

When Fire Meets Ice

Chapter 1 - So it begins.

Even in the dark, you could see her, like a shining beacon. Her skin's creamy white tone reminded her of whipped cream as the sunlight shone through her window and onto her candy floss hair. Her hair was a vibrant, liquid pink against her pallid skin- it was striking. The strands flowed down her back freely, stopping in a line around her hips, gentle waves ran loosely like a waterfall down to her waist- different shades of pink were scattered throughout- they were the colors one would only expect to find in the most vibrant of gardens. Her eyes were a fire in water if you can imagine such a thing. They were a passion for ice; she used to believe her glacier eyes were ice-cold, that they knew no warmth- that is what she used to believe. But she had realized over the years that the hottest fires always burnt blue, especially in Frost City. The city was enormous. It was fascinatingly beautiful- there was so much color. Some skyscrapers rose into the clouds casting their shadows across the ground. They marked the different sectors of each city and were built with delicate marble and intricate stone. The city held an equally impressive arena for the lucky enough people to get into the adventurous district where they could train and fight with wyverns, raptors, and other creatures. There was an underground area, one of which was known to the whole world, where people who were sorted into the intimidating district could train in combat with sabers, knives, and whatever the hell else was found down there- to be completely honest, Cryental didn't care, she never ventured down there anyway. Cryental was part of the intellectual district- only the most intelligent citizens were sorted into this area, and boy oh boy, did Cryental know it. She had an IQ of over two hundred, the fastest record for hacking a virus in the city, and the programming skills of someone you would not expect to only be sixteen years old. At age twelve, Cryental had already helped the leaders of Frost City uncover a variety of secrets from their rivals-Ember city, but after the paparazzi wouldn't

leave her mother's doorstep – she decided to move out of her small home and into her own apartment, away from the leaders and whatever the hell they wanted her to do next. She had received emails and seen officials knocking on her door but had chosen to ignore them- she was part of the intellectuals, not the adventurous or the intimidating, and she would keep it that way. Cryental stood from her desk chair; she patted down her slightly matted locks as she fumbled for her apartment keys; falling asleep at her desk was becoming a habit she ached to get rid of. As she stared at her reflection in the mirror, she let herself smile. She wore a slightly creased white blouse, which was tucked into a flowing ebony skirt. She straightened her clothes and pulled on a pair of rather old black flats- you would think that she would have a decent pair of shoes for the best programmer in Frost City. She was a unique looking girl, not generic, looking like most other girls her age. Most of them had dull chocolate hair-the kind of color one would look at and not focus on for any more than a few seconds; they always had the newest makeup caked onto their fake tanned skin and skirts that bordered on having the status of underwear. But Cryental had delicate, porcelain skin and dyed her hair a different color each month- she didn't care for makeup and tended to just throw on whatever she could find in her wardrobe, which would explain her lack of friends. With a deep sigh, Cryental pulled open her apartment door and strode out of her building. The streets were already bustling with broody looking businessmen, stressed women trying to get their children to the academies on time, and people like her- strolling leisurely to the local bakeries and cafes for whatever they craved that particular morning. Cryental always craved the same thing- a chocolate croissant with not so much chocolate, it became overly sweet and sickening, but not so little that it was tasteless and bland. She could see the quaint bakery just ahead of her. Its pink sign moved subtly in the eager wind; a flurry of butterflies made their way through her stomach as she approached the doors, catching the eye of the waitress who was serving two stern-looking men. That was odd; Cryental rarely saw anyone dressed like that around here; maybe they were visiting from

another city? If they were not from Ember City, she did not exactly care. Despite her curiosity, Cryental entered the bakery, various smells filled her nostrils, and she let herself bask in the swirls of cakes and coffee as she took a seat on a plump lilac chair in the corner and allowed herself to sink into the cloud-like pillows. She pulled out her phone. It was a relatively old model, but all she used it for was to call her mother- everything else was done on her state-of-the-art computer. She had started building it herself when she was fourteen; she was still improving it, but it was her prized possession- she was convinced that it had one of every part in all four cities within its intricately designed system. Cryental pushed the power button of her phone down-nothing. She tried again; this time, lines of rainbow plagued the screen; she could have sworn a man's face appeared for a moment- she needed more sleep. She rubbed her eyes and threw her phone onto the seat next to her; it was an old thing, she told herself; it was only a matter of time before its meager system entirely broke down anyway.

"Marcy!" Cryental giggled as she practically leaped out of her seat and hugged the waitress; the perky woman chuckled back and held her close. Cryental noted the hints of strawberry which clung to her friend's hair; Cryental didn't care for companions, she was too busy with her business, and she considered herself married to her work, she had no time for people- but there was something about Marcy that brought a smile to Cryental's face every time she saw her. It was like being warmed by summer rays regardless of the season.

"How have you been, sweetie?" Marcy asked, placing a freshly baked croissant down onto the table in front of her. Cryental let out a deep exhale and ran her hands through her wavy hair.

"Not bad, thank you, I have an insane amount of work to do, but it pays the bills, I guess!" Marcy placed a comforting hand on Cryental's shoulder.

"Honestly, honey, you work yourself too hard!" Marcy's warm smile faltered as she looked back over at the two men in suits over the opposite end of the café. "Have you seen those two men before?" Cryental shared a concerned glance with the waitress as she peered over at the two officials to find them already staring back at her. A shiver made its way down her spine, her toes curled slightly in her shoes at every look they were giving her.

"No, no, I don't believe so." Cryental felt a chill caress her body, but it was not from the cold. "Why? Is everything okay?" Marcy sat down next to Cryental, getting as close as possible to her ear.

