

CHAPTER NINE

The next afternoon Chapling and I walked into the conference room for our last meeting before leaving for Harry Noor. We would trial our program today.

Around the table sat everyone involved with the mission. TL, Nalani, David, Jonathan, Mystic, Bruiser, and Red.

Chapling and I took seats to TL's left.

TL closed the door and remained standing. "I am too close to this mission emotionally to run it successfully and efficiently. I've had an in depth discussion with David and have decided effective immediately that he is in charge. However, I'm still going on this mission. As previously outlined, I will be playing the role of trainer. I'll also be acting as mission advisor to David, but all decisions will come from him, not me."

Whoa. I was totally not expecting that. I looked across the table at David's focused expression and thought what a stressful mission to be in charge of. I mean, my God, we're talking about TL's daughter here.

With a nod to David, TL sat, and David stood. "Okay, team, I am going to outline the mission and then give the floor to Chapling and GiGi." David began walking around the table, placing green folders in front of each of us.

I opened my folder to see a giant picture of Zandra right on top. I began leafing through the other papers—standard things we should know for the trip. Information on location, parties involved, aliases, mission details, equipment list, etcetera . . .

David set the last folder in front of Bruiser. "First, let's briefly recap things. Last Monday, TL and Nalani's seven-year-old daughter, Zandra, was taken from her maternal

grandmother's home. We still have no idea what they want. TL and Nalani both have many enemies. So the kidnapper could be anybody.”

“Myself, Mystic, and TL traveled to the abduction site,” David continued. “It was there that Mystic saw images of the Demise Chain fight club. Unfortunately, he saw no images of Zandra, but he knows without a doubt that he needs to be involved in the Demise Chain if he is going to find Zandra.” David looked at Mystic, and he nodded his agreement.

“TL and I immediately dove into researching the Demise Chain,” David went on. “Between Red's input and our own research, we've discovered a few things. First, it's a closed club. You have to be invited in. Harry Noor is the owner of the club and the owner of a handful of fighters labeled Warriors. Recently, he put the word out that he's looking for some new Warriors. He also put the word out he's looking for a computer specialist to design a program that will identify top notch fighters that can be his Warriors.”

“Obviously, the better his Warriors are, the more money Demise Chain makes.” David glanced at me and Chapling. “Additionally, this computer specialist will be able to advise his Warriors during a fight what to do differently, all based on technological physics. And that sets the ground work for the mission. GiGi and Chapling will be leaving tomorrow to interview with Harry Noor, show him their new program, and get hired on. Two days after that, Harry and his new computer specialist will be meeting and testing prospective fighters.”

David nodded to Mystic. “Mystic and I will show up with our personal trainers, Jonathan and TL. GiGi and Chapling will have their program rigged to identify Mystic and I as top notch fighters. Harry Noor will bring us in as Warriors, and we will officially become Demise Chain competitors.”

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

David turned his attention to Nalani and Bruiser. “Now for the ladies. There are no women fighters allowed. And the only way ladies are allowed in the audience is if they are on the arm of an invited guest. However, fighters are allowed to have wives and girlfriends at their sides. Bruiser will be traveling as Mystic’s girlfriend, but clearly, her role is our fighting consultant. All of us will be wearing hidden communicative devices. Mystic and I will be counting on her to coach us through our actual fights, along with the input from the Combat Thrash Program.”

“Nalani has already secured a job within Demise Chain as the hostess. She will be our one inside person, serving as back up, on guard for anything that might happen. Because of their personal connection to this mission, Nalani and TL are the only two who will be in disguise.” David rolled his chair out and took a seat. “Once Mystic starts interacting with the fighters, he’ll know what our next move is, who has Zandra, and where she is. Obviously, we’ll regroup and go from there.”

“The format of Demise Chain,” David continued, “is that fighters go up against each other, the winners move on to the next round, and so forth. By the end of the night there is a grand winner who is awarded the purse. Currently there are six Warriors. They all fight each other as well as the visiting competitors. Harry Noor could care less who wins, just as long as it is one of his Warriors.”

“Red is going to be here at home base ready to give input as needed.” David opened his folder. “Now for aliases. Jonathan will be Trainer Jones. TL, Trainer Tim. Nalani, hostess Nan. Bruiser, girlfriend Bee-bee. I’ll be Warrior Daniel. Mystic, Warrior Michael. Chapling, computer specialist Charlie. And GiGi, computer specialist Gertrude.”

