

By Roel Calderon

10,000 years of galactic empire cannot die in one battle. Humanity has found this out. The Tenma Empire has ruled the galaxy since time immemorial. They rule it still. One single planet had eluded their grasp, for the simple reason the Tenma choose not to take it. Earth has prophecies of doom and destruction surrounding it. They are all true. 200 years ago the first encounter of Tenma and Humanity occurred. The Earth was destroyed, totally and utterly. The Tenma champions sent to Earth were killed. Billions died. In the end all that was left was the First and her Champions. They awakened the Angel of Life and their world was reborn, but the war is far from over.

Krieg remembered the first time he saw the Tenma. He was on his way home from kindergarten. His teacher had taught them about the clouds that morning, and he was marveling at the beauty that simple clouds of water could create. Even then he dreamed about flying among them. Krieg lived in a small town nestled into the foothills of a large mountain. The clouds stayed near the mountaintop all the time, scraps of white looking like the sheep grazing in the dizzying heights. From the school the town looked like a cobblestone path leading to the mountain. Then the Tenma appeared. No one knew what they were looking for, or why they had come. It wouldn't have given any of their victims any satisfaction to know why they destroyed their town, then began to destroy the mountain. Krieg watched in awe as the Tenma sliced a hundred meters at a time off the mountain. He watched as the mountain shrank before his eyes, and as each slice was taken out, Krieg knew that his life as he knew it was ending. He'd always been able to look to the spot half way up the mountain, where the sharp crag made a large flat

meadow, and see his home. Now all he saw was the sky behind what was left of the mountain.

Krieg sat down and began to cry for his lost home, family, and video games. But through his tears he saw something flying in fast, from where the mountain used to be. It was a plane, and it was going faster than anything he had ever seen in his life. Just then a dozen streaks of white light flew out of the plane and landed in what was left of Krieg's village. They were completely silent when they attacked the Tenma. The Angelic Assault Squad was pulling Mach 2.5 when they jumped from the bomber they had been riding in. Before the crash and boom of their arrival smashed the town, the Tenma were already dead. In smoking craters surrounded by the ash of their enemies the Angels stood proud, shining heroes in gleaming silver armor. Then one fell, coughing blood and clutching the blade driven through his side. The battle began at once; a single Tenma champion fighting desperately to escape the holy wrath of the Angels. To Krieg's untrained eye it was a blur of motion and one resounding crash after another. Then the bomber came around for its second pass. It had only one weapon left to drop, but that was always all that was needed. A brilliant gold streak came down from the plane, moving slower but still too fast for the eye to follow. It dove into the middle of the furious fighting, and exploded into a shower of gold light. Then silence came back to the town. Standing in the steaming crater he had just created stood the Champion of Destruction, clad in gleaming armor smeared with the blood of friend and foe alike. The power he wielded crackled from his eyes and fingertips, a dancing aura of pure power. Krieg had never seen anything so beautiful in his entire life.

The Angels were summoned to fight for light and life once again, but they needed hosts, a person to tie them to our world. And so this school was created. A place where the chosen few were trained to accept the powers of the holy angels, and carry the fight to the Tenma smeared stars. A school whose curriculum was Integrity, Compassion, and Honor. A school named Hope. Much is required of the chosen, but above all else is purity of purpose. Those souls who possess such intense purpose and will are allowed to attempt the greatest challenge of all, to become one of the champions of Darkbolt. The First unknowingly accepted Darkbolt into her body, and very nearly lost herself in his utter dark. But through a feat of will she reined him back and took his power as her own. This is the ultimate purpose of the school; to train a new host for each of the demons, to train those like you.

Krieg cast an impatient glance at his professor. He knew all this already. Since his first glimpse of a Champion he knew his destiny lay as a living prison for the embodiment of chaos and destruction. To don the golden armor of the Demon of Destruction was his only desire. Krieg had spent years toiling, to be noticed, to be chosen as a student of Hope. His ambition had propelled him far above the other students; his sneering disdain for the Angel's power and all who accepted it well hidden. He knew firsthand the limitation of Angels. Why accept the power of an Angel, when you could take the power of a God? That the God did not wish this made it all so much more thrilling. Champions had succumbed to the dark whispers in their nightmares before, requiring the other Champions to restrain, and sometimes kill, the host. Now that

day was finally here, the day Krieg would prove his superiority. If Krieg won the tournament he would be selected as having the force of will to wrestle a Demon into submission. Destruction was the most savage and terrible of all the demons. Most of those champions who have forsaken the light were the host for Destruction. But Destruction was also the most powerful, and in Krieg's mind that made it the only choice.

Hope was the most elite campus in the entire world. It was in Tokyo on the site of the old Tokyo Bird High School, more for sentimental reasons than anything. The academics section was top ranked in the nation, but paled in comparison to the combat training program. Hope is well stocked with the more mundane things like shooting ranges and an obstacle course. Hope also boasts an indoor arena, and training room with walls made of battleship hull layered three deep, all a half-kilometer underground. Down in these depths the Chosen ones are bonded with their angelic partners and taught to use their full power. The walls usually have to be replaced every 6 weeks. Until the Chosen get the hang of having a second mind in their head with them they live in a dorm. They often pilgrimage to the temple where The First was bonded with Darkbolt, and meditate on the duality of their new souls. One part is an anxious teenager granted godly power and equal responsibility, the other an immortal soul of pure light and goodwill dealing with the hormonal rampages teens are so often visited by. While the human side usually defers to the greater experience and wisdom of the Angel, they have also have the same needs as all other teenagers. For this reason the girls and boys dorms are separated by three miles, and strict controls are put on the use of teleportation powers. However every year a picnic is thrown to honor the founding of Hope. The area around the temple has

been preserved as a forest, and in the meadows of the temple grounds this celebration is held. It is a grand tradition to begin each picnic with a martial arts contest to determine the strongest fighter in the school with food, dancing, and alcohol in amounts that would kill normal partygoers to follow. It was during the opening stages of this party that the first and last attack by the Tenma against Hope itself occurred.

