

# 10,000 DAWNS



## **Bad Friends, Better Weaponry**

**by James Wylder, art by Raen Ngu**

"This is your sword." Kinan said.

"Kinan, every time we start training you don't need to give me the 'this is your sword' speech. I get it. Its my sword. I cut things with it. Its really important. If I lose it in a fight someone will take the opportunity to stab me really hard." Kinan rolled her eyes at Jenny, and tossed her sword, still in its scabbard, at her chest.

"Fine." Kinan said, "but your sword isn't just your sword it's-"

"-an extension of my body? It should feel like part of my arm? We've been over this." Kinan frowned. "You're in an odd mood." Jenny shrugged, and drew her sword, swinging it around in a few practice motions.

"I'd just like to do something? You know?"

"There's not much we can do right now. Everything depends on what Graelyn and Archimedes are doing." Jenny nodded, but looked even less happy. "Stop pouting and confess your feelings already." "Confess? No need to be so dramatic." Kinan, without being able to change her facial expression, somehow conveyed the entire concept of, "Me? Dramatic? Seriously? I'm the dramatic one?" by just staring at Jenny. "Okay fine. But look, this isn't easy for me. I'm the one who does stuff in the Prime Universe. Its my home turf."

"But its very difficult to time travel within your own universe. Not unless you're piggy backing off someone else. You'd get in their way. Or even stop them from being able to go forward at all if the Labyrinth blocks you."

"I'd know what to do!" Kinan rubbed her forehead.

"Jenny, I trust you more than anyone else. You're the head of the Dawn Artemis Corp, for goodness sakes. But be honest with me, would you be good at a subtle infiltration into a group without showboating and starting seven fights?" Backgammon Jenny opened her mouth to respond, but closed it. She was right. Kinan didn't have to be so sassy about it, but she was right. "You're the best fighter in Dawn."

"After you." Kinan shrugged. "Oh, don't be modest."

"Fine. And you've also got a real passion where I'm practical. You're good to have on the team. Along with Lametrius leading the Hermes Corp, and the Silent leading the Apollo Corp-"

"Couldn't they get a different name? 'The Silent', really?"

"-we have a near perfect organization. We all have different skills. We just have to hope Graelyn and Arch succeed." Jenny dropped her sword on the grass, took off her sunglasses, and sat down on the hill, looking up at the floating blobs of water in the sky. She adjusted her poodle skirt, and pulled at the collar of her turtleneck.

"They might fail."

"They might."

"Then we'll be dead."

"Yes." Kinan sat down next to her, pulling the tails of her brown coat under her to protect her white pants from the grass, and looked up at the people swimming in the glob of water.

"Well, I guess if I die, I'm glad its here. Though I'd like to take you to see the Spinneret where I work there someday, if we can ever travel there."

"I've seen the Spinneret."

"But not my Spinneret. You haven't met my boss Kalingkata, my version of my boss Kalingkata, or..." She trailed off, and picked her sunglasses up off the grass, sliding them onto her face. "Never mind, it was a silly thought." She rose, and looked behind her for her sword, which wasn't there.

"Kinan, where'd you put my sword?" Kinan raised an eyebrow.

"Nowhere."

"Oh come on, you don't have to do silly tricks to teach me some lesson about it. We've been over this."

"I didn't touch your sword."

“Then where is it?” The answer nearly took her head off. The sword was floating in the air, untethered to any visible person, and Jenny barely managed to duck out of the way in time.

“What the hell?” She yelled as the sword came down towards her again. She would have moved to dodge it, but Kinan flying kicked the air next to the sword, and there was a thud as she impacted the empty space, then another thud as she pushed the invisible figure to the ground. She hovered there, inches above the grass, perched on the figure's check like an incubus.

“You can come out now. I know you're here.” She whispered. One by one, empty spots in the air swirled into black cloaked figures, each with a bejeweled gauntlet on one arm, and their hoods up. A light blue stripe marked each of their robes, and none of their faces were visible as their hoods were up. Kinan grabbed Jenny's sword, and threw it to her, which she caught perfectly, using the natural motion of the sword's throw as momentum to help move her body into a fighting stance. It was the kind of simple yet seamless gesture it took years if not decades to master, the kind an amateur wouldn't be impressed with, but a master would recognize instantly. Jenny's black hair wafted in the breeze as she waited for someone to speak, or move. Kinan was the first to with the simple act of rising off of her invisible opponent, who took the same black robed form as the rest of them.

