mutants, but with Trunk, Fire Rockets would be more focused on protecting him, making Fire Blast focus more on protecting Fire Rockets instead of attacking. Fire Blast left to get Furown.

'Whimp!' Fire Rockets shouted at Fire Blast as he left. The mutants let him go because it was Fire Rockets and Trunk who they were after. 'Hang tight, buddy, I'll take care of them in a cinch.'

Fire Blast dashed through the alley ways as fast as he could to get to Furown. Since his search was conducted in a well-organized manner, he had an idea where Furown would be.

'Furown!'

'Fire Blast?'

'It's Fire Rockets. He needs your help.'

Furown and Fire Blast rushed back. Furown could argue "why should I help?", but in his heart he knew that he could never forgive himself if anything were to happen to him. Upon reaching the battleground, they found a few dead mutants and Fire Rockets blasting stars out of his head at the remaining ones. With Furown and Fire Blast in sight, the mutants ran away.

'You okay?'

'Yeah,' Fire Rockets replied as he barely breathed. He was wounded as well.

'Where's Trunk?'

Looking around him, Fire Rockets could not see him. He ran to the far east, then to the far west, shouting his name. Looking back at clueless Furown and Fire Blast, Fire Rockets realized that he was gone.

Walking down the street, Furown saw that Fire Rockets was really depressed. He hated it more than seeing him happy, Fire Rockets might've only known Trunk for a day, but the two were so identical that they might as well have known each other all their lives. Furown would've gone the distance in retrieving Trunk if he knew how. But the truth was, all of them knew that humans had a very low chance of surviving here, especially if they were targeted by mutants. The trio said nothing, but they all shared their belief that Trunk was dead.

Then, in the dark night, they felt a territorial vibe. It belonged to a strong mutant. The three put aside their emotions and got on their guards. They did so for their comrades if not for themselves. Fire Rockets was serious more than ever: he had lost a friend on this day, and there was no way he was going to lose another. As the activator of the territorial forcefield appeared before them, all three were shocked. It was Trunk.

'.. Trunk?' Fire Rockets asked in shock and disbelief.

'Shut your whole.'

It was his voice, but not the tone they knew. It was a dark, sinister one, one which sent chills down Fire Rockets's spine. This was no human, the trio realized, but a mutant of a high class. The left side of his face was furious as if he carried a personal vendetta to kill all that his eye saw; the right side was burned off. His hair was that of Trunk, as well as his height, weight, and choice in wardrobe. However, aside from the blood on his cloth, his arms were not the same. His left side was a brilliant magenta saber; on his right was a skeleton arm whose elbow was covered with bloody flesh and from the shoulder came a sharp bone. His bony fingers were fleshless. What got Fire Blast's attention was the shield he had on his left hand. It resembled his own, only with a dragon instead of a skull. What got Furown's attention was the dark belt he had around his waist. It emitted a threatening aura. For Fire Rockets, the mere expression in Trunk's eye puzzled him. It told him that he wanted him and his friends dead.

'Trunk .. what's going on ...?'

'Rockets, this isn't Trunk. It can't be.'

'I am,' Trunk replied. 'But who the heck are you?' His reply puzzled Furown and Fire Blast. 'I don't know who you are, but get lost. This is between me and Johnny.'

'His fight is my fight,' Furown shouted back.

'No,' Fire Rockets said, 'why does this have to be a fight, Trunk? What happened?'

'What? Suddenly you have amnesia now?'

'If you have a split personality, yes. Now tell me what's going on.'

Looking at Fire Rockets and hearing the sincerity in his voice, Trunk felt that he was telling the truth – that he had no clue why they should fight.

'Guess a trip down memory lane is necessary since apparently you seem to have blocked out your horrible past. Just last week we were the best of friends. Always had been since high school. Everything was going perfect until you made a move on my girl.'

'Alicia ..' Fire Rockets remembered.

Memories started rushing back. He was in love with their colleague Alicia and married her. He chose her over his best friend. Because of that they drifted apart. Fire Rockets tried to talk to him, to tell him that he didn't wish it to happen, but it did, and that she was in love with him. Trunk became bitter after that. He stopped coming to school. In fact, when Fire Rockets went to his place to see if he was alright, but found no one there. When he got back home, he found the door wide open. Rushing to see if Alicia was fine, Fire Rockets found her body on the floor covered in blood. Trunk was lying on the ground beside her with his right wrist cut open. He killed her then committed suicide. What happened after that Fire Rockets could not remember. Being in shock, he probably wandered off into the streets without any thoughts whatsoever crossing his mind. Perhaps shortly after that he blocked his past out of his memory as it was too horrible. He had lost everything.

'But wait .. how are you ..'

'Alive? Turns out cutting your wrist isn't the fastest way to end your life. Before I died I mutated into this.'

'And Alicia?'

'She's dead.'

Fire Rockets felt the shock all over again.

'I sat there for hours, wondering why I was still alive. But then I knew why. This is a second chance to set things right: I shouldn't kill myself, but kill you!'

Having finished what he had to say, Trunk charged towards Fire Rockets with his saber raised. That's when Fire Blast jumped in and blocked with his own sword. Furown pulled Fire Rockets out of the way. Trunk tried to get bypass Fire Blast but couldn't. Fire Blast stood on his nerves and in his face. Trunk tried another tactic: get through Fire Blast, however, that was even harder. Trunk was good with his blade, but Fire Blast was even better with his. Both of them were skilled, but because of his emotions getting in the way, Trunk failed to focus purely on his match. Knowing that this wasn't his day, he backed away.

'This isn't over,' Trunk said to Fire Blast first, then shifted his sight to Fire Rockets. Then, he was gone.