"There is something off about them; their movements seem- "

"Robotic." Cryental finished her friends' sentence as she watched one of the men pick up the coffee cup and bring it to his lips; each movement he made was jolty and unsteady. A cheery-looking elderly couple strolled into the coffee shop, and Marcy leaped up, kissing Cryental on the forehead before she skipped over to welcome the new customers. She devoured her croissant in less than a few minutes-looking rather unladylike- as the crumbs from the pastry clung to her strawberry hair. Before Cryental departed from the bakery, she grabbed her phone (which was still broken) and gave Marcy a quick hug just to make sure she was okay- after all, those men were rather unsettling. Marcy gave her a kind, polite smile and wandered back to her workstation uncomfortably. As soon as Cryental left the bakery, the air felt vastly different- she could not explain it; it seemed to be warmer. This would not have been odd in Ember City or even in Aqua city, but Frost city had earned its name for a reason- the winter was ongoing, the heat was extremely rare, if not impossible. As she strolled back through the city, she noticed the excessively large telescreens, which were plastered on the sides of buildings, looked the same as her phone had in the bakery- they had rainbow stripes scattered across them like litter on the floor, and now she was sure that there was an outline of a barely moving man just behind the stripes. Other people started to

notice it too; children were pointing and trying to draw their mother's attention to the peculiar sight in front of them, people working in cafe's and bakeries started to wander out of the buildings, curiosity plaguing their features, and stare aimlessly at the strange telescreens. A man appeared. Oh, God. Cryental muttered a string of curses to herself as she beheld the rather sinister-looking man that had gradually appeared on the telescreens in front of her. His slicked-back ebony hair did not look real as he smirked demonically; this obviously caught the attention of most of the citizens as audible gasps sounded from the distressed crowds. Cryental stumbled backward into a body of stone, She stared upwards, and to her horror, it was one of the men from the coffee shop, he held a large gun- she swore she could hear her own heart beating out of her chest.

"Hello, citizens of Frost City." The man's voice was more sinister than his appearance if that was at all possible. "My name is Altair; I hope that you and I will get on like a house on fire."

Fire.

That is when it clicked, Cryental was not in the intellectuals for nothing. This man was from Ember City, and whatever the hell he wanted was not good.

"Now, your leader is alive, don't worry." Cryental felt her face redden swiftly as she processed the words Altair had spoken so nonchalantly; as she surveyed her surroundings, she noticed there were more men dressed in identical dark suits, all displaying the same sinister smile that Altair had first presented. "We don't wish to harm you, but your leader's resistance to my power has been somewhat." He paused for a moment "problematic."

Cryental's eyes snapped towards the main city building; it was rumored that it scraped the heavens, its peak going higher than any clouds that were visible. A piercing screech sounded from the bottom of the building.

No. Please, no.

The screams were bloodcurdling as people started sprinting away from the building, praying for their lives. Cryental was frozen as she watched the skyscraper tilt towards where she was standing. She could not think; nothing was making any sense. Who was this man? Why was this-

Marcy. All Cryental's attention focused on the quaint pink bakery as the crumbling tower started to shake the very ground she stood on. Cryental was being pushed by various, sweaty bodies. There was no way she could reach her friend. Cryental felt her heart shatter as Marcy slumped down in one of the bakery chairs- as if she were accepting her inevitable fate, accepting her impending death. Cryental screamed her friend's name, but her frail voice did nothing over the screams that surrounded her. A dark-skinned man gripped Cryental's arm harshly, she couldn't breathe as he pulled her away from the chaos, she tried to scramble away from the intimidating figure who was now gripping her arm so hard, she knew it would leave a nasty bruise the next day- if she survived that long. As she struggled, the man pulled her to a halt in front of him.

"Cryental, I need you to cooperate." The young girl could not speak; she tried to get her limbs free if only for a moment so she could run. The young man in front of her, who she now realized had crimson liquid leaking down his face, huffed loudly. "I have no choice; I apologize in advance, ma'am." Cryental froze as yellow smoke appeared from the man's bloody, calloused hands, and the chaotic city morphed into a dark blur. Then, everything went black.

Chapter 2 - The leader

Cryental let her eyes open slowly; her eyelids felt heavy, her body was unsurprisingly sore. She felt almost vacant as if her soul had been forcibly stolen from her body. Cryental jolted upright-her veins filling with adrenaline. It took a while for her eyes to adjust to the gleaming white, which surrounded her. Everything was the color of pure crystal - the walls, the ceiling, the chair in the middle of the room. The only thing that was not a gleaming light was the large glass window in front of her, where three equally tall men stood. Two of them had their backs to her, but one man (the same man that had knocked her out- which she was rather angry about, by the way) alerted his colleagues of her awakening. The first man to turn around was ethereal. Everything about him screamed 'God' from his sandy blonde hair, which draped over his eagle-like eyes, to the muscles which rippled beneath his shirt that Cryental could just about make out, the man smirked, and Cryental realized she had been staring at his torso for an embarrassingly long time. She felt her cheeks turn to a deep rose, but her face paled as soon as the last figure span around to meet her drowsy, wandering gaze. It was the leader, or the ex-leader now. He was just as striking as the last time she had seen him; his cropped black hair was still in a neat line around his head; however, now loose strands flew wildly in all directions. She noticed a large blood splatter on his otherwise pristine suit and felt the room start to spin as she once again was blinded by the amount of white around her. She heard a small click as part of the wall opened up, and the handsome blonde boy from the other side of the glass strolled in carelessly, seeming more interested in fixing his hair as he walked past the glass than speaking to the disoriented, scared girl in front of him.

“Hello, sweetheart.” His voice was deeper than she expected-he looked about her age, maybe slightly older but not by much. Cryental stared at the boy in blatant shock and disbelief as he looked rather bored with the sight of her. “Hello? Can you not hear me? Are you deaf or?” He started moving his hands in odd motions as he pointed to her.

"No...no I- I'm not deaf." The blonde boy sighed deeply, rolling his eyes.

"Well, this experience is going to be fantastic, isn't it?" Cryental had no idea what the boy talking about; she rolled her eyes as the leader entered the room with a slight limp.

