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**Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within**

by RieSonomura

Summary
Her fear of abandonment. His desire to atone for the sin he committed against her, as well as to be seen as who he really is inside. Will they come to terms, heal from the pain, and let down their barriers? Falconcina. Content warnings in appropriate chapters; there will be some sensuality and spoilers for various games represented in Smash. NOW COMPLETE.
Prologue: The Real Me

Chapter Notes

So uh, this is a Falconcina (Captain Falcon x Lucina) fic that is gonna be several chapters, likely some angst and emotional depth and character development. There's most likely gonna be some sensuality in some chapters, and a fair share of violence, so I'm rating M to be safe. Don't judge me ok ;; if this isn't your cup of tea, feel free to click the back button. But if you like this ship and/or angsty hurt-comforty storylines by all means stick around. This story also contains Xenoblade spoilers in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Also to new and old readers - yes, the promised revisions have happened. My vision for the direction of some of the plot in this fic has changed slightly from when it started in 2015, but the end goal is the same, and with Ultimate's release, I may throw in a few more surprises. I hope you enjoy, nevertheless.

This chapter was named after "The Real Me" by Natalie Grant (the title of the fic itself is taken from the lyrics too)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Prologue - The Real Me

"Agh!" Lucina gasped, jolting awake and sitting up in bed. Sweat covered her face and her breath was shaky. She clenched her fist and held it to her chest, trembling.

This is the third time I've had nightmares like this, she thought. Even though the chain of events in those nightmares were different each time, like on one occasion she had her leg pinned under rubble, two things remained constant: the crowd of people, including some people she cared about, merely looking on and then walking away; and then, there was always that same shadowy figure running toward her. Whether that person was going to save her or not remained unclear, as she always awoke with a shout when that happened.

The future Ylissean princess looked at the window. Moonlight shone through very faintly, and Zelda, her apartment mate, was sleeping in the bed across from hers. Zelda seemed to be in a deep sleep, as she did not stir when Lucina awoke from her night terror.

I don't even know why I have these dreams. I know that in the future I come from, even though my parents were slain, I fought bravely alongside my comrades. But I wouldn't know what to do if I lost any of them... She stepped out of her bed barefoot and walked across the carpeted floor to the small study the two princesses' apartment had. As she walked quietly she continued to ponder, I think what would be even worse would be to become abandoned by those you care about. Which is what I thought at first, but what if something bad did happen to me? And the people I loved would willingly walk away?

She shook her head. No, don't be silly. I fought bravely in my father's place that day to enter the Smash tournament, and Robin came along too, and I met so many friends...they wouldn't do that.
Walking over to a bookshelf, she thought, \textit{And what about that person that always comes running to me at the end? Something about it seems...familiar.}

She grabbed a book from the bookshelf, turned on the reading lamp on the desk, and sat down and began to peruse the tome. \textit{Maybe if I just read something, anything to get my mind off this, I could feel better...}

On the topmost apartment suite of Smash Tower, Captain Falcon lay on the couch in the TV room of the flat he once shared with Snake, staring at the ceiling. He wasn't usually one to let regrets and worry weigh him down. In fact, in his days of F-Zero racing, he projected himself to the public as an optimistic, confident man who could do almost anything. But lately, he began to feel insecure because those appearances were just a facade, even in the Smash tournaments. As long as he wore the helmet, no one would really know who he was inside.

What's more, he started experiencing feelings of remorse and regret, something he didn't think he would experience until now.

\textit{Why am I having these thoughts? Why do I feel so guilty over that day...?}

That day being the day he fought Lucina and Robin as a testing grounds to allow them into the Smash tournament. They were worthy opponents, but one thing about what happened that day never really left his memory.

\textit{That girl only wanted to protect her father...he probably wanted to fight alongside her as well, and I...}

He got up and walked toward the large glass window which offered a breathtaking view of Smash City's skyline, the neon lights of the buildings appearing as fluorescent dots from afar. It was truly a stunning view, which somewhat reminded him of Mute City at night. But he couldn't help but feel melancholy in spite of having the suite in Smash Tower with the most stunning view, and not just because his friend wasn't occupying the flat as well at this point in time.

\textit{That day, I did what any person would. I tried to protect myself. It's a natural instinct, but I didn't mean to hurt him at all...or her, for that matter.}

"Her" being Lucina, the daughter of the man he defeated. He remembered how she looked back at her fallen father with sorrow in her eyes, then turning to Captain Falcon with a determined expression on her face, saying "For my father...!" before dashing toward him.

\textit{When she ran to attack me, I tried my best to defend myself too, but...I just couldn't bring myself to hurt her...}

The memory of him intentionally mis-aiming his punch to just send shockwaves past her face flashed into his mind. And then how he kicked away her sword, making sure not to hurt her...

\textit{I even held off on my Falcon Punch, in the hopes that she'd run and save herself. For someone to go through all that...if Robin hadn't shown up, who knows what...} He sighed. \textit{No, I shouldn't even think about it.}

He walked to his room and, eyeing the smartphone on his dresser, picked it up and opened up the texting app. As the bright artificial light from the screen faintly illuminated his dark room, he went through his contacts and spotted a familiar name: Snake. He started with this message:

"Hey Snake, it's been a while. Something's really concerning me right now."
A few seconds passed, and Falcon sighed, saying, "Yeah, right. As if he'd answer-" and then the cellphone vibrated briefly and a new message appeared on the screen. Surely enough, it was from Snake. It said, "this better be important if you're texting me at 1 AM"

Letting out a sigh of relief, Falcon typed his next message: "So you'll listen?"

Snake's reply was, "yeah, you woke me up and I don't even have any tournaments to participate in right now so shoot"

"Right then. Not so long ago, when I was fighting two newcomers to prove their worth in Smash, I feel I may have wronged one of them somehow."

Falcon sent that message, and then typed, "I don't want to go into details, but...I want to set things right with her."

Snake's reply took a while, but then his next message said, "woah, HER?...I guess I shouldn't ask, but" followed by "you should do whatever you can to help her whenever she needs it you know?"

"I guess so..."

Snake's last texts for the night said, "just don't stress it too much. do what comes naturally and I'm sure things will be fine." followed by "it seems this is really heavy for you, so you should try to get some rest."

"Okay...thanks," Falcon texted back before he collapsed on the bed and put his phone down.

"The question is, though," he mumbled, "how exactly will I do it...? How can I settle things peacefully with her? I don't even know how she feels about me right now..."
Fleeting Peace

Chapter Summary

The start of a new relationship...perhaps?

(disclaimer: everything up to chapter 4 was written in 2015, so if anything seems unpolished compared to later chapters, that's why) and yes, i made an off brand parody of JoJo, lmao (based on an actual Nintendo property, too!)

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 1 - Fleeting Peace

Sunlight filtered through the windows of Zelda and Lucina's flat. Zelda yawned and stretched as the gentle light woke her from her slumber. Clad in her lavender cotton nightgown and socks on her feet, she stepped out of bed and put her slippers on. She started walking toward the flat's restroom when she noticed that the door to the study was halfway open. She peered in, noticing the reading lamp was on, and walked in. Sure enough, at the reading desk was Lucina, clad in her silky blue pajamas, asleep with her head resting on her arm. Her hair was a mess and a bit of drool flowed out of her half-open mouth. Moreover, Zelda wondered how Lucina avoided catching a cold, seeing as how Lucina was barefoot.

Reaching her hand out, Zelda gently shook Lucina awake. "Oh, Sleeping Beauty..." she said in a singsong voice, in a somewhat teasing manner.

Lucina groaned as she awoke. "Nng...Zelda...?"

Turning off the reading lamp, Zelda asked, "Were you in here all night?"

"Huh?" Lucina mumbled. After fully regaining consciousness and noticing the open book on the reading desk, she said, "Yeah, I guess I was."

Zelda paused for a moment, and asked, "Another nightmare, I take it?"

"Ah!" Lucina gasped. She was surprised that Zelda could tell so easily, as in the past, Zelda was awoken whenever Lucina had a nightmare, but Zelda did not wake up when Lucina did the night before.

"I knew it..." Zelda said. "You know, Lucy, if there's anything you want to talk to me about..."

"...I'm fine," Lucina said, standing up. "They're just bad dreams. I'm sure it's nothing."

Zelda looked concerned for a moment, but after seeing that Lucina didn't seem to be in any immediate distress, she said, "Well, I guess we'd better brush up and get ready, then."

"I guess so..." Lucina replied, as she followed Zelda to the bathroom. The two brushed their teeth and washed their faces. After they changed their clothes, Lucina looked at herself in the mirror as she brushed her hair. She thought, Why can't I shake the feeling that something bad is going to happen soon?
"Lucina! Let's go!" Zelda called out from the hallway.

"Coming!" Lucina shouted. She followed Zelda to the hallway and the two waited for one of the elevators to come down to their floor.

Within a matter of seconds, the elevator doors opened with a ding. Shulk and Robin were the first two people Zelda and Lucina saw standing behind the elevator doors.

"Hello, ladies," Robin said.

"Zelda! Lucina! Good morning!" Shulk said, enthusiastically.

"Jovial as ever, aren't you, Shulk," Zelda teased.

"Oh, come now, Zelda!" Shulk replied, chuckling. The two princesses stepped inside the elevator before the doors closed and the elevator continued its descent.

Zelda stood close to Robin, Shulk, and Ness, who was obscured from the initial view when the doors first opened. Lucina, however, distanced herself from the others and looked down at the floor as she walked to the back of the elevator.

"So, Ness," Shulk said, "I heard your friend Lucas is coming back today."

"Yup!" Ness replied. "I hear two more fighters are coming with him."

Zelda asked Ness, "Is one of them... Roy? I heard he's finally returning as well."

"Uh-huh! There's also this guy named Ryu joining us. He calls himself a 'world warrior' or something."

"Intriguing..." Shulk pondered.

"Say, Shulk," Zelda inquired. "Have you seen Link?"

"No, not yet," Shulk replied. "I guess he's in a different elevator."

"I see..."

Lucina silently listened in on their conversation when she suddenly heard a familiar voice mutter, "Ryu, huh..."

Surprised, Lucina looked in the direction of the voice. Standing a short distance to her right was Captain Falcon. The two exchanged glances for a few moments, not saying anything, their faces expressionless.

Looking straight ahead, Lucina asked the Captain in an attempt to break the silence, "So... how are you doing?"

"... Could be better, really," Falcon replied with a sigh. "I didn't get much sleep last night..."

Lucina felt a bit of unease at that statement for a moment, but then immediately dismissed it as coincidence. "I see," she said, briefly looking at him.

"You seem concerned," Captain Falcon commented, noticing the look in Lucina's eyes. "Is there something on your mind...?"
"...No. I'm fine." Lucina said after a moment of hesitation.

Within a few seconds, the elevator doors opened once again with the familiar **ding** sound, having arrived at the lobby.

Walking up to Zelda and the others, Lucina inquired, "So...where to, guys?"

Robin said, "We're thinking of grabbing breakfast at the cafe, then heading to the rec room afterwards."

"Sounds good," Lucina said with a nod. She walked off with her friends, save for Shulk who was walking a bit behind. After he and the Captain stepped out of the elevator, Shulk turned around. "Is something the matter, Captain?"

"To be honest, yeah," Falcon replied. "You're a good friend of Lucina's, correct?"

"Yeah," Shulk confirmed. "Robin and I hang out with her a lot. I really admire both of their abilities, and Lucina herself reminds me of a friend I have back home. She's met her, actually." By "her", Shulk was referring to his childhood sweetheart, Fiora. The two met during an off-world quest, one in which Lucina's own father, Chrom, also came along, and even the newest Smasher, Ryu himself.

"I see," Falcon said. "I wish I could say the same in regards to my relationship with her..."

"Would you like to talk about it?" Shulk invited. "Over breakfast, of course. I'll be heading to the cafe too."

"Okay."

...

The cafe was packed with many different people, including Smashers, who would be socializing at the waiting line if not at a table. After the two grabbed their food and drinks, they sat down at a table a short distance from Lucina and her friends, who seemed to all be chatting it up.

After taking a bite of his food and swallowing, Shulk asked, "So, Captain. What's up with you and Lucina?"

Falcon took a sip of his coffee, and replied, "Before you joined the tournament, you saw the broadcast of the day I fought her and Robin to allow them entry into the tournament, right?"

"Yeah..." Shulk said.

"Well," Falcon continued, "I feel like she may be upset at me for what I did to her father..."

"You mean Chrom?" Shulk questioned.

"Yeah," Falcon answered. "I really didn't mean to hurt him, and it seemed he wanted to participate too. Probably alongside his own daughter. In the end he became Robin's teammate in his Final Smash, like how you call on your friends, Riki and...?"

"Dunban?"

"Yeah. That's his name." Pausing for a moment, Falcon continued, "I know I hurt Lucina at that time...she seemed so distraught seeing her father lying on the ground. And I just couldn't bring myself to let actual harm come to her..."
"I understand..." Shulk said, his voice sounding somewhat melancholy. It really was a lot to take in.

"So with that in mind," Falcon said, "I want to make up with her. I had a conversation with her in the elevator earlier, and while it was a bit...awkward, she didn't seem to hate me like I feared she would. But...what can I do?"

"I really don't know," Shulk answered honestly. "In my opinion, the best you can do for now is be there when she needs someone. Trust your instincts."

"My instincts, huh," Falcon murmured. Those words of advice Shulk gave were eerily similar to Snake's advice.

After they finished their breakfast, Lucina and all her friends walked to the recreational center down the street, with Captain Falcon following a short distance behind, seeing as how he felt he had nothing better to do during the day.

The recreational center was a laid-back place where Smashers could have fun when they weren't fighting. There were some arcade machines throughout, mostly of fighting and racing games, with some shooters and rhythm games mixed in. A jukebox was positioned on the wall perpendicular to the entrance, with a vending machine for soft drinks to its left. Zelda and Link were having a conversation close to the jukebox. There were also billiards and ping-pong tables. On the wall opposite the jukebox was a large screen HDTV and couch, where Lucina, Shulk, Robin and Ness were watching the latest episode of *LoLo's Outlandish Trek*. The episode airing was one fans had been waiting for; the epic final confrontation between Lotaro and Nio. Every once in a while excited shouts erupted from the TV corner whenever an action-packed scene showed.

"Heh," Captain Falcon murmured, seeing Lucina and her friends enjoying themselves watching the animated action show. He walked over to a pool table, removed the triangle from the pool balls, and grabbed a cue. Aiming his shot, he was about to take it when he heard a voice saying, "I guess even someone like you can take it easy once in a while."

Captain Falcon recognized that voice. "Samus..." he said, looking up at the blonde bounty huntress. "I wasn't expecting to see you here."

"I could say the same," Samus replied. She took a cue herself and took a shot, knocking several balls into the holes. "I don't know if you heard, but with Lucas and Roy returning, along with someone new named Ryu joining us, Smash City is holding a small championship."

"Hmm..." Falcon glanced over at a man wearing a red bandana and white karate gi silently observing Mario and Luigi playing a fighting arcade game from afar. Falcon recognized that person as Ryu.

"Yeah, that's him," Samus said, noticing Falcon looking at him. "It's going to be tonight, I suggest you do your best if you want to have a chance of fighting Ryu at the end."

"Sounds like it'll be a blast..." Falcon said.

"I just wish Snake was there to see it..." Samus sighed, putting the cue away.

"I know you miss him," Falcon tried to console her. "He'll be watching, I'm sure. Just don't give up hope on him coming back, okay?"

"Of course. I'll see you there tonight."
"I look forward to it...you just give it your best."

"You too, Captain," Samus said, walking off.

Little did anyone know, after that night, nothing would be the same...
Cry for Help

Chapter Summary

The night that changed everything (yes, going for an In medias res approach here)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 2 - Cry for Help

It all happened in the blink of an eye.

The rock Charizard was carrying fell on Lucina's left leg. Immense, unbearable crushing pain flooded the blue haired Ylissean's whole being. The pain was so intense that she could only gasp, her face contorted into an expression of suffering, the pupils in her eyes shrinking in response to the sheer agony.

Panicked screams filled the arena as spectators and disqualified participants began to run for the exit. Lucina was lying on her stomach, pinned to the ground by the huge rock on her leg. The intense pain was making her delirious and everything she saw and heard seemed like a blur. She looked at Robin, who stood there looking on with a shocked expression on his face. Feebly reaching out her hand, she tried to shout his name but all that slipped out of her lips were incomprehensible murmurs.

Robin...she thought. Please...help...

Frightened, Robin slowly stepped away, knowing there was nothing he could do to help.

No...Robin...where are you going? Where is everyone going...? No...my nightmare...it's happening...

She heard a muffled yell to her right, and slowly tilted her head in that direction. Shortly after, she saw two men running toward her.

Shulk...? Is that you...? Before blacking out, she briefly saw the form of a tall, muscular man clad in blue.

Is...that...?

Several hours earlier...

"Are we ready, everyone?!" Master Hand's voice echoed throughout the arena as he hovered over the stage equipped with virtual simulators of the various worlds' stages, that replicated them in almost lifelike quality. "Smash City's first All-Star Championship is about to start! Our first six rounds will consist of free-for-alls with eight combatants, and the four combatants with the highest amount of points at the end of each round will be able to advance. The semi-finals consist of team
battles in which the participants that advanced from the first few rounds get to choose their partners, which will lead to the final round: the members of the remaining team in another free-for-all against Lucas and Roy! The last one standing will have the honor of fighting in the Championship Match against our newest fighter, Ryu!"

"This sounds really exciting!" Shulk said, as he waited with the other Smashers in the waiting room.

"Oh yeah!" Luigi chimed, his voice brimming with enthusiasm.

"Wow, Luigi," Mario said. "I'm-a surprised to see you as excited as Shulk here. Normally in these kinda situations you'd -" 

"Brooooooo..." Luigi protested, puffing his cheeks in an irritated matter. "You know-a me better than that, Mario. Do I need to mention the many times I -"

"Luigi! Don't-a mention that in public!" Mario felt a bit embarrassed when it came to Luigi bragging about the times he went on his adventures and often ended up saving his own older twin brother in the process.

"Sibling rivalry, am I right?" Sonic asked Shulk, observing the exchange between the plumber brothers.