'I don't understand,' Fire Rockets said in confusion. 'If this is the real Trunk, then who was with us before? He was normal.'

None of them had an answer, but seeing he want to hear anything, Fire Blast said: 'Normally I would say that what you saw was a ghost from your past, but we know for a fact that it was no ghost. All of us saw him.' Then, Fire Blast paused and looked at Furown to say something.

'What? I'm not down with that sentimental stuff!'

'I think what Furown is trying to say is you shouldn't think about the person you hung out with today. For all we know it could've been a trick Trunk was pulling to try to make you feel guilty about what happened. But you shouldn't feel guilty 'cause he's the physco. He probubly was just some kid Trunk payed to dress up like him.'

'Or maybe it's one of his abilities .. shapeshifting ...'

Furown was seroius, but Fire Blast didn't even consider the possibility.

'Look. We could sit here and theorize all night long about what really happened, but it's not going to solve anything. I think we should put this whole thing behind us because whoever Trunk is, he's not the friend you once knew. If he came to us again with the intention to fight, then that's what we'll give him. A fight. Nothing more, nothing less. Zero emotions. Okay?'

'.. I really cared about him.'

Day Six: Alone

The next morning brought a bit of a change. Aside from being cloudy and windy, Furown had decided that they should split up.

'What? Why?' Fire Rockets questioned.

'To cover more ground,' Furown replied.

'That's bull,' Fire Blast commented.

'Look, I already made up my mind. We're splitting for now. You two want to search together, that's fine by me. But get one thing stright: until we find the professor, I'm flying solo.'

Then, he left. They didn't know what was going through that head of his, but felt that something was up. Why would he go alone?

Fire Rockets and Fire Blast decided to stick together in their search. Unlike Furown, they knew that no matter how strong they were, there was always the possibility of someone stronger out there. Although they wanted to locate the professor quickly, both of them stopped at a certain sight. They could not walk away from what they saw and craved.

'Food!' Fire Rockets exclaimed with a watery mouth.

There was a pile of food on a table, and not any kind of junk food, but nutritional. There was bread, cheese, and other sorts of food that had become a rarity in a world like this. Fire Rockets and Fire Blast could not resist the urge to gobble it up. The thought of it being a trap didn't cross their minds.

'Now this is quality food,' Fire Rockets talked as he munched, 'not that canned junk you brought us that night.'

'I didn't see you come up with anything better.'

'Lighten up, dude, I was only joking. Now let's dig in!'

Without even considering if it belonged to anyone, Fire Rockets dove right in and ate like a starved child. The way he saw it it was a doggy dog world: if the gatherer of this bouquet of food wanted it, he wouldn't have left it. Fire Blast joined him. The two had time and a large appetite hence they dug in as if they were competing against each other.

'You eat a lot for a skinny dude,' Fire Rockets commented between his munches.

'Right back at ya,' Fire Blast replied in the same manner.

However, their feast was cut short as it was interrupted by an unexpected watcher. Fire Rockets hadn't noticed him, but the moment Fire Blast did, they both stopped eating.

'Trunk,' Fire Rockets sounded.

Seeing the emotional pause in Fire Rockets, Fire Blast stood up. He knew that Fire Rockets could not fight Trunk with their given history, hence he took his rival on. He drew out his sword and jumped towards him, engaging in a battle. What he did not know was that what he did was exactly what Trunk expected to happen. The next chance Fire Blast got to look back at Fire Rockets, he noticed that he was gone.

'Fire Rockets!' Fire Blast exclaimed, then turned back to Trunk. 'What have you done with him?'

'Nothing really. Did you even see me come close to touching him?'

The calm and condescending tone Trunk used irritated Fire Blast; Fire Blast jumped with his sword at Trunk, but because he was driven by rage, Trunk managed to

block his attack easily, redirecting it with his own saber towards the ground. Holding it down, his smile grew sinisterly. Fire Blast grew in anger.

What Fire Blast did not know was that Fire Rockets was as fine as he was. The moment Fire Blast left to tough it up with Trunk, the Sourcerer had reappeared behind and teleported himself with Fire Rockets into his dimension. It was a dark, spaciuous place with a pitch black ground and a dark violet sky. Noiseless black lightnings were seen in the distance, but could never be reached .. as if they were illusions.

'Where are we?' Fire Rockets shouted in confusion as he looked around him.

'A place where I go for a little R and R,' the Sroucerer replied grinningly. 'But not this time. This time there will be anything but resting, relaxing or recuperating.' Seeing his opponent freak out by his surroundings, the Sourcerer added: 'Take it easy, honey, you want a ticket back home, just knock me out cold.'

'What is this?'

'A date. What does it look like? It's a fight.'

'But why?'

'Why?'

'Why do you want to fight me?'

'Because you're on Furown's side, and he's the toughest cookie on the block.'

'So go fight him.'

'Later. After I've given him a reason to show me his true power. You see, I know he has a weak spot for you, so once I kill you and deliver your head on a platter for him to see, I'll get my chance for a fight till the death with him. So now, let's dance.'

'... you schemed this, didn't you? For Fire Blast and Trunk to fight while you get a piece of me?'

'Bingo.'

'Devide and Conquor?'

'More like a fair fight. A one on one. Don't worry about your friend, star boy, he's not the one who's about to be dead meat.'

With that, the sorcerer dashed towards Fire Rockets. Fire Rockets realized that he was going to attack with a kick delivered by his right foot as it had its own field of a dark matter around it – it was powered up. Fire Rockets dodged the attack in time, and counterattacked with a shove for distance, then shot a star directly at the sorcerer's head. The sorcerer was blown across the battlefield.

