



Chapter One

RELAY



Space. The vast and infinite expanse of Space. That which became everywhere, ever growing, ever expanding, ever changing, for that was its nature, to be unforgiving and harsh in its singular goal.

It was rather cold for Zed to be up there in his usual sleeveless armour and flame decaled jeans, as his small form lay at the boundary between the starry vacuum and the dark blue of the highest skies. He was on the cusp of becoming one more satellite around the planet, but he was just missing out, and he'd likely be plummeting back to earth once gravity decided to take effect. Whether it would be as a living missile or meteoric corpse, he did not know.

Boy did he hurt though, and it wasn't just the growing frost, or the prickling radiation, or feeling his brain slowly starve of oxygen. It was mainly the immense pain radiating out from his gut, and the feeling of having thrown up violently, as a result of being sent hurtling through the several hundreds of miles that left him in one of the high planes of the atmosphere.

At least he could see the curvature of the planet from there, it easily including the edge of his domain and the beginning of the next, while he could even see all the way to the edge of the continent and just barely over the sea past that.

It would have all been very beautiful, if he wasn't simultaneously icing over and burning alive at his core, like someone badly mixed up the execution of a frozen dinner. Adding the fact that he had also soared through a cloud on the way, ice crystals and boiling droplets floated damply about his person as well, leaving him suffering more in an already oxygen-low zone, as he orbit slowly decreased.

He could do nothing for a while but lay back and peer into the dark abyss above him, see the stars and planets twinkling in the distance, as he watched its infinite majesty unfurl before him, and remind him of how completely out-classed he was. The well was endlessly deep, unfathomably incomprehensible, and involving so much tireless work; she must have done this to show him what that truly meant.

Still, something must have shifted in Zed's mind, because as he lay there in a mix of light below and dark above, he could only think about what had got him there and what he was going to do when he returned to the ground.



"Hello?!" Called out a figure at the front desk; their voice full of attitude, if sounding somewhat modulated. "Can I get in to see the Overlord? *Please.*"

"Gruh," the secretary grunted, only being seen by the big black punk boots that sat in the nook of the eye-height wooden counter, "you have an appointment?"

The arrival was a rather tall and lanky individual, seeming almost impossibly thin in build, as they wore a skin-tight bodysuit of grey metal and had it broken up by reinforced steel joints. However, they looked like a sports player in the angular armour they wore; possessing large shoulders, limb guards, and a protective cuirass, that were all made of sharp plates patterned in the hazard lines of black and bright neon yellow.

Each element of them looked like it was blocks within blocks and plates beside plates, giving the whole form a weirdly abstract shape, but clearly looking like each piece could simply slide inside each other to easily pack up the attire. Though, the slanted chest had a notable shape built into it, in what was a symbol much like their armour,

where a circle surrounded by a hexagon was extended top and bottom by angular pieces, until they culminated in a tiny peak and a thorny tail.

“No, I *don't* have an appointment,” they growled, trying and failing to calm themselves. “I just need to speak with him! It's very urgent!”

Again, the helmet about their head was similar in design, with it obscuring most of their features with a reinforced face guard, and only showing eyes of green glowing rings that glared out from a blackened shadow.

“Take a number.”

She gestured with her boot tip to a small and rounded red dispenser attached to the side, leaving the arrival looking at it confoundedly, before precariously pulling at it with their metallic fingers.

“NUMBER FOUR!” Screamed the ticket dispenser, in a brash and immediate voice that caused the figure to flinch. “WAIT YOUR TURN. THANK YOU!”

“But... but I really need to—!”

“NUMBER FOUR!”

“But there's not even anyone—!”

“NUMBER FOUR!” The device insisted, somehow sounding impatient.

“Grrr, fine...” They grumbled, sounding clearly defeated, as they turned for the seats to the side, “I'll *wait*, if that's what I *have* to do.”

“THIS TICKET WILL SELF-DESTRUCT ONCE USED!” Yelled the ticket in a slightly higher-pitched voice, as it once more surprised them.

“Sorry about that,” the secretary said tiredly, despite never looking up from reading. “Our inventor is in the habit of giving things *unnecessary voices* at the moment.”