"Haha, yeah..." the blond wielder of the Monado agreed with a chuckle. Looking over at Captain Falcon standing against the wall, he noticed the blank expression the F-Zero racer had on his face. Falcon's helmet hid his eyes from everyone's view, but Shulk didn't need to have eye contact with Falcon to know that Falcon seemed somewhat stoic at that moment.

"Everything okay there, Falcon?" Shulk asked.

"Huh?" Falcon asked, looking up from the floor to look at Shulk. "Yeah, I'm alright." After seeing Shulk talking to everyone else, Falcon pulled his smartphone out of his pocket upon hearing the text notification sound. It was from Snake; this time Snake took the initiative to text Falcon first.

"Yo, Cap," the text began. "I'm watching the live broadcast of that championship. I'm looking forward to seeing you do your best."

"Thanks," the Captain texted back. "I kinda wish you could have been here, too. I imagine you would have liked to fight against Ryu if you were given the chance."

"THE Ryu?" Snake's reply began. "I dunno, I've never been one to want to meet too many famous people. As it stands now I might not even come back to Smash City..." Snake sent another text that said, "Although, I am curious if you were able to patch things up with that girl yet."

As the Captain was about to reply, Master Hand's voice boomed through the loudspeakers. "The first round is about to begin! All combatants are to enter the arena in an orderly fashion, and from there, those participating in the first round will be selected. Please put away all your personal devices before going through the doors."

Following that announcement, Falcon texted Snake, "I'll message you later.", before dropping his phone off in the box of personal belongings.

"And here they are, our strong and brave Smashers! I am looking forward to seeing you all fight your hardest!"
Mere minutes before the incident...

"Crap, Ike's really bringing his A-game to the battle," Captain Falcon murmured as he walked out of the waiting room and toward the water fountain in the general hall. He had been eliminated from the last round due to not having enough points to advance. Shulk had been eliminated the round before. Robin and Lucina, however, were among the Smashers that had been able to advance.

"Oh, hey, Captain," Shulk said, standing near the water fountain.

"Hey, Shulk," Falcon replied. "I can't believe Ike took my advancement spot by only 40 points. He's really gotten stronger since the last time we fought." By "the last time", Falcon was referring to the Brawl tournaments.

"It's understandable," Shulk said, as the Captain helped himself to a drink of water. "Everyone wants the chance to be able to face off against Ryu. I was in a similar spot to yours. Kirby, of all Smashers, beat me the round before for the last advancement spot!"

"Haha, really?" Falcon said with a laugh, wiping the water off his mouth.

"And now for the semi-finals! Our first semi-final round is a team battle, where the Red Team, Charizard and Mewtwo, will face off against the Blue Team, Robin and Lucina!" The loudspeaker announcement boomed throughout the whole building, followed by the reverberating echo of the audience's cheers.

"Heh," Falcon said. "Looks like Lucina and I won't be having that rematch."

After hearing the Captain's words, Shulk seemed silent for a moment, and then said, "Maybe it's for the best this way. Maybe the next time you two interact, things will be a bit better. And maybe she'll get to face Ryu -"

"Shulk?!" Captain Falcon immediately turned to Shulk, surprised that Shulk didn't get to finish his sentence. The first thing he noticed was Shulk's eyes glowing blue.

He's having a vision... Falcon thought, familiar with Shulk's Vision Counters in battle as well as when something bad was going to happen.

The minute Shulk's eyes stopped glowing, the expression on his face grew dark. "Oh...my god..."

"Shulk!" Falcon called out to the wielder of the Monado. "What's wrong? What did you see?!"

Shaking, Shulk said, "It's terrible...Lucina is gonna be hurt real bad!"

"...How bad are we talking?" the Captain asked, apprehensively.

Pausing for a moment to catch his breath, Shulk answered, "Charizard will go out of control and attack Robin with its Rock Smash, but at the last minute Lucina will push him out of the way and...her leg will be smashed badly..."

"Damn it..." Falcon murmured under his breath. "But...isn't there still time? We can still do something, right?"
"Well..." Shulk lamented, "We can't actually step into the battlegrounds ourselves, but we can try telling Master Hand or Ryu to call it off, but I doubt they'll believe us..." He sighed. "This is...just like what happened with Fiora..."

"Fiora?" Falcon questioned.

"...It's nothing. I'll explain some other time," Shulk answered. "Let's go!"

...

Midway into the battle, as the Blue Team of Robin and Lucina had the upper hand, Charizard began to act strange. The look in its eyes changed to one of bloodthirst.

*Charizard...?* Mewtwo thought. *Something's wrong...* The Psychic-type Pokemon cautiously advanced toward the dragon-like fire-breathing Pokemon. "Charizard, are you - "

Charizard immediately turned around and smacked Mewtwo with its tail, knocking him away.

"Urgh..."

Charizard then launched itself toward Robin using its Flare Blitz attack. In an attempt to shield Robin, Lucina ran to attack Charizard, but was knocked over.

"Argh!"

Thankfully, Flare Blitz stopped short of Robin, at which point he found it fit to try to counterattack. "Elwind!" He figured the quickest attack would be best to protect himself for now, but Charizard immediately jumped above the stream of wind blades.

"What!?"

From above, Charizard began to use its Flamethrower attack. Robin immediately shielded to protect himself from the flames, but within a few seconds, the shielding aura around him shattered, leaving him stunned.

Getting up slowly, Lucina saw that her partner was in trouble. "Robin!" she cried, dashing toward him. It was at that moment that Charizard grabbed a rock and prepared to drop it on top of Robin.

...

At the topmost seating row, Ryu was watching the battle when he saw Shulk and Captain Falcon running to him. "What's the matter?" the world warrior asked the two.

"Listen," Shulk blurted, "You need to call off the battle right now! Something terrible is going to happen!"

"What...?" Ryu asked, confused. "How do you know this? What's going to happen? How should I - "

"Guys..." Falcon gasped faintly, his gaze directed at the battlefield. Shulk and Ryu followed suit.

The next few moments seemed to go by in slow motion. The moment Robin regained consciousness, he saw Charizard carrying a large boulder above him, ready to drop it. Lucina immediately shoved him out of the way in a dashing leap, and the rock fell right on her leg.
"Ryu, Shulk," the Captain said. "Come with me. I may need your help. The least we should do is try to save her."

"Right."

"Let me help as well," Ike said, walking up to them.

Ryu said, "Alright, Ike. We could certainly use all the help we can get."

The four fighters descended down the seating rows into the arena as everyone else was in a state of panic.

"Everyone remain calm," Master Hand's voice echoed. "The battle has been canceled, and medical teams will be on site soon. I ask that no one panic."

The four fighters ran toward the downed swordwoman, Shulk and Falcon leading. "Lucina!" Shulk shouted as he ran.

As they all arrived by her side, Ryu asked Falcon, "How bad does it look?"

The Captain's helmet was equipped with bio-scanners on the inside of the helmet's visor. After scanning Lucina's leg, he said, "Her leg isn't as badly damaged as we thought. With some medical help, she should recover within a few days at a hospital. However, we need to be careful lifting the rock." Turning to the others, he said, "Shulk, guide the paramedics to the scene when they arrive. Ike, Ryu, you guys give me a hand."

"Okay," Shulk said as he stepped outside the arena, waiting for the ambulance. Ike and Ryu joined Falcon in grabbing the rock on three different ends, preparing to lift the rock.

"Let me help," Mewtwo offered to the other three. "I feel I am somewhat responsible for this. I should have tried to stop Charizard...I imagine it's acting this way because Red hasn't been controlling it for a while now."

"Don't blame yourself," Ike consoled him. "Where is Charizard, anyway?"

"Lucario and Greninja helped subdue it. It will be undergoing special training to control itself in the next few days." Preparing his psychokinesis ability, Mewtwo said, "Okay, everyone, on three. One..."

"Two..."

"Three!" Ryu, Captain Falcon, Ike, and Mewtwo lifted the rock clean off Lucina's leg with their combined effort, and slowly and carefully moved the rock a distance away before dropping it on the ground again. By that time, paramedics arrived on the scene with a stretcher, with Shulk leading them.

Walking over to the paramedics, Falcon instructed them, "Be careful putting her on the stretcher. Her leg will be able to recover with treatment and rest, but you should still exercise care when lifting her."

"Understood," the paramedics replied.

Shulk told the others, "Can I be with her on the ambulance ride? I want her to feel safe and know that I'm with her."
"...Okay," Falcon acquiesced. Shulk then stepped into the ambulance as the paramedics loaded Lucina onboard and shortly after drove off to the hospital.

"...Captain, if I may ask," Ike inquired, "Why didn't you go with her?"

"...Well," Falcon began with a sigh, "She and I don't have the best history...I figured that...I would just help her when she needed help the most, like a friend once told me...but I still can't face her, even like this."

"A friend..." Ike pondered. "...Snake?"

"Yeah," Falcon replied. "Right now, though, I can't even message him. What happened today...I'm just too shaken up."

"...I'm sure anyone would be," Ike replied, with a solemn twinge in his voice. "Robin seemed especially scared. He knew he couldn't do anything to help..."

"Yeah..." Seeing that everyone else had left, Falcon said, "Well, I guess I'll be heading home now."

"Good idea..." Ike said.

"See you later, Ike," Falcon said. Turning to Ryu, he apologized, "I'm sorry this had to happen, Ryu. I guess this means the championship is canceled, and on such a bad note, too..."

"Don't worry about it..." Ryu responded, in an attempt to console the Captain. "Master Hand and I are still thinking about what to do next. Just...know that you are not to blame. Nobody is."

"Of course..." Falcon replied. "I guess I'll talk to you tomorrow, then..."

With those words, everyone else headed home to their rooms in Smash Tower, a heavy, tense air lingering in the dark, starless night.

Chapter End Notes

So...when Shulk mentioned what happened to Fiora, that will be explained in the next chapter. And it's safe to say there will be a Xenoblade spoiler in a later chapter *cough* a certain someone may make a cameo. And I use gendered pronouns with Mewtwo, Jigglypuff and Lucario but "it" with other Pokemon.

And Red is the Pokemon Trainer, obviously. I don't wanna say anything else, I may write the next chapter tomorrow or so. I think this ending for this chapter was pretty effective.
Chapter Summary

emotional confessions... the first step to getting closer...

Chapter Notes

Chapter's namesake - Beating Heart by Ellie Goulding

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 3 - Beating Heart

Lucina slowly opened her eyes. Her senses were still a bit distorted, but she could barely make out the fact that she was in an ambulance, as she felt the stretcher she was strapped to rattle every once in a while as the ambulance drove to the hospital. She could also faintly hear the sound of sirens. The anesthetic being administered to her by the intravenous tubes helped to numb the pain from her injured leg. Her vision was still blurry; however, she was able to faintly see Shulk out of the corner of her eye. She slowly turned her head to face him.

"Shulk..." she faintly whispered, her mouth covered by a small, transparent oxygen mask, her breath making condensation form on the mask's inside.

You decided to stay with me on the way...? She wanted to say, but was too weak to. Just so I wouldn't be alone? You're too kind, Shulk...

Walking slowly over to Lucina, Shulk put his hand on her forehead and said, "Don't worry, Lucina. You're going to be fine. For now...just rest, and within a few days you will be able to recover..."

Upon hearing those words, Lucina slowly closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

The next morning...

"Mmm...how long have I been sleeping?" Captain Falcon murmured groggily as the bright sunlight shone through the curtains. He climbed out of bed, clad only in his dark blue, silky pajama pants, and opened the curtains. Judging by how bright it was outside, it had to have been quite late in the morning.

"Damn... Did I really sleep this late?" he said. Remembering what happened the night before, he thought, it's ironic...the other night I couldn't sleep very well cause I was worried, and this morning, I guess I didn't want anything to do but to just sleep in...

He turned around and looked at himself in the mirror. His short, jet black hair was a mess, and his
bluish-green eyes looked tired. Almost as if by instinct, he traced the scar on his left eyebrow with
with his left hand. Scar aside, he had a face many women would call handsome. His physique was
certainly something, as well: his muscular biceps; chiseled, hairless chest and abs; and toned thighs
were all a result of his personal training for racing and fighting.

In spite of all this, he believed he couldn't show his true self like this to anyone, either from the
world he came from or in Smash City. The reason behind this was that wherever he went, danger
would follow. He remembered the incident that gave him his scar, as well as the many times he
went out of his way to protect his friends from harm, including a woman he had feelings for;
unfortunately, that relationship was short-lived. He thought that perhaps that was for the best if it
meant she wouldn't be in harm's way.

He looked at his reflection and said, "It's not every day I get to look at myself in the mirror like
this...I sometimes wonder if the person staring back at me really is me..." He shook his head.
"Come on, Captain Falcon. Stop with that angsty pseudo-philosophical bullcrap," he berated
himself.

Almost immediately afterward, the smartphone on his dresser began to ring. The ringtone was that
of a codec call; it was then that he recognized who was calling. He picked up the phone.
"Snake?"
"You didn't message me last night...though I guess with what happened, I don't blame you."
"...You saw?" Falcon asked, with a trace of anxiety in his voice.
"Well...the cameras stopped rolling after Charizard hurt that girl, but...yeah."
"I see..." Falcon sighed.
"Is something the matter?" Snake asked.
"Well..." Falcon began, "Last night...I actually was able to help her. I lifted that rock off of her,
with some help...she's in the hospital right now. However, Shulk rode the ambulance with her on
the way to the hospital...I felt I shouldn't be with her on the way there."
"You know what I think?" Snake replied. "I think that she would appreciate you going to see her
regardless of whatever happened in the past. Which, if you're going to see her, I suggest you get
going soon. Do you know what time it is...?"

Looking at the smartphone's screen, Falcon caught a glimpse of the time displayed there. "Crap,
it's almost 11 AM! I didn't think I'd have slept that late!" he shouted, hanging up the call.
Immediately after, he got ready to go, starting with a cold shower, and brushing up before he put on
all his clothes.
"I really hate cold showers..." he muttered under his breath after putting his clothes on. Looking at
his uncovered face in the mirror once more, he sighed, and then put his helmet on.
"I guess I'd better get going, then..."

The elevator ride down was a solitary one at first. The Captain leaned against the wall in the back,
looking up for the whole time until the doors opened again. He looked at Robin, standing on the
other side of the doors.
"Robin..."
"Good morning, Captain," Robin replied, his voice sounding monotone as he entered the elevator. The two stayed silent for a while after the elevator continued its descent, then Robin said, "I take it you're going to see Lucina?"

"Huh?" Captain Falcon was surprised by Robin's question at first, but then replied, "Yeah... are you?"

Robin sighed, and replied, "I feel I should make it up to her for what happened last night." He turned away, a melancholy expression on his face. "You saw what happened... I was a coward. I panicked. I knew I couldn't do anything to help."

"Come on... don't beat yourself up like that," Falcon said, in an attempt to console him.

"I really admire you for the fact that, in spite of what happened in the past, you immediately came running to her aid," Robin replied.

"I..." Falcon was at a loss of words to reply to Robin. After a while, he said, "I just... couldn't leave her like that. I always believed you don't need a particular reason to help anyone in need..."

Was that really it, though? He thought. Was there more to it than that...?

"Falcon?" Robin asked, noticing the Captain lost in thought.

"It's nothing," Falcon replied.

The two arrived at the lobby, and took a taxi to Smash City's hospital a few blocks away. As they entered, Robin walked up to the receptionist's desk and asked, "Where is Lucina's room?"

"She's staying in room 317. She's had a lot of visitors today," the receptionist replied.

"I see. Thank you," Robin replied. Turning to the Captain, he said, "I guess we're going to the third floor."

As the two arrived on the third floor, they noticed Lucina's room had some visitors. "Is that...?" Robin peered through the window and saw Chrom embracing his daughter tightly. In the room with him were his wife, Robyn, and their son and Lucina's younger brother, Morgan.

"Chrom's there..." Robin said to the Captain. "Do you still want to...?" He trailed off, knowing how the Captain must have felt in regards to his past with Chrom.

"I guess I'll wait until they leave..." Falcon said, walking down the hall and taking a turn to the right. Robin stayed there until Chrom and his family left, overhearing their conversations.

"Lucina... I'm so glad you're alright...!"

"Father... I'm sorry to make you worry."

"Get better soon, Sis!"

"Heehee... thanks, Morgan."

... 

"Hey! Captain!" Shulk called out to Captain Falcon as Falcon walked down the hallway.

"Oh... hey, Shulk," the Captain said, stopping in his tracks.
Shulk walked over to him. "Did you come to see Lucina?"

"Yeah..." Falcon replied. "But her family is visiting her right now and I don't want to interrupt that moment."

"I see..." Shulk said. "I stayed with Lucina overnight. I will admit I fell asleep after she was taken in for an operation on her leg, but the next morning, Dr. Mario told me that she'll be keeping the cast on for a day and a half, and will then undergo some training to try to get up and walking again."

"That's good..." Falcon answered, with a sigh of relief.

"Yeah," Shulk said. "I was worried since this situation reminded me of what happened with Fiora..."

"You mentioned that name before," Falcon inquired. "What exactly happened?"

Shulk sighed, and said, "One day, when my hometown was attacked by Mechon, Fiora tried to fend them off, but was stabbed in the abdomen by Metal Face." His face looked anguished as he continued, "I think the worst thing about it was that, at the time, I saw a vision of it happening, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't prevent it..."

The Captain sighed. "I guess I can almost understand how Robin felt that time..."

"Yeah..." Shulk said. "As for Fiora, I thought for sure I'd lost her then, but later on, I found her again. The Machina of Mechonis had given her cybernetic enhancements and in essence saved her life. I'm thankful she's okay for now, but still..."

"I understand," Falcon said.

"Well, I'd better head home," Shulk announced. "It's been a really long several hours."

"Okay, see you later," Falcon replied. Shulk waved to Falcon as he walked toward the elevator.

Seeing that Chrom and his wife and son left Lucina's room, Falcon walked over to her room to check on her and Robin, who were having a conversation. Stopping a short distance from the door, he began to listen in on their conversation.

"Are you doing okay, Lucina?" Robin asked.

"I've been fine," Lucina replied. "Before my family showed up, I got a lot of visitors. Zelda came in to check on me, and I also received a lot of gifts from everyone. Ryu even gave me a letter wishing me a speedy recovery, and that he looks forward to sparring against me under better circumstances someday." She looked out the window for a moment, and said, "And of course, Shulk was with me on the ride here..."