Walking towards him, Fire Rockets said: 'Only one problem with your plan, witch boy: I don't go down that easily.'

Getting up, the sorcerer replied: 'Then we're a perfect match 'cause, guess what: neither do I.'

And so, a fight between Fire Rockets and the sorcerer was on route. Fire Blast and Trunk had also fought with the intention of killing. Trunk had agreed on a temporary alliance with the sorcerer only to get back at Fire Blast for getting in his way. Since he lost the last time because he was angry and his foe was calm, he thought of turning the tables around. With Fire Blast driven by rage, Trunk smiled as he believed he could easily take out Fire Blast for once and for all.

Meanwhile, in another part of the city, Furown had his own problems. Shortly after separating from his group, he felt that the streets were suddenly quieter. At this time of day and in a neighborhood such as the one he walked in, he knew it wasn't normal. Furown had suddenly stopped.

'Come out,' he ordered.

All he heard was winds blowing, but what he felt was more than whispers of nature, but the cries of an abnormal creature. The cries weren't of sorrow, but were full of misery, as if they demanded death to all lives. It wasn't Dr. Tent's, but something far more sinister. What it was or how powerful it was was yet to be determined. Reviving no answer, Furown commanded once again. Then, it appeared.

Its appearance and entrance were bizzar and unlike anything Furown had ever seen. It came waterly out of the destructed pavement infront of Furown as water would of a wet towel. As for its entity, it was not man nor animal. It had no legs, but a strange body. Its chest was grey on the sides, but silver in the middle, with black blood coming out of its neck. The blood seemed dry, as if it had been spilled out days ago and never wiped. In fact, it seemed perminant. The head was of a mutated freak – the brain, which covered the entire head, was exterior, leaving no place for eyes, ears, or even a nose. Its mouth was wide open with its black tounge coming out. It could only extend so far as it appeared to be chopped off. The mutant's two hands, however, were blue and too

bony and long for a body of his calibre. He had long five fingers on each hand, each one large enough to hold Furown's head on their own. From his shoulders and all the way back to his tail, the mutant seemed to have mutated into some sort of metallic armor. It was that of a giant roman warrior like the ones found in museums. With an odd structure such as that, Furown didn't know what to expect.

'Friend or foe?' Furown shouted as he remained on guard.

He didn't reply. All he did was float in the air.

'Friend or foe? Friend or foe?' Furown repeated quickly with panic.

Looking at him and sensing the aura that came from him, Furown did not feel comfortable at all in participating in this face off. He wanted to know his intentions even if they were unfriendly. However, he could not attack until he knew that this mutant was an enemy. Then, Furown got his answer. As they waited, a child passed by the street. A human child. He was about six and the only human in sight. The blood on the child's shirt told Furown that his parents, like many other humans, were killed recently, most likely by mutants or in a crossfire. Furown wanted to scare the child away for his own safety, but the mutant before him snatched him with one hand and, within a second, gobbled him alive. The child's cry and suffering lasted a second.

'You eat .. children!' Furown said with a shock in his eyes and tone.

'No,' he spoke, 'All humans. But children are the tastiest.'

Furown, remembering his eight year old, got furious. Newfound strength and energy came from his fury. Before he knew it, Furown had sprinted so fast towards the devourer that he did not see him coming. Upon being at point blank from his target, Furown delivered a fierce blow with his right fist, one which knocked the devourer into the building behind him. The devourer tried to block it, but it was too much for him to withstand. Unlike most mutants, Furown's anger seemed to work for his advantage. Because the devourer had given him a reason to be angry, his powers doubled. However, little did Furown know, that was exactly what the devourer wanted. As he floated back to Furown, he told him why.

'I am unnatural,' the devourer spoke, 'even when compared with our kind. I am unnatural. There are many things unnatural about me, several of which I have no control over.'

'Such as snaking on little kids?' Furown spoke with rage.

The devourer laughed. He enjoyed seeing Furown pissed. Furown attacked again. What the devourer meant was that he had no control over coming to Furown. He was attracted to aura's of high class mutants. For him, it wasn't personal, but the city felt like it was not big enough for the both of them. In fact, the whole world should not have more than one high class mutant, and he elected himself to stay. Furown and any other high class mutant would have to die.

Furown punched and punched as rapidly as he could, and the devourer did nothing but withstand them. Furown found it odd that he wasn't attacking, but didn't give him a chance to. At some point during his chain of punching, Furown felt the breath of the devourer. It reeked of human blood and rotten flesh. Then, he could hear him breathing. It was as if this punching had become a routine.

'Come on!' He taunted Furown as he received his most ferocious punches, 'You're not hitting me strong enough! Harder! Harder! Harder!'

Hearing such a request, Furown feared the worst. This mutant was defenatly not like any other he had ever face before. In fact, he scared him.

Furown's, Fire Rockets's, and Fire Blast's fights went on all day long and, having no ally on their side, all night long. At first they thought about 'when' they would see victory, but then the question diverted into an 'if'.

Day Seven: Alliance

Fire Rockets stratigized for victory. He knew that his adversary would be too smart to beat unless he was tricked. Fire Rockets faked his fall. He acted as if every blow he took from the sourcerer had inflicted more damage than it did. He certainly had brousid and bled enough to make it seem real. With both knees and hands on the ground, Fire Rockets preformed a convincing act as if he was down for the count.

'Won't go down easily, huh?' The sourcerer mocked Fire Rockets as he circuled his victim. 'You didn't even last a day, you weakling!'