"Reign your attitude in Fallon." He smiled widely as if just noticing Cryental, "Ah, how delightful to see you again- how are you doing?" Cryental tried to stand; one foot after the other, she managed to make herself steady, but before she knew it, her knees gave way. She would have gone crashing to the ground if the blonde boy-Fallon, that was his name- had not caught her just under her elbows. His grip was firm but not too tight. Fallon laid her gently on the floor and walked back towards the leader; how he had gotten to her so quickly was a mystery. It was just then that she noticed his clothing; he wore a black, satin shirt which was tucked into ebony trousers; they looked freshly pressed. He looked better than she did, there was no doubt about that.

"Where am I?" Cryental whispered, her voice coming out raspy and dry.

"God, I thought you said she was smart, sir." Fallon retorted.

"Fallon shut it." The boy rolled his eyes at the leader and set to wandering around the room, staring at himself in the glass every time he passed it. God, he was vain... But Cryental supposed if you looked like that, why wouldn't you be? "Cryental, we have taken you here because- "

"You mean kidnapped." Fallon stopped pacing, and the leader stared at her hesitantly. "You kidnapped me; you took me against my will, which is literally the definition of kidnapping." Fallon started to walk again, huffing dramatically as he strode back and forth.

"I understand this may be frightening, but we need you to help us shut down the software running the city; we can only promise that you and your family will not be hurt- I will see to that myself."

"You aren't making any sense, sir; what software?" Cryental inquired, rubbing her throbbing head.

"Well-" The leader started but was interrupted by Fallon.

"Basically, robots from Ember city have taken over the city, and if somebody doesn't shut them down, then we are all going to die." Cryental's face paled, and she suddenly felt as if she would be sick. "I mean, don't get me wrong, I don't know why they chose you, darling, you are pretty, but you don't exactly look like the sharpest tool in the box." The leader looked irritated; he opened his mouth to speak, but Fallon interrupted again. "Do we have anything to eat, boss? I could do with a burger." The leader looked infuriated. "I am going to take that as a no." He set to wandering around the room with no direction once more.

"I apologize for Fallon; there is an extremely complex software running my city Cryental; I believe you are our only hope." The leader held sympathy in his eyes as he spoke softly to the girl.

"And if I refuse?" Cryental pouted, her eyes never leaving the harsh leaders to face.

"We can't force you to help us, but if you don't, the city will fall, and you will be partially responsible." Cryental felt heat flood her cheeks; how dare he try to guilt-trip her! After everything, she had done for Frost City.

"Fine." Cryental was shocked to hear herself say the word. What was she getting herself into? Fallon walked over to her; she was a crumpled heap on the floor-like a fragile, fallen flower that had been trampled by too many feet to stay delicate and pure. He knelt, so his big, blue eyes were somewhat level to her own.

"Looks like me and you are going to have to get to know each other then." Cryental's brow furrowed.

"What? What does he mean? Sir?" She was speaking rapidly, far too quickly for anyone to understand. Over her dead body would she spend another second with this boy.

"Fallon." The leader pointed in the blonde boy's direction, "will be your bodyguard and sole protector." Cryental felt her eyes roll back in her head.

"Up you get, sweetheart, we have work to do." Fallon flashed a small smirk and a quick wink and strode with faultless confidence out of the doorway.

Chapter 3 - The intimidating

"Hands up! Cryental, you need to keep your hands up." Beads of sweat ran down Cryental's soft, pale skin, her hair was pulled into a tight ponytail, loose strands had started to fall out of place messily. She had been training with Fallon for only a few hours, and she despised it.

"Fallon, I'm trying my hardest." She whimpered; the floodgates were close to opening; she could only push herself so hard.

"Try harder." He growled. Cryental and Fallon were opposites; Cryental was happy for starters... Fallon seemed so sad; he always seemed to have a sort of stubborn hatred present in his eyes that she did not quite understand. Fighting was not her specialty; she was placed in the intellectuals for a reason, and he was intimidating for a reason. Although the fact that he could not figure out why she could not fight probably explained why he was not in the intellectuals- he was not dumb, he was just... not as smart as Cryental. Inadequate if you will, in terms of IQ anyway, his fighting on the other hand was-

She was letting her thinking steer away from the real issue; she could not learn the art of combat, no matter how hard she tried. A sharp pain split across her right cheek as Fallon landed a punch. "Keep your hands- "

“up! Yes, dammit, I know.” Fallon paused for a minute and looked at her through his damp, sweat ridden hair.

“Lose the attitude, darling.” Cryental felt anger rush through her, but she took a deep breath and let his condescending tone pass over her head. That was another difference between Cryental and Fallon. Cryental breathed through the anger, replacing the feeling of heat and malice with cool calm, Fallon however, punched whatever came into his vision first and broke things... a lot of things, usually made of glass. This was why they never trained in her apartment; she had some priceless examples of molecular makeup that she was sure he would love to get his temperamental hands on.

Cryental let out a yelp as Fallon pulled her close to his broad chest. “Do what I say, or you will be killed, do you understand me?” His warm breath caressed her skin; goosebumps appeared on the back of her neck at the feeling of the heat. She nodded frantically, fear pulsing through her veins. “There are three Ember City soldiers coming towards us; if they find an intellectual in the intimidating district, they will get suspicious; you are going to fight me, okay. Fight me, Cryental.”

“We have a small problem, which is that I can't fight Fallon,” Cryental said pleadingly; Fallon pulled away from her sweaty body slightly.

“Consider this a test of your progress so far.” Cryental stumbled backward timidly. She barely got a chance to breathe before Fallon lunged; she dodged with faultless accuracy, sending a clumsy elbow into his back. She knew he purposely left himself open so the fight would look more realistic, that did not make hearing him grunt in pain any less satisfying for her; in fact, she rather enjoyed it. He spun around and landed a blow to the left side of her face, which she was obviously expected to block. She could have sworn he winced slightly as he saw pain coarse through her body. The guards walked past the duo, barely glancing their way.