"Lucina...I'm sorry about what happened yesterday. I was a coward...I - "

"No...it's fine," Lucina consoled him. "I know the situation was tough...I'm just glad that you still came. I'm glad that no one left me when I needed them the most."

"Lucina..." Robin murmured.

"I think that...once I recover, I'm going to try to train to become even stronger so that nothing like this has to happen again." Lucina paused for a moment, and continued, "For the past few days up
until the tournament, I had a nightmare..."

Robin was curious at that statement. "What kind of nightmare?"

Sighing, Lucina began, "I dreamt...that I was in a predicament much like what actually happened. I was horribly injured, and no one came to help me, they all just looked on...well, no one except one person. I couldn't tell who that person was in the dream, but something about them seemed...familiar."

"...I see," Robin said.

"Which," Lucina continued, "I still wonder who it was that saved me that day..."

When Captain Falcon heard those words, he slowly backed away from Lucina's hospital room.

Why am I such a hypocrite? Robin says he was a coward for not being able to help Lucina...but I'm even more cowardly than he is right now, he thought. For now...I think it's best she try to recover without knowing that I helped save her that day. He went home to his flat in Smash Tower for the day.

"Well, if you ever find out who that person is, tell them I am beyond grateful," Robin said.

"Of course," Lucina replied with a hopeful smile. After Robin left, however, Lucina's smile sank and became a worried frown.

I'm sorry, Robin...you're a dear friend, but I hate having to hide my true feelings from you...from everyone that came to visit. She looked out the window. I just don't want you to worry any more than you are right now.

As she drifted off to sleep, these last few thoughts floated into her mind:

I don't want you to think of me as the weakling I really am...

---

Two days later...

The day had come for Lucina to try to get back on her feet again after the cast came off. Wearing the customary hospital gown and fuzzy slippers, she was brought on wheelchair by her mother to a room with a walkway and two handlebars on each side.

"Lucina," Ryu said, standing on the other end of the walkway. "Are you ready?"

"Yes...I think so," Lucina said.

"Alright," Ryu replied. "Just remember: don't rush yourself. Take as much time as you need to get used to walking again."

"Okay." Lucina said, grabbing the handlebars and slowly hoisting herself up, placing most of the force to push herself up on her good leg.

"Good," Ryu encouraged. "Now just take one step after the other. Just go easy."

"Alright..." Lucina said, stepping forward with her good leg first. "So far, so good," she mumbled. However, things didn't go so well when she tried to step forward with the recovering leg; the minute she stepped on the ground again with that leg, sharp pain shot up that leg, causing her to collapse to the floor.
"Arrrrrgh...!" she cried out in agony.

"Lucina...!" Robyn cried, running to her aid. "Are you alright?"

"...it's nothing, mom," Lucina replied, groaning slightly. "Could you bring the wheelchair here so I can try to start over?"

"Okay." Robyn replied. She brought her daughter back to the starting point, where she managed to make three steps before collapsing in pain again.

Noticing Captain Falcon watching Lucina try to get back on her feet from the windows outside the room and then walking away, Ryu said, "At the same time, you shouldn't overexert yourself. If you need to take a break, feel free to do so. If you come back later, Ms. Trainer will be here to help you." By "Ms. Trainer", Ryu was referring to Wii Fit Trainer. Ryu then said, "I actually need to take care of something. I will check in later, though."

Ryu stepped outside as Wii Fit Trainer took over for him. Walking over to the Captain, he asked, "Is something the matter, Captain?"

"It's nothing," Falcon replied. "Since I helped her that day, I just wanted to check in to see how she was recovering."

"That's a very noble thing to do," Ryu said. "I take it you haven't actually spoken to her yet, though...?"

"Not really..." Falcon lamented.

"I see..." Ryu answered. "I think you should talk to her when she's resting after her training for the day, though."

"Sounds like a good idea," Falcon concurred. "What were you discussing with Master Hand?"

"Ah, that," Ryu remarked, remembering what he told Falcon that night. "After the championship was called off, Master Hand and I decided to encourage the other Smashers to bring their friends over from their own world and undergo testing to become newcomers to the Smash tournament. Some veterans from the past may give this a shot, as well, and we may even consider new faces from other worlds too."

"Interesting..."

"Of course," Ryu continued, "There might be some that...may not make it."

"...Snake?" Falcon asked. "You think he might not make it back?"

"...Possibly," Ryu said sadly. "His circumstances may be harder than anyone else's right now."

"I understand..."

Later that day, Lucina was resting in her room. It was then that Captain Falcon finally decided to pay her a visit.

He walked into the room. There were a lot of gifts around the room that Lucina received from various Smashers: a large plush Nopon from Shulk, a bouquet from her family, "Get Well Soon" balloons from Pit and Dark Pit, a box of chocolates from Zelda, and a potted plant from Robin, as well as several cards from various people, Roy and Ryu included.
I couldn't bring her any gifts...Falcon thought. But I figure my presence here will be enough. He walked over to Lucina, fast asleep in her hospital bed. Her face looked very peaceful. Sitting in the chair close to the bed, he whispered, "I hope you'll recover soon. You're a fighter, I know you can do this." Standing up slowly, he continued, "It's the least I can do to make things up to you..."

I can't help but relate to you right you...I was in a similar situation myself, once.

He began to walk toward the door when Lucina slowly awoke with a moan. She opened her eyes and saw him walking to the door. "Captain...?" she asked.

Surprised, he turned around. "You're awake..." Walking toward her again, he asked, "How are you feeling?"

"I'm slowly doing better," Lucina said.

"That's wonderful," Falcon replied, looking out the window.

Lucina suddenly asked, "Were you...the one that saved me?"

"Ah..." Falcon faintly gasped under his breath. He said after catching his breath, "Yes...I was. Ike, Mewtwo and Ryu helped."

"I...see..." Lucina mumbled. "If I may ask...why?"

"Huh?"

"Why did you save me...? Me, of all people?" she asked.

"I..." The Captain paused for a moment, and continued, "Do I need a reason? It's always been my belief that...you don't need a reason to help people..."

"It's because I was weak, wasn't it?!" Lucina blurted out, her tone sounding somewhat confrontational and tense.

"What...? I - no..." Falcon was at a loss for words.

"Is that it? That no one believes I'm strong enough? First, I let that happen to my father, and then what happened recently to me..." Lucina looked down, the sorrow becoming apparent in her voice and expression. "I've been putting on a show this whole time to everyone who visited...even Shulk...even Robin...even my family. I'm a hypocrite. I'm pathetic..."

"Lucina, you idiot..." Falcon whispered.

"Huh?" Lucina gasped. What happened next was something she never expected.

He took her in his arms and embraced her tightly. She was caught completely off guard, but what was perhaps even more surprising was the fact that she enjoyed being held in his strong arms, feeling the gentle warmth of his embrace, his hand gently touching the back of her head.

"Don't you get it, Lucina?" he said, his voice sounding very worried, but at the same time somewhat comforting. "Everyone is worried about you...they see you trying to carry more than you can handle. They all care about you deeply...and...so do I."

"Ah?!" Lucina felt tears begin to well up in her eyes.

"What happened to you isn't your fault at all! Circumstances that are out of our control get the best
of each of us all the time...please...I ask of you...don't take it out on yourself..."

"I...I..." Lucina was trembling, teardrops falling from her eyes, the anguish engulfing her like a tidal wave.

"Don't be afraid to let it out..." he whispered to her. "You're not weak...I assure you."

"U...uuuu..." Lucina couldn't hold back her emotions any longer. She wrapped her arms around him, pressed her face to his chest, and wept, her sobs wracking her body.

"It's alright...it's alright..."

The few minutes Lucina spent sobbing in the Captain's arms felt like an eternity, but after a while, she calmed down. "Thanks..." She said. "I think I feel a bit better."

"I'm glad," the Captain said, releasing her from his embrace. Feeling somewhat flustered, he looked away and said, "I'm sorry if I got too...carried away."

"No," Lucina answered him, shaking her head. "It's fine. And..." She looked to the side briefly. "Robin told me to thank the person who saved me for him, so...he says he's beyond grateful for what you did."

"No problem. Even in spite of what happened between us before... I just couldn't leave anyone in need." He began to walk to the door. "I'd better head home, it's getting late. I hope your recovery goes well."

"Thank you..."

The next day, Lucina successfully got the hang of walking again, and was released from the hospital. Zelda picked her up and took her home.

That evening, everyone was gathered in the meeting hall in Smash Tower's lobby, where Ryu made the announcements he told Falcon about at the hospital. They also had a toast to celebrate Lucina's recovery.

However, later that night...

In the dead of night, as Zelda and all the other Smashers were fast asleep, Lucina slowly walked to the door to the apartment she shared with Zelda, fully clothed in her everyday gear. She briefly looked back at her sleeping roommate solemnly.

"I'm sorry, everyone..."

The next morning...

Falcon was sleeping soundly in his bed when his phone began to ring. It was only 8:35 AM this time. "Snake...?" he murmured. After coming back to his senses, he noticed the ringtone was different; it was that of a catchy guitar melody. He recognized that as Shulk's ringtone.

Picking up the phone, he answered, "Shulk? What's the matter?"

"It's terrible, Captain!" Shulk said on the other end of the line. "Lucina's gone missing!"

"What!?"
Couple clarifications. Yes, Falcon has "You Will Know Our Names" as the ringtone when Shulk calls, and a codec call noise when Snake calls.

About Robyn's appearance in this chapter: she and male Robin are in no way related. I guess in the Smash universe, both Robins know Chrom. Robin is Chrom's trusted comrade (and one of Lucina's friends as well), while Robyn is Chrom's wife and the mother of Lucina (and her little brother, male!Morgan). Just...don't overthink it too much.

As for Falcon's appearance... I know his appearance in the F-Zero anime, that he has brown hair and brown eyes. But the anime is considered not canon to the games and I'm not going with that anyway. At the end of the story mode of F-Zero GX, Falcon removes his helmet and walks off, and even though it's only a view from the back, he has short, somewhat messy jet black hair. Fanarts on Pixiv depict his eyes as a bluish-green, so I'm going with those qualities for his appearance. He also has a scar above his left eye, around his left eyebrow, like the anime incarnation, cause iirc that's where he was injured and Blood Falcon was cloned from? I don't wanna go too much into depth explaining is too complicated

The "woman" referred to near the beginning that Falcon had feelings for is indeed Jody Summer. Before you say anything, I know that Falcon and Jody are siblings in the GP Legend anime. However, as I mentioned at the beginning, it's not canon and I'm not going with that storyline. The Falcon in GPL is a man named Andrew Summer, the one I'm going with here is "canon" CF from F-Zero X and GX, aka Douglas Jay Falcon.
Face My Fears

Chapter Notes

Title for this chapter based on "Face My Fears" by Utada Hikaru (from the Kingdom Hearts 3 OST)

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 4 - Face My Fears

"Lucina's gone missing!"

"What!" Those words were the last words Captain Falcon expected to hear after Lucina seemingly made a smooth recovery at the hospital, especially considering what happened when he visited her the other day. He thought that for sure, life would have gone back to normal in Smash City and she would be fine...that he had successfully patched things up with her.

After regaining some of his composure, he reluctantly asked, "D...do you know where she is?"

"We don't know," Shulk replied on the other side of the line. "We've formed a search party that is looking around right now. I suggest you meet up with everyone in the lobby."

"Alright, I'll be there as soon as I can." The Captain hung up the call. After getting ready, he picked up his smartphone one more time and opened up the texting app. Opening the pre-existing page of texts he exchanged with Snake, he began to type a message.

"Hello Snake,

Listen. Something has happened involving that girl I told you about. I have a feeling that a lot may change in the next few days, and I may not be around to reply for a while. I just hope that it's nothing serious and all will end well. When the time comes, I will let you know how it went. So, until then...take care.

- Captain Falcon

P.S. Samus misses you dearly, and she's awaiting your return someday. For my sake, I hope you return too. I miss sparring with you, and just talking about things too."

Pressing the Send button, he then put the phone down and headed down to the lobby.

...

A tense air hung in the lobby as the Smashers sat on couches and chairs all around, worried expressions on their faces. Spotting Shulk from afar, the Captain walked over to him. "Have you...heard anything yet?" He asked Shulk.

"Not yet," Shulk answered him, shaking his head sadly. "The search party, consisting of Samus, Link, Ryu, and the Duck Hunt duo went out half an hour ago looking for her. Hopefully the dog will be able to trace her scent..." He bowed his head, a solemn look in his eyes. "I just hope she's
"Okay..."

"Yeah..." Falcon agreed.

"...You know," Zelda began, walking toward them, "I always thought that ever since a few days ago, Lucy had been acting strange...she'd become very distant."

"Zelda?" Captain Falcon was caught off guard at first. "Oh, right, you're Lucina's roommate..."

Zelda nodded. "I know that she'd been having a lot of nightmares before the incident..."

"Yeah, she told me too," Robin said, joining in on the conversation.

"Robin..." Falcon murmured.

"I'll still never forget how she pushed me out of harms' way that day," Robin said. "She's a good friend of ours...I just wonder what made her act like this."

"I wonder, too..." Falcon said quietly. I guess I'd better not mention about how I overheard from her about her nightmare that day...

Shulk heard a small noise coming from his pocket. He pulled out his smartphone. On the screen was a text from Samus, which said:

"After some investigation, the Duck Hunt team was able to track Lucina's scent. Apparently her last known location was the off-world teleporter. Reasons as to why she went there, or to which world, are currently unknown."

"What...?" Putting his phone away, Shulk stepped forward. "Everyone, may I have your attention? It appears our search team has discovered Lucina's last known whereabouts!"

Everyone who had been sitting down stood up, and in the blink of an eye, murmurs filled the air.

"Please do not panic," Shulk announced. "She was last spotted at the off-world teleporter. The reasons behind this are unknown, but it is assumed that she is safe for the time being."

"Off-world...teleporter...?" Robin mumbled.

"Is something the matter, Robin?" Zelda asked him.

"Shulk, if I may," Robin said, walking up to Shulk. "I remember the last time I saw Lucina, which was when she was recovering in the hospital, that she said that once she recovered, she'd like to try to train more. I just didn't think she meant like this..."

Falcon tensed up upon overhearing what Robin said to Shulk. You don't mean...

Almost immediately, Falcon turned toward the doors and ran into the streets.

"Falcon! Hey!" Robin called out after him, but to no avail as Falcon left the tower. Turning to Shulk, he asked, "What just...?"

"Stay there for the time being," Shulk advised Robin. "I'll go after him. The search team should be back soon, so they'll take things from there."

...
On the way to the building with the off-world teleporter, Falcon ran into the search team. "Huff...huff..." he panted, crouching over with his hands on his knees.

"Captain? Is something the matter?" Ryu asked.

"Ah...Ryu..." Falcon said, trying to catch his breath. "You're just the person I wanted to talk to."

"What is it?" Ryu questioned.

"I wanted to examine the last coordinates of the off-world transporter," the Captain replied. "I imagine you have access to the teleporter's logs. The others can head back to Smash Tower for now."

"Okay," Ryu said. "Everyone else, head back to the tower. I have some further investigation to carry out."

Heeding his words, the rest of the team headed back to the tower. Ryu and Falcon then began to walk toward the the building housing the teleporter.

"Hey! Wait!" Shulk called after the two, running.

"Shulk?" Ryu asked.

"...if it's fine with you, I'd like to find out where exactly Lucina is, too."

"What do you think, Captain?" Ryu asked Captain Falcon. The Captain nodded in response, saying, "Sure."

...

As the three walked up to the teleporter's control panel, Ryu entered his credentials, gaining him access to the teleporter's logs. "Let's see here...ah, found it."

"What is it?" Shulk asked.

"It appears Lucina teleported to Bionis, more precisely, to Gaur Plains, no less than an hour ago."

"Gaur Plains..." Shulk murmured.

"Ryu," the Captain said. "If I may, I would like to go after her and make sure she is alright."

Ryu seemed hesitant for a moment, but then answered, "Okay. I trust you'll know how to get back."

"I'll be fine," Falcon reassured him. "All the worlds have teleporters back to Smash City, right?"

"Yes," Ryu answered him. "So, you ready, Captain?"

"Yes."

"Hyah!" Lucina shouted as she dealt the finishing blow to the last Armu in the pack she decided to take on. Putting her sword away, she stood there and took it all in: the vast grass-covered landscape, the wind blowing through her hair, the rivers and lakes, the clear blue sky, and the wildlife inhabiting Gaur Plain. This was nothing at all like the simulations whenever she battled in tournaments.
"I suppose this may be a good place to train," she said to herself. Walking on ahead, she spotted a flock of Tirkin and began to sneak up on them when she felt the ground rumble and heard loud footsteps echo throughout the land. "What..."

The flock of Tirkin began to flee as a giant ape-like creature walked by. "What in the name of Naga is that...?" Lucina mumbled anxiously. "I have a bad feeling about this..." She began to crawl past, out of the monster's line of sight, then got up and began to slowly walk away when she stepped on a large, dried tree branch.

Hearing the noise, the monster immediately turned around and spotted Lucina.

"Crap...!" Lucina gasped. She began to run as the monster frantically chased her, roaring. She cut across running down the shallow river, feeling the tremors in the ground from the monster's steps. She could tell this monster was stronger than most of the other animals inhabiting the ecosystem here.

She ran along the grassy terrain again but unfortunately was cornered against a stony wall. The monster began to raise its left arm. Standing there paralyzed in fear, she thought, Is this it? Is this the end for me...? I was so foolish...

"Look out!" a familiar voice shouted. Just as the monster swung its arm toward Lucina, she felt herself being tackled away by someone, pushing her out of the way in the nick of time as the monster's arm crashed into the wall, knocking rocks down.

"Ugh..." she mumbled, slowly opening her eyes.

"Dammit, Lucina," her savior said, who turned out to be none other than Captain Falcon. "Are you trying to get yourself killed here?"

"You...?" She murmured. "You saved me...again..."

"Now's not the time to be worrying about that," Falcon said. "At the very least, we should try to take this thing down together. I'll help." Falcon got into his battle stance as Lucina drew her sword. Attacking first, Falcon ran toward the beast and leapt toward it in an aerial kick. The attack seemed to be for naught as the monster grabbed Falcon and tossed him at a diagonal angle toward the ground.