The sourcer drove his foot into Fire Rockets's stomach. Fire Rockets flew across the battlezone. Once again, Fire Rockets acted as if it took most of him out. As the sourcerer came towards him for the finish, Fire Rockets decided that this was the time to attack. The sourcerer's guard would be down now as he pshyologically believed he was victoroius. Fire Rockets was correct in assuming that rationalization. Leaving himself wide open, Fire Rockets attacked the sourcerer's weakspot with a powered-up, brute blasting star out of his head. It knocked the sourcerer out of sight and, presumingly, out cold as Fire Rockets's reality transformed before his eyes back into his previous setting. The sun had just started to come up. Looking around him, Fire Rockets saw Fire Blast knocked on the ground and Trunk going for the kill.

'No!' Fire Rockets shouted as he shot a train of stars at Trunk.

Trunk, caught off guard, sustained the first shot, but was blown away by its sequels. Getting up again, he found Fire Rockets's foot in his face. Fire Rockets shot a fire blast out of his foot, sky-rocketing Trunk out through a building. Trunk could return and fight more, but seeing that vengeance and despair worked in Fire Rockets's favor, he decided to call it quits for now.

Rushing towards Fire Blast, Fire Rockets dropped to his knees and held his friend's head between his hands.

'Buddy, speak to me,' Fire Rockets said dramatically.

'Let go .. of met,' Fire Blast replied in a stuttering, injured-like tone.

'You can't die on me!' Fire Rockets went on with the drama. Fire Blast hit him on the head. 'Ouh!'

Getting up, Fire Rockets saw that Fire Blast wasn't any more injured than he himself was. Both of them had a tough and long battle, but still had the energy to go on. Although he wanted to, Fire Rockets refrained from rubbing the fact that he won his fight while Fire Blast lost his in Fire Blast's face. Fire Rockets could see clearly that Fire Blast was bothered by his defeat. He knew that he lost only because he let his emotions get involved in his fight. Had he not worried about Fire Rockets, he probably would've won.

Fire Rockets and Fire Blast's search came to an end sooner than they had expected. They had found the professor.

'You've seen him? Where?' Fire Blast questioned a lowlife mutant.

'I don't know, somewhere around the block,' he replied.

Fire Blast didn't like his reply so he bullied the scum mutant by holding his shirt and shoving him against the wall. Fire Rockets stood by him in support of his approach. The two had played bad cop and really bad cop. The look Fire Blast's blind eyes shaped in told the mutant that he was the really bad cop.

'Easy on the shirt, pal,' the mutant exclaimed. 'It's the last one I've got!'

'Talk.'

'All I know is: he's got a place around here. I know this because I've seen him come out before dawn to gather some junk and metal scrap from the streets. He's like a hobo whose building something secretive and big, I dunno.'

'Where?'

'I dunno know, somewhere around the block,' he repeated.

'Show us.'

The mutant, being threatened by the two, took them to the streets where he had last seen the professor. Having no use for him anymore, Fire Blast let him go. Fire Rockets and Fire Blast started searching the buildings for the professor's secret layer.

'So what happens when we find this guy?' Fire Rockets asked as they searched.

'I don't know. I guess take him to see Furown.'

'What if he doesn't want to come?'

'We make him come.'

Neither did Fire Rockets nor Fire Blast wished to go to such extremes, but they believed the professor to be an asset. Seeing how desperate Furown wanted him, they knew that if the professor was to side on the wrong team, they would never stand a chance. They had to complete the mission at any cost.

Fire Rockets and Fire Blast searched thoroughly one place after another. Upon stumbling on the professor's garage, they caught his attention. However, there were two things that led to their next predicament. The first was the fact that Fire Rockets and Fire Blast did not know that the lot they've wandered into was the professor's. It was cleverly disguised as a junkyard to dis-attract attention. The second was that the professor always got rid of unwelcomed visitors.

'What was that?' Fire Rockets said as he heard something move.

Tilting their eyesight to where the noise was coming from, Fire Rockets and Fire Blast saw wired tubes and other gadgets moved about as if they were possessed. Several of the tubes stopped and settled facing Fire Rockets and Fire Blast as if they aimed at them. They powered up in a threatening and alerting manner. Understanding the professor's need to defend himself, the two realized that they were ambushed. Fire Rockets and Fire Blast knew that the tubes were weapons set to kill upon motion. The security system functioned well.

'Wait,' Fire Blast shouted.

Fire Blast had a feeling the professor was watching. He was in luck – the professor was. He was in a different chamber looking through the monitor that presented live feedback via his cameras. The professor switched the defence system from automatic to manual as he himself grabbed the controls. He awaited to hear what Fire Blast had to say.

'We're not here to fight you, but make a proposition.'

'You've got sixty seconds,' they heard the professor's voice over the intercom.

'Can you show yourself,' Fire Blast asked, then added: 'please?'

'No.'

'That's fine,' Fire Rockets jumped in. 'We can talk here.'

'What are you doing?' Fire Blast whispered to Fire Rockets.

'You've got your chance to speak,' Fire Rockets replied, 'and so far you've managed to get him to say “no”. I think it's my turn to give it a try.' Then he spoke aloud for the professor to hear him: 'It's like this, prof. My friends and I need a smart guy, like yourself, on our side. In return, you get protection. From all three of us.'

'I only see two.'

'He's running late, but he'll be here. So? We got a deal?'

'Not interested in joining a political party.'

'Whoa hey, who said anything about politics?'

'You want me to join your group to do what exactly? Fight? Make a change in the city? Make a statement?'

'.. maybe.'