"What do they want?" Cryental muttered once they had finally passed, "Why are they doing this? They are not killing anyone; they are not trying to kill the leader anymore. I don't understand." Fallon moved close to her; the smell of his sweat filled her nostrils.

"The leader of Ember city has wanted Frost City in their power for centuries, so they have infiltrated it; there's no point in ruling a city if there are no people in it to obey you."

Cryental's brow creased.

"But the tower, they knocked it down- "

"They thought the leader was inside, he was late to work, but some soldiers found him. He got shot; a few members of the intimidating and I helped get him out, which is exactly why I am now stuck on this job with you." She felt her heartache at the emphasis he placed on the word 'you.' "It seems that when the leader is impressed with people's skills, he gives them more work to do." Cryental backed away from Fallon as she took off her fighting gloves.

"What are you doing? We aren't done, Cryental."

"That's where you're wrong. I am done; I need to go home and start working on the software- it's your job to protect me, so do it." Fallon gripped her wrist harshly.

"Drop the attitude; I don't want to be here anymore than you do."

"I'm going back home," Cryental muttered, pulling her arm from his grip.

"You mean we are."

"What."

"Where you go, I go." He said, a smirk appearing on his face. God, he was irritating. "milady," he said mockingly. Cryental rolled her eyes and started walking out the doors, Fallon trailing closely behind her. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter 5 - Exhaustion

Cryental was curled up on her sofa like a tired puppy. The hours of training with Fallon had drained her of any energy she had. The dull hum of the television filled the room; her eyelids were heavy, heavy enough that she could drift off to sleep exactly where she was lying. Fallon had been in the kitchen for much of the evening, she had little clue what he was doing, and to put it frankly, she did not care. She could not stand him, everything he said was so snarky, everything he did was so...intolerable. She hated him, and she had no choice but to put up with his attitude until she cracked the coding. Heavy footsteps sounded behind her; she spun around quickly, adrenaline coursing through her veins at the thought of one of those awful men from the café before being in her home.

"Take a breather; it's only me," Fallon said, his voice was raspy. Cryental felt her breath catch in her throat as she beheld the man in front of her. He wore loose black trousers, and his shirt-well he did not have one on. She felt her cheeks redden. "You alright?" He said, his eyes wandering around the room, never resting on her face for more than a second at a time.

"Yes. I'm alright-just tired."

"You should get some sleep; we have trained the first thing tomorrow." Cryental let out a long, overexaggerated groan. "How do you expect to defend yourself if all you can do is read weird signs on a computer."

"Don't be a dick." Cryental gasped at herself; she had never sworn before, never even dreamed of using such foul language. Fallon stared at her; his eyes as lifeless as always. "I am so sorry, I never swear I don't know what came over me, I- "

"Chill, it's cool." Fallon wandered into her bedroom slowly. "I'll sleep on the floor, goodnight." Cryental took a deep breath as the humming of the TV filled her ears once again. She

exhaled slowly and let her eyes close. She needed to sleep tonight, as much as possible. Because tomorrow morning, she was going to flee Frost City.

Chapter 6 - The escape

It was still dark when Cryental awoke. The sun barely peeked over the skyscrapers; hints of orange hues ran through the sky frivolously. She pulled her hair into a messy bun quickly as she tiptoed through the apartment. Everything seemed louder when it was quiet; when the only sound one could hear was their own breathing, the smallest noise was like an exploding bomb. She would leave soon. All she had to do was grab some bottles of water, a couple of protein bars, and then she would be on her way. She would come back when this had all blown over, but she couldn't do this- she couldn't cope with the hours of training, she couldn't deal with Fallon's snarky comments or the pressure of the government relying on her and only her to crack the codes.

"Are you joking?" A husky male voice startled her; she dropped the bottle of water she had just picked up and watched it roll towards two bare feet. Fallon stood in the doorway, a cheeky smirk on his face. "You know, I knew you were frightened, Cryental, but I never took you for a coward."

"I'm not a coward," Cryental whispered; a pang of pain hit her heart as she said that word- coward. How dare he?

"Really? Because fleeing when things get hard is pretty damn cowardly." Fallon said, yawning and stretching his large arms as he observed her every move.

"You don't know how hard this is; I have the fate of the city resting on my shoulders." Cryental walked towards Fallon a newly found confidence was present in her step.

"What? And I don't?" He exhaled sharply as he watched her move towards him.

"All you have to do is stand there, look pretty, and occasionally beat up bad guys." Cryental was sure her cheeks were now flushed with red. "I have never seen software like this; I don't even know where to start!"

"So, you think I'm pretty?" It took everything within Cryental to stop her from lunging at him. She was not an angry person, everyone who had met her had always described her as bubbly and happy, but something about Fallon brought out the fire-like fury inside of her.

"That was not the point of what I just said, God! You are so stuck up." Fallon rested against the doorway, the muscles in his arms feathered slightly.

"You aren't going anywhere, so get the hell back to bed, and I will see you in the morning."

"You can't stop me, you know." Fallon let out a low laugh.

"Just you watch me, sweetheart." Cryental kept eye contact with Fallon as she backed towards the door; he started walking after her; each step was faultless. As she reached for the doorknob, Fallon gripped her arm and pulled her backward, pushing her against the wall nearest the door. Their faces were less than an inch apart. "If you get hurt, I don't get paid, and I need that damn money." Fallon's voice was a harsh growl; Cryental was breathing quickly now, "Get the hell back to bed, Cryental, or did you need me to prove my point again." She pushed his broad muscled body from her.

"I hate you." She hissed.

"Likewise." He replied, there was something like a feral growl in his tone, Cryental fell onto her bed, and she could not help but let silent tears fall from her eyes as she fell asleep.

