

Project Armageddon
by Tevie Son

A bright orange sun hung low in the blood-red sky. Yet, despite the fiery image it projected, it bestowed no warmth upon the inhabitants below. Emerald eyes watched the globe of light intensely as it shone above the debris. No clouds obstructed his view, only the occasional trail of smoke from a retreating skycraft. He shut his eyes and covered his ears. He could still hear the screams, could still see the bullets launching themselves into his comrades. His eyes dilated behind his lids, his pulse accelerated, his breathing grew harsh.

A metallic voice rang through the air. As if in a trance, he uncovered his ears in order to hear the words.

“This is a Holy War, in which we intend to uplift the existence of our God.”

“There is no God.” He whispered, barely audible. The ringing in his mind had stopped, replaced by silence as cold as death.

“By defending the Holy Alliance from the nonbelievers who defile its name, I believe that we are guided ever closer to the feet of our Creator.”

“There is no God.” He spoke louder, clearer.

“This is a Holy War, in which-”

“There is no God!” He shouted. Rotating his body quickly, with the grace of a striking snake, he fired a round of projectiles towards the source of the voice. A transmission mecha thirty feet away plummeted from the sky. He smirked as it burst into flames.

A lone figure standing over the ruins of what had once been a home gazed at him intently. Her words drifted through the air, carrying themselves to the child’s ears.

“I’ve finally found you...Celestial 009.”

4017 A.D.

Flags of all colors floated high above the Alpha Zen Emporium, a tribute to the Annual Celebration of the Three Superior Worlds. Today, all interplanetary skyrails connecting the Superior Triad- Alpha Zen, Dios, and Erphanes- were open to the general public, for it was the anniversary of the day the first Fathers and Mothers civilized the Iosian Galaxy and molded it into the Superior Worlds. The festival could never be canceled; it was blasphemy. Besides, not even the strongest of dust storms could penetrate the forcefield surrounding Alpha Zen-the most prominent military power in the universe.

A man checked his wristwatch for the third time in one minute, irritation easing into his fine features. That brute was seventeen minutes late. Then again, what else could you expect from an Alpha Zenian. He sighed, frustrated beyond belief. If this deal wasn't so important for Dios Tech, he would've ditched this revolting planet long ago.

"Lio!" A voice behind him called. Lio carefully donned his business face before turning.

"General Raizen." He inwardly cursed his unbidden clipped tone.

Raizen seemed to be unaffected, however. "Sorry I'm late. I took a taxicraft here since the Skyrail was so crowded, but I'd forgotten how slow those blasted things are."

Lio frowned. *Idiot. What do you expect from a relic with a propulsion of only 50 kilomachs an hour?* "That's a shame." He vocalized, with all the politeness he could muster.

Raizen put his arm around Lio's shoulder, relieved the tense lines of Lio's face had faded somewhat. When his grey eyes weren't slanted with disapproval, Lio was a terribly handsome man. All citizens of the Superior Worlds were beautiful, a result of generations of genetic engineering. Not a single physical imperfection- no scars, wrinkles, or unsightly hair-marred

their profiles. The utter regularity of such extraordinary beauty was in itself astonishing, eerie, and wholly unnatural.

A pristine chime rang through the air, signaling the beginning of the Tournament. The people began to direct themselves towards the Emporium. Lio stopped in his tracks as he noticed the giant holopic projecting itself into the sky, previewing the next event. The pictures of the two fighters commissioned to battle one another flashed threateningly, both horrifying and delighting the audience with their hideousness. The holocam passed its lens over the array of attached rings fastened to their claws, ready to release a shock of G-waves at a moment's notice if the creatures even considered rebelling.

“Ugh.” Lio recoiled in disgust.

Raizen chuckled heartily. “What, never seen a Kratian before?”

Lio straightened, now a little offended. “I can't help it; they're repulsive.”

Raizen, eyes still shining with unconcealed mirth, struggled to maintain a semblance of composure. “I understand- they're not even remotely attractive. Apparently they were the native inhabitants of this planet before the first Fathers and Mothers came.”