'Look,' Fire Blast butted in. 'The truth is: it's an ugly city. And you need strong mutants on your side, pal, otherwise you'll be toast. Sure you think you're fine now, sitting in your own little barbie house base, but what happens after a week from now? Or a month? Or a year? This is only the beginning of the nightmare, and so far it's a war out there.'

The professor remained silent for a while. Fire Rockets and Fire Blast knew that he was thinking about what they said. The truth was he was running out of material to build the machines he needed and the power to energize them. With so many powerful mutants around, the professor could not venture off the block to get what he needed. Then, he spoke.

'And what if I were to say no?' He tested them.

Fire Blast jumped and sliced the guns changing their status from fully operational to dysfunctional. He did so so fast that neither Fire Rockets nor the professor saw him move. Standing with confidence, Fire Blast lowered his sword.

'I'd reconsider,' Fire Blast added.

Unexpectedly, a wall in the far side of the garage lowered. It was a shield that concealed a secret room. Out of that chamber a man came out. It was the professor.

The professor stood firmly, wearing a wardrobe of his making. It consisted of metallic scraps from head to toe, including rusted iron boots, chest armor, and a fake gold belt that had several pockets in which the professor kept his screws. Undereneath the metal pieces there was a dark magenta suit. On his chest armor there was a sign of an upsidedown pentagon. The left half of it was magenta, while the other half was navy. On his left shoulder there seemed to be a huge nail nailed into his body. Figuring out what its purpose was was a mystery to all. His face was unviewable as he wore a metallic helmet. It covered his face as the face-sized glasses were as black as dark sunglasses. On his right hand he wore a rubber black glove, while the left arm had mutated into a gun. It was a huge weapon with an apple-sized muzzle on its front side. On the weapon's left side another weapon of four barrels seemed to have mutated on the first. The way how all five mouths of the intimidating weapon powered up sent chills down Fire Rockets's and Fire Blast's spines. They got ready to fight.

'Relax,' the professor said. 'I'm willing to give socializing a chance.'

Lowering down his left arm, the professor raised his right. He removed his helmet. His face was horribly mutated with his suit. White skin and grey hair could scarcely be seen. Only the left side of his cheek seemed to be as it once was – the rest was either orange or black: his eyes and lips were orange; his nose, forehead, ears, chin, and the back of his head were all black. Mute balls had not been kind to his appearance.

'Hi,' Fire Rockets warmly introduced himself and his friend: 'We're the Fire brothers: I'm Rockets; he's Blast.'

'Rockets, you're an idiot,' Fire Blast replied.

'Not cool, dude,' Fire Rockets replied, then turned back to the professor and asked: 'so, what's your power?'

The professor smiled at Fire Rockets's naïve and childlike attitude. He was glad to see that there were mutants with a heart. The professor chose to answer Fire Rocket's question by showing him rather than telling him, and what better way to show him, he thought, than to present his finest work to date. He took them to see his masterpiece. He hid it underground in the basement which it consumed every inch of it. It was large .. tank-size large. Upon seeing it Fire Rockets and Fire Blast couldn't help but stare with amazement. It was a battleship.

Looking at it from the front, it appeared to be a weapon rather than a ship. Its pointer was laser cannon, one which seemed large enough to take out a city. On top of the huge cannon was the cockpit from which a pilot could command the entire vessel and not just the weaponry. Aside from the main beam cannon, there was a built-in machinegun on its right, a couple of targeting missiles on the left, and a grenade launcher underneath. It had a deadly frontier. Moving to the back behind the cockpit was a storage room, probably created to carry large objects. The pink frames that formed the boundaries of the storage room showed how deprived from materials the professor was. In fact, because he had no material, the ship seemed to be incomplete. There was no walls, no roofs, and no windshields. Looking closely, one could see that not all materials were aluminum or metal, but some were plastic; not all bindings were by heat and hammering, but some with duct-tape.

The battleship as whole resembled a turtle, having a fat body, flat four legs, and one small head sticking out of its long neck. It stood on four pipelines coming from each corner beneath the storage room. Some were burnt black by the flames they emitted when lifting off. However, their job was to levitate the ship and nothing more. To move forward, there was a huge engine which, when fired up, burns the fuel and produces fire from the rear, thrusting the battleship into a remarkable speed. Mirroring the four legs vertically was a matching set, identical in shape, size, and location. Their job was to speed up the descending process. If the battleship would ever have to go to battle, a second could be the difference between life and death. The professor was smart enough to know that putting all the weaponry at front would be stupid, hence he installed two targeting rocket launchers, one on each side of the body. They had more

flexibility in movement as they could rotate a full half circle from front to back. As they walked round it, Fire Rockets and Fire Blast noticed that the initials GF2 was written on it in several places.

'What does GF2 stand for? Your second girl friend?' Fire Rockets joked.

'Grand Fox,' the professor replied.

'What happened to 1?' Fire Blast asked.

'It ..' the professor paused dramatically as if he had a flashback regarding the subject. There seemed to be regret in his eyes. 'Got destroyed.'

Fire Rockets and Fire Blast could clearly see that talking about the original would only upset the professor. They figured he probably lost someone along with it, probably a wife or a son. Fire Rockets changed the subject by asking a dumb question.

'I don't get it. What's your power?'

'I built it by myself.'

'.. Nice.'

'Yesterday,' the professor added.

'No way!' Fire Rockets exclaimed.

'Cool ability,' Fire Blast remarked. 'My specialty's rapid movement, big mouth over here's specialty's fire, and Furown's power is pure strength. And you, doc., you've got the power to build machines from scratch in no time at all. No wonder Furown wanted you so badly on our side.'

'And Furown is ..?' The professor asked.