The book in her hands showed a horrifically malformed head of a man, who had grey skin, tiny legs, and odd protuberances like a horn for an ear, while his creased eyes made him look like he needed to scream, despite the fact of having no clear mouth.

Behind that book was a girl; her being clearly beautiful and noticeably young, with skin so pale it made the plain paper of the pages envious. It also brought out her light green lipstick and metallic

piercings, showing her distinctly punk or gothic style, even if her crescent of silver hair hung over her face and covered half of it. Still, it did not obscure the black-rimmed glasses she wore, or the larger than normal eyes that glowed subtly with a green radiance, as she was seen scanning the words with an intense focus and an impressive speed.

"WATCH!" Suddenly yelled another device; this time coming from the secretary herself.

"I swear... I'll get a moment's peace in a second..." she leaned the book away to glare at the watch on her gloved wrist, "WHAT, REC?!"

"Urk... sorry," said a rather timid man on the end of the communicator. "are the voices... being a bit much?"

"Ya think?!"

"Okay, I'll try a different voice then... For now, can you send July through to me, Gaze? I can't reach her through comms for some reason."

"I wonder why..." she then leant back in her chair and making a loud droning yell towards the door at the back of the small office section, "JUUUULLLLLLYYY! REC WANTS YOOOOOU!"

"...CAN IT WAIT?!" Came back after a short delay. "I'M BUSY ON THE FORGE!"

"Can it wait, Rec? She's on the forge."

"Noooooot really," he nervously considered, alongside some weapon blasts sounding off in the background. "It's alright, Patch! We'll get your fingers back on soon!"

"JULY! Those things down there are trying to eat Patch and Rec again!"

"Alright, alright," the woman sluggishly exited the room behind the secretary. "Just don't blame me when I go out like this."

July came out, to show she was wearing welding goggles, a reinforced leather apron, and pretty much nothing else.

If anything, it blatantly displayed that she was an amazon of a woman; being just over 6ft tall, with long and flowing purple hair, alongside the rich caramel coloured skin on display and the ample cleavage showing through the top of her outfit. From her naked sides, to her bare derriere, it showed her solidly built and ripped with

defined muscle, yet every inch of her – from the top of the neck to the bottom of her toes – was decorated in chaotic tattoos of red, black, and blue.

She only wore two other things; both on her head of course, to not obstruct the view. The first was a bandana of fiery red and blue, it plainly keeping her hair out of her face, while the second was a black collar choker around her neck, that had an impressive ruby held within.

“GAH! July!” Gaze gagged in surprise, nearly falling out of her chair. “Why... why are you naked?!”

“I always forge naked,” she grinned teasingly; absentmindedly brushing black soot off herself. “Makes sure my clothes don’t burn.”

“That she does...” Rec sighed, before abruptly calling out in alarm and firing towards something. “Patch, right!”

“What’s up, egghead? Need me to come down there and kill some Punks again? I thought you weren’t touching them this time.”

“I didn’t know that *specific* power coil was connected to the vats, alright! Patch has them held down, but she’s losing parts by the second!”

“I’m down fingies!” A cutesy voice announced, sounding as if this was just mildly surprising. “Itta making it hard to hold ma forkies, hiyah!”

Something then sounded like a squelch of jelly, before landing on a floor with a heavy splat.

“Okay, I’m making my way down. Just let me get changed.”

“No rush or *anything*! Quick Patch, hold the panel–!”

The connection then suddenly cut out, as Gaze and July just looked at each other in confusion.

The amazon simply shrugged and promptly untied the knot at her back, dropping her leather apron where she stood, leaving her naked as the day in the middle of the office space. Remaining there without a care and a happy hum, she then touched her forearm and phased her hand through, letting her reach deep inside as she seemed to rummage around for something.

“GAH! July!” The secretary gagged again; this time scrambling up to stand in front of her. “*July... we have a guest.*”

“Oh... hello,” she noticed the arrival unfazed, before giving

herself a little flex and running her hands around her chest. “Like what you see?”

“Your fleshy meat lumps don’t impress me, no,” stated the arrival plainly; staring over at them from the seats by the front with a perturbed look. “Can I just get to see the Overlord, please?”