Chapter 7 - Climactic

It had been a week since Cryental had tried to escape her cramped apartment, and since then, Fallon had not taken his eyes off her. Every breath she took, every move she made was monitored. She felt like a prisoner in her own home. Today would be the day she would crack the software. The men who had infiltrated the city were not really men at all. They were intricately crafted robotic software- it was more complex coding than Cryental had ever seen. She had sat at her computer for fourteen hours a day, she practically lived off energy drinks and protein bars, and still, she had nothing. Fallon and Cryental had moved past their altercation; they spoke but only when necessary. Fallon had given up trying to train Cryental in the art of combat; her frail body just was not built for fighting- and he accepted that. Cryental let out a gasp; Fallon practically jumped out of his skin at the noise; she barely breathed when she was working.

“What? What is it?” He asked, leaping out of his seat and striding towards her.

“I-I think I’ve done it, Fallon, I’ve done it!” She giggled; he let himself smile slightly at the sound. She jumped from her chair and threw her arms around his neck; she smelt of roses and something sweet, which he could not quite place. She pulled herself from his arms, and he felt his stern features soften slightly- she was beautiful despite how irritatingly clever she was. He glanced down towards her lips just briefly and moved a strand of light pink hair from her face. Then all the lights went out.

“Get in the bedroom, go.” His tone was stern; it was not a question. It was a command. Just like that, Fallon was pushing her towards the bedroom and shutting the door behind him. He couldn’t hear anything; maybe it was just a power outage. A loud crash came from the entrance as the door was broken down. Two abnormally large men slowly walked into the apartment, but the closer they got to Fallon, the quicker he realized that there were not two, but one, and it was not a man but something from another world. It looked human for the

most part, apart from the deep blue scales that lined its body and the tongue, which was tragically reptile.

“Holy sh- “Fallon did not get the last syllable out as it lunged for him with claws longer than the knives on the kitchen counter.

“Where is she?” It hissed; by God, its breath stank of something worse than rotting flesh. Fallon fired up his magic, a white flame appeared at his hands as he fired it towards the monster; it knocked the thing back but only by a couple of steps. His magic was not strong enough to face it; it looks like he would have to do this the old-fashioned way. He pulled a dagger out of his shirt sleeve; he always kept at least one up there just in case. The monster went to attack him again; a line of inky blood appeared on the creature’s face as Fallon struck its cheek. Brilliant, now it was angry...

The monster gripped Fallon’s leg -its claws dug into his flesh, leaving small bloody incisions in its path; he couldn’t help but struggle against the thing as it yanked him upwards and threw him into the wall, his elbow dislocated with a sickening crunch.

Chapter 8 - Help

Cryental could hear the racket, she heard a loud thump and a piercing scream, and that is when she lost all sense. She darted out of the room and found Fallon fighting with one arm; the other was held tight at his side. She did not have time to think about what could have happened to her friend- her bodyguard as she beheld the real problem. In front of her was something out of her worst nightmares; it was taller than anyone in Frost City, its scales shone eerily in the moonlight. Without thinking, she yelled just as Fallon was launched into the fridge-he did not get back up. The creature spun around, its smile revealing uneven, jagged teeth.

"Ah, the boss will be happy we have found you now." Cryental backed into the wall looking for anything she could use as a weapon. "You really thought you could stop us that easily? Your little stunt just showed us your location, you silly girl." Cryental backed into the bathroom, grabbing a pair of tweezers as quickly as she could and forcing them into the creature's side. It roared out in pain and slashed Cryental across the stomach; she felt warm liquid cover her abdomen as she stared up at the beast. She was going to die. The creature jolted, and ebony-colored blood poured from its stomach. Cryental's vision focused in and out rapidly; everything was blurry. The creature collapsed, and she managed to decipher the fact that there was a knife in its back, and Fallon was rushing to her side frantically before everything went black.

Chapter 9 - Fallon

Cryental felt soft cloud-like pillows beneath her body as she allowed her eyes to open; with great effort, she pushed herself up. She looked to her left and found that she was not alone, stretched out next to her, was Fallon-looking worse than she felt if that was possible. He did not have a shirt on...because it was wrapped around her stomach, although the pale cream that it once was had turned to a deep crimson. She cringed at the idea of Fallon undressing her in order to tend to her wounded stomach, but she looked at him with warmth in her icy eyes. As if he could sense her looking at him, his eyes snapped open.

"You're awake. How are you feeling? Don't stand up too quickly; I will get you some water, just stay-" Cryental shocked herself as she reached out and grabbed his hand.

"Fallon, I am fine, thanks to you." Fallon did not pull away from her; in fact, she could have sworn he wrapped his own fingers around her hand just slightly. "where are we?" As her eyes focused on the room around her, she realized she was not in her own room. The room was mostly dark blue, with orange accents scattered throughout it.

"We are at my mother's house. She wasn't too excited when I stumbled in here with a loose shoulder and a bloody girl, but she got past it in the end." Cryental started to panic, she felt her breath quicken, and she could have sworn Fallon could hear her heart rate increase.

"But my apartment, my computer- "Fallon nodded understandingly and cut her off.

"I sent two of my friends to get them early this morning; nobody had been to the apartment since I killed that...creature. So hopefully nobody will notice they are gone." Cryental felt her features soften as she stood up slowly. Maybe Fallon was not such an ass after all.

"Come on." He said, pushing himself off the bed with a wince. "I'll get you some food."

"You're remarkably nice to me this morning Fallon, it's scary." Fallon chuckled.

"I'm just doing my job- wouldn't want you running off again or getting nearly killed by a demon again." Cryental felt her heart drop as she processed his words.

A job.

That is all she was to him, a way of making quick money- she was foolish for letting herself think anything more of his kindness. She pulled the drenched shirt off her body to find three nasty-looking scars. She did not hide her surprise at the disappearance of her wounds.