'Not sure yet, but you can ask him yourself. That's where we're heading right now .. hopefully with you on our side?'

The professor smiled, then gestured at GF2, and said: 'Well, then, I do believe that this is the fastest way to fly.'

Hoping on board, Fire Rockets and Fire Blast sat in the storage room behind the professor as they watched him turn the engine on. GF2 made a loud noise as if its generator could power up an entire city. Looking at the professor switching on certain switches and pulling certain levers, Fire Blast wished it was him in the cockpit seat.

'You know,' Fire Blast said to the professor. 'Before this whole mutany thing started, I was a pilot.'

'Oh really? What kind?'

'An F15 pilot.'

'Impressive. Then I guess I'll have to scoop over and watch a professional drive some time.'

'That would be something, doc.,' Fire Blast replied with satisfaction in his voice.

Sitting back, Fire Blast held on to the frame structure around him as he knew he could be blown away if he did not hold on tight to something. Upon looking at Fire Rockets, Fire Blast saw him still leaning over towards the cockpit watching the professor push buttons.

'Fire Rockets!' Fire Blast shouted as the engine noise was too loud for regular tone to be heard. 'Get back and hold on to something. We're gonna lift off any second now.'

'In a moment,' Fire Rockets shouted back, then turned towards the switch that had mesmerized him from the first moment he stepped on board. It tempted him. 'What does this one do?'

Fire Rockets asked the question on his mind without awaiting an answer. The second he asked his question, he triggered the switch. The professor hadn't realized what Fire Rockets had done until it was too late. Fire Rockets freaked out at seeing the abnormal occur – the surroundings outside GF2 faded into a bright cyan with violet rings circling the battleship. The garage and its junk was no longer visible, neither was the ground. A high-pitch sound was made by the engine, one which grew higher and sharper by the second until their surroundings reappeared. However, it wasn't the garage anymore, but a dry wasteland. The sky was cloudy. Fire Rockets was confused.

'Where,' Fire Rockets asked as he glanced about, 'the heck are we?'

'You mean when are we,' the professor corrected. 'That would be sixty-five million years before common era.'

'You mean we .. For real? We traveled back in time?! Just like that?'

Because of Fire Rockets's messing around, he brought them to a humanless period. Instead of lifting off into the air, GF2 warped back into time. While Fire Rockets tried to grasp his new reality, Fire Blast wasn't as shocked. From the first moment he

heard about the professor's ability, he figured that he could create any machinery. Playing with the four dimensions of reality was a bit unexpected, but achievable if he knew what he was doing. After all, mankind, having created vehicles, had already messed around with the third and fourth dimensions which are space and time. Hence jumping into different spacetimes wasn't that difficult, not with a mind like the professor's.

'Yes,' the professor replied. 'And once we get back, I'm making a child safety lock on the time machine so that children would refrain from touching it.'

'Whoa, go back? You must be crazy, doc., I mean, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity! We have to take a moment to discover this new world!' Fire Rocket had jumped out of GF2 by now. 'We might see prehistoric animals .. dinosaurs even!'

'Fire Rockets, Furown is waiting for us,' Fire Blast said.

'Aha! That's where you're wrong, my footless friend,' Fire Rockets spoke as if he was the smartest of the three. 'Furown isn't even born yet, ergo he could not be waiting. Dude, we have a time machine! We could go to him any time we want so we could never be late!'

'It's not a toy,' the professor said.

'Of course it's not a toy,' Fire Rockets said, then said to Fire Blast: 'it's a cool one.'

'Fire Rockets,' the professor said. 'Get back in or we're leaving you.'

'What? Oh come on!'

Neither did the professor nor Fire Blast reply with words, however, they did with their facial expressions. The professor's cold look told him that he wasn't a joker; Fire Blast's grin was wider than it should be. He found the relationship between the professor and Fire Rockets to be an amusing one, and knew that Fire Rockets would always know how to push his buttons and drive him crazy, even if it was unintentionally.

Just before Fire Rockets jumped aboard, he figured that the professor was bluffing. He thought that if he did venture off, they would either wait for him or accompany him. However, to actually leave him was something Fire Blast would never do hence he decided to call their bluff. He walked away with confidence. GF2 warped out.

'Hey!' Fire Rockets exclaimed at the air as GF2 vanished.

Fire Rockets was shocked to see GF2 gone. He looked around, hoping that they were somewhere nearby laughing at him, but nothing was in sight. There was a couple of volcanos and a train of mountains up ahead, but nothing else. Fire Rockets was worried at first, but then decided not to. They'll come back, he thought, they're just playing.

Not wanting to waste time in this new, old world, Fire Rockets started running towards the trail of mountains. He thought if there was anything living in this timeline, he should be able to see it from up there. Once he got there, he boosted himself up instead of climbing. He fired his legs with flames and reached the summit with no trouble at all. Viewing the scenery from the top, Fire Rockets saw a beautiful sight, one which was, sadly, void of any lifeforms. Fire Rockets received goosebumps, ones which told him that he was all alone in the world. He sat on the hill and looked with emptiness across the horizon.

Fire Rockets's action-packed adventure didn't run dry, not even when he was feeling down. Seconds after sitting down and hugging his legs, he jumped up and out of the way of becoming a meal. If he hadn't, he would've been chewed as huge jaws were occupying his space. Looking at the owner of these massive jaws, Fire Rockets saw a monster he had thought long gone.

'A Tyrannosaurus Rex!' Fire Rockets exclaimed.