“Zed?” She took off her welding goggles, to look at them curiously with her piercing sky-blue eyes. “Sorry, Zed’s out at the moment. You’ll need to wait for him to return.”

“Can’t you just tell me where he is?!” The arrival stood up impatiently. “I can go see th—!”

“NUMBER FOUR!” Interrupted the ticket dispenser once more.

“I need to get—!”

“NUMBER FOUR!”

“GIGI-GIGI-GIGIGIGE...” They jittered, sounding on the verge of exploding at the device.

“Gaze, get rid of that blasted thing, will you?” July sighed, with her turning to walk out of the saloon doors in the surrounding wooden bench.

“With pleasure.”

The goth secretary promptly lit her gloved hand in a projected sphere of green aura, as the same effect wrapped itself around the red ticket dispenser and pulled it from its perch with an invisible yet firm force. A casual movement of her digits then floated the device through the air and took it into the blue tent nearby within moments, where she unceremoniously – and almost vindictively – dropped it with a loudly audible *ka-clack*.

Clearly satisfied with what she had done, she smiled, adjusted herself and sat down with a relaxed flop, letting her bury her face in her book again, before she suddenly got the idea to check her phone and text with a rapid press of her fingers.

Moments after, July arrived at the arrival’s side, showing her placing the goggles away inside the skin on her arm, while each piece of her clothing phased out from about her body and came to rest like she had been dressed this entire time.

The woman came to wear a fiery bikini the same style as her head band; it honestly loose enough to make it barely an upgrade from nudity, as it noticeably had a spikey red symbol over one breast that

had been sewn on by hand. With it, her legs puffed out to become swamped in a baggy pair of comfy maroon leggings, a handbag of furry blue that came out of her waist, and a pair of heavy combat boots that came out of her feet.

“Look, even if we told you where he was, you *can’t* go see him. He’s in an important meeting at the moment.”

“GIGI... GIGI... I must-GIGI... find-GIGI... Overlord.”

“He’ll be back soon, I swear,” being as the woman stood just a bit taller than them, she put a hand on their blocky shoulders. “You can even go with us, when we go get him... alright?”

“GIGIGIGI... geh, alright,” the arrival slumped in surrender. “I can adjust...”

“What’s your name?”

“Cueko.”

“Well, Coo-echo. Can you fight?”

“A... little. I only recently became a Gyezeokzu.”

“Oh,” July blinked in surprise. “What’s a gye-zeok-zoo?”

“I perform feats of precision and skill for a crowd. I guess, more than often against an opponent.”

“Well, that’s perfect then! I can give you the tour around the base, while we go rescue our idiot scientist.”

“A... scien... tist? That’s what I heard the besgab call... a Ceiwpci, right?”

“Jehe. You’re a long way from home, aren’t you?”

“If this ‘scientist’ *is* a Ceiwpci, then we must go save them at once! Ceiwpci are our greatest resource!”

“Don’t let Rec hear you say that, he has a big head already. But come on then, let’s go find our... so-called ‘Soup-sy’.”

The base was a former bowling alley, but it was now looking barely anything like that, after what had probably been several months of deep renovations. They had made the main room now look spacious and particularly sleek, having the entire floor plated in a metallic-like vinyl of dark grey, while the new neon lights in the ceiling gave it a feeling of approaching something professional.

Though, the place came with a clear and intended ominous edge, because at the centre sat the long and dark meeting table, that used its sharp art deco design to compliment the advanced computers built

into it, and in amongst the ceiling above. Of course, alongside it sat a variety of mismatched and low-quality chairs, them each dissimilar to the next and clearly compromising the vision, while all yet dwarfed by the tall one that sat at the head and lay covered in a sheet.

This main room led off into multiple spaces; Gaze's small office section being the first to greet you after coming down the long corridor from the front doors. The tall and dark tent precariously positioned behind it was blatantly leaking the sheer number of books it contained, as it mostly obscured the sight of the unisex bathroom that stood in the back corner of the place.

A reinforced steel door stood clear in the opposite corner, but that was the entrance to the storage area, which was a cold and harsh room that kept the deliveries back when the place was open to the public. The deliveries would ideally be for the food counter that stood at the other side of the room; it being one of the places still not perfectly refurbished in the renovations, but still serving the current occupants well in their basic needs for a kitchen.