Lio murmured reverently, “It puts me into convulsions just imagining what this galaxy looked like before the Fathers and Mothers shipped those *beasts* out to the Lesser Planets. The thought of those things roaming around freely...” Lio stopped abruptly, fighting down another shiver.

Raizen nodded his agreement. “...But since you hold no interest in the Tournament, where would you prefer to go?”

“Well... At the Athenaeum, Dr. Aurelio's giving a lecture I've wanted to attend for a while now.”

“Oh. What about?” Raizen asked, without much interest.

“He entertains an interesting-and rather controversial- theory. That all citizens of the Superior Triad descended from...Terrans.”

Raizen’s eyes widened before he broke out into peals of hysterical laughter. “Terrans?!” He couldn’t help it; the very idea was preposterous. Aurelio was setting himself up for social ridicule, not just among his colleagues but among his students, friends, and family. Terra referred to a planet that supposedly existed in another galaxy centuries ago. On this planet, a population of Superior Beings emerged from the lowest beasts. With their arsenal of knowledge, despite their physical insufficiencies, they conquered the world. After decades of progress, the Superior Beings grew so powerful that even nature could rule over them no longer. They soon discovered, however, that the only ones standing in their paths toward dominance were separate tribes of their own species. They turned on each other-annihilating themselves, their progress, and their planet in the process.

Lio, a little miffed that Raizen so blatantly dismissed the conjecture of one of the finest minds Dios had to offer, responded almost defensively. “Shut up! Terra really existed! He’s got evidence proving-”

“I hardly count the positions of stars as ‘evidence’.”

“It existed.” Lio muttered. “Just under a different name...What was it? I read a text on it last moontide...”

A smooth voice pierced Lio’s thoughts. “Earth.”

Lio exclaimed, excited, “Yes, that’s it! They called it Earth! How did you know...?” He trailed off. The owner of the voice had disappeared. Lio briefly wondered if he imagined it- that voice and those deep emerald eyes.

“Did you see a green-eyed man just now?” Lio questioned his companion.

Raizen waved his hand dismissively. “Didn’t look like he was from around here. Erphanesian, probably. Never mind, I’ll treat you to the best food in the galaxy.”

Lio resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

3073 A.D.

I can't believe this is happening. I keep praying that it's all a dream. I open my eyes, but the reality is still the same. I know denial's not the answer, but I fear that if I accept the truth, I'll fall apart... They didn't deserve to die that way. My faith is shattered.

Green and blue lights from the monitor’s screen flickered across his skin in an almost blinding ambience. The Main Security Grid. He stepped over the bodies of the guards before taking a seat. For a while, he watched the Tournament on the security monitors. Watched the crowd cheer as the Kratians bled and bled and bled...He slammed his fist into the keyboard, hoping that the pain in his hand would diminish the volume of the ringing in his mind. Red skies burned behind his corneas.

The Alliance slaughtered them, just because they sought the truth. I'll give those "believers" something to remember, make them rue the day they allowed me to live. I'll sell my soul away. Anyone with the power to save me died in that massacre.

He stepped into a warehouse on the outskirts of the city. The massive structure within the hanger towered menacingly, its shadow encompassing the whole room. As he approached, it knelt prostrate before him. It knew its master.

I've finally completed the ultimate humanoid mobile-defense mecha, Z-0127 Requiem. It utilizes the most destructive human emotion-hatred- and channels it into a cataclysmic force capable of decimating planets. Constant stimulation of the thalamus and reticular formation demolishes the body's normal limitations on

touch, sight, and hearing, putting the user into a state of almost painfully heightened awareness. A direct link to the limbic system allows all primal emotions-fear, aggression, anger- to explode outwards while simultaneously inhibiting the moderating messages of the frontal lobe. Requiem allows its master to transcend human capabilities by blocking all the brain's mediatory systems. It's genius. The world's in my hands.