"Augh!" Falcon cried in pain.

"Captain!"

"I'm fine...ngh..." Falcon grunted, slowly standing up.

Seeing the monster advance toward Falcon, Lucina immediately lunged toward it and began to hack and slash at it with her Falchion, doing some seemingly noticeable damage. The monster diverted its attention to the blue-haired swordwoman and held both its arms above her, poised to swing them down and bludgeon her, but she dodged out at the last second, running toward the Captain and helping him up. However, just as he stood up, the beast rapidly smacked them out of the way, knocking them both down a considerable distance to the right.

"Ngh..." Lucina groaned, slowly pushing herself up. "What are we...supposed to do -"

Just then, Lucina heard a voice, a female's voice with an accent similar to Shulk's, shout, "FINAL CROOOOOOSSSS!" Immediately after, a burst of red light emerged from behind the beast,
shocking it and causing it to fall to the ground.

"Is...that...?" Lucina whispered, standing up. Captain Falcon slowly stood up as well, noticing the person who toppled the beast. It was a young woman, about Shulk's age, with short dark blonde hair, green eyes, and what appeared to be a mechanical suit of armor on her body. Or perhaps this wasn't a suit of armor, but rather, a mechanical exoskeleton. The armor was beige with traces of gold and light blue, and she had two large drones on her back as well as a peculiar crest engraved into the armor's chest area. The young woman herself was wielding two long swords, one in each hand, which she put away.

"Fiora...!" Lucina cried joyously, running to her.

"Fiora...?" Falcon murmured, walking to the woman.

"Oh, hey, Lucina," Fiora said with a smile. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

"I guess it has," Lucina said, chuckling nervously.

"Oh," Fiora said, noticing the Captain. "Who's he?"

"Ah...hello," Falcon said, extending his hand for a handshake. "You can call me Captain Falcon. It's nice to meet you, Fiora."

"Nice to meet you, too," Fiora said, shaking his hand.

"Um...guys..." Lucina said, glancing at the beast, who was beginning to get back up. Noticing this, Fiora drew her blades again. "Further introductions can wait till later. This is a Territorial Rotbart, and it's not gonna go down easy!"

Getting up, the Territorial Rotbart let out a loud roar and beat its chest with its hands.

"Now it's getting serious! Look out!" Fiora shouted. The three took a defensive stance as the beast ran to them.

Glancing at the two ladies, Captain Falcon said to them, "I have a plan. Lucina, when I count to three, you dodge forward, run behind this thing and slash it from behind. I'll take it from there and leave an opening for Fiora to finish it off. You ready?"

"Ready!" Lucina said, a determined look in her eyes.

"Ready," Fiora replied.

"Alright, here it comes," Falcon said as the Territorial Rotbart ran to them. The monster raised its arms above them again. "On three, everyone. One..."

"Two..." Fiora said.

In the split second before Territorial Rotbart swung down its arms again, Lucina shouted, "Three!" Just before the monster's fists hit the ground, Fiora dodged to the left, Falcon backflipped away, and Lucina rolled on the ground forward and ran around it to its back. There she sliced at it in a leaping attack. "Falcon!"

"Got it!" Falcon shouted, running toward the beast. Generating energy in his fist, he leaped toward it and shouted, "Falcon..." Then punching forward, he yelled "PUUUNCH!" A burst of flame erupted from his fist, and the sheer power of the punch knocked the monster back. "Now, Fiora!"
"Okay!" Fiora yelled, leaping into the air. The drones on her back came off and positioned themselves around her abdomen, charging up energy. She shouted, "Respond, and move! Cannon Drones!" A giant blast of energy shot forth from the drones, burning a hole into Territorial Rotbart's chest and killing it instantly.

After the monster fell, the three regrouped. "Hee hee..." Fiora giggled.

"Hmm?" the Captain asked.

"I must say," Fiora chimed, clapping her hands together, "That was some truly brilliant teamwork from you guys!"

"T-teamwork?" Lucina stammered, a slight blush creeping across her face. "You...think so?"

"Of course!" Fiora said. "Why, do you feel that's not the case? Did something happen?"

Sighing, Falcon interjected, "Well, you see..." He proceeded to explain everything to Fiora.

"I see..." Fiora said. "So something happened between you guys, and after an incident, Lucina decided to go training here by herself...It's a good thing I came here to help." Looking at Lucina, she continued, "But I suppose it's even better that he came here to protect you, Lucina. I think he just wants to mend the rift after what happened back then."

"You think so?" Lucina asked. She looked at the Captain, who met her gaze as well.

"I have an idea!" Fiora exclaimed. "Why don't you two train together?"

"Huh?" Both Lucina and Captain Falcon gasped, looking at each other.

"I'm serious!" Fiora said. "Lucina, you'll be able to train with the Captain protecting you...and hopefully, you'll be able to talk out whatever issues have been plaguing you."

"I..." Lucina murmured. Falcon looked away, anticipating her refusal, but then her response surprised him.

"Sure. I'll let him train me."

"Really...?" Falcon asked Lucina, a trace of uncertainty in his voice.

"Yes," Lucina replied. "He's saved me twice already. I feel I can trust him...and there was also that time I was in the hospital, when he visited, I..." She blushed as she continued, "I showed a moment of vulnerability, and...he was there to wipe my tears away."

"Awwwww!" Fiora gushed. "That's so sweet! Aren't you glad you have one of those strong-but-gentle types with you?"

"Ah..." Falcon murmured, blushing and hiding his face under his scarf.

"S-say, Fiora," Lucina said. "Were you really just passing through the area?"

"To tell the truth, no," Fiora replied. "Shulk told me last night about the initiative to bring over candidates from Smashers' home worlds, and others as well, to be considered to join the tournament. Shulk chose me as a candidate from his world, so I'll be meeting up with someone to interview me from Smash City soon. Shulk should drop by later on."

"Ah, okay," Lucina said. "When you see Shulk, could you tell him to tell the others back at Smash
"...Sure," Fiora said. "Well then, I shall be off. If you need a place to stay upon nightfall, there's the old Colony 6 campout in the cave just to the east of the statue in the distance. I'll probably stop by later."

"Okay," Lucina said. "Take care." Fiora waved as she ran off.

"...Well then," the Captain said to Lucina, "Shall we begin training now?"

"Yes," Lucina said with a nod.

And so began their training that would take them various places as they trained to become stronger. What neither of them anticipated was by the time their training came to a close, their relationship would have changed a great deal...
The sun had begun to set on Gaur Plains. Lucina and Captain Falcon had spent several hours training, both against other monsters as well as in one-on-one in friendly sparring matches, and they were quite exhausted. Remembering Fiora's advice from earlier, they headed for the cave located east of the statue. After walking past the nearby lake, they entered the cave.

Fiora mentioned that the cave was once a refugee camp for residents of Colony 6 after it was ravaged, and it still possessed the bare essentials for living. Several sleeping mats with blankets lined the stony floor, and there were a few tables with chairs and boxes that contained tools essential for survival, such as various first aid implements, rope, cloth, and hunting tools. In a corner far away from the sleeping mats was a cauldron hung over a stack of wood. It wasn't luxury, but it would do.

"Wow..." Lucina murmured, taking in her surroundings. "The people who last stayed in this cave sure knew how to survive."

"Having to spend so long in the wilderness like that..." The Captain remarked. "I can only imagine."

"Hmm?" Lucina was bemused by his comment.

"...Ah, sorry if my words seemed out of place. It's just, the world I come from is so technologically advanced that scenarios like that would not be an issue," Falcon clarified.

"I see," Lucina replied, taking a seat at a nearby table. "You know...I've always wanted to see what the worlds everyone else is from are like. I guess I just want to broaden my horizons, as they say. When I was a child, I loved reading stories that took place in other worlds. And...during my time here in the Smash tournament, I've come to know so many people who ended up being my friends, and they would tell me all about their own worlds."

"Is that so?" Falcon asked, taking a seat across from her.

"Yes," Lucina answered him. "When I first met Shulk's friend Fiora at that off world quest some time ago with my father, she told me all about this world, where she and Shulk came from. I chose to come here because I wanted to see how vast and amazing it was for myself. ...If it's okay with you, I would someday like to visit the world you come from, too."

"Really?" Falcon was surprised by Lucina's remark. "I could take you someday in the future, but I don't think it would be such a great place to train, seeing as how it's vastly different from your
world or Shulk's."

"Oh, no, it's fine," Lucina said. "I would like to go somewhere else to continue our training, but I'm not sure yet. I'll probably let you know tomorrow morning."

"Sounds fine," the Captain replied. All of a sudden, he winced and clutched an area on the left side of his back with his left arm. "Ngh..."

"Is something wrong...?!" Lucina gasped.

"I think...that battle with that monster..." he strained, "May have...injured me a bit."

"Let me see..." Lucina began. "I know some first aid from my battles back in my world."

"Okay..." the Captain obliged. He slowly began to lift the back of his jacket, exposing his back. As was expected, the area he was clutching earlier had some bruises and scratches on it. One of the scratches appeared to be bleeding slightly.

"A-ah..." Lucina wasn't grossed out by the injuries, as she had helped treat her own and others' in her own future when she battled Grima, whenever she didn't have the aid of a healer. She was instead...slightly flustered by the sight of that rippling, nicely toned back, even though only a small portion of it was exposed. Her heart started to beat a touch faster, and she felt the blood rush to her face a bit.

Why...am I reacting like this? This isn't like me...I need to focus.

"Something the matter?" He asked her, noticing her standing still for a bit.

"...Not at all," she answered him, regaining her focus. "Let me look around for any medical supplies."

She began looking around in the crates. She found a crossbow, something she made use of in one of her journeys outside her own world and Smash, but realized it wouldn't be of use unless they were hunting. Putting it aside, she continued to dig around until she found some gauze, medical tape, a small towel, cotton balls, long thin wooden sticks, and a bottle of some unknown solution. Before taking the other supplies out, she brought the bottle to her trainer to see what kind of medicine it was.

"Could you examine this?" She asked him. Releasing the side of the shirt he was holding with his right arm, the Captain took the bottle and examined the labels. Upon reading the ingredients on the back, he answered, "Good find. This is an antibiotic gel."

"Okay, great," She replied, taking the bottle back as he handed it to her. She put it on a nearby table, then returned to the crate and brought over the gauze, tape, wooden sticks, small towel and cotton balls to the table, placing the cotton balls in an empty bowl. "You ready?"

"Sure," the Captain answered her, lifting the other side of his shirt with his other arm. "You may want to wash the area clean of any debris before you start disinfecting."

"Got it," the swordwoman said, knowing what she needed to do. Taking the towel, she dashed outside to the nearby lake and dipped a portion of it into the cold water before running back.

Noticing her walking back in with the wet towelette, Falcon told the blue-haired Ylissean, "Okay, I'm ready."
"Alright..." Lucina walked over to the Captain, taking in a deep breath to remain calm, and, kneeling close enough to have access to the area she was going to treat, slowly brought the wet end of the towel over to the scrapes on the exposed part of his back.

"C-cold..." He muttered, shivering slightly.

"No one said it would be easy," She said in an attempt to reassure him. "Now just hold still."

The Captain said nothing, only nodded as his protégé slowly and gently wiped away any dirt from the area of the wounds with the wet end of the towel. After a while, the water from the towel didn't feel as cold. When she was done, she dried the area with the dry side of the towel, softly patting the area instead of rubbing it so as not to aggravate the wounds.

"Now it's time to disinfect," she announced. Walking over to the table, she put one cotton ball from the bowl onto a wooden stick, uncapped the disinfecting gel bottle, and put a decently sized blob of its contents onto the cotton ball. She then walked over to him and once again knelt down close to him, and slowly brought the cotton ball to one of his scrapes and started to rub it in.

"Easy now..." the Captain told her. "Don't rub too hard."

"Got it." She carefully coated each of the open scrapes with as much antibiotic gel as she could, rubbing softly.

"Ahh..." Falcon sighed. Caught off guard by that sigh that didn't have any trace of pain in its tone, Lucina didn't know what to think. "Am I...rubbing too hard?"

"No..." He shook his head. "It's just...perfect, actually."

"I see..." She was a bit surprised to see him taking this so calmly, but proceeded to rub the medicine into the wounds as best she could. "There. That should help it heal faster with little to no scarring."

"What next?" He asked her, still lifting the shirt just in case she needed to do anything else.

"I think it would be best to cover the wound, so that you don't risk any pathogens or dirt coming in." She walked back over to the table and grabbed the gauze, placing the conveniently adequately sized fabric over the wounds.

"Hold that gauze there with your other hand," she instructed him. As he held it there, she grabbed the medical tape and fastened the gauze to his skin safely and securely, instructing him to move his fingers wherever necessary.

"Okay, we're done. The scrapes weren't even that deep, so they should heal within a few days." Finding herself in a daze and staring at the bare skin of his rippling back again, Lucina silently looked away, blushing slightly.

*Gods...! Why am I reacting like this...? It was just something I decided to do to repay him by treating his injuries...*

"Thank you, Lucina," the Captain said. "I'm guessing this is something you're used to...?"

*He...thanked me?*

"W-well," She began with a slight stammering chuckle, "I guess you could say it's something I got used to in the future I came from, haha..." She scratched the back of her head with her left hand.
"Well, well, well, I come back and you two are already hitting it off...?" A playful, feminine voice with the same accent as Shulk's asked.

The same voice from earlier.

"Fiora!?" Falcon gasped in surprise, lowering his shirt as if by instinct.

"H...how long have you been standing there, Fiora?" Lucina questioned as she walked over to Fiora, feeling somewhat embarrassed. "C-cause I assure you, it's NOT what you think..."

"Oh, just long enough to see you getting all hot and bothered at the sight of his bandaged back..." The blonde cyborg girl teased, a suggestive look on her face.

"...Fiora. If you weren't one of my best friends, I SWEAR..." Lucina grumbled, feeling even more embarrassed.

"Hahaha, I'm just teasing," Fiora giggled, patting the Exalt on the shoulder. "Try to loosen up a bit!"

"I...guess I should," Lucina said with a sigh. "Sorry about that."

"No worries," Fiora reassured her. "I just had my interview with Sonic from Smash City. I feel it went pretty well, and he says he'll let me know if I'll be picked for this, or even any upcoming Smash tournament. I'm really excited at the thought of fighting alongside you guys, and Shulk, and Ryu, and everyone else one day! Hopefully, your father will have his chance by then, too..."

"Yeah...that would be great," Lucina agreed, a content smile gracing her face.

"See, that's the Lucina I know!" Fiora beamed. "Although...I kinda wish Mega Man were the one interviewing me. He's sooo cool! But I guess he's not much of the talkative type..."

Feeling a twinge of guilt at Fiora mentioning Chrom in passing, Captain Falcon tried to change the subject. "Fiora...I don't think you ever told me how exactly you and Lucina met. Why don't you come in?"

As the two best friends walked in, Fiora grabbed a chair of her own, letting Lucina sit next to her trainer before Fiora herself sat in front of them.

"Okay, so...one day, a few months ago, these Golden Chains appeared in this world. Shulk was still in Smash City at the time, so I couldn't contact him in time, but I was curious about them, so I followed them, and I met this blue-haired android lady, and of course, Lucina and her dad. Lucina and I seemed to just click right away," Fiora explained, giggling at the last part. She continued, "Ryu was also there, alongside his best friend Ken. With their help, and the help of some others we met along the way, we were able to save the multiverse." Grinning confidently, she boasted, "Pretty awesome, right?"

"It really is," the Captain said.

"Shulk told me about Fiora beforehand. It was during the Golden Chains quest I told Fiora and Ryu about Smash," Lucina continued. "It seemed Ken was pretty interested too. I told Master Hand about the three of them, but at the moment Master Hand saw the most potential in Ryu and wanted him on board right away, heh..."

"I guess he couldn't say no to star power, eh?" Fiora commented. She and Lucina giggled, and Falcon couldn't help but smile at these two close friends enjoying themselves talking about things.
At the same time, this sight of camaraderie made him think of his friendship with Snake, and he couldn't help but feel a bit melancholy.

*I hope one day we can talk again like old times, Snake...* the Captain thought.

"But enough about me. What were you guys doing just now before I arrived?" Fiora asked.

"Ah, well..." Lucina began. "My trainer...he was injured from the fight earlier. I was just treating his wounds."

"Oh no..." Fiora gasped, looking a bit remorseful and worried. "And he still trained you in spite of all that? They weren't serious, were they?"

"Fiora..." Lucina murmured. She didn't like to see the normally chipper and fearless Fiora looking so sad.

"It was nothing," the Captain reassured her. "Just some minor scrapes. It seems this is something she's done before."

"Is that so?" Fiora asked curiously.

"...It's true," Lucina admitted. "The world I come from is the same one as Robin's, but in a bleak, desolate future. My father died in that future, so I had to face the Fell Dragon, Grima, by myself, although I had some other allies to help."

"Must have been tough..." Falcon said sympathetically. *I suppose I can see why she felt so strongly about her father being able to participate...*

"I still managed," Lucina stated. "And the reason I'm training with him is because I want to be even stronger...to protect myself better, and those I care about."

"That's such a noble goal, Lucina," Fiora complimented her friend, her voice full of admiration. "And, Mr. Falcon, it's also very admirable of you to still train her and patch things up some more with her. I meant it when I said you were the strong but gentle type. I'm sure you two will get along just fine!"

"You flatter me, Fiora," the Captain said, chuckling. "Well, I suppose it's only fair to talk about the world I come from."

"Hmm?" The two friends leaned closer in curiosity.

"Truth is...even though I am a bounty hunter and trained in close combat, I'm better known as a star racer in my world."

"Ooooh..." the two girls expressed their interest in unison.

"Heh, I guess you two really are interested," Falcon said. "Maybe you can watch me in a race one day too, Fiora."

"That. Would be SO COOOOL!" Fiora gushed, her eyes shimmering with excitement.

"That's Fiora, all right," Lucina giggled. "She always gets so excited at the thought of seeing other worlds. She was like that when we met. Always so adventurous..."

The three had a hearty laugh for a while, and when they were done, Fiora had a sudden insight. "You know...I've come to realize just by looking at you two, that you two really seem to
complement each other."

"How so...?" Lucina questioned, tilting her head slightly. She was curious to hear Fiora's reasoning.