"Oh, you don't mind a bit of acid, do you?" July asked suddenly, clearly reminding herself as she led them through the place.

"I'm more partial to mrez myself, but anything that works, ya know."

"Okay..." she abruptly turned the corner between the two tents. "This way, Cueko. It's a bit of an... annoying trek, sorry."

The entrance aisle to the alley was cut off from the rest of the room by a great wooden divider; one that would have separated the lanes from the customers in the day, even if the lanes themselves had now been amalgamated into the rest of the room, and made to hold the two expansive tents that now sat upon it. The navy blue one was nearest, and the one neighbouring it was army green, them both large enough to temporarily create full-sized living spaces, as they took up a lot of the former bowling lanes.

July headed down the parting between the two tents, taking Cueko towards what would have been the pin dispensers, if they all hadn't have been extensively removed. It left a load of hollow and draughty caverns just lingering in the back of the alley; it defying the sheets that covered them to show the dark abyssal holes beyond, at least until they could be refurbished completely.

The only hole that *was* completely renovated was the centre one ahead, it having a larger and more tidy area cut out by an expert hand, as an impressively long escalator had been installed to lead down into the obscured space below.

"Here, we go down. I just hope you don't mind a bit of darkness."

"I am well equipped for dark spaces."

"Please keep your arms and other appendages inside the escalator at all times," said a recording of Gaze coming from the escalator; putting on a clearly level and professional voice.

"How about imps?" The amazon rested her elbows on the sides and rid the thing down. "Hope you don't mind them?"

"I know imps can get in the way," they somewhat stiffly rode down on the step exactly behind her. "Such creatures don't often cause much of a problem."

"You've encountered them? I thought you said you were a guy-zeo... something?"

"I was only recruited to be a Gyezeokzu recently... by saving the Servile from a cave-in a few months ago. He said I shouldn't be working caves, so he... he promoted me..."

"Please make sure to avoid getting your clothes caught. We don't want anyone losing their body parts in a horrific, spine-shredding... Rec, who wrote this?"

"Working in caves? What were you doing there?"

"Just my oehan back then. Ahh, my oehan. Just me and a dark pit of earth, digging for hours on end."

"Then, what were you digging for? Got to be pretty dangerous if you caused a cave-in over it."

"I... uh," Cueko became noticeably awkward, as they avoided eye contact. "Yes, very dangerous I'm sure, they just... never told me..."

"Well, at least you'll like it down here."

"Please watch your step," said Gaze's recorded voice finally, as they both exited onto the level below.

The entire place ahead was one dark corridor; it seeming dauntingly long with how the only light was what was leaking in from above the escalator. You could just about see the outline of what existed down there, and it was truly a remarkable sight, because a function complete model city had been constructed under the entire main floor, to accommodate the numerous creatures that could be

seen inhabiting it.

These were the imps; small and plump humanoids hiding in the dark with their black shimmering fur, but just barely seen by their feline eyes that glinted with a deep yellow colour. If they could be seen, they were often varied in build between the size of a grapefruit and the size of a fully grown cat, with them often baring their multitude of ram-like horns and their tiny maws of spikey fangs. At the moment, they could only be heard by the grumbling pseudo-speak they often used, as they seemed to go about their industrious daily lives in their city.

“See in the dark, I take it?” July asked him knowingly, with her sky-blue eyes looking radiant in the blackout.

“Yes,” Cueko nodded simply, with their green rings staring back at her and glowing enough to give off a faint light. “You too?”

“Kind of. Just follow me. Don’t rise to them; they don’t like seeing new people often.”

She then swiftly led Cueko down the corridor and past the city of the imps, as a lot of the dark creatures waved to the amazon of a woman like a passing celebrity, and she waved fondly back. Though, their reaction to the figure behind her was vastly different, because as they stared at the form for the entire length of the corridor, they remained with that wary instinctual expression – of an animal debating whether it was going to pounce.

Despite it being rather threatening – in a way akin to an oncoming hoard of hungry rats – Cueko honestly seemed like they didn’t care, for they barely acknowledged the imps and just seemed to scan around the tunnel to measure it all with an appraising eye.