It wasn't an adult Tyrannosaurus as its meaty thighs were barely Fire Rockets's height. Like any Tyrannosaurus, it had short two-fingered arms with one huge reptilian tail to swing. But to Fire Rockets the beauty in it all was its huge head. The dangerous bone structure, the red eyes with dark skin around them, the huge, flesh-craving tongue its mouth housed, all of these made Fire Rockets extremely happy. The Tyrannosaurus, on the other hand, wasn't as fascinated. All he saw was a meal, one which he tried to bite. Fire Rockets dodged again.

'Bad Tyrannosaurus Rex! Bad Tyrannosaurus Rex!'

Fire Rockets had taken a liking to it, hence could not kill it. Being a mutant, he probably could defeat it without a sweat. While he thought of what to do, the Tyrannosaurus tried once more to bite him, but he slipped away once more. The Tyrannosaurus grew in anger and whacked Fire Rockets with its tail. Not seeing it coming, Fire Rockets was knocked off the mountain and fell on the ground. He was knocked unconscious. The Tyrannosaurus came down to dine.

Back in the future, GF2 emerged once more but with one less passenger.

'What did you do?' Fire Blast exclaimed.

'Nothing,' the professor replied as he tried to figure out why it left. 'Fire Rockets must've set a timer to return us here after sixty seconds. That's why I hate it when others mess with my stuff – they never know what they might do.'

'We have to go back.'

'Precisely what I had in mind. And relax, Fire Blast, you don't have to be protective about him when talking to me. I'm on your side now. I'll get him back.'

And back to the past they went once again. However, not being able to pinpoint exactly when they first appeared, the GF2 appeared in the same wasteland but Fire Rockets wasn't present. They had come half an hour later than their earlier conversation. Knowing that Fire Rockets wasn't the patient type, Fire Blast scanned the perimeter with his eyes in search of where he might've gone off to. Noticing that there were volcanoes up ahead, he pointed at them with a thought.

'Let's go search there. Maybe he got a ridiculous idea that he could fire up his powers by jumping into a volcano or something.'

'Worth a shot.'

The GF2 lifted off the ground heading towards the volcanoes. They seemed inactive and stable, yet the professor decided not to get too close as it may prove hazardous to the ship and the crew on board. Swinging slowly around the volcanoes, the professor and Fire Blast scanned the area for any sign of their friend. They found nothing. However, they did attract the attention of a local. Before they knew it, the crew of GF2 was attacked by a Pterosaurs.

'What the?' Fire Blast exclaimed as he ducked.

'We must've come too close to its nesting grounds. It must think we're after its babies.'

The Pterosaurs kept at them, trying to attack Fire Blast with its huge head. Fire Blast drew out his sword and slashed the air between them as to scare it away. His move failed. The Pterosaurs came close once more, and Fire Blast jumped on it with his sword, but it evaded in time. Fire Blast fell off board. However, he dropped his sword in time and hung on the Pterosaurs's foot. Seeing his sword fall, the professor assumed Fire Blast had fallen as well so he dove down to rescue him. Realizing that the Pterosaurs was his only ticket of surviving, Fire Blast hung closely on it and climbed his

way to its back. It struggled and resisted, but Fire Blast refused to let go. Then, it stopped. All of a sudden it gave up.

'What's wrong? Had enough?' Fire Blast gloated as he hung tightly on its neck.

The Pterosaurs's calm flight indicated that it gave up the fight. Seeing it like this, Fire Blast loosened his grip around its neck. It appeared sad, he thought. Examining its body and wings carefully, Fire Blast realized that it was too small to be a mother. If anything, it fought with them only because it was small and alone and frightened.

Having only saved his sword, the professor glanced high and low at where Fire Blast might be. Unexpectedly, he heard the Pterosaurs come flying by his side. What was shocking was the fact that Fire Blast was riding it.

'You .. tamed a Pterosaurs?!'

'Not exactly, but I am going to take this little guy with us back home. I'm gonna call him Aero-Tactile.'

Fire Blast felt a connection with Aero-Tactile. He saw that they shared a lot in common. Both of them were scared and alone, hence got defensive. But he wanted to show Aero-Tactile that he didn't need to be, that he too, just like Fire Rockets, could learn to feel safe when surrounded by people who care.

'Aero-Tactile? That's an odd name.'

'It was my plane's name. I figured if my name was Fire Blast ..'

'I see. Well, come on then. We've still got a friend to find before going home.'

Meanwhile, Fire Rockets came too. He found himself being chewed by the Tyrannosaurus. However, aside from salayva all over him, he wasn't harmed. The Tyrannosaurus's teeth weren't strong enough to damage Fire Rockets's mutated skin. It seemed to bite passionately with the desire to kill, but could not even tare apart his arms. The moment Fire Rockets realized that he could do no harm, he smiled and stopped fighting. Then, instead of fighting his way to be set free, Fire Rockets was dropped on the floor. The Tyrannosaurus's jaws were dropped open as if he had saw something horrifying. Turning around to see what it was that shocked him, Fire Rockets saw a nearby volcano erupt.

It didn't take long before lava started fludding out from the summit and spil onto the ground. Both Fire Rockets and the Tyrannosaurus understood that one touch of the hot stuff and they would be scorched alive. They tried to escape, but they were

surrounded by lava from every side. What was worse was the fact that it was closing in on them. Fire Rockets could fly away, but couldn't leave the Tyrannosaurus. Then, in the nick of time, they were spotted. Riding Aero-Tactile, Fire Blast swoops down and picked Fire Rockets away, leaving the Tyrannosaurus alone. Fire Rockets immediately released himself from Aero-Tactile's clasp and flew on his own two feet.

'You've got to help me save Rex!'

'What?'