"Well, for starters, you know how the opposite ends of magnets attract each other? I can just see it. You two are so different, but so similar as well. You, Lucina, are mostly calm and composed, but on the inside, you're very strong and determined. And you, Captain...your tough, battle hardened appearance belies a...softer side. You never leave anyone behind."

"It's true..." Falcon admitted. "I've not only hunted down dangerous criminals across the galaxy, but I've also rescued a lot of people in need. I've come to be known as a true hero."

"A hero..." Lucina murmured in wonder, holding her hand to her chest and looking down. "I wish to one day be considered a hero, too. All I did was take on the appearance of the Hero King, Marth, to instill hope in the survivors from my future."

"That doesn't make you any less of a hero either, Lucina," Fiora encouraged her friend.

Looking up, Lucina smiled at the cybernetically enhanced Hom. "You're too sweet, Fiora."

"Heehee..." Looking at the two training partners once again, Fiora continued, "But...I can also see a duality within the two of you. You, Captain, are like the light, the sun, a fire burning brightly - full of passion. As for you, Lucina, you're like the darkness, the moon, the deep oceans - you're more tranquil and rational. And with these qualities, you two can perhaps...find balance. Maybe even...bring out the best qualities in each other, despite you two being so different."

"You...really think so, Fiora?" Lucina was amazed by Fiora's read into the two of them.

"I do," Fiora confirmed, nodding. "In fact...if I didn't know any better...I'd say you two are each other's...you know..."

"Our...what?" The Captain wasn't sure where Fiora was going.

"...I was thinking...that the two of you would be each other's, well...other half." 

"Ah?!" Lucina felt the blood rushing to her face as she blushed intensely. "F-F-F-Fiora, PLEASE! Our relationship is strictly professional!"

"I mean...who's to say it won't stay that way? Ohoho..." Fiora giggled teasingly with a wink.

"Fioraaaaaaa!"

"O...other...half...?" The Captain muttered, looking deep in thought, as he tenderly held his right hand to his chest.

"...Are you okay?" The blue haired swordswoman asked her trainer. It was a bit strange to see such a strong man showing a more sensitive side, but on the flip side, it seemed Fiora's intuition about him was on the dot.

"Just...thinking. Don't worry about me."

An inexplicable feeling washed over the future Exalt as she observed her trainer in his pensive state, especially with how he told her not to worry. She could tell something was troubling him, and in that moment...

_Is it wrong of me to just...want to be close to him right now...?_
She slowly stood up and slowly reached her right hand over to touch his shoulder, when she ended up pulling back out of hesitation.

"...It's too soon. I shouldn't...this is something he has to deal with on his own. I mustn't interfere.
She sat down, unaware that Fiora had already gotten up and was heading for the cave entrance. "...Fiora?"

"It's getting late," Fiora said, noticing the sky turning completely dark and the stars illuminating the sky. "Wouldn't want you two to go to bed on an empty stomach. I'll be right back!"

"Okay..." After Fiora ran off, the Captain spoke up. "Hey...Lucina?"

"Yes?" She turned to him.

"Fiora's comment...the 'other half' comment, it had me thinking."

"You're not upset, are you?" The swordswoman asked.

"Of course not," The racer reassured her, letting the hand he once held to his chest rest at his side. "Though, I couldn't help but think of a bittersweet memory of mine..."

"Is that so?" Lucina sat back down on her chair.

"At one point, I did have someone I considered my other half. Her name was Jody." The Captain looked at the ceiling.

"Jody..." The blue-haired young woman murmured. "You must have cared for her a lot.
What...happened between you two?"

"I really did," Falcon confirmed. "I guess...she was my first love. Unfortunately, I...for her own safety, I had to break things off after a while. She was being targeted by dangerous men, like Black Shadow, my arch-nemesis."

"He must have been a real threat if you felt you had to break things off with Jody," Lucina said with a sigh. "I can understand that... Sometimes the only way to protect those you love, is to no longer pursue a relationship with them...cause you don't want to see them get hurt because of you, or worse."

"It's why I myself didn't get close to anyone in the world I came from..."

"All things considered, though, it ended on a pretty high note," the Captain clarified, looking at his training partner once again. "We're still good friends, and she's...found someone else. Someone that won't put her in danger like I have. If I may be brutally honest...I'm happy for her."

"I see..."

Just then, Fiora came back with a haul of ingredients for making supper in a sack, and behind her was Riki, another one of Shulk's friends and an Assisting Fighter back in Smash City, carrying some slain Turkins, presumably to be used as the meat in the meal.

"Riki?!" The two exclaimed, surprised.

"Heropon live to serve!" Riki boasted cheerfully, striking a heroic pose that with his stature looked a bit dorky, but adorable at the same time.

"Riki will be helping me out in the kitchen tonight," Fiora said.
"Looking forward to it," Lucina told her friend.

As Riki and Fiora prepared dinner, the Captain and Lucina continued to discuss their experiences in their own worlds, this time on a lighter note.

"...and then, Morgan said, 'How are you gonna win this war if you can't even smoosh one stupid roach?!'" Lucina explained, adding a slight mocking tone to mimic her little brother's words at that moment.

Laughing heartily, Falcon asked, "You were...scared of a common household bug?! Hahaha..."

"I-it's not funny! That thing was huge, and it had wings!" Lucina puffed her cheeks angrily for a few moments, then burst out giggling. "Okay, maybe it IS a little funny..."

"Good to see they're getting along well..." Fiora mused contentedly.

"Friends happier when they taste our cooking, Fiora!" Riki encouraged her.

"You're right," Fiora nodded confidently.

"...and then, after I leaped out of the train's way with the baby in my arms, I...ripped my pants."

"Captain, you did NOT!" Lucina shouted, clutching her sides as she laughed hysterically.

"Alright, you two, dinner time!" Fiora called out.

As the four sat down at the table and ate, the Captain noticed something peculiar about Fiora. "Excuse me...Fiora?"

"Yes, Captain?"

"You're...only having a glass of water for dinner?" Noticing her trainer glancing at the sole glass of water where Fiora was sitting, Lucina added, "He's right...I don't think I've ever seen you eat anything, Fiora."

"Oh, that...this body of mine? The Machina of Mechonis made it so that water is my sole power source. I don't really need to eat to keep my energy up." Glancing at Riki, she added, "Riki helped me with taste testing back in the kitchen." She then took a sip of her water.

"But...you could, in theory, eat if you wanted to, right...?" Lucina questioned, curiously.

"I guess..." Fiora replied. "They didn't explicitly warn against it..." Standing up, she said with a slight twinge of excitement in her voice, "Be right back. I think I'll serve myself something, too. By the Bionis, it's been too long..."

As Fiora walked off to serve herself her portion, Riki started another conversation. "How are friends?"

"We're doing fine, Riki," Lucina happily answered him. "This is really good. You and Fiora did a great job."

"Lucy's comments flatter Heropon!" Riki declared, doing a typical Nopon "dance" which just consisted of him bouncing around in a circle.

"So, you call yourself 'Heropon'?!" The Captain asked the Nopon.
"Yes!" Riki announced. "Riki idol and hero to all Nopon!"

"You're...not dismayed at the fact you're only an Assisting Fighter in Smash City, are you?"

"Wha-? Meh-meh! If Riki can help, he proud to help!" Riki answered the Captain. "Besides, Cappy, Shulk more important than Heropon. He deserve to be in spotlight, even if Riki never get his chance to be an actual Smasher."

"C-Cappy...?" Falcon snickered slightly at that nickname, unsure why exactly he found it amusing. "But I'm glad to know you're content." Noticing Fiora walking back in with her relatively small meal, his attention shifted to her. "Were you listening, Fiora?"

"Yeah," the cyborg said, taking a seat. "What's up?"

"If...let's say, you were picked to participate in Smash, but...you were only an Assisting Fighter, or only came out during a Final Smash, like Mega Man's other versions, or...Chrom when Robin uses his Final Smash...how would you feel...?"

"Captain..." Lucina felt a bit remorseful that the Captain asked that question sounding so guilty.

"I..." Fiora hesitated for a moment, looking down sadly. Within a few seconds, however, she looked back at him, a determined fire in her eyes. "I'd still be happy. I would get to still fight alongside Shulk when he needed me. And I'd get to spend time with Lucina in Smash City, too! So no matter what...as long as I get to be with everyone...I'm content."

"I'm glad, Fiora," Lucina said, smiling.

Maybe I've been too hard on this whole situation...maybe my father is content where he is right now.

Within a few minutes, everyone was done.

"Woo...that was great!" Fiora cheered. "Thanks for the suggestion, Lucina. I've almost forgotten how great it is to enjoy a meal with company."

"No problem, and thank you for the meal," Lucina thanked her friend. "But we'd better get our rest tonight. We have places to go tomorrow as we'll be training across different worlds."

"Just stay safe, friends!" Riki pleaded.

"Heh, we will," the Captain reassured the little heroic Nopon, patting him on the head.

"Meh-mehhhh..." Riki purred.

"You'll need some supplies, though," Fiora advised. "I'll be back in the morning with some things you'll need for your journey. It should last you a couple days." Her face changed to a concerned expression briefly as she continued, "I just hope it won't be anywhere too dangerous..."

"Don't worry, Fiora," Captain Falcon reassured the Hom. "I'll keep your friend safe, no matter what."

"Captain..." Lucina muttered, also sounding worried. I just hope you don't put yourself in danger for my sake, either...

"Thank you." Looking outside for a moment, Fiora noticed the night sky becoming cloudy. "Well, better get going. It's gonna rain soon..."
"Take care!" Lucina called to Fiora as she and Riki headed out.

Within minutes, it started to rain. "I guess we should get some rest, then," the Captain said.

"You're right," the Exalt agreed. The two found some sleeping mats on the floor a short walk away, and proceeded to lie down in separate mats, covering themselves with the slightly tattered blankets.

Falcon was about to drift off to sleep amidst the sound of the rain tapping the rock ceiling of the cavern and the dying flames beneath the cauldron when he heard Lucina sighing, sounding somewhat anxious. "Can't sleep?" He asked her.

"I'm just...a little worried about the days ahead of us," she answered him. "I know you'll do what you can to keep both of us safe, but... what'll happen when we run out of supplies?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there." He sat up for a bit and made eye contact with her. "I think when we do reach that point, however, we'll stop by Termina to restock. Maybe even say hello to an old friend of mine there, too."

"Termina..." Lucina mused. "Is it...safe there, though?"

"Of course," the Captain clarified. "We don't have to worry about an imposing moon hanging over us, threatening to destroy us in three days. Young Link took care of that."

"I can imagine," Lucina said with a slight chuckle. Feeling calmer, she yawned and lay back down. "Good night, Captain."

"Good night, Lucina." He lay back down himself and let the sounds around him lull him into a deep slumber.

... 

"I'm sorry, Jody. It's because I love you that I want you to be safe...and that's why we can't be together anymore."

"Captain...? Please, don't do this..."

"I'd rather see you happier with someone else, than lose you... Please, forgive me." The Captain walked away from the brown haired woman, who looked like she was about to cry. Deep down, he felt the urge to cry too, but held it back.

Time seemed to pass in the blink of an eye and he saw her in the streets once again, in the arms of another man. A slightly bittersweet smile graced his face as he was relieved to see her moving on and loving someone else. However...

"Will I ever find my own happiness...?"

"For my father...!"

"That voice..." He turned around as the surroundings seemed to change to that familiar arena from that day. Within a few seconds, he saw Lucina dashing toward him, about to swipe at him with her sword, again just like that day. However, when she was about to attack him again...

"Auggghhh!" She collapsed to the ground in pain.

"Lucina!?!" He was stunned at the sight before him as the surroundings changed to the hospital room he visited her in. She was now lying in the hospital bed, clad in the customary gown, tears
streaming down her face.

"Captain...can I ask you a favor?"

"Yes?"

This isn't how the conversation went that day... He thought.

"Please...promise that you'll never leave me..."

"I..." The Captain hesitated.

"I need you more than you think...Captain...Captain?"

"Captain!"

"Ah?!" He awoke to see Lucina squatting down by him. "Agh...must have been a dream..."

"I guess so," the Exalt conceded. "You kept murmuring my name..."

"Did I...?" Falcon mumbled, almost dazed. Regaining his grasp on reality, he got up and said, "Well, it doesn't matter now. Let's go...Fiora's waiting for us."

"Indeed." The two left the cave, and headed toward Fiora who was waiting at the statue.

"Okay, so, you guys ready?" Fiora asked the two Smashers, who then nodded. Smiling, she said, "Okay, great. Riki and I prepared this for you." She handed the Captain a rather large looking sack, but much to Falcon's surprise, it was rather light.

"What all is in this?" He asked the Hom girl.

"You've got...some first aid supplies, climbing implements if you ever need them, some rations, stuff to build a makeshift shelter with if you ever need to, and anything else you may need to make your travels easier and safer."

"Thanks, Fiora," Lucina said, walking over to her friend and shaking her hand.

"Anytime.""

"Say, did you get to tell Shulk? And everyone else at Smash City?"

"Of course," Fiora confirmed. "They're all wishing you the best, and will wait for your return. And know that Chro - I mean, your father is very proud of you."

Lucina felt happy tears well up in her eyes. He was right...everyone does care. Wiping them away, she declared, 'I'll do my very best, and come back stronger than ever.'

"That's the spirit!" Fiora chimed. "I wish you two the best, and I hope to see you in Smash City one day!"

"Same here," the two called out in unison. They waved Fiora goodbye before setting off.

"So...decided where you want to go next?" The Captain asked the swordwoman.

"I'll let you know when I get there," she answered him.

As they walked off, Falcon looked to the sky for a moment and wondered, But still...what could
Chapter End Notes

So first off, unintentional Mario Odyssey reference with the Cappy, but you're welcome. :P

Second, let's address the elephant in the room. It's been almost FOUR years since I updated this. My original vision for how the events would turn out varied a lot, first with Snake not returning as Smash 4 DLC, I wasn't sure what to do. Then, Ultimate happened, and EVERYONE IS HERE! I was happy to see not just Snake, but EVERYONE ELSE returning. Of course, Mecha-Fiora is now a part of Shulk's Final Smash, but with Chrom being now also playable AND still in Robin's Final Smash and Victory Animations, I have some hope for my cyborg daughter(TM). I may still do the whole "some cameos from future characters I'd like to see" thing too, especially since I have a feeling DLC will last a lot longer this time around.

Oh, and there will be some MORE angst later on too, as well as... (°_°) but of course, that won't be the main focus. I want to deliver a Smash fanfiction, no, a contained Smash fanfic "multiverse" so to speak that will be different from the pack, and I hope I'll be able to achieve that.

So here's to a great rest of this fic! Look forward to it!

And lastly, I guess you could say Project X Zone 2 is canon to this fic, happening a few months before Ryu becomes a Smasher, despite the game coming out after Ryu was Smash 4 DLC. There's also a slight reference to Codename STEAM, in which Marth, Ike, Robin and Lucina guest appear in, but it's just a fleeting nod. In that game, Lucina uses a crossbow (I think she also uses it in PXZ2, not sure)
Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 6 - By Your Side

It had been several days since Captain Falcon and Lucina left Gaur Plain to train across other worlds, with the supply sack Lucina's friend Fiora gave them. The two had trained across various worlds, and to their surprise, the supplies lasted longer than they expected, a whole week to be precise. It was thanks to Lucina's survival skills that they were able to stretch their supply. Of course, by this moment in time, their supply had finally run out. As promised, they decided to head to the town of Termina to restock and see where to go from there.

"So...this is where you said we'd restock and say hello to that 'old friend' of yours, right?" Lucina asked her trainer.

"Yup," the Captain nodded. "Welcome to Clock Town, right in the heart of Termina."

"Wow..."

The town was much like the kind of town Lucina would expect to see in her world, but some details were also a bit different. The two stood just outside the doors that led to the underground waterways. Towering behind them was a giant wooden clock that did not have Roman numerals like a regular clock tower, but instead an outer rim that moved every second clockwise, causing the image in the center to shift every full cycle. Right before them was a marketplace area of sorts, sprawling with citizen activity.

"Where could he be...?" Falcon murmured, trying to scan the crowd for any trace of his old friend. Within a few seconds, he spotted them.

"Link! Over here!"

"L-Link?!" Lucina was confused at first as to why Link would be here of all places, and why the Captain referred to him as an "old friend". In a few moments, however, everything became clear to her.

"Hi Captain! Long time no see! Who's the lady with you?"

Noticing the childish boy's voice coming from below her line of sight, Lucina looked down and saw...Link. Except, he was a lot younger, close to Ness and Lucas's age, maybe even younger than that. He wore a child-sized green tunic and held a wooden carving for a shield, with a circular
"Lucina, meet Young Link," the Captain introduced her. "Although technically, he's just the Link from this timeline. He used to be a participant in the Smash tournaments, long before you joined."

"I see..." Lucina murmured. Squatting down to meet his gaze, she asked the younger Link, "I'm guessing you haven't been called back for any tournaments yet?"

"Seems that way, lady," Young Link answered her. "I miss everyone...Ness, Peach, the older me, Zelda, Pikachu...and even the Captain here. He's been like a father figure to me."

"Heh, it's true..." the Captain admitted, making a gesture that looked like he was scratching the back of his head somewhat bashfully. "I've...never had the chance to settle down and start a family, especially given my career outside of Smash. So, guiding him and hearing him out on things...I'm glad I can fill that role in his life. He's in many ways like a son to me."

"A son...?" Lucina pondered. "H-how old are you, Captain?"

Pausing for a moment, failing to see immediately how that question was relevant, he answered, "I'm 37...why do you ask?"

"T-thirty-seven?!" Lucina gasped. "How long have you even been...at your career, anyway?"

"I'll...tell you some other time," the Captain trailed off. "I don't wanna discuss it in front of the little one here. It might get too...dark for him."

"I understand..."

"Hey, lady," Young Link asked the Ylissean. "How old are you?"

"...I'm twenty-one," she answered him. "Why do you ask...Link?" Lucina couldn't shake the feeling of how weird it was to call Young Link as just "Link".

"I finally get to have a 'mommmy!'" Young Link cried, jumping in joy.

"M-m-m-m-m...MOMMY?!!" Lucina shouted, covering her face with her hands in embarrassment. "L-listen, most women my age aren't even... 'mommies' yet...and I'm just the Captain's training partner. T-that's all."