Gertrude? I nearly rolled my eyes. What a horrible name.

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

David looked around the room. “Before I turn things over to our computer team, are there any questions?”

Chapling raised a pudgy finger. “Um . . . what if something goes wrong? I mean, there’re not a lot of definitive details here. Who’s to say GiGi and I are going to sufficiently wow Harry Noor with our brilliance? I mean, well, of course we’re brilliant, but do you all not see this whole mission hinges on us?”

“And,” he continued rattling, “if we don’t secure that job, the whole thing is down the drain. What do we do then? Huh? Huh? Okay, and if we do, by some act of God, get the job, our program might have a glitch in it and not identify Mystic and David as top notch fighters.”

Chapling glanced at me. “Not to say our program will have a glitch.”

“It won’t,” I assured him.

“Oh!” He threw his hands up, completely ignoring my reassurance. “And once Mystic gets his next image, what are we all going to do? Just walk out of there? And what about our trainers, TL and Jonathan? What if Harry Noor doesn’t allow them?”

“And—”

“Chapling,” I interrupted, “everything’s going to be okay.” Sheesh, he reminded me of me. This was what I must look like in one of my frantic states. “I know the mission isn’t cemented and certain things hinge on other things, but that’s just the way it goes. You can’t know for sure what’s going to happen every second. You just sort of roll with it and have the confidence it’ll succeed.”

“But . . .” Chapling’s voice trailed off, and then a few seconds later he blew out a shaky breath and nodded. “Okay. Okayokay.” He gave everybody a guilty shrug. “It’s my first mission.”

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

“You’ll be fine,” TL spoke.

I reached over and rubbed Chapling’s back. “You’ll be fine,” I whispered.

“Plus, Chap, we’ll have several more briefings. One when you get done meeting with Harry Noor, another one after Warriors tryouts, another one when Mystic sees what he needs to see. There’ll be plenty of communication throughout the different stages of this mission.” David closed his folder. “At this time I’d like to turn things over to our computer team.”

Chapling and I both pushed back from the table and made our way over to the wall inserted flat screen.

“Daisy,” Chapling addressed our ranch’s main computer. “Show time.”

GREETINGS, she typed in big bold letters across the center of the wall screen.

I turned to our team. “Tomorrow we’re meeting with Harry Noor. Some of the world’s best program designers will be there, too. The competition will be tough.”

“But,” Chapling interrupted. “Smart girl here hacked into all their computers and knows what fighting program they’ve all designed.”

I smiled. “We’ve, basically, taken the key components of their program and coded it into one I’ve affectionately deemed the Combat Thrash Program. Okay.” I stepped to the side of the screen. “Without further ado, I’d like to introduce the Combat Thrash Program. Daisy, do your thing.”

Daisy cranked on the speakers, and out poured hard rock. On the screen, shooting in as if someone was throwing a ball of video, were flashes of actual fights timed to the music thumping the room. Clip after clip ending with one man hitting another, and his blood spraying out to transform into animated 3-D.

Then the screen divided into a dozen small boxes, each displaying two animated men fighting. The screen flashed, much like a camera does, x-raying through the animated men to show their muscular skeletal.

The music trailed away as the animation continued, and Chapling and I turned to our team.

“We’d like to ask Mystic to come up,” I said, nodding to him.

“Daisy,” Chapling prompted, “may I have the Influence Sway Skins?”

A tray slid out from below the wall mounted screen, and on the tray sat a slim, rectangular box.

Chapling took the box and opened it. “These are one-of-a-kind devices, made exclusively for this mission. They will provide us with an image of Mystic’s muscular make up, record and measure his strapping intensity and breadth, and in layman’s terms give us a thumbs up or down if he’d be a good fighter.”

I nodded. “Clearly, Mystic simply standing here while we measure him doesn’t give us an indication of his reasoning skills. Which is why we’ll also be recording his cognitive thought processes as he engages in a two minute mock fight with Bruiser.”

“Mystic,” Chapling addressed him, “if you could take off your shirt and roll up your jeans.”

While he did that, I waved Bruiser up. “When Mystic and David actually go in front of Harry Noor, they’ll be expected to engage in the same sort of mock fight with one of the Warriors. This will give Harry a visual of them actually in action and us the data we need to inform Harry Noor if Mystic and David are good fighters. Which, of course, the answer will be yes.”

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

I watched as Chapling placed wireless Skins all over Mystic's body. "Nice color," I complimented him. He'd changed the Skins from white to skin color.