He entered the cockpit and stepped into the silver circle located at the room's center. A low whirring filled the space; the monster was being brought to life. He started floating, as if suspended in gel. Wires encased him in a steel cocoon before hooking into his arms, legs, and temples.

Celestial 001, 002, 003. All failures. 001 wasn't mentally capable of handling the controls. 002's hatred was far too mild; he could have forgiven. Someone with a heart capable of forgiveness cannot operate the Requiem. The unrestrained emotional stimuli drove him insane. 003 didn't have the physical prowess to keep up with the regiment. I can no longer use female subjects.

Even now, after eight years, he still flinched from the pain of Requiem's embrace. But no longer did he cry out. He had endured so much pain...and the day it would all be made worthwhile finally arrived. He wouldn't let this opportunity slip through his fingers. **Fly.** His mental command reverberated throughout the mecha. Ivory wings extended into the sky. He could feel it, that temporary peace. They were in the air.

I've found the perfect subject-Celestial 009. When I look into these exquisite jade orbs, I know he'll succeed where the others did not.

He and Requiem became one. He gazed through its eyes, searching for something in particular. He stopped. **Hover.** They were now directly above the Emporium.

After 006's demise, I finally realized where I went wrong. I require the body of a man with the control of a child. Someone so blinded by their emotions that they cannot see the big picture. Only a monster can operate a monster.

That feeling of peace dissipated as he took in the scene before him. One of the Kratians had fallen. The other stood on the other side of the arena, hooded eyes focusing on the marble below. Drip. A drop of crimson blossomed on the immaculate white floor. Drip. The rings on his claws loosened before falling to the ground. The creature had earned his freedom; but still, he kept watching the exodus from his wounds leave their mark upon the tiles. Drip.

Eight years. Our journey to the Iosian Galaxy took almost an entire decade. I've seen this boy grow into a man., at least physically. In isolation, one cannot expect to show normal psychological development. To ensure that I don't make the same mistake, I never allowed his passion for vengeance to diminish. I only permitted him to watch vids of the Holy Alliance's worst cruelties-public beatings, shock torture, executions. I showed him the bodies of the dying, of the lost children. And as a final touch, I informed him of the cross he must bear.

Red swam before his eyes. He felt it bubbling up within him, cascading over his nerves like a cold wave. It surrounded him. He closed his eyes, letting it rise, boil over. It was begging to be released. He raised his arm. Requiem did the same. **Fire.** Bullets rained from the sky. He watched as the crowd dispersed frantically, animal-like in their confusion, dodging the rapidly increasing amounts of falling dead. Sanguine orchids tainted the once-white marble, dotting the canvas. The demented artist laughed...

For decades, the icebergs had been melting. For decades, the seasons steadily grew more extreme. But our planet's plight gained little to no real attention until the weather was in total chaos. The sudden submerging of Italy threw the world into a panic. The Apocalypse was upon us at last. Tensions flared; religious fanaticism rose to an all-time high. In response to the Third Awakening, the Holy Alliance was formed. The population irreversibly split into the non-believers and the Holy.

Raizen ran through the maze of city streets, his heart pounding in his ears. All around him, people were crying, shouting, running. A few bodies lay scattered across the ground ahead.

As he approached, he resisted the urge to release his lunch all over the pavement. Their profiles were frozen in varying expressions of terror, and their bodies... Their bodies were compressed sickeningly, their bones protruding from their skin at various angles. He realized with disgust that they'd probably been trampled by the hysterical crowds.

He sprinted down the road with renewed vigor. He could still hear the shaking voice on the other end of his transmissions piece, telling him with bemused wonder that all the S-class elites stationed around the Grid had been eradicated along with the Worlds' finest defense system- literally by someone's bare hands. The perpetrator even left a message on a security holo, requesting Raizen meet him at the Emporium.