"Oh...I see, lady...sorry to bother you." Young Link looked down, a bit dismayed.

"It's no worries. I can still be your friend," she consoled him, uncovering her face and patting him on the shoulder. "By the way, my name is Lucina."

"Loo-shie-na?" Young Link asked, tilting his head to the side.

Giggling, Lucina lifted the cap off of Young Link's head and playfully mussed up his hair. "You'll get it eventually, sweetie."

"Heh, you're sure good with kids..." The Captain complimented his protégé. "I was more his babysitter than anything to be honest, trying to make sure he didn't do anything stupid."

"Hey! I wasn't..." Young Link griped, glaring irritably at Falcon and puffing his cheeks.

"It was for your safety, young man," Falcon said in a slightly scolding tone.
"Heheheh..." Lucina couldn't help but giggle at the exchange. "But you're right, Captain. I guess I get it from caring for my little brother, Morgan. Can't believe he's sixteen already..."

"Yeah, you mentioned him not so long ago," the Captain recalled.

_I also saw him that day when your family visited you when you were recovering...I didn't want to interrupt that. You deserved to have a peaceful reunion with your family..._

"...Captain?" Lucina asked Captain Falcon, noticing him looking lost in thought again.

"...Nothing," he reassured her. "Anyway, little one, we came here to stock up and look for some more areas to train."

"Well, why didn't ya say so?" Young Link answered him, grinning confidently. "I'll show you where you can get some goods, and some great places to train too!"

"Lead the way," Lucina told the young boy.

As Young Link led the two around Clock Town, Lucina couldn't help but take her surroundings in, feeling a great sense of wonder. Her trainer and some of the more veteran Smashers may have visited Clock Town countless times, so to them it was probably no big deal. But to Lucina, any new world she discovered for the first time left her awestruck - she was much like her friend Fiora in that regard. The way the morning sun gave the clouds in the sky a rose hue and the adobe walls a similar glow; the poster on one of the walls that appeared to be advertising an up and coming Zora songstress's concert; a pair of twin girls practicing some lithe, graceful dance moves; and the exquisite stained glass patterns on the shop doors.

"Hey, don't get too distracted, now," the Captain advised her. "I think...one of the training exercises I have planned for you will involve you improving your focus."

"Okay..." she conceded. "You're right...I do need to focus better. But just now...I guess I can't help myself."

"Heh..."

After Young Link led them to the central marketplace, he gave them a supply of Rupees he had been saving up. "Don't spend it in one place, now!"

"Heh, smart kid," Lucina complimented him. "What'll you be doing?"

"Oh, you know...just taking a stroll," Young Link answered her. "I won't be far though. If you need any more Rupees, just let me know!"

"Will do," the Captain told the youth, who waved happily before walking off. Shifting his attention to his protégé, he instructed her, "Alright, to make things easier, we'll split up and get any supplies we may need. Just purchase anything you think may help us, and meet me back here within 45 minutes."

"Got it."

Forty-five minutes passed, and the two met up again at the promised location. The Captain already stashed away everything he purchased in the sack Fiora gave them, while Lucina showed him her haul. Of all the items in the haul, one item in particular caught his eye.

"A...hair clip?" He took the hair ornament and carefully examined it. "Isn't it a bit...gaudy,
"Appearance wasn't really that important for me. It's the functionality, right? If there's ever a situation where I need to pin my hair up."

"I mean, I guess..." He put the hair clip and the rest of the items his training partner purchased in the bag. "Think you could wait here for a moment? I'll be right back. I just need to ask Young Link something."

"Something like...?" The Exalt asked, curiously.

"You'll see. I'll be back in a few." Within a few seconds, her trainer walked off.

"He's so secretive like this..." she mumbled. "Oh well..."

"Excuse me, miss...?" A voice from behind her called out to her. She turned around and saw a young woman who looked to be about her age, with short red hair and a rather simple dress.

"Yes? May I help you?" The Ylissean asked the young woman.

"I don't think I've ever seen you around these parts before. What brings you here?" The woman asked.

"Ah, well, it's my first time here, really," Lucina answered the woman, chuckling slightly. "My trainer brought me here to restock our supplies and continue our training."

"That explains you being with Mr. Falcon earlier," the woman concluded.

"You...know him?"

"Of course," the woman answered Lucina. "I know most of the people from Smash City. They come to visit every now and then."

"That explains it," the swordswoman said. "I'm new to Smash City, so...I'm afraid I'm a bit out of the loop when it comes to this sort of thing."

"It's no worries," the woman answered. "By the way, my name's Anju. What's yours?"

"You can call me Lucina," the future Exalt answered her. "Can you...tell me more about Termina as a whole...?"

"Oh, can I!" Anju beamed. "I'll tell you all I know..."

... Within a few minutes, the Captain returned.

"I see...this world is very interesting," Lucina commented after Anju told her all she knew.

"Oh, I see you've met Anju," Falcon said.

"Ah—?" Startled, Lucina slowly turned around. "Oh...you're back already?"

"Yeah," the Captain confirmed. "Ready for our next training exercise?"

"Sure." Turning to Anju, the blue haired swordswoman said, "I guess I'll see you later then, Anju."
"You two have fun!" Anju called out, waving happily.

As the two walked off, the swordswoman asked her trainer, "So...where to?"

"Just follow me," the bounty hunter answered her. "We won't go far, but..."

"But...?" She didn't much enjoy it when her trainer would trail off like this.

"You...might want to hold my hand."

"Your...what?!" The Exalt was surprised to hear such a suggestion. "What will everyone think?!!"

"Don't worry about it...don't you trust me?"

"I..." After a moment of hesitation, Lucina conceded. "F-fine." She held Captain Falcon's hand.

"And...you'll want to close your eyes. Wait until I tell you to open them again."

"Let me guess...it's a surprise?" Lucina asked, closing her eyes anyway.

"You...could say that."

The Captain led his protégé through town, her eyes closed all the while. Feeling a bit self-conscious about what people might think when they saw the two of them together, she drew slightly closer to her trainer.

...

"Okay, you can open your eyes now."

Lucina opened her eyes and saw a staircase before her. "Stairs...I don't understand."

"It's just up these steps," the Captain clarified.

"Alright..." The two headed up the stairs. Right before them was a gap separating the platform they stood on from another platform, followed by two circular wall decorations just before the roof of another building. Bridging the first gap was a narrow wooden beam. The scene at the plaza below them was more bustling and noisy than usual, with two jugglers performing their routine, and a Zora band with the songstress from the posters practicing.

"Okay, so this first exercise is to help you with focusing." Turning to his training partner, he said, "See if you can follow my lead, to my destination and back."

"What are you..." But before Lucina could finish her sentence, Falcon put the bag with the supplies down and immediately took off running across the narrow wooden beam effortlessly without losing his balance or shifting the beam's position, then dashing and leaping at an angle to the first circular wall decoration, then to the second, and finally to the roof just after that, then making his way back almost the same way he came, again almost flawlessly.

"Wow..." the swordswoman murmured, amazed.

"Now you try," Falcon offered, stepping aside. Lucina slowly inched toward the wooden beam, but hesitated.

"You're not...afraid of heights, are you?" The Captain inquired.
"O-of course not..." Lucina stammered, briefly staring irritably at her trainer before looking down and taking a deep breath. "Just calm myself...I can do this."

"That's the spirit."

"Here goes..." The Exalt slowly stepped onto the wooden beam, holding both her arms out to her sides in an attempt to maintain balance, and slowly inched across the beam. The wind blowing in her hair and the sights and noises from below proved to be too overwhelming for her senses, however, and she started to tip to the right.

"Oh nooooo!" She frantically waved her arms to try to regain her balance, but started to fall off the edge. Thankfully, before she could fall, the Captain immediately reached out his arm and grabbed her hand.

"I've got you!"

Wincing, Lucina slowly opened her eyes and looked up at the Captain. She held on to his hand as well as he slowly lifted her back up to safety.

"Just don't look down, okay?" He urged her.

As she was lifted up to the platform, she said, "Don't worry, I already told you, I'm not-" At that moment, she found herself looking down anyway. She started to feel dizzy and wavered slightly as she grunted, "Ngh..."

"Heh...maybe I shouldn't have said anything..." He pulled her closer to him and to safety, letting her catch her bearings once she was once again on terra firma.

"Hah...hah..." The swordwoman panted, slowly shaking her head, and the dizziness off with it. "O...okay. I think I'm ready to try again."

After helping her stand again, Falcon told her, "Remember, this lesson is about focus. You have a lot of visual and auditory stimuli around you, as well as the fear of falling. Don't let it overwhelm you."

"But...how?" Lucina asked Captain Falcon. "It's not like I can just...shut them all out."

"You can," He encouraged her. "You'd be amazed what you can do when you put your mind to something. Try to reimagine what I did earlier."

Turning around, Lucina looked at the scene before her, focusing on what was directly ahead, instead of below. In her mind, she was able to retrace the Captain's movements, almost replaying them in her mind like a film.

"I...think I have an idea of how you pulled it off," the future Exalt said, still looking ahead. "But...is it really as simple as just dashing across...?"

"Not quite, but you're close," The Captain told her. "Just...for a moment, close your eyes."

"Okay..." She closed her eyes.

"Now, imagine the scene before you again, except there's nothing below, just a bottomless pit." Feeling a sense of fear creep up her spine, Lucina apprehensively said, "I...fail to see how that will help."
"Trust me, it will," the Captain reassured her. "It's just the platforms, those circular extrusions on the wall, and nothing else. Now, envision what I was doing again, with all that in mind."

"Sure." With her eyes still closed, she was able to replay the memory of the Captain dashing across the wooden beam, but just as he was about to leap to the circular extrusions, the vision in Lucina's mind became like static.

"Ugh...I can't...keep my focus."

"Why?"

Even though she had created a mindscape free of all distracting visual stimuli, the auditory stimuli remained. "There's...too much noise. I'm losing my focus."

"Don't," he urged her. "Tune the noise out."

"How?!" The Ylissean pleaded. "I'm lost! I don't have that same finesse and level head in situations like this like you do!"

"Just breathe," the racer instructed her. "Focus on the sound of your breathing...and my voice."

After a few breaths, Lucina said, "I think the image is becoming clearer now..." before resuming her deep breathing.

"That's it...put aside all external distractions, focus on what you're going to do. Plan things out, take into mind all the other factors like the wind and keeping balance on the beam, as well as the trajectory of your jumps."

After a while, she was able to envision what she needed to do perfectly. "I've got it!" Her eyes flew open and she got into a dashing stance as she shouted, her eyes ablaze with the fire of determination, "Here I go!" She immediately dashed across the wooden beam, looking straight ahead the whole time while coordinating her steps to maintain her balance. She then made a running leap toward the first circular decoration, and after landing safely, leapt hands first onto the second one, pushing herself upright then toward the roof, landing feet first. She then without a moment's hesitation replicated her movements the way she came before landing safely on the starting platform.

"My God..." Falcon murmured, stunned.

Panting, Lucina wiped the sweat off her brow before making eye contact with the Captain. "Well? How'd I do?"

"I..." Snapping out of his trance, he answered her, "I never imagined you'd actually throw in that somersault. Very creative approach..."

"So...do I pass, or?"

"Yes," the Captain confirmed. "Of course. You pass with top marks. I think you've got focusing down pat now."

"That's great," Lucina said, leaning against a wall.

What's this feeling...? She thought, gazing at the clear blue sky. He...praised me...I don't know why but...it feels good. Is it so wrong of me to want to just...make him proud of me? I don't even know where this is coming from...
"Say, Captain," Lucina began, trying to take her mind off the strange psychological sensation she felt. "How is it that you maintain focus? When you did it, it seemed like second nature to you."

"That's easy," he answered her. "Whenever I'm participating in an F-Zero racing cup, there's no room in your mind for distractions. You have to act fast, read your opponents and anticipate anything that comes up. A split second can mean the difference between winning or losing...or in some cases, even life and death."

"D-Death?" Lucina gulped. "Doesn't that...scare you?"

*His bravery knows no bounds...* She mused.

"Like I said," Falcon reiterated, "I'm able to beat the odds and come out in one piece precisely because I maintain my focus."

*It doesn't help I actually HAD a brush with death, though...* The Captain thought to himself.

Noticing the Captain looking deep in thought again, she asked him, "Everything alright? You're doing that...thing again."

"Ah..." Snapping back to reality, the Captain shook his head. "It's fine. I was just...thinking of where to go next."

"I see..." Changing the subject, Lucina asked, "Say, that wooden beam, and that band playing down there...was that what you asked Young Link about?"

"Very perceptive, I see," Falcon complimented. "Yes, that was the reason I approached him. This training exercise wouldn't have been possible without all this."

"Ah."

"I think that perceptiveness will come in handy for our next exercise," the Captain said. "Ready?"

"Lead the way," Lucina replied.

"Heh, you're eager," Falcon teased her, patting her on the shoulder. "Just let me warn you...it's a bit of a walk."

..."Huff...huff..." Lucina crouched down after the long walk, gripping her aching thighs. "I hope we're close...wait..." She noticed the ground ahead of her looked like sand. She looked up and saw the coastline, waves rolling into the shore, and Young Link close to the water with a rowboat. "The...ocean?"

"Yup," the Captain said.

"What...don't tell me you're going to teach me how to swim or something?" The future Exalt quipped.

"Hahaha...no," the Captain chortled. "You...do know how to swim though, right?"

"Of course I do..." Lucina stated.

"Then you'll be fine. You might have to do a lot of swimming, even if it isn't the main focus of this exercise." Walking off toward Young Link and the rowboat, he beckoned his training partner,
"Follow me."

The two met up with Young Link at the edge of the shore. "Hey, little one. You remember where to take us, right?" The Captain asked Young Link.

"Mm-hmm!" Young Link nodded.

"Hold on," Lucina interjected. "You mean to tell me the conditions for the focus exercise weren't all you put Young Link up to?"

"Maybe..." Falcon hinted. "Come on, let's go."

... 

"Alright, we're here!" Young Link announced. The three had arrived at a platform above water with a ladder leading up to an elevated platform. "Though I wonder why you guys wanted to go to the Marine Research Laboratory..."

"We're not gonna go in per se," the Captain clarified, leaving the supply bag with Young Link. "You just wait here with the rowboat. We'll let you know when we're done." He disembarked and headed up the ladder, then called to Lucina, "This way."

"Okay." Lucina climbed carefully out of the rowboat and headed up the ladder. Once they were both on the upper platform, she asked Falcon, "What's this exercise for?"

"Good question," he answered her. "This is for being able to read your opponent's moves. Though, since we're surrounded by water, you may want to keep in mind what you learned for focus too."

"Got it."

"Now, draw your sword," the Captain instructed her. She obeyed, and the Captain himself got into his fighting stance.

"So...you just want me to anticipate your moves. Is that-" She began, before seeing the Captain lunge at her. She blocked most of his blows with her sword, but eventually lost her balance and fell on her bottom.

"Ugh..."

"First lesson - you must always be prepared. If you're up against a powerful enemy, good luck getting them to listen to you before beating you to a pulp." The Captain reached out his hand to help Lucina back up. "Second lesson: don't rely on blocking. You can't block everything thrown at you forever. Either you'll give under the pressure, or the enemy will exhaust themselves, at which point it's best to find an opening and counterattack."

"I...think I got it."

"Ready for round two?" The Captain asked, once again getting into his stance.

"Ready."

This time, Lucina focused on the Captain's movements as he lunged at her, dodging as many as she could. She tried attacking him; however, he just as swiftly dodged out of her way.

*How strange...* Lucina thought. *This is almost like...the first time we fought...*
She tried to attack him again, but he blocked the blow with his wristcuffs, and kicked her Falchion out of the way, the arm holding the sword flying up in response.

_No...how nostalgic. This is exactly how we fought before..._

Struggling to regain her bearings, she noticed energy building in the Captain's fist. "Falcon..."

"Ah!" She quickly dodged out of the way, before realizing at the last second that she was at the edge of the platform.

"W-w-whooaaa!" Lucina cried, waving her arms frantically before unceremoniously falling into the ocean below with a splash.

"...Lucina?" He called out. Within seconds, his training partner surfaced, her Falchion still held in her other hand.

"Don't look at me like that. It's not easy swimming and wielding the Falchion at the same time."

She swam to the lower platform, hoisted herself up, and climbed the ladder again after squeezing the excess water out of her hair.

When she got back on the upper platform, Falcon told her, "You're getting there. I noticed you were reading my movements after a while, and you seem to have dodging down. However, try to remember what I said about finding an opening. It's not exactly good to dodge forever, either."

"I see..."

"And also, keep in mind your surroundings. You're lucky we're out at sea for this."

"I guess..." Lucina agreed, not wanting to think about how the situation could have been different. "But...how can I distribute my focus?"

"Remember the training earlier?" Falcon reminded her. "Just like you can focus on one thing and filter everything else out, you can adjust your focus on the fly too, according to the situation. Divide your attention between my attacks and your surroundings as the situation demands it. Give it a try."

"Alright... I'm ready."

"Here I come...!"

This time, Lucina knew exactly what to do. When the Captain moved in, she swiftly dodged, immediately shifting her attention from him to her surroundings, making sure she didn't misstep and fall into the ocean again, then back to him when she determined she was in a safe position. When he attacked again, she blocked the blow with enough force to make him lose his balance, then elbowed him, causing him to fall on his bottom.

Pointing the tip of her sword at him, Lucina declared confidently, "I win."

"Heh...you sure do."

Lucina put away her Falchion, and this time extended her hand to help the Captain up.

"You passed...again," the Captain said with a smile. "Congratulations."

"Thank you..." Lucina replied.
He's praising me...again. There's that feeling again... she thought, feeling her heart skip a beat. She couldn't help but notice how genuine and comforting his smile was, and she felt a bit warm inside.

That...smile...what's coming over me? She held her hand to her chest, closing her eyes as a soft, dreamy smile graced her face. I don't know why, but hearing those compliments and kind words from him, and seeing him smile so genuinely...it makes me happy. No...this feels like...it's more than just happiness...

"Um...Earth to Lucina?" The Captain tried to get her attention. "You didn't accidentally drink some of the sea water, did you?"

"Wha-!?" Startled, Lucina broke out of her daydream. "Of course not...I was just...thinking. And yes, I know how ironic it is since I was asking if you were okay when you seemed lost in thought earlier..."