"I used magic to heal you." Cryental's mouth widened more.

"You have magic? You really have magic?" Fallon rolled his eyes dramatically.

"There's a lot you don't know about me Cryental, now get yourself out here so we can get some food in you." Cryental pulled on one of Fallon's t-shirts, which were far too big on her tiny body. The kitchen was small but nicely decorated. It was rather cramped with a myriad of plants and small statues. A small, tanned woman stood by the stove, stirring something which smelt like heaven in a pot; Cryental worried she would collapse as the woman rushed to her side with speed she had never witnessed before.

"Sit down, dear. Fallon, get the poor darling a drink." Fallon smiled at his mother fondly and grabbed a bottle of water from the counter. A small voice echoed from the other room, and Cryental found herself looking down at a frail girl in a wheelchair; she felt a pang of sympathy run its way through her.

"Who's that?" Whispered Cryental into Fallon's ear.

"This," He exclaimed, "is my little sister and runner up for the most irritating person in the world-second to you, of course." Both the girls rolled their eyes at the boy.

"You are pretty." Whispered the girl- her name was Lucia. Cryental smiled warmly at Lucia and took a sip of water. After a large breakfast of eggs, sausages, bacon, potatoes, and beans, she drifted off on the sofa; she felt two strong hands lift her gently and place her on the bed where she fell into a deep, undisturbed sleep.

Chapter 10 - The talk

Night had fallen when Cryental awoke; the moon was high in the sky- a glowing orb in a sea of black. She awoke alone; Fallon was nowhere to be seen. As she stood from the bed, she noticed one of the doors was wide open-a cold breeze ran its course through the house; it seemed to lead to a large balcony. Cryental clutched Fallon's t-shirt closer to her body, trying to stay as warm as possible as she walked slowly out of the doorway. Fallon was standing there, staring at the stars; she startled him as she walked towards him.

"Sorry I didn't see you there," Fallon whispered; his eyes held a sorrow that was not there earlier. Cryental stood beside him, making sure to keep her distance as she recalled what he had said to her earlier. It is my job.

"Why are you doing this?" She inquired.

"The same reason you are." He lied.

"You said you needed the money; I'm not getting paid, so why are you?"

"They were my conditions; they pay me what I ask, and I help them-simple."

"That sounds dodgy." He giggled slightly.

"You never asked me why I needed the money." He was looking at her now, scanning her face with that predatory gaze that made Cryental's toes curl.

"That's because I'm not quite sure I want to know." She muttered back.

"It's for my sister," Cryental did not know what she was expecting, but it was not that. "She needs magic to save her legs, but we can't afford it; all I want in this world is to see her walk again, to see her be happy." Cryental met his gaze now, her eyes never leaving him, "I am sorry I have been so hard on you; I just can't stand to see her wake up with lifeless eyes anymore; it's- " Cryental threw her arms around his neck, holding him tightly. She felt her cheeks redden as she felt his hands move across her lower back and hold her to his body tightly.

"I'll make sure you get the money, okay? no more silly stunts or running away; if you need me to do anything, then tell me." She could have sworn tears lingered in his eyes.

"Thank you, Cryental." He brushed a kiss against her cheek as he wandered past her and back into his home. She let the butterflies infiltrate her stomach as she watched him walk back into his bedroom.

Chapter 11 - Façade

"Bloody hell Cryental, don't scare me like that." She coughed and spluttered as he released her, and she regained her balance.

"Get dressed; I want to take you somewhere" She walked out the door while clutching her throat; he had a remarkably strong grip. She flopped down on the sofa, catching a glimpse of Lucia sleeping peacefully in the other room; her wheelchair was next to her bed- a symbol of pain and anguish. Fallon dragged himself out of his bedroom moments later. He wore a sapphire shirt with black jeans and a pair of crystal white trainers. Cryental stopped herself from staring too long and jumped out of her seat.

"Right, where are you dragging me out of bed to go at five in the morning?" He yawned.

"The bakery."

"Cryental, the bakery was destroyed when the building was knocked down, and besides, we have to be careful, you would have been profiled by the Ember City soldiers; your pink hair isn't exactly subtle." She rolled her eyes and wandered over to where he was standing; she pulled a brown wig out from behind her.

"There is more than one bakery in Frost City, and exactly, the guards will be looking for a pink-haired girl and her bodyguard. Not a brunette girl and her fiancée." Fallon smirked.

"You know you are smarter than you seem."

"I'm in the intellectuals you div." Fallon pushed her gently.

As they walked down the cobbled streets of the intimidating district, Cryental could not help but stare in wonder at the hundreds of citizens training with knives, sabers, and magic. It was amazing. There were more plants than she would have imagined; she did not know why, but she always thought the district would be covered in blood and fire. But it was more colorful than were the intellectuals lived.

Fallon pulled her towards a small, dirty-looking window.

“What is this?” Cryental inquired, pulling her fingers through the brown wig she had put on.

“This,” he said, knocking twice on the dusty windowpanes, “is the best bakery in Frost City.”

“Fallon, it’s a window.”

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.” A round man poked his head out the window and grunted.

Fallon flipped two silver coins into his hand and waited patiently. The man returned a couple of minutes later with two steaming pastries. “Ah, and now I present to you the best apple pastries you will ever eat.” Cryental stared skeptically down at the pastry in her hand but decided to take a bite. It was... delicious. It was the perfect sweetness, slightly salted. The apples were flavorful and soft. Fallon nodded as he took a mouthful of his own pastry.

“good, right?” He asked,

“Good is an understatement.” Cryental murmured, although she was not sure her words were decipherable as she chewed her way through her pastry. This really was the best bakery in the city... she couldn’t help but miss Marcy as she chomped her way through her food, she had always been so bubbly and happy and not to mention the only friend Cryental had. Fallon pulled her close to his chest. Just as they finished eating, two armed guards approached the pair, guns in their bulky arms.