“See anything you like?”

“This place is very secure. It might need some structural supports to stop it deforming over a period of a century, but for now, I see no threat of collapse from the ground above.”

“Good to know. Though, I was telling Rec it would be nice if we got rid of the blatant iron stench down here. Perhaps you can do something about that?”

“I know nothing about that. But it may be damp, another thing to watch out for. It’s a killer more than often.”

“Hmm... well, tell me, Cueko. For someone so familiar with...

structure, how do you know Zed then?”

“I don’t. I just need... help.”

“Then... then why come *here*? We’re Villains – *evil* Villains – it’s not exactly the ideal place to go for help. And Hallowville isn’t much of a hub for you to visit, even on a whim.”

“I’m from Michstein. This place was nearest.”

“Ja... hahahaha! So, not *that* far from home then.”

“People spoke of the Overlord, when I was going through the town. Some said he was a tyrant, a monster that people were wise to fear.”

“Yeah, he does that,” she smirked.

“But... other people spoke, and they spoke of no one else... who *helps* more than he does.”

“Yeah, he does that too. Come on, we gotta head further down.”

July and Cueko arrived at a small intersection, one lit by a small device purposely stuck to the ceiling by white goo that was admittedly peeling away, as it lit three directions they could take from here.

Ahead, the path rose using a slanted staircase and led to a doorway in the floor; one that looked tightly sealed and coated in dust from no one being allowed to use it. To the right was a newly constructed door; it leading into considerable space that cut off the city of imps, as it lay adorned with childish scribbings, colourful stickers, and an expertly crocheted sign saying; “Patch’s Room”.

Left was the path the pair were heading for, because as a worse draught came from the reinforced doorway of dormant advanced technology, it showed the gaping hole that remained leading into the empty elevator shaft. Even more lights had been tentatively stuck at regular intervals across the frame – again using that white goo – as they continued into the looming shaft below and continued a few levels down.

They revealed the long and singular cable that remained there on its lonesome; showing it continuing past the open door on the lower level, before it stretched into the abyss of darkness that laid beyond and faded out of sight.

“Need help down?” July courteously reached out her tattooed hand.

“Pfft, we climbed tighter cables getting to work.”

“Cocky,” she raised her eyebrows in a surprised yet smarmy approval. “Let’s go then, hotshot. You first, if you’re so good.”

Cueko nodded, before simply stepping over the dark and daunting gap with confidence, to clamp their hand around the elevator rope and immediately pull their feet to it with unwavering one-arm strength.

July didn’t even see them adjust, or contemplate the action of letting go, as they then just released part of their magnet-like grip and dropped themselves down with a metal grind against their armoured hands. They even seemed to move with the gradual start and bracing end of an actual elevator cabin, letting them stop exactly in-line with the floor of the basement level, before they stepped back onto the ground with the exact same amount of singular effort that they had used to take it.

She immediately caught up with the arrival soon after, by leaping at the wire and spiralling down it with the grace of the finest pole dancers, until she showily flung herself off it with acrobatic skill and used her momentum to land into a continuing walk.

“They should be just ahead,” July told Cueko, moving past them determinedly, “let’s hope they haven’t been eaten.”

Both were now in another long corridor, this one plainly lit by a lot more of those poorly stuck lights, as it showed itself to be a fairly basic space, similar to something in an ordinary but high-class office building. The floor was white vinyl, and it continued up the wall to half way, until a stand-out steel beam split the entire corridor in half, leaving the top half as a ceiling of a lighter metal and long dead neon lights.

It was also clear why these sections were separate, because as a skilled hand had left them each in pieces, they now showed a range of clearly sinister devices hanging out of them with abandon. The bottom had missing sections and drilled holes, removing the pressure plates and laser triggers, while the middle bar and ceiling showed things ranging from sharpened blades, to automatic guns, to other harmful traps that were clearly dismantled, or at least rendered inert.

Past that mess, lay the door that ended the hallway, in what was a section no doubt added recently, with its different and darker steel that securely sealed off the place with a strange red symbol exactly

like the one on July's brassiere.