Hahaha...don't be silly, Lucina. We're just training partners...it's impractical to feel this way for him, she thought.

"Shall we head back, then?" She suggested.

"Yeah...I'm a bit tired, myself," Falcon agreed. "Is it...okay to head back when you're soaking wet, though?"

"Oh...right," Lucina said. "It'll be fine. I just wanna relax for a bit by the shore and let the sun dry me off."

... After the three arrived at the shore, Young Link asked them, "Wanna head back to Clock Town now?"

"Not just yet," Falcon answered the youth, receiving the supply bag back from him. "Lucina fell into the ocean during our training, and she wants to dry off a little." Turning to his training partner, he asked her, "Are you sure about this, though? Won't the sea water, I don't know...damage your clothing?"

"It should be fine," Lucina reassured him. Turning to Young Link, she asked, "Is there at least some kind of laundry service in Clock Town?"

"There is, actually," Young Link replied. "When you check in at the inn, you can ask for some laundry services overnight."

"Okay." Glancing at a circle of rocks nearby and a pile of wood, she suggested, "Why don't we rest for a bit over there?"

"Sure," Young Link said. "Want me to light a fire for you?"

"You're too sweet, thanks," she complimented him with a smile.

... After striking flint rocks together a couple of times, Young Link kindled a spark that set the small pile of sticks ablaze, creating a decently sized campfire. Lucina sat on the sandy ground and drew slightly closer to the fire, letting the heat dry off her body as much as possible. Captain Falcon and Young Link sat against a couple of rocks.
"You drying up there well enough, Lucina?" The Captain asked her.

"Yeah..." She answered him. "Don't worry, I'm used to this."

"I can tell..."

After she felt the sun and the fire's heat dried her off enough, Lucina leaned back against a nearby rock and lay her legs flat. "I've almost forgotten how nice it sounds..."

"How nice...what sounds?" The Captain questioned, perplexed.

"The sound of the tides rolling in to shore," she answered, calmly. "It's so relaxing...that, combined with the faint crackling sound of the campfire...I just find it really soothing, two contradicting things in perfect, serene harmony. Back in my world, I didn't get to know peace like this that often..."

"Ah..." The Captain said. "My world is mostly technological and cut off from the wild, so I guess I can see where you're coming from."

"Is that so?" Lucina asked, giggling slightly.

"It is."

"Well, I guess there's not much to do now except just...take it easy and enjoy this moment." She tilted her head up to the sky, the wind blowing gently in her hair, and closed her eyes. She did feel a lot calmer and relaxed, no doubt, but all of a sudden, she was reminded of what Fiora said about her and the Captain together.

Fire and water...the sun and the moon...light and dark...huh. Two opposite forces...in harmony? Is...this what you were trying to tell me, Fiora...?

"You're not gonna take a nap here, are ya?" Young Link asked Lucina.

Opening her eyes, Lucina answered him, "No, not really. I still have energy to spare. I just want to relax for a bit...it's been a lot of rigorous training."

"Ah, okay," Young Link said. "Well, I'm heading back to Clock Town. Meet me in front of the gate you guys departed from. I wanna show you something when you get back. And..."

"And...?" Falcon asked.

"And...I'd suggest you guys not stay out here too late. Maybe head back when the sun starts to set. It's not very safe here at night..."

"Wasn't planning on it anyway," Captain Falcon reassured the youth. "We'll see you soon."

"Okay!" Young Link ran off.

Looking up at the sky, the Captain said, "You're right, Lucina. This really is soothing..."

... The sun eventually started to set, and like Young Link suggested, Lucina and Captain Falcon headed back to Clock Town. By the time they arrived, night had already fallen, and surely enough, Young Link was there, waiting for them.
"Oh, you guys are here," Young Link said. "Hope you guys aren't too tired!"

"We're fine," Lucina answered him. "Didn't you say you had something to show us?"

"Yup!" Young Link nodded, sounding chipper. "Follow me!"

Within less than a minute, Young Link led his two friends to the central square, where the twin dancers Lucina saw earlier stood with musicians behind them, and an audience before them, sitting on the ground. Within the audience, Lucina also spotted Anju from earlier, along with a tall, purple haired man she hadn't seen before. "You guys are just in time for the big show!" Young Link announced.

"Big...show?" Lucina asked curiously.

"I taught the Rosa Sisters this dance," Young Link bragged, giggling slightly. "Just wait and see!"

The audience clapped as the Rosa Sisters gave an introductory bow. Within seconds, the musicians started playing their song - a hypnotic, ethereal tune with exotic and orchestral instruments and a mesmerizing beat. When the beat began to drop, the sisters began to sway in an almost unreal harmony, their movements seeming to mirror each other.

"Wow..." Lucina murmured in wonder.

"They really are the picture of perfect harmony," the Captain commented.

The sisters' dance consisted of mostly lithe, graceful arm movements and the slow, somewhat sensual swaying of their bodies. Every once in a while they would twirl a short distance from each other, and strike graceful poses by holding their arms out to their sides.

"It's like their movements are...lighter than air itself," Lucina said, utterly mesmerized by the sight before her. "What do you think, Captain?...Captain?"

What she saw was slightly surprising to her, though not exactly unpleasant. The Captain appeared to be mimicking the sisters' dancing movements, his arms swaying slowly and hypnotically, his hips and torso occasionally swaying to the melody ever so gracefully. It was strangely captivating to see a man of his build moving in such a fluid manner.

"What...are you doing...?" Lucina inquired, still watching him move so fluidly.

"I have one last training assignment for you today," Falcon answered her, still moving his arms slowly and gracefully as if through water. "Read my movements, and try to mirror them while maintaining perfect sync with my own movements."

"How...?" She asked, finding herself unconsciously tapping her foot to the beat.

"Close your eyes...let the rhythm and melody dictate your movements."

When the melody picked up again, Lucina found herself moving in the same lithe, fluid manner, perfectly mirroring her trainer. The audience's attention was drawn to them as the duo's perfectly synchronized, graceful movements lined up with the beat and rhythm. Every swaying of their arms and bodies, every elegant pose they struck, every airy twirl, was like they were moving as one. As the song wound down, they moved their arms in a hypnotic manner once again, and performed a half-twirl before...seemingly embracing each other. At that moment, the audience, followed by the
dancers and even the musicians themselves, burst into a core-shaking applause.

"Such movements...like the tides of the ocean or the gentle breeze...so soft!"

"It's like they were moving as one!"

"I've never been so mesmerized..."

The duo, meanwhile, was panting, holding their embracing pose, their faces drenched in sweat, completely stunned by the accolades.

Such thundering applause...I can feel it rocking my very core... The Captain thought, almost dazed. His partner couldn't tell, but his eyes were closed behind the visor. I must admit...I'm not used to attention being showered on me quite like this. It feels so...alien. But...I wouldn't call it unpleasant.

Her eyes also closed, Lucina's mind was swimming. This day...has been one surprise after another...the way we moved...it really did feel like we were on the same wavelength. I...still feel light as air...like I'm just drifting...

Eventually, the applause died down, replaced by the sound of chattering citizens as they went about the rest of their day. Catching her breath, Lucina was the first to open her eyes. "Captain...?"

"Y-yes?" Falcon asked, still a bit out of it.

"I can't believe what just happened...it's like..."

"We were moving as one, right?" He seemed to read her mind. "Yeah...this exercise was to help with your teamwork...to be in perfect sync with your partner."

"I...see..." Lucina panted. At that moment, she realized something. "Hold on a moment..."

"Hmm?" The Captain slowly opened his eyes, though again Lucina couldn't tell from behind his visor. She looked down, and he followed suit.

Their bodies appeared to be pressed together closely above the waist.

"Ah-" They both seemed to gasp at the sight, then slowly looked back up at each other's faces. There was a pause, and then...

"Ah?!" The Captain shouted. "Whaaaaaaaaaa-?" Lucina cried. They both immediately released each other from their embrace and backed away rapidly, shocked.

"I...uh..." The Captain's heart was racing faster than the Blue Falcon itself.

"Uuuuuuuuhhh..." Lucina was trying not to panic. Then, they both seemed to blurt out the following at almost exactly the same time:

"It's not what you think-"

They paused, flabbergasted that they would say the same thing in unison. They opened their mouths again, but the words that spilled out were once again at the same time:

"It was just a reflex-"

And again...
"Don't look at me like that-"

They immediately tried to think of something the other probably wouldn't say at the same time, but they once again shouted in unison:

"SETTLE IT IN SMASH!"

And again.

"SERIOUSLY?!!"

Their almost uncanny perfect sync was broken by the sound of a couple chuckling.

"Oh...hello Anju," Lucina said, recognizing the woman standing before her. "Who's he?"
Meanwhile, the Captain murmured to himself, "Heh...I think that exercise worked a little too well..."

"Oh, you're...what was your name again? Sorry, I'm always like this when meeting someone new..." Anju apologized.

"No worries...I'm Lucina. Captain Falcon is training me."

"Ah, yes, Lucina," Anju recalled. "Anyway, this is my husband, Kafei," she said, introducing the tall, purple haired man standing next to her.

"Your...husband?"

"Yes, we got married at the Carnival of Time a few months ago," Anju clarified. "Before the official wedding ceremony, there was a little...ritual to officiate our vows. The night before our wedding, we officiated our vows by combining my Moon Mask with his Sun Mask."

"The result is as you see here," Kafei said, holding up a pearl-like mask. "This is the Couple's Mask."

"Wow..." Lucina murmured. "Is this...what couples usually do before a wedding, though?"

"Heh, probably not," the Captain interjected with a chuckle. "It's just how Termina works, apparently."

"Heh...I see." Turning to Anju, she said, "I guess I can see the romantic value of such a ceremony, though. The symbolism behind it...two opposites, who are also two halves of a whole."

Fiora's words once again echoed in Lucina's mind, particularly the comment about being each other's other half.

Why...am I thinking that...? Fiora...what have you done. I'm taking your words to heart now, it seems...

"When you put it that way, it does sound more romantic," Anju said. "I just never really thought about it that much."

"As for you two," Kafei began, "If I didn't know any better, I'd say that with the way you two were moving, and the tender embrace at the end...I'd almost mistake you two for the perfect couple."

"C-couple?!!" Lucina hid her face in her hands.
"Listen, Mr. Kafei," the Captain said, laughing nervously. "W-we're not a couple at all. This is just...part of our training. We got...a bit carried away. That's all."

"If you say so..." Kafei giggled.

"Hey, Kafei!" Young Link called out to the happily married man.

"Oh, hey Link," Kafei waved at the youth.

"You're big now?! I hadn't seen you since I stopped the moon from falling...you were my size then!"

"Silly Link," Kafei teased. "Have you forgotten? I was technically always 'big'...it was just that Skull Kid put me under a curse. When you saved Termina, the curse was lifted, and I returned to my older self."

"Ah, right..." Young Link scratched the back of his head, a bit embarrassed that he forgot.

"It's no big deal," Anju said. "Why don't you three stay at the Stock Pot Inn tonight? It'll be on the house just this once."

"Sounds great," Lucina said. "Say...think you could offer some laundry services for my outfit? I kinda fell into the ocean earlier today."

"Of course!" Anju replied. "I'll offer that at a discount today. When you arrive in your room, I'll leave a basket for you to leave your clothes in. They should be clean the next morning."

"I'll cover the bill," Young Link offered. "How much, Anju?"

"Just 30 Rupees," Anju clarified.

"I'll make it 60," Young Link offered again. "I'm sure the Captain could use it too."

"H-hey-" The Captain began, before realizing Young Link's generosity. "Now that you mention it, I guess I could benefit from this too..."

"Alright, then," Lucina said. "Lead the way, Anju."

"Okay." Waving to Kafei as she walked off with the others, she called out to her husband, "I'll see you at home, dear!"

... After arriving at the Stock Pot Inn, Anju checked the three into separate rooms. As promised, the Captain and Lucina had laundry baskets waiting for them in their rooms. Young Link walked into his room right away, but before the two training partners entered their rooms, Lucina asked the Captain, "Hey...is it ok if I choose where to go tomorrow?"

"Of course," the Captain said. "Just let me know. I've already given you the essential lessons for today."

"Sounds good," Lucina nodded. "Good night, Captain."

"Good night, Lucina." A tender smile graced his face again before he opened the door to his room. Lucina did the same.
After closing the door behind her, she disrobed completely, putting her clothes in the basket. Noticing the robe laid out on the bed before her, she changed into it. After a few seconds, she heard a knock at the door.

"It's Anju. I'm here to collect your clothing for the laundry..."

"Okay." Opening the door, Lucina handed Anju the basket with the clothes she wanted washed. "It'll be ready by tomorrow morning," Anju said, taking the basket and walking off. After she left, Lucina closed the door and climbed into bed.

*Such an eventful day...* she thought. *I wonder how the next few days will go...*

She tried to close her eyes, and almost immediately saw his face flash into her mind.

_Huh...?_ She briefly opened her eyes again.

_Why did I...?_ Feeling drowsiness overtake her, she thought, *I'm sure it's nothing...* before drifting into a peaceful slumber.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Ok so first off, those dances? It was inspired by an Overwatch SFM video I saw once called "The Architech's Aesthetic", especially the song. And I guess, Mandala Dances in general. Look up the former video when you can, it's really awesome. Coincidentally also, Princia Ramode's Master Class video in F-Zero GX is also called, "My Princia, Mandala Dance” and maybe a bit of inspiration was drawn from that too.

Also, next chapter...if you wanted some hot stuff, you're gonna get it (°_°) They're technically not gonna do the sex just yet, but...hohoho, you're just gonna love it. (°_°) Stay tuned!
I hope y'all are ready...(° ﾟвяз (^_^)

For some much awaited lewdness~ and also fluff and a bit of feels.

Content warnings for this chapter: nudity, lots of suggestiveness, SOMEWHAT LEMONY-LIME AT THE START. Or as the Youths™ call it nowadays, smut. It's not too explicit though...I hope. This first sexy dream scene may well be THE hottest thing I've ever written, and even then I'm not that confident oof...

Either way, I hope you guys enjoy... (° ﾟвяз (^_^)

also, for the areas the two are traversing later, as well as the Stock Pot Inn itself...I kinda took some liberties, it may not be accurate to the actual levels' layout in MM.

Title based on "Easier to Fade" by A Himitsu feat. Madi Larson

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 7 - Easier to Fade

That night, Lucina had an unusual dream, even for her.

It wasn't a nightmare, in fact it was quite the opposite. A rather…intimate dream.

Both she and the Captain were in some sort of forest at night, fireflies illuminating the surroundings around them, the trees themselves appearing to be bioluminescent. The tranquil surface of the lake just ahead shimmered with the reflection of the firefly lights. She wasn't sure of the circumstances that led to her situation in the dream, but her dream self appeared to be under a trance, drawing closer to him, reaching her hand out to touch his face, and simply murmuring, "Captain...I need you. I want you." She could even feel that desire in her own body, wanting to be held and touched by him.

"I know," he replied. Sweeping her into his embrace and caressing her face, he whispered, "There's more ways to express this than just words, you know...consider this...one last lesson."

Lucina's dream self nodded, and all of a sudden she felt his lips on hers, his tongue sensually probing the inside of her mouth. She closed her eyes, welcoming it all, sighing and feeling light headed at the pure longing and desire she felt in the kiss, savoring the fact that the texture of his lips was the perfect balance of rugged and soft. She had barely even realized when he had divested her of her outerwear until his lips started trailing down her body, from her neck right down to between her small bra-cupped breasts, his lips feeling ever so warm on her bare skin that was exposed to the chilly night air.

"Mmm..." she moaned. Her heart beat faster as she felt her whole body coming alive at his touch. This was so forbidden, and yet...it only felt right. In that moment, she only wanted nothing more
than to be lost in him. It was only then she realized she was pinned against what she could only
guess was a tree, so she freed her arms to try and strip him of his garments, his own pleasurable
moans sounding like music to her ears, stroking his exquisite muscular body as more of his skin
was exposed, feeling every sinew, as his right hand ran its fingers through her silky indigo hair,
eventually shifting its attention to the curvature of her spine, its loving caresses setting her very
being aflame with passion. One thing led to another and before they knew it, they were both lying
on the dirt floor, baring all to each other.

Having never actually seen his face, the Captain's face was still concealed in this deliciously sinful
dream of hers, even though the rest of his bared body looked absolutely stunning. She for some
reason felt no shame being naked before him, either. She welcomed him as he leaned in for another
kiss, and slowly, gently became one with her. There was a slight pain at first, but afterwards she
only felt sheer bliss as he slowly filled her to the brim, that large, warm, pulsating feeling inside her
where their bodies joined making her feel complete. She couldn't help but let out a deep, ecstatic
sigh at this feeling, as she could feel his breath on the most sensitive spot on her neck all the while.

Gods... Her dream self thought, her mind clouded by the purest bliss. How is it...that you just feel
so good inside me...?!

Everything else seemed to go by in a pleasant blur...their sensual, somewhat undulating
movements...their rising body heat...the way his left hand caressed her shapely hips before
gripping her left thigh, eventually wrapping his arm around her back...the way her lips would
occasionally travel to the sensitive spot on his neck, eliciting a deep moan from him, before
meeting his lips again, their sighs mingling between kisses...the way his right hand delicately slid
up her right arm until their hands met and their fingers interlaced...how she could feel all of him
pressed against all of her, feeling every divine inch...their vocalizations gradually increasing in
frequency and pitch...and finally...

"Mmmmh...aaah..." She moaned, a bit loudly.

"H-how strange...it feels...like I'm floating..." he sighed softly, his voice sounding calm but
blissful.

Lucina shut her eyes as a rapturous haze overcame her mind, a powerful but tender feeling pulsing
throughout her whole being. She had never felt anything this good in her whole life. Shuddering
and sighing, she reached her left arm to the sky as she felt the Captain holding her closer,
shuddering as well and moaning softly. After a while, her arm collapsed and she wrapped it around
his back.

Catching their breath, they gazed at each other again longingly after regaining their bearings, softly
and affectionately touching each other's faces, and went in for one last kiss before...

...

"W-Whaaa-!" Lucina awoke with a shout, her heart racing, her cheeks a bright red. She felt utterly
embarrassed, but also strangely turned on by her dream, surprised her subconscious would even
have such thoughts.