Fire Rockets did not waste time arguing. Instead, he flew back down there to try and pick the Tyrannosaurus out of the spot himself. Seeing him struggle to save the dinosaur, Fire Blast knew that Fire Rockets too had made a friend in this unlikely time of the world. He flew off to GF2 – which was on route to get to Fire Rockets – and told the professor the situation. Lowering the GF2 close to the Tyrannosaurus, Fire Rockets and Fire Blast helped relocate the Tyrannosaurus onto the storage room. GF2 struggled as it barely supported the Tyrannosaurus's weight. As soon as they flew on solid grounds once more, GF2 came down again.

'Well,' the professor said as he sized up the Tyrannosaurus. 'Looks like the crew doubled.'

'I hope you don't mind,' Fire Rockets said. 'This is Rex, and he's as harmless as a fly.'

Seeing the look on Fire Rockets's face, the professor knew that he would be resistant on taking Rex with him home as Fire Blast was with Aero-Tactile.

'Well, I suppose we better go home before you bring along a whole herd.'

With that, GF2 travelled back to the future. Seeing unbelievable changes in scenery and environment, the two dinosaurs themselves changed. They became less aggressive and refrained from acting out. They were afraid, but felt protected by Fire Rockets and Fire Blast. With everyone ready, GF2 took off once more to find and reunite with Furown.

Furown's fight with the devourer had almost drained him of his energy, will, and power to go on. He had been beating on his foe's body for hours and not a single drop of blood was spilled nor a cry shrieked. Furown was beginning to lose hope of walking out of this alive until a mysterious figure was seen standing on a building. That's when the devourer escaped. He was full of mystery, Furown thought, ones which – most likely – he would never know. Glancing up at the shady figure, Furown remembered who he

was. It was the same mutant who helped him and Fire Rockets in their fight with Dr. Tent on the first night they was in town. The devourer must've sensed this mysterious mutant's aura and knew he was too powerful to overcome. Then, from behind him, GF2 showed up. The bright lights blinded Furown that he had to look away. Once GF2 came down and Furown looked back up to where the mutant was standing, he saw nothing.

'Furown,' Fire Rockets said as he jumped out. 'Allow me to introduce you to .. what the heck happened to you?'

'Nothing I can't handle. A pleasure, professor.'

'Likewise.'

'I take it they filled you in on my proposition?'

'Yes. And I must say I –'

'Furown, you won't believe it!' Fire Rockets cut in. 'He's got a time machine in there.'

'So?'

'Hello! A time machine. We could go back a week before this whole mess started.'

'I've already tried that route,' the professor jumped in. 'In fact, I went there several times to study what caused our mutations and to see if it was preventable. It was not. What made us like this was something that came from space for all I know. It came from the sky in the form of a meteor shower. Though instead of meteors, they were energy masses. Upon impact with an object, they mutated with them and fused whatever was in contact as well. I call them mutational energy balls, or mute balls for short.'

'So there's no way we could avoid this reality?'

'None. Except if we were to go way back into the past and hide there.'

'No. This is our world. And we belong here,' Furown said as he had all of Fire Rockets's, Fire Blast's, and the professor's attention. 'Since everyone is present, I'll come out and say what I had in mind. What I –'

The three were surprised to hear Furown suddenly cut off. He was staring at something in the shadows on his left side. They all turned and saw a silhouetted physique.

'It's you!' Fire Rockets exclaimed in remembrance.

He did not reply. Furown took a few steps towards him.

'Join us,' Furown asked.

'Sorry,' the mysterious alley replied. 'I'm more of a backstage hero.'

Then he disappeared. He might've been a dark mutant with threatening powers, but he was a heroic one. He wished for light to shed on this city once more, but until that happens, he decided to hide in the shadows and give hope from there. The look he gave Furown with his eyes told him that Furown and his friends could spread the light as well, but in their own way. And that was what Furown was getting at.

Furown took charge: 'I won't lecture you about the times. You're living it. But I will tell you about a possible future. One crime-free and with laws again. Humans can't secure that future; the army can't do it either. But mutants can. We are on the top of the food chain. We can make things happen.'

'Pardon me, but: Are you suggesting an alliance?' The professor asked.

'We are strong to defend and kill, but not strong enough to make the distance, at least not alone. There will always be others stronger. If we want to live, we won't do it like Dr. Tent or any other psycho out there. We've gotta stick together. We've got to have each others' backs. Sure we'll live in war for now, but it will bring us peace at the end.'

'Tell me, Furown,' Fire Rockets said. 'Do you think we could find peace in a world like this?'

'No, but we will create it.'

Day Eight: Life

As the sun came up once more, the four realized that it has been a week since the mute ball shower took place. Since then a lot has changed and each one of them grew. They would soon realize that they had no home, but the city was their home; they had no family, but the team members were their family. Furown, Fire Rockets, Fire Blast, and the professor avoided fighting but fought when they had to. The professor wasn't much of a fighter, but had protection from Furown, Fire Rockets, Fire Blast, Rex, and Aero-Tactile. Aboard GF2 and around the city was where they lived.

The once futuristic utopia became a dystopia; ground zero was renamed Mute City. The useless law-enforcing police carried the initials MCPD. Everything took a radical change, and on this morning, only a week after the mutation of life, Fire Rockets realized that this was only the beginning.

Then, Dr. Tent appeared before them, this time with a number of mutant minions. Their brains were dysfunctional in the sense of thinking. They were like zombies. With Fire Rockets riding Rex, Fire Blast on Aero-Tactile's back, the professor commanding GF2, and Furown leading the team, Furown grinned. It wasn't confidence in victory that made him grin, but the way his life turned out. Grinning, he dashed as fast as he could to fight the fight of his life.