"Thanks." When Chapling finished, he stepped back. "Daisy, record adroitness aptitude now." And then he nodded for Mystic and Bruiser to begin.

In the corner of the conference room Bruiser and Mystic threw some phony punches, kicks, and elbow strikes, each taking turns with offensive moves and defense blocking. At the two minute mark Chapling stopped them.

A large 3-D image of Mystic's muscular structure appeared on the screen. "This," I pointed to the screen, "is Mystic's image. Daisy," I commanded our computer, "show us excellence."

Patches of translucent yellow slowly filled his image, from his toes all the way up to his brain.

"The yellow represents a match between excellence and Mystic's body composition, including his brain patterns." I turned to the screen. "Daisy, give percentage."

99.9 PERCENT.

I smiled. "As you can see, Mystic matches the best fighters in the world at a ninety-nine point nine percent."

"Which," Chapling put in, "is a fib."

"A fib," I agreed, "that will get Mystic a slot as a Warrior."

Chapling clapped. "Okay, now for the best part."

I turned to our team. "Like we said, everything we've showed you thus far is basically a combination of what all the other program designers will be doing. But we've got something they don't."

“Daisy,” Chapling spoke, “finale please.”

A life size hologram of Mystic appeared on top of the center of the conference table.

Every one of my team members simultaneously pushed away, their eyes wide in amazement.

Another image popped up of a *huge* man. “This is—”

“Utotiz.” Bruiser interrupted. “He holds the world title in MMA.”

“Based on the data we just took of Mystic, and all known information on Utotiz, we’re going to see these guys in action. Daisy,” I told the computer, “fight.”

Both holograms moved at once, coming toward each other.

Utotiz jabbed his knuckle between Mystic’s nose and mouth.

Mystic unleashed an upward kick at Utotiz’s head.

Utotiz feinted a kick, then rammed his heel into Mystic’s shin.

Mystic executed a double punch to Utotiz’s chest.

Utotiz grabbed Mystic’s arm and wrenched it behind his back. He took the waist band of his jeans, lifted Mystic high above his head, and threw him to the ground.

Blood went flying through the air, and I took that as my cue to stop the hologram.

Mystic swallowed. “Was that my blood?”

Chapling cringed. “Utotiz *does* hold the world title.”

“Obviously, when we get in front of Harry Noor,” I addressed the team, “Mystic and David’s hologram will succeed in submitting whomever they have a hologram fight with.”

David put his finger in the air. “Now what about the other portion of this? Actually advising the Warriors during a fight.”

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

I nodded. “Well, of course our program has thousands and thousands of combat data. Very simply, we’ll be recording the fights as they occur and advising the Warriors on what to do when. Watch.” I turned to the wall inserted screen.

“Daisy, phase two of Combat Thrash Program,” I requested.

Two fighters appeared on the screen.

“This is a film taken from an underground fight club in Russia,” I told my team. “These fighters are approximately two minutes into a fight.”

While the fighters continued grappling, a smaller screen split off and to the left, turning the men into an animated image.

I pointed to the man with red hair. “Any coach can tell that man what to do differently, but we can tell him *exactly*. Notice the dark haired man has the red haired man in a shoulder lock. Any coach would tell red hair to front roll out of it as an escape, but based on both men’s physiological make up, in this instance red hair should front roll out to the right at a thirty degree angle.”

“Daisy,” Chapling commanded, “show thirty degree escape versus normal.”

Another animated box moved off and to the right. The one on the right showed the normal response with red hair front rolling and dark hair twisting his wrist to keep him in place.

The animated box on the left showed the revised response with red hair front rolling at a thirty degree angle, successfully escaping the shoulder lock, and gaining top ground.

“Wow,” Bruiser exclaimed. “That is too cool.”

Chapling and I shared a smile. Getting kudos from Bruiser was the slam dunk.

Around the room everyone gave their approval and congratulations, and Chapling and I exchanged a pleased look.

*The Specialists – Fight To The Finish*

“Obviously,” I pointed out, “when Mystic and David are fighting, Chapling and I will be there with our program to advise them what to do and what not to do. Our advice combined with Bruiser’s will give them the knowledge needed to succeed.” I looked around the room.

“Questions?”

Everyone shook their heads

David nodded. “It goes without saying, you two have done a superb job.” He stood.

“You’ll fly out at 0900. Dismissed.”