Krieg was still wiping sweat from his eyes, savoring the knowledge that he had just crushed everyone in the Junior Class at unarmed combat. He stretched and massaged his aching muscles, and felt out the spots that would turn purple in the near future. He had proven himself to be the best. A student came to congratulate him, but Krieg stared down at the underclassman like the insect he was. Technicians were erecting the arena for the Senior Class tournament, with its foot thick bulletproof glass walls, force fields, and dozens of high-speed cameras. Most of the senior fights happened too fast for unaided human eyes to follow. The seniors were lining up to draw opponents, anxious to find out whom their first battle would be against. Even when at rest they were beautiful. They looked human at first, but the pale glimmer of wings would sometimes appear behind them, or the halo of power flare up as excitement got the better of self-control. Krieg knew he would have the power to crush them all soon, and regarded the unconscious light show as a display of weakness.

The Tenma Assault forces teleported into the cover of the forest, hoping for a few seconds of surprise. They arrived in the middle of the opening stages of the Senior Class tournament. Nearly two hundred Angels gaped at the new arrivals, then launched

themselves into the fight. The Tenma were shocked to be so quickly assaulted by such numbers. They had arrived in overwhelming numbers true, but in their hubris they had not figured students into the equation. Hate fueled the bloodlust of the students, memories of atrocities 10,000 years in the past mingling with raids from childhoods. Several Tenma broke away from the main fighting and advanced on the underclassmen and spectators. It fell on the juniors to keep the others safe. Krieg squared off against one of the Tenma shock troopers, and he meant to kill it. The blows from the magical armor came fast and hard, each mammoth fist tearing the air and exploding the earth where they hit. But none hit Krieg. The ploy Krieg used was old, but worked. Get in close, get in their face, and let the monster's strength solve your problem. In its single goal of smashing Krieg into paste the Tenma threw a powerful punch at Krieg, who was straddling the head. Predictably, Krieg dodged yet again and the enchanted armor smashed its own head into splinters. The fighting raged as more and more students piled into the fight. Trees shattered, the earth exploded, and students screamed their rage and pain. The crying and weeping of the wounded was the only sound left once the Tenma retreated. Injured students hobbled about, picking up bodies and trying to tell the dead from the wounded. The seniors fanned out to be sure all the Tenma were either dead or gone. One found Krieg unconscious and bloody up in a tree where an explosion had thrown him.

In the aftermath of the attack it was decided that the valor and courage shown by the students more than proved them ready to accept the responsibilities of being bonded. The cameras in the arena had recorded most of the attack and they clearly showed the

students in combat. Many died fighting, but all those that survived were given medals. Krieg's was awarded while he was in full body traction in the hospital. He was a celebrity, a normal human teen who had defeated a Tenma in hand to hand combat. He was a hero, who was in an extremely bad situation. Many of the worst injured were healed by the Angels, who laid hands upon them and miraculously cured the wounds. Krieg was impatient for his turn to be healed. The cast itched maddeningly. That's when Krieg found he could not scratch. He quickly found that neither of his legs nor his arm would obey him. The Tenma had used a very powerful attack, one meant to kill all it touched. Krieg had survived the outskirts of the blast, but his body would never move again. Only the dark powers of the Demons could heal him, and only if he was the powers' master. All of the chosen came to his room and gave him a choice. He could let the doctors and Angels attempt to heal him in time, or attempt to control Destruction in his current state. Krieg never hesitated.

Krieg grasped the orb. It was cool to the touch, but then it hit him. All the rage of a centuries of enslavement, all the pain and humiliation at constant defeats, the bitter laughter at the greed and corruption of human souls, and the joy of having a chance to kill once more. All the emotions of Destruction washed over Krieg in waves too fast and heavy to fully comprehend. And then came the power. My god the power! It filled him, burned him, chilled him, drowned him, and made him thirsty for more. He retreated into his mind, away from his broken body, to meet Destruction face to face. The battlefield was where it had all begun, a dead mountain town with no mountain anymore. And here he saw the same thing he had seen 10 years earlier, Destruction. The golden aura of

power was the same as he remembered it, but this time it surrounded a huge saurian monster. To win this battle Krieg needed to focus on something he wanted more than anything else, even his life. He focused on Destruction's power, and he tore it from Destruction with the fury of his will. He chained the demon down in the darkest pit of his soul, powerless and enslaved once more. Now Krieg marveled at his new strength. He had the power of the Gods themselves, and he loved it. The power crackled through his every fiber, energizing him past anything he had ever believed possible. Krieg looked down at his splendor, a cape of gold and armor to match. He had done it! He was the most powerful force in the galaxy! A gigantic party was thrown for the birthday of this new God, and there was much rejoicing. Krieg never suspected Destruction was rejoicing too. Krieg was too euphoric to miss the piece of his soul Destruction had taken as its own. And when Krieg finally did, he realized he really didn't mind.