The circle of the symbol was at the centre of the door, it surrounded by two different sized pieces, one being the larger that took up most of the circumference, while the smaller looked like a minor and jagged offshoot covering the rest. The large piece also had extensions of its own, having four curved fins that hung off it, in a way that made it look like half of a spinning sun.

"Eaten? By imps?" Cucko asked confused, but following her without a step lost. "The ones back there didn't seem to be inclined to attack."

"No, not those," July came up to the gate and brought out a small device like a car key fob from the tattoos on her palm. "Just be prepared to fight, and aim for the head."

"Rrgaejvo," the figure nodded seriously, lifting their fist before themselves.

Then, there was a metallic *shwing* of a blade, as a large silver paddle shot out from the blocky bracer around their wrist.

The thing was about a third of their height in size, being a four-sided shape that was shorter on his wrist and larger at the top, while curved sharply on the outer edge in order to bring the corner into an impactful point. As the body of it also seemed to curve to a noticeable degree, July figured it seemed to be a functional blend of what was a scoop and pickaxe, but it clearly had a lot of care gone into it, with how it was polished to a sheen and had a newly sharpened edge.

"Pheeew, impressive. Never seen that before."

"It is a common tool amongst my unit," Cucko told her almost dismissively, before flexing their opposite arm and bringing out a second similar paddle.

"Let's see how you use it then," July smirked, before she pushed the fob with a showy flair.

The symbol promptly rotated in place on the gateway, leaving the four-pronged large piece going to the top and the small piece going to the bottom, before it then clicked with the releasing lock and split the metal doorway across the length. It then rose in opposite directions, disappearing itself through the ceiling and floor respectively, as it opened on a sparse and spacious office reception with five angled doors ahead.

However, this drew immediate attention to two people, one with messy royal blue hair and one with absurdly long grass green pigtails, as they both frantically struggled to push a metal sheet against the centre-most door.

“Grrr... keep it going, Patch!” The former fiercely growled. “They might eventually just... go away.”

“I’m tryiiiiing,” the latter moaned like a straining child. “Ahh! A leak!”

The moment she said that, a stream of sludgy and green water shot out of the side of the panel, arcing through the air like being projected out of a hose.

In an immediate response, the girl moved across the panel and panickily shoved her finger into the gap to plug up the leak, before she somehow left her digit there and quickly returned to help the blue-haired man push up against the panel.

“You really expected this to work long-term?” July asked the pair, with her sass particularly aimed at the blue-haired man.

“OH! July!” He jumped in surprise, quickly turning to use his back to push, as he faced her. “You took your sweet time, didn’t you?”

This man was odd, because he looked back at them with a large pair of brown goggles that held bulbous and reflective black lenses, while a third of his head was noticeably broken up by a large metal plate that looked like a computer circuit.

The rest of him was covered in a swamping brown jacket, a pair of baggy leggings, and a blue shirt with that spikey red logo, but the outfit was also ripped off at the right arm to bare his long arm of steely silver. The limb was made in sections and connected with black ball joints, being able to fully rotate in its shoulder socket and awkwardly hold up against the wall behind him, as it seemed his left leg did the same beneath his leggings and told it was of a similar style.

“I was doing my job, egghead. And look at you. You couldn’t even manage when you had Patch to help you.”

“Julllyyy,” the girl moaned; similarly moving to push her back against the metal plate. “Heelp, they being meeean. I only have one... two... three... four! Four fingies left!”

She then bared her hands to the amazon, clearly looking for sympathy, because even with the palms being mostly buried within

large heavy sleeves, they clearly showed fingers that were stitched together from various skin colours. Well, the remaining ones were, for all had gone except the thumb and index ones, despite the clear absence of any bleeding.

The girl herself was much like her fingers, being someone who looked like a tall and slender teenager made in pieces, whether that be in the body parts that made her, or the clothing that she wore. As such, her outfit seemed to be made from everything, showing a maroon jumper base that was barely seen through the chaos of textures and colours that had been adorned to it, while as much could be said for the white skirt and fluffy panda hat that she also wore. The only things that seemed to be fully intact about her person seemed to be the sunflower-patterned boots on her feet, of which she often popped wheels out of her soles to skate around at speed.