“The Knights of Sky. Funny you're trying to cut my apprentice's head off, since we're allies.” She hadn't drawn her sword yet. Jenny wondered exactly what she was waiting for. One of the figures stepped forward, and lowered their hood. It was Greggor, or so he'd been called before, the current leader of the Knights of Sky.

“Our alliance was based on the idea that we could have any semblance of control over ourselves. That time has clearly ended. The Prime Reality we're tied to has fallen. The war is over Kinan, and all that's left to figure out is who is going to be on the Council's good side, and who won't be.”

“I won't be.”

“I'm well aware. But we have the luxury of choosing our fate. Your head on a platter would certainly make the Emperors' days. They seem to like getting heads, specifically, so we're going to make an effort for that.” Kinan didn't nod, just stared.

“You're giving up. Just like that. Slaves without a fight?” Greggor scowled.

“We did fight. We left our home world, and let me tell you the Firmament is damn lot better than your Spiral, so we could take a stand against the Council when they wouldn't intervene. We've given everything for this cause.”

“Clearly not.” Kinan said.

“I won't condemn my people to die if I have another choice.”

“Its not like death is a big deal for your people anyways. They'll get over it.”

“You'll have to kill us.”

“Like I said, you'll get better.” Jenny looked between them.

“What do you mean they'll get better?” She interjected. They ignored her.

“You won't.” Greggor said.

“No.”

“And we won't if you kill all of us. We won't be able to start the process.”

“Which we will if you try this.” The robed figures lifted up their gauntlets. Jenny had a lot of questions: how did these guys get onto Spiral unnoticed, how long would it take the frankly copious reinforcements they had around here to arrive? What if Graelyn and Arch failed and this was all for not?

“Let me just ask you one last thing: we know you're mounting some operation to try to stop the council in the past, but from what we've gathered your mission is just a band aid. It gives the Prime Reality more time with no guarantee it will even survive the conflict. Don't you realize how hopeless this war is? Do you really want to keep fighting a group so powerful that even a time traveling army can't stop them completely?”

“Yes.”

“Why? Give me one good reason Kinan!” He was yelling now, the spittle flying from his mouth. “To be free.” She replied. He lowered his arm, stared at her in thought for a moment, and in a motion that Jenny wasn't sure was covering his face or rubbing his eyes, removed his face from view as he said: “Let's get this over with. Kill them.”

This was by no means the first time Kinan and Greggor had fought. He was prone to challenging people to needless duels, and Kinan was prone to accepting them. She always won. But Greggor had never brought this many people to help jump her, after all duels need to at least pretend to be civil. Now the kid gloves were off, and Jenny wasn't sure what would happen. Kinan took a step back, and then another, and Jenny turned around and walked backwards as well, listening for the sound of Kinan's sword being unsheathed. Their backs touched. The sound she was waiting for happened. The figures encircled them.

“Any chance the cavalry will swoop in here?” Jenny asked.

“We've got this.” Kinan said, over-confidently.

There was stillness, and then violence. Bolts of lightning surged from the gauntlets of the Knights of Sky, and Kinan and Jenny burst into action. Both ran towards opposite members of the Knights, dodging the bolts, and Kinan unceremoniously slashed her sword across one of their chests. A thin blue light emanated from the hole, then blood in shifting colors spilled out, and then organs. The circle looked shocked. They'd fought together before, and they'd come to kill her, but the reality of death was not something they'd expected for themselves. Kinan and Jenny wasted no time taking advantage of that fact, even as Jenny was trying to overcome her own shock. They both beheaded one of the Knights in the silent moment of horror that had followed the first death. Rainbow blood sprayed from each falling body.

Then the fighting began in earnest. Kinan and Jenny were like one body in two places, working their enemies into vulnerable positions so the other could finish them off in, dodging and weaving to help minimize the number of blows and bolts of lightning coming towards the other, and giving up blows they could have made to give the other a better, cleaner, strike. Kinan would sweep the legs out of foes, while Jenny would leap across them, slicing their chests open before landing and drawing her sword against the body of the next one. Jenny would move quickly, feinting on one side before slinking around to the other while Kinan flanked them, leaving the enemy open to a blade through the chest from one side. Their blades were part of their bodies, extensions of their arms, and elegant tools of violence.

But it wasn't a contest. It was a massacre. Jenny wasn't even sure when during the fight Greggor died, but it didn't take long for the circle of the Knights of Sky to be rainbow bloodied corpses and detached parts. Backgammon Jenny's name implied a bit of risk in her life, her name came from a betting board game after all, but this wasn't fair odds. She hadn't realized their training had progressed to this point. Jenny panted, leaning on her sword. Kinan stood impassive.