I don't know what possessed me to ask him "Did you ever believe in God". I think my buried guilt is involuntarily manifesting itself in small ways. I didn't expect the answer I received. He said, with a conviction that's unusual in someone so young, "Even if Heaven and Hell and all that exists, I've nothing to fear. If God's as great as everyone says, he won't let me fall, no matter how many sins I commit. He'll be wise enough to repent for the mistake of creating me-and all other humans-in the first place." And for the first time since I undertook this project, I felt horror. What have I done? Perhaps the monster I created was not of alloys and machinery... but of flesh.

He scoffed as a countless number of lasers ricocheted off Requiem's surface. Small pinpricks of sensation moved along his body, the areas afflicted corresponding to the mecha's. If this didn't even scratch him, there was no way Requiem would fall to this pathetic assault. He was getting bored. This final battle certainly wasn't living up to his expectations.

Suddenly, pain exploded along his right side, just below the ribs. "Having fun?" A voice taunted. He turned to address his attacker. Raizen managed to grin at him, despite his labored breathing, a colossal psimetric blaster in his grasp. "What exactly do you hope to gain by ruining our Celebration, stranger?"

Emerald eyes narrowed. “I want a new world.”

“Naïve, aren’t you? I expected a more realistic answer from the man who’d caused me so much trouble. Well, whatever.” His hands tightened around his weapon.

“Before we begin, I’d like to ask your name. I have a feeling this fight’s gonna be epic, so if I don’t ask now, I won’t get a chance.” “*After defeating you*” was left unsaid.

Wordlessly, the warrior within the mecha raised his hand and aimed at Raizen. However, he could not issue the command to fire; his mind was in disarray. *Name*. He couldn’t remember. “Celestial 009” flashed through his mind before he dismissed it. That wasn’t it...

He clutched his side, groaning in pain. Raizen had targeted the same area as before. Pushing all unnecessary thoughts from his mindscape, he swiveled around to get Raizen in his sights. **Fire.** Raizen dodged the bullets that hurtled towards him, barely managing to hide behind a fallen column.

Now thoroughly annoyed, the warrior aimed once more. The crimson abyss bloomed within him. He felt a “click” within his consciousness; the ammunitions tankard was switching sides. A set of SF-missiles lined the mecha’s sides. **Destroy him.**

But Requiem didn’t obey his commands. Panic seized him. What happened? Was he still too weak? Suddenly a piercing shriek penetrated his consciousness. Requiem was crying. The wires under his skin convulsed. He screamed, the pain making his vision fade.

Raizen observed the monster above him as it emitted mind-numbing shrieks. He smirked triumphantly. “Looks like the Deactivator finally worked. Give it up, kid. This little baby’s shutting down your weapon’s mechanizing structures. You put up a good fight, but you’d better give in. All I needed was a little time. It’s over.”

The words “it’s over” triggered a familiar ringing in the warrior’s mind. The peaceful oblivion that had been twirling behind his eyelids was once again replaced by cruel, relentless red. He roared a challenge to the heavens. Requiem shook, replying to his iron will. Raizen gaped in horror as the mecha began to glow. “What in the Worlds is going on?” He shouted.

The warrior laughed ominously. “My revenge is complete. I am Death, He who ends everything.”

Fight for Life.
Die for Right.
I Sentence You to
A Cruel Angel’s Thesis.

Self-destruct.

The ground collapsed under the sheer strength of his ardor’s final creation. He smiled as the landscape before him-the people, the buildings, the sky-became drenched in scarlet. The door to another world had opened.

His emerald eyes, sparkling with the serenity of the ocean, focused on Raizen. “By the way, soldier, my name...is Gabriel.”

She leaned back in her chair as the screen went blank, waiting for some kind of emotional release- a feeling of fulfillment, or even regret. But none came. She only felt...empty. She chuckled, the hollow sound echoing throughout the room. The irony of the whole situation gnawed at her insides.

“I ended up walking the same path I committed myself to destroying. When will we fools realize that hatred cannot save anyone?” The question received no answer, only silence. She turned to her lab journal, scrawling only three words before shutting it forever.

PROJECT ARMAGEDDON: TERMINATED