Noticeably, her skin was multi-coloured and held together with microscopic black strands, making both her cute nose and often smiling mouth somehow come together in a cohesive whole, while her mismatched green and turquoise eyes showed the brightly eager expressions of an innocent child.

“It’s okay, Patch,” July winked at her reassuringly. “We got this.”

“Wait,” Rec noticed. “Who’s that next to you?”

Suddenly, there was a sound like a lot of small pops, as several other fingers came flying out of the holes in the side of the panel and were thrown to the side. In their wake, multiple streams of the sludgy green came pouring through, them quickly shaking the sheet and destabilizing the pair’s grip, until something had the leverage to burst in and lead the charge for the attack.

What came through the doorway was a daunting creature; a massive slime made of green translucent ooze, that stood nearly as tall as the ceiling with a slug-like form, but showed clear expressions of consciousness and rage with it having formed claws to bare. The head was the worst part though, for it was a foetus, a shrivelled and veiny proto-human barely bigger than a rat, as it lay suspended in the top-most point of the gelatinous liquid and looked deeply twisted by its no-doubt horrific existence. Its tiny head had been removed of human features, any eyes or mouth holes being covered by its leathery skin, but it didn’t stop the thing from looking around, with it

somehow sensing its prey and taking a measure of those around it.

Patch had dodged, her using her quick speed to move in the mere seconds before the creature came through, but Rec had been plainly caught by the attack, as he had agonizingly ridden the half-rusted metal panel to the side of the room. After a clatter and a moment of dizzy recoil from being clipped across half his body, he eventually forced the heavy sheet off himself, where he came to realise that the baby head of the creature had swung his way with a dark and salivating feeling emanating from it.

“Oh, shi-!” Rec started, until the thing interrupted with an animalistic and infantile scream.

Within a second, it had moved, scrambling over the vinyl floor with a thousand growing tendrils, as it worked instinctively and rushed to encompass Rec with its green ooze.

Luckily, he thought fast and scrambled to flip the panel, letting him basically make a metal ramp over himself for protection. That plan quickly began to have problems though, because beside the weight of the liquid ooze being far too heavy for Rec to support for long, its form was leaking in from below and dropping over the side, dissolving part of his brown jacket with an ominous hiss.

“Little... little help h-!” The cyborg struggled to call out, only to be interrupted, when it turned out help had already arrived.

There was a fierce *shwing*, *squelch*, and *thump* within a second, before a deluge of green water then fell upon the protective panel and swiftly came to drip harmlessly onto the floor. With it, he saw a shadow come to stand by the edge of the panel, where it then abruptly surprised Rec, by forcing its long silver scooper under the protective metal panel and effortlessly tossing it over to the other side of the room.

“Are you alright, Ceiwpci?” Cueko asked, despite still looking ahead.

“Uh... uh, yeah. I’m good, thanks.”

As the goggled eyes looked up to them, he realised that the green ooze had clearly tried to eat away at the hazard-patterned armour – it coating the right arm with a thick gelatinous acid – but Cueko stood there non-plussed while it fizzled out and blatantly failed to form rust against the protection. Rec also swiftly noticed that the foetus of the beast was laid out dead on the floor beside the figure’s slender steel

boots, where its tiny shrivelled form was lying in a puddle of green and had been perfectly bisected down the middle.

“Pespaqk Eki,” they determinedly readied those dual scoopers again. “Stay here.”

“More are comin’!” Patch called out, pointing to the doorway ahead with a lone remaining finger. “Let’s gettem!”

With the first green ooze cleared out, another few could be seen wiggling and squirming in the dark corridor ahead, as they instinctually headed for the door in the pursuit of prey.

The girl expertly reached down to the belt on her skirt and flicked opened a small pack on it, letting her pull out a dinner fork and wield it like a dagger, before aiming it at the nearest slime and pitching it through the air with a precise throw. However, it then made a sudden *ding*, when Cuckoo appeared in front of her and it bounced off their armour.

“Oops! Sorry!”

The figure didn’t even notice her, they just came to stand at the head of the centre corridor and stared daggers at the creatures that were coming their way.

One immediately lunged at them, it letting out another desperate shriek and massive tentacle of acidic green that reached for him, but Cuckoo didn’t react at all, until they simply reached out and grabbed the slimy limb in their right metallic glove.