“Sir, Ma’am, we are looking for a girl with pink hair; she shouldn’t be hard to spot, about the same build as yourself.” One of the men pointed to her; visible panic crossed Cryental’s features as she stared at the floor.

“I am sorry good sir; I don’t believe we have come across such a person, but we will let you know if we see anybody matching that description.” One of the men was scanning Cryental, his brow furrowed.

Fallon and Cryental walked away slowly, fake laughing with each other as they left the men behind.

"Are you okay?" Fallon whispered as they strolled back to his home.

"I'm fine." She muttered, looking down at the floor- praying that he would not see the tears forming in her eyes; she was terrified. Another armed guard stopped them and asked them the same question; they smiled naively once again and answered with brief answers. And that's when Cryental saw it; she saw the glowing blue light under the guard's uniforms. Only one systematic structure could emit that kind of light- Crotanium. Cryental lifted a hand to her head as they were speaking to a guard.

"Sir, you must excuse me; I am feeling rather faint." Fallon knelt; he looked genuinely concerned.

"Let's get you home, dear." He said, his eyes full of mischief as he pulled her away. "What's wrong?" He whispered.

"I know how to shut down the system." Cryental saw Fallon smirk out of the corner of her eye.

"That's my girl."

Chapter 12 - Earthquake

When she arrived back at Fallon's home, she pulled off her wig and sat down at her computer, which had somehow been set up perfectly. She got to work right away, typing commands, and numbers into the computer; she had seven different programs running at the same time- every key she pressed was important, every code was essential. Fallon paced behind her, daggers at the ready just in case an untimely intruder arrived once again. Then they felt it. A small rumble beneath them, but Cryental did not stop working. Fallon hesitated in his movements just briefly before he continued pacing around the room. Then they felt it again; this time, Cryental paused. Because it was no longer a small tremor, the furniture was moving up and down, plates and glasses fell from the counters onto the floor. Fallon sprinted towards Cryental.

"No! Go check on Lucia. I'll be fine." Fallon nodded and ran in the opposite direction-towards his younger sister.

It was getting worse now; Cryental could not keep the computer steady; her hands were jittering; if the wrong key were pressed then everything, she had worked on would disappear. She would lose all her progress. Every inch of the apartment was vibrating now; Cryental was thrown off her chair- she gripped at the sofa, desperately trying to cling to the fabric as she heard shouts of panic from the streets below. That is when the door flew open; she could have sworn it was practically torn off its hinges at the mysterious force behind it. Oh god, oh god, oh, god. The room stopped shaking; tears plagued Cryental's eyes as she focused on the figure that had just walked into the room. It was him; it was the man from the telescreens before, it was Altair.

"Ah," He breathed deeply, "I do hope I'm not interrupting anything." Cryental forced herself onto her feet, taking up the fighting stance Fallon had taught her. He cackled, he intimidated her, but she did not show it. She would die before she showed him that he had any control

over her whatsoever. "brave little Cryental." She furrowed her brow; she would have to distract him- she had not gotten far enough in the programming to be able to tell what his strengths and weaknesses were. "I am going to give you an option here. You either come to me slowly, and we sort out a negotiation, or you continue to be a little bitch and get your head blown off." Cryental kept her eyes pinned to the man in front of her, blinking as little as possible- she did not want to miss a single movement. A low growl came from behind her, and she relaxed a little as Fallon put a comforting hand in between her shoulder blades.

"Well, fancy seeing you here," Fallon said sarcastically. Cryental tensed up at his words.

Do not be stupid. She thought to herself, the last thing they needed was to make Altair angry. Maybe they could talk, trick him into trusting them-

"So, are you going to be a pussy, or are you going to fight?" Fallon purred. Well, she thought, looks like any form of pacifism had flown out the window. A comforting hand pushed Cryental back towards the computer. Altair tutted, wagging a long finger at the pair.

"Don't make any moves you will regret Cryental, come to me." Fallon stepped in front of her, and she backed away towards the computer; she only had a few more codes to do until she shut the system down completely; if Fallon could buy her time...she could do it. "How cute," he sneered, "an intimidating risking his life for an intellectual," Fallon growled in response, pulling two daggers from his sleeves. "You think you can kill me with steel, foolish boy, you can't kill me."

Fallon whispered, "But I can bloody well try." Then he lunged for Altair; Cryental watched a blur of limbs and color as Fallon and Altair fought. She sat at her computer, typing in the codes she needed frantically. She barely got the first code typed up before she was ripped from her desk by something that did not look much better than the last demon that had attacked her. She let out a screech of terror as the demon swung for her with pointed claws;

she felt her closed wounds pull as she dodged blows and tried her hardest to land any punches she could.

Fallon heard the screech; his attention left Altair for a moment, only a moment. He felt warm liquid run down his side as cold metal pierced his skin. Cryental was fending off the demon, but she was growing tired; she would not last much longer.

Shit. Cryental's breath came fast and frantically; her legs were starting to buckle. She was cornered; the demon smiled, revealing rows of jagged yellow teeth. She was going to die. A surge of power filled the room, and the demon dropped to the floor; it was still alive, but it was down. In the doorway was Lucia, with her hand held out shaking. She possessed magic too, Cryental let out a small giggle as Lucia smiled at her warmly and retreated, her wheelchair moving remarkably quickly. Cryental forced herself upwards, there was an incision on her leg, but it was superficial -she would survive. The noise from downstairs was prominent-good; Fallon was alive. She tiptoed down the stairs, but she doubted it would have made a difference if she had launched herself down them; there was too much noise to hear anything. She rushed to the computer; Fallon's relief was obvious when he saw her walk into the room. She sat on her chair and began coding once again. Fallon kept Altair occupied, kept him turned with his back to Cryental-let he thinks that dastardly demon had taken her life. Fallon was growing weaker; his legs close to buckling. He knew that at least three of his ribs were broken, and he would most definitely need the wound in his side, treating soon if he made it out alive. Cryental typed away at her keyboard, her eyes flicking across the screen at a ridiculous speed left, right, left-right; she pressed keys quickly and concisely. Her heart dropped as she saw the same demon from earlier standing in the doorway; she looked over to Fallon... just one more code... he was struggling, he looked exhausted whereas Altair stood tall as if he had done nothing but take a brisk walk. Just half a code left... The demon approached; its claws ready... Just two more words... Altair was crouched over Fallon's crumpled body, his dagger lifted. Cryental hit the finish button.