“Jesus, Kinan. Did we have to kill them all?” Kinan turned to her.

“They'll be fine.”

“They're dead!” Kinan cocked her head to the side. “We killed them. You don't get back up after that.”

“They're part of the Firmament. Death is an inconvenience for them.”

“They said they couldn't get up if we killed them all. Kinan are you listening to me?”

Kinan walked over to a corpse, and pulled the gauntlet off. She gestured for Jenny to do the same, and soon they had a big pile of the gauntlets. Kinan reached into her bag without another word, and threw a handful of dust to make a portal, grabbing a stack of the gauntlets before walking through. Jenny grabbed the rest, and followed Kinan into the white swirl, where the pair walked through the Labyrinth in silence. Eventually, they reached the white door they were looking for, and Kinan opened it up. They exited into a room filled with machinery, strange machinery that looked both industrial and dirty, and

old, but also futuristic and beyond anything Jenny had seen.

"Where are we?" She asked, running her hands along a panel which had glowing letters floating above it.

"The headquarters of the Knights of Sky." Kinan kept walking, and Jenny hurried to follow.

"Not a lot of sky here..."

"No." There were rows of tanks as they kept going, filled with featureless, sexless, bodies that looked bluish.

"What the hell are these Kinan? They look like the Faceless." Jenny had seen the Faceless many times in her job, naturally. The strange blue floating beings from an alternate reality that communicated via small electrical bursts rather than speech Graelyn and Arch had seen for the first time during their tour of a fallen world. But they also didn't look exactly like them either, they clearly weren't the same thing, but she wondered if there was a connection.

"These are templates for the Firmament to upload their consciousness into when they die. This way they preserve their memories." Jenny pulled her hand away from the glass of the tube she was touching. The

"You mean.... They're going to be waking up?" Kinan nodded.

"They need a bit of help though. Take the largest jewel from each gauntlet, the one on the back of the hand, and put them in the slots by each tank. Jenny ran over to the gauntlets, and carefully slid out the first jewel. It felt strange in her hand, like holding a baby..."

"Kinan, they tried to kill us."

"Yes."

"So why don't we just leave them dead? They're traitors."

"Because they didn't kill us. They made a rash decision to protect their friends."

"So?" Jenny said, gesturing with the rock.

"So, we're reminding them they have other friends. After all, they're not the only person in this room who got a second chance after trying to kill someone, are they?" Kinan made eye contact with Jenny through the dark sunglasses she was wearing in a dark room. Jenny wanted to fold into the darkness. She didn't want to think about that... What she'd nearly done all those years ago... She pushed it out of her mind. Kinan was right. She didn't want her to be right, but she was right.

"Okay. Lets resurrect this jerks."

The pair went to work. Jenny plugged the rocks into the sockets, while Kinan operated some sort of complex holographic switchboard. Eventually, the machines in the room began to whirr and hum.

"Just a matter of time then." Kinan said, wiping her hands off.

"So, who exactly are the Knights of Sky anyways? I mean, this is weird stuff."

"The Knights of Sky broke away from the Firmament, but managed to get a hold of one of their old rebirth facilities and relocate it here. Without it they'd be-"

"-Just as mortal as everyone else." Greggor said, pulling a robe on as he rose from where he'd slid out of his tube.

"Greggor. I'm glad to see you're alive. I brought your gauntlets back." He looked down at them.

"...I tried to kill you."

"You did. And if you do it again, I know where you live and I'll break your rebirth pods and you'll be just as dead as everyone else who dies. But we're allies, and I'm a woman of my word. You made a mistake. Don't make it again." She started walking away, just like that. Jenny really wondered why she couldn't have conversations like a normal person. Greggor stared silently at her as she walked away, and then nodded to himself as his comrades slid out of their own pods. Jenny looked around at them, flashed a peace sign, and scampered after Kinan. They walked in silence for a time, through a portal, and through the Labrynth, till they arrived back on Spiral. The dinosaurs had already started eating the corpses of the Knights of Sky's old bodies.

"Kinan, did you know they were going to jump us like that?"

“No.”

“Ah. I thought it was some kind of lesson for a bit there, still. You know, don't leave your sword lying around, its important, that sort of thing.”

“I won't lie, it was pretty timely. Don't leave your sword lying around. Its important.” She sighed, Kinan was right, again, of course.

“So what are we going to do now?”

“Get back to training. We have a war to fight, even if we lose it.” Jenny smirked.

“Always the soldier.” Kinan threw up a peace sign.

“My eyes are always on the prize, Jenny.”

end.

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