Then, with another firm and decisive motion, they sliced off the tentacle with his left blade, and then freed their right enough for them to stab directly into the slug’s main body. The slime never even flinched in reaction, it just began to screech again while growing another tentacle, but the blade came up through it in the second after and cut the foetus in half with one brutal attack.

All the time, Cuckoo never looked amused, afraid, or even worried about their limbs being deep within the acid, never even acknowledging the sheer mass of liquid that was being left, as they just made deliberate move after deliberate move with only a little bit of cockiness showing. It was well deserved of course, because they dealt with the next slime and the next slime, without even moving their feet from where they were planted, letting them process through each of the monsters with the effort of merely scanning things

through a supermarket checkout.

"You..." Rec tried to ask him. "You... you good?"

"I think he's alright. He's just doing his thing."

"July!" He barked, with his black lenses snapping to look up at her annoyed. "Why didn't *you* help me?"

"Eh, I got better things to do."

She then offered down her strong hands to the cyborg, and despite his annoyed scoff, he took it in his blocky and steely fingers, as she effortlessly lifted the smaller man to his feet. Rec then quickly began to brush off his long brown coat, but as he did, he noticed something on the floor beside him and carefully picked it up with his metal digits.

"Patch, one of yours?"

"Oh... yes-yes-yes!" She chanted, bouncing over with excitement and putting the finger back in its place. "Can't rinky dink without my dinky pink."

"You can also go now if you wish. I think we've got this handled."

"...Leave?" The girl tilted her head at him curiously, before suddenly looking shocked and alarmed. "Oh my sun! I'm late! *I'm late!*"

Her lean and colourful form then blinked around the small office space within a second, leaving her becoming a blur of green wind that speedily picked up all her fingers, until she apparently found them all and instantly disappeared down the corridor towards the elevator shaft.

"Byyyyyyyyy!" The voice quickly faded into the distance.

"I *thought* she was supposed to be at the meeting," July remarked, looking after her.

"Yeah, *she* actually rushes when she's needed. What took you so long?!"

"I told you, I had to get dressed. Get dressed after making *your* upgrades. Remember, dingbat?"

"Oh... they done? I would like to install it soon."

"Nearly, I was *interrupted* before I could finish the safety mechanism."

"Bah, you can forget that, I don't need it," he grinned at her impishly, before glancing over his shoulder at Cueko. "I take it *they're* the reason then?"

“Yup,” July casually shifted to a lower pitch. “Wants to see Zed.”

“Ahh, wants to see his high and mightiness,” Rec nodded, turning to watch Cueko with her. “They said what for?”

“Not exactly. Though, they don’t seem to be hiding anything about it.”

“Always good. You know *who* they are then?”

There was a sudden and sharp *thwack*, as both watched the figure hack into the next foetus with a brutal efficiency.

One after another, they felled oozes into puddles of water, until it eventually brought forth something shockingly larger than the rest, in what had two of its foetuses horrifically merged into each other. It had become a large amalgamated mess of tiny limbs, fingers, and irregularly placed body parts, leaving it clearly possessing double the ferocity of the others, as it basically grew hands from out of its overwhelming amount of ooze and wrapped them around the slender form ahead.

Cueko still never broke stride – even as it bellowed at them a fierce roar and blatantly threatened to drag them away into the darkness – because they just made a sudden chop with both of their scoop blades and cut across what could be considered the “neck” of the beast. The blow abruptly separated the foetuses from the rest of its ooze and caused the green body to immediately drop like green water, leaving the two amalgamated babies seemingly crying for pity, while their small bubble of acid was left briefly floating in the air.

With another immediate and precise motion, they made another cross-slash with those scoop blades and trisected the merged foetus with a clinical precision, leaving the creature as three long meaty strips of leathery bacon that fell on the ground with a muted *splat*.

From then on, waves of ooze creatures continued to assault the figure with their seemingly unending numbers, but Cueko blended them up one-by-one and never stopped for even a second. Rec had just watched them the entire time, showing his brow had blatantly lifted, to say he would have astonished wide eyes beneath his goggles.

“I think...” July smirked deviously. “...They’re a killing machine.”