They dropped to the floor.

Altair and the demon fell to the floor.

Cryental gasped audibly; Fallon looked around the room, focusing on the spasming figures on the floor. Cryental rushed to Fallon's side.

"You did it, Cryental, you did it." He winced in pain at his broken ribs.

"Come on, let's get you a healer." Lucia came out of the doorway, her wheelchair looking slightly worse for wear.

"It's okay," she whispered, "I can do it, I can heal him." Cryental stood back, clutching at the wound on her leg, which was still leaking blood. The green fire appeared at Lucia's hands, and every muscle in Fallon's body relaxed as she touched him. The bruises and cuts that had formed on his face disappeared into small marks, and the fleshy wound on his side turned to a thick pink scar. Cryental's breath caught as Lucia approached her and held out her hand to her leg. It burnt slightly, but it was a good burning sensation as if a gentle flame danced over her skin, knitting her flesh back together. Fallon's mother came into the apartment briskly.

"Did you kids feel that earthquake? How crazy was- "Her mouth fell open, and she dropped the bag of groceries she had just retrieved. "What on earth- "

"She did it, mum; she deprogrammed them," Lucia muttered. Fallon's mother ran to Fallon's side and brushed a hand over his head, moving hair from his eyes.

"Go into the front room, all of you; I expect we will be hearing from the leader very soon."

She flashed Cryental a genuine smile. And as if on command, there was a knock at the door.

Chapter 13 - Happiness

"So, you're telling me, you set your magic school alight when you were thirteen just because the girl you liked told you to?" Cryental laughed through mouthfuls of food.

"What can I say?" Fallon asked, "I was a stud in my time." The restaurant was beautiful; the leader had offered to pay for everything Fallon and Cryental wanted. And while Fallon's first request was his sister's surgery, Cryental's was a steak dinner. They had defeated the ember city soldiers and restored Frost City to its prime once more. Everywhere they went, photographers would take pictures of them, news presenters would rush to ask them questions, children would ask to take pictures of them- they were known in every district as the saviors of the city- a title that neither of them particularly disliked...

Fallon stood from the table, and Cryental gasped as tears filled her eyes. Lucia walked into the restaurant, she walked. Fallon sprinted over to her and lifted her into the air, kissing her forehead. She sobbed, thanking him through her tears. Cryental walked over towards where the brother and sister reunited and gave Lucia a tight, warm hug.

"You deserve this and so much more," Cryental told the girl. People all over the restaurant were taking pictures of them now, but Fallon and Cryental did not mind. As she looked at Fallon, she found him not looking into her eyes but rather at her lips. She turned away from her companion and walked out of the restaurant, waiting for Fallon to follow.

A few minutes later, she felt a warm hand on her lower back. Fallon turned her body towards his and brushed a strand of hair from her face behind her heart.

"You're so beautiful." He whispered, taking in every inch of her face. Cryental brought a shaking hand up to his face and moved her delicate fingers along one of the many scars which plagued his once flawless skin. He glanced at her lips once again; she saw the muscles in his jaw feather. Without thinking, she closed the space between them, their lips

crashed together. He was hesitant at first, pulling back just slightly, but then he melted into it, his tongue gently flicking against her own as he pulled her body tight against it; his hands roamed her waist and moved up her back. She tugged on his hair just briefly before pulling away from the kiss; she looked into those deep sapphire eyes, which were once full of sorrow, and saw a new warmth, a new light, a symbol of hope. He smiled at her, but this time it was not a snarky, sarcastic smirk; it was a genuine grin full of love and happiness.

Ending - And then it was over.

Cryental sat in the leader's office; after all, she had done for Frost City, she was still nervous about speaking with him. The door opened behind her, and he walked in; he was wearing a navy suit which perfectly complimented his skin tone, his hair had been cropped back to its normal short length.

"Cryental, I cannot thank you enough for all you have done for us." She let herself smile at his kind words. "I would like to reward you with whatever you so desire." Cryental shook her head.

"Really, the city being safe once again is reward enough, sir." The leader shook his head.

"No, that just won't do. Cryental I, the leader of Frost City, name you the official programmer of all four districts." Cryental felt her mouth widen, "I also present with you with a house within the main leader district where you will be taken care of for the rest of your life. Please accept my offer." Cryental laughed.

"Of course, yes! This is – this is amazing, I can't thank you enough." The leader smiled at the door as Fallon entered.

"Ah yes, and I almost forgot to tell you, Fallon will be your official bodyguard and advisor; he can stay with you or travel to meet you in the morn- "

“He can stay with me.” She said rather too eagerly, earning a cheeky smirk from Fallon and a knowing glance from the leader.

“So be it. I will leave you two to discuss plans. Thank you again, both of you.” As soon as the leader had left the room, Cryental leaped into Fallon's arms; she wrapped her legs around his waist and let herself melt into the hug, God this felt good. Fallon placed her delicately on the floor, his hands not leaving her waist as he did.

“So,” he said, “Would you like to know your first task as the government's official programmer?” Cryental picked up the keys to her new home and pulled Fallon's hand around her shoulders.

“Tell me tomorrow.” She smiled, and the couple walked out of doors towards their new future.