"What is wrong with me? Why am I dreaming of such...indecencies?!" she exclaimed. "He is my
personal trainer, not my...my...!" She buried her face into her hands, a great sense of
embarrassment weighing on her. "It felt...real, too...it doesn't help that I'm practically naked under
this robe."

But...you know, she thought, he is quite good looking, he does have a nice physique...and that
"No, no, no!" She cried, shaking her head rapidly. "Naga help me..." she muttered, not sure what to think about her sudden feelings. Seeing as how the sun hadn't rose yet, she lay back down and murmured, "From nightmares to lewd dreams...how ironic..."

Looking up at the ceiling, she said to herself, "I wish I understood why I'm developing these...feelings. I'm...sure he doesn't even feel even close to the same way about me..." Within a few minutes, she managed to drift back to sleep.

...The sound of the Cuccoos crowing woke Lucina up as sunlight shone through the curtained windows. Slowly sitting up, she murmured, "I'm surprised I was able to get some sleep after...that." She yawned, stretched, and climbed out of bed. She was ready to freshen up when she heard a knock at the door.

*Is that...? ...No. Can't be him this early...* She called out, "Yes? Who is it?"

"It's me, Anju," Anju called from the other side of the door. "Your clothes are ready."

"Okay, good," the Exalt said, opening the door.

"Here you go," Anju said, handing Lucina a basket of clothing.

"Wait a minute..." Lucina murmured, apprehensively. Examining the basket's contents, she realized the clothing was much too large for her - it was more suited for a man. A more physically fit man.

"These...aren't mine," Lucina said, handing the basket back to Anju. "These must be the Captain's..."

"They are...?" Anju gasped. "Oh nooooo! I probably gave him yours by accident!"

"You...what?" Lucina began to imagine the Captain's reaction when finding her laundry basket delivered to him, and began to feel embarrassed.

"I-I'm so sorry! I have this habit of mixing up what belongs to my customers!" Anju panicked. Looking down the hallway, she consoled Lucina, "Well, at least you don't have to worry about him having your clothing. He doesn't have a basket there yet."

"Phew..." Lucina breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll be back in a bit with your clothes, then...Lucina, right?"

"You remembered," Lucina giggled. "I guess you're gonna give that basket of clothing to him then?"

"Yeah," Anju answered her. "Just sit tight, ok? I'm heading back to the Laundry Pool. I'll knock again when I have your clothes."

"Alright..." After Anju walked off again, Lucina closed the door and proceeded to freshen up in her suite's restroom. Within a few minutes, Anju returned with another knock.

"It's Anju...again," Anju called out. "I have them...for real this time."

"Okay, thanks."
After Lucina changed into her clothes, which were fully cleaned and dried and felt like new, she exited her room. Upon stepping out into the hallway, she saw Captain Falcon leaning against the wall.

"What took you so long...?" He asked her in a slightly teasing manner, a slightly smug grin on his face.

"I..." She felt her heart skip a beat upon seeing his face and hearing his voice again so soon, due to the dream she had earlier. Looking to the side, she answered him, "Anju...accidentally gave me your clothes."

"Ah...?!" The Captain let out a small surprised gasp, but quickly regained his composure. "Heh...that explains a lot. Young Link told me Anju is prone to mixing things up."

"Yeah..." Lucina chuckled nervously. *I guess I'd better not mention how he almost got my clothes...* She slowly looked at him, still feeling her heart subtly skip a beat upon seeing his face.

*Why am I feeling this way...? It's only intensified since yesterday...is it because I'm getting used to traveling with him? That I've spent several days with him? That we've been talking more, getting to know each other more...?*

"Is...something the matter, Lucina?" Captain Falcon asked the Ylissean, a trace of genuine concern in his voice.

"...N-nothing," Lucina stammered after a slight pause, looking down a bit and wiggling her left foot shyly. "I think I just have some...butterflies in my stomach. Maybe I'm just...nervous about training, still."

"Maybe," he said. "Or maybe you're just hungry. Young Link's treating us to breakfast downstairs."

"That'd be great, I'm in," Lucina chimed as she followed her trainer downstairs.

*But...to be honest, I think this feeling is due to something...other than nervousness or even hunger...but what? What could it be...?*

...After eating breakfast, the two training partners and Young Link exited the inn. "So, where to now?"

"Hmm..." Falcon pondered. "I was thinking of the Ikana region, but that place honestly gives me the creeps."

"Because of the graveyard...?" Young Link questioned, in a slightly teasing manner.

Catching on, Lucina decided to tease her trainer some more. "Don't tell me...the great Captain Falcon is afraid of ghosts...?" A smug grin crept up on her face as she continued, "Guess hanging around Luigi gave you the same phobia, huh..."

"K-knock it off, you two," the Captain stammered, somewhat irritated. "I just...feel really uneasy around graveyards for some reason..." His tone became more serious, somewhat pained, as he looked down, slightly grimacing.
"I guess it's something that affects him deeply..." Lucina thought. "Sorry..." She looked down, a bit regretful that her joke may have went too far. She was known for an off-beat sense of humor, but the last thing she wanted to do was offend someone.

"It's fine..." Falcon reassured her, his voice sounding compassionate but at the same time still a bit shaken up. "You...couldn't have known."

"If you say so," the Exalt replied, a bit relieved.

"But yeah, maybe it's best you guys not go there," Young Link said. "Especially at night..."

"What...happens at night?" Lucina asked, apprehensively.

"You definitely don't wanna be there at night," Young Link emphasized. "It's said that the spirits of the dead arise from their graves when night falls...sometimes you can hear the wails of the departed, too..." His voice became more ominous as he said those words.

Captain Falcon and Lucina gulped fearfully. "P-point taken..." Lucina stuttered. "A-anyway, I was thinking about heading to the mountains."

"The mountains?" Young Link inquired.

"It's...to test yourself against the elements, right?" Falcon asked his training partner, catching on to her plans. "Seems like a wise choice, and we're dressed warmly enough. I just hope it won't be too cold..."

"It shouldn't be," Young Link told him. "It's spring, so the snowfall is lighter. If it were winter, I'd advise against it. The blizzards in winter are brutal..."

"I can imagine," Lucina said, not wanting to actually imagine how harsh and biting the snowstorms would be in the winter months.

"You've got everything you need in that travel sack, right?" Young Link asked the Captain, glancing at the travel sack the man carried on his back.

"It should suffice," the Captain answered the youth. "Always come prepared, right?"

"Yup!" Young Link agreed with a grin.

As they walked off, Lucina briefly turned back to the youth. "And, um..." She began.

"Yeah, what's up?" Young Link questioned.

"Ah...sorry about...the Captain and I stealing the show from the Rosa Sisters last night..."

"Lucina, you don't have to..." Falcon tried to dissuade her.

"You kidding? They loved it!" Young Link cheered the Ylissean up. "They were moved to see their dance had inspired others!"

"Is that so?" The Captain questioned. "Although, if they're looking for a male dancer for future performances, I'm afraid I'll have to pass...heh."

"Hehehe..." Lucina giggled at the thought. Almost immediately, a somewhat alluring image of the Captain in slightly more revealing clothing, like the kind of clothing male dancers would wear in her world, and dancing in that same slow, fluid, somewhat seductive manner, crept into mind, and
she hid her face in her hands as she blushed.

*Why am I thinking of that now...!? Why is my mind even going there?* She felt her heart beat faster.

"Something the matter?" Falcon asked his training partner.

"Nothing..." Lucina reassured him, lowering her hands and looking at him. "Just...a bit nervous."

"I'll do my best to keep you safe," he comforted her. "Like I've been doing...don't you worry."

"Okay," she said with a nod. *I can't let these feelings for him show right now...whatever they are.* "We'll see you later then...Link."

"Okay!" Young Link called out as he waved. "I'll meet you guys back at the Smithy's house in Mountain Village later!"

"Mountain...Village?" Lucina asked.

"It's a house surrounded by a river. Can't miss it!" Young Link began to walk off on his own way. "Good luck, you two!"

...

An hour and a half had passed. Lucina and Captain Falcon were once again continuing their training, this time against the wildlife as well as against the snowy, cold landscape. Their synchronization exercise from the other day proved to be the most useful, as they synchronized their attacks and moved as one whenever the situation called for it. The lessons for maintaining one's focus and mindfulness of their surroundings was more utilized when it came to them traversing the terrain.

"You're doing excellent, Lucina," Falcon complimented her. "You're really putting what you learned into practice. Keep it up."

"Thank you, Captain," Lucina replied with a smile. Those encouraging words made her feel warm inside in spite of the frozen air around her.

*At least he's proud of me...he's noticing my improvements. It's a simple joy, but one I cherish,* she thought. Just then, she hunched over. "Ugh..."

"What's the matter?" The Captain asked, running to his partner's side.

She clutched her right shoulder with her left hand as her right arm, which wielded the Falchion, hung limply to the side. "My back...around the right shoulder blade...it feels so numb. Like something's...melting...and it's really annoying."

"Can I see?" He asked her.

"Okay..." She lifted her hand off the spot on her back.

Noticing her hunched posture, he commented, "Well, found one of the reasons. You've been maintaining that same posture as we fought. You should always keep your neck and back straight whenever possible." He gently straightened her up, one hand pressed against her back and the other on her stomach.

*He...touched me...?* Lucina thought. She didn't seem to mind him touching her to get her posture right, in fact...she welcomed it. Her heart began to race again.
"Want me to rub that spot on your back?" The Captain offered.

"If...you think it will help," Lucina obliged. She felt his hand travel up to the spot she was gripping in pain earlier, and then...

"Ah-?!" She gasped the minute he started massaging that spot in slow, careful, circular motions, her breath condensing into a fine mist in the cold air. Luckily, the gasp was soft enough for him not to notice. Within seconds, she closed her eyes, the way he massaged her making the ache and numbness evaporate into a pleasant sensation that got her blood pumping. She began to feel even warmer inside.

"Mmmm..." she began to moan, her voice sounding breathy, the fingers on her left hand curling up before relaxing, as a reaction to this amazing sensation. "That feels...r-really nice..." she sighed, a content smile gracing her face.

...He didn't hear that moan, did he...?

"Feels great, doesn't it?" Falcon asked, his voice sounding strangely sensual, though Lucina probably only interpreted it that way due to the sheer pleasure coursing through her veins at his delicate ministrations. "This should fix those muscles and nerves up right as rain. Just relax..."

"Okay..." she breathed, leaning back against him a bit more as he continued to rub her sore muscles.

_I could really...get used to this..._ she thought, her mind becoming foggier with the purest bliss as she relaxed even more at his touch, his other arm supporting her, her breathing settling into a steady, calm rhythm. Unfortunately for her, the exquisite feeling was cut short by a cold breeze blowing through, blowing her hair into her face.

"P-puh!" She spat, breaking free from the Captain's grip as she frantically tried to get the hair out of her face with her hands, the hand holding her Falchion dropping it in the snow. The Captain only chuckled and commented, "What happened to you feeling like you were on cloud nine a few seconds ago...?"

"Oh, stuff it!" Lucina retorted before bursting into giggles at how the chain of events all played out. The Captain couldn't help but do the same.

"Anyway, let's keep going," The Captain suggested. Lucina lifted the Falchion out of the snow, sheathed it, and followed him.

...After walking a bit further, Lucina found that same spot on her back bothering her once again. Clutching it, she muttered, "Dammit...not again."

"Lucina?" Captain Falcon called out to her, a short distance behind her.

Slowly turning around, she told him, "I guess...the pain hasn't fully subsided yet."

"Understandable..." The Captain said. "Though, please do keep in mind what I said about-" His sentence was cut short by what felt like a tremor in the ground.

"An earthquake?!" He gasped, struggling to maintain his balance.

Wobbling slightly at the tremors, Lucina said, "No...this doesn't feel like a typical earthquake...I
"This is...?" The Captain trailed off before focusing his senses. He could hear the what faintly sounded like ice cracking, slowly getting louder. It was only then he realized what was happening.

"Stay right where you are, Lucina!" He urged the blue-haired swordswoman. "Don't move a muscle, okay? I'm coming to get you!"

Lucina only looked on as time seemed to flow in slow motion, just like the incident back at Smash City. Captain Falcon backflipped away before dashing toward her, faintly leaping at the last second to scoop her up in his arms as she could feel the ground beneath her start to give way at that very moment. She could only hear her heart beating loudly in her ears as she looked down fearfully, snowflakes softly drifting by her field of vision. She was only a short distance above the ground when she saw it all crumbling away. She didn't have to look back to know they wouldn't make the jump. She only looked at her trainer once more with terror in her eyes before...

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"...Uhhh..." Lucina groaned, slowly coming to. She could feel herself laying in a large pile of snow, the chilling wind howling as it blew through the hollow hole in the mountain they fell through. It was then she realized that the snow was what saved her life.

"I'm...alive?" She murmured. Praise the gods... She slowly got up, a bit dizzy from the fall, the snow crunching beneath her feet as she stood. Once she gained her balance, she decided to look for her trainer. "Captain!...Captain?"

Within a few seconds, she heard terrified mumbling a short ways behind her. "Captain!?!" She turned around and ran to him, hoping he was safe.

Lying there in the snow was Captain Falcon, seeming terrified about something. Thankfully, he didn't have any major wounds on his body, and the travel sack was intact. However, the same couldn't be said for his mental state.

"I...was this close to dying...I don't want to...not like this...not again..." he slurred, trembling and holding his arms close to his chest, his face contorted into a frightened grimace.

"Captain...?" She asked, anxiously. He didn't seem to snap out of his almost catatonic fearful trance, so she gently placed her hand on his left shoulder. "It's me, Lucina. I'm here...I'm okay. We're both safe."

"L-Lucina...?" He stammered, slowly coming back to his senses. "I...I'm alive?"

"Would I be talking to you otherwise?" She quipped, giggling softly.

"I...guess not..." He slowly stood up, brushing the snow off his clothing and looking behind him before shuddering in horror. Lucina directed her gaze to where he was looking, and immediately saw why he was so terrified as her smile sank. Just a short distance behind him were sharp, tall rock formations jutting upward.

"That...could have been the end of either of us..." Lucina murmured timidly, holding her left hand to her mouth.

"You see why I was in a bit of a panic earlier," the Captain clarified, turning back to her, his
terrified shuddering breaths condensing in the icy air. "I...had a brush with death several years ago. It...really messed me up, and whenever I come *this* close to dying and I can't do anything to avoid it...I can't help it. Fear just...grips me."

"I see..." Lucina said solemnly. "I...guess that explains your uneasy feeling around graveyards as well..."

"Yeah," Falcon replied. "After my first incident, I could only think of one thing: *that could be me lying in that grave.*"

"It must have been tough..." Lucina tried to console him. *I guess I'd better not press further about that for now...* Looking up at where they fell from, the cloudy wintry daytime sky faintly lighting where they were, she said, "Anyway, there's no way we can get back up there, even with rope."

"True," the Captain said, slowly calming down. "Although, the fact this part of the mountain gave way suggests there's a series of hollow passages beneath. We should try to navigate and see if we can find a way back to the surface."

"You're right," Lucina concurred. "I think I see some faintly lit passageways up ahead..."

"It'll help if I bring the lantern," Falcon said, setting down the travel sack and opening it up. He reached into it, retrieving a traditional oil lantern filled with oil, then tying up the sack again and setting it on his back again. "The oil should last us for two and a half hours. Within that time, we should hopefully find a way back."

"Alright," Lucina said. "Lead the way, Captain."

*I wish you'd open up to me more, Captain. I want to be able to understand you more...connect with you more. It sounds strange, but...it pains me to see you in distress.*

... The two weren't even thirty minutes in to their exploration of the winding underground caverns when Lucina decided to start a conversation. "I am curious about something, though..."

"Yes?" Captain Falcon asked her.

"You said...when you race in an F-Zero cup, that your keen focus and intuition can mean the difference between winning and losing, or even life and death...right?"

"Heh, you remember," the Captain said as the two continued to walk the empty cavernous corridors. "Yeah, it is...but there's always a bit of fear involved..."

*Ever since his accident, I'd imagine...* Lucina concluded to herself. *Even though I don't know if it was during a race or not...I shouldn't pry. *Fear can be a powerful motivator when applied in just the right amount, right?*

"You're so smart, Lucina," Falcon complimented her. "Yes...that's exactly correct. It's my focus, intuition, and that slight fear, that push me to win every race in one piece. It's why I also instructed you to imagine the bottomless pit back then. That fear of failure when the stakes are raised just pushes you to not settle, to give it your all."

"I see..." Lucina murmured. "Sometimes negative emotions can push us to do something positive. In my future, the Fell Dragon, Grima, ruled over all and slaughtered many, including my father. The loss broke my heart, but it also lit a spark within me...a desire to avenge him, and protect those
that survived."

"Really...?"

"Yes," Lucina said with a nod. "And that's why...I want to become stronger. To protect others even better than I did...as I still witnessed losses. And...to protect myself as well..."

"I...see..." The Captain trailed off, sounding somewhat solemn.

"Hey...Captain." Lucina stopped walking for a second, looking at her trainer as square in the eyes as possible.

"...Yes? Where's this coming from...?" Falcon questioned, stopping as well.

"I..." Lucina began, hesitating for a second, then continuing, "My...progress during training so far has been satisfactory, right...?"

"More than that," the Captain answered her honestly. "It's exceeded expectations. I couldn't be more proud of you."

"Thank you..." Lucina said, feeling that same joyous feeling throughout her being. This only encouraged her to speak her feelings. "If it's okay with you...why don't...I protect you, this time?"

"Huh...?" The Captain seemed surprised by this proposition. "You...protecting me?"

"I'm serious," Lucina emphasized. "You've done so much for me. Let me return the favor."

After a moment of hesitation, the Captain obliged. "Sure. Just...don't push yourself too hard, either."

"Thank you..." Lucina felt happy tears welling up in her eyes, but she held them back for his sake, not wanting to show any perceivable weakness.

"Of course, if you ever find yourself in a pinch, I'll still step in," he advised her.

"Even though...I want to show my worth to you and protect you?" She asked.

"Can't have you dying on me, now," he told her. "What would your friends or your family think if you didn't come back? I admire your selflessness, but you can't overdo it."

"True..." she agreed, looking to the side briefly.

"Think of it this way," he proposed. "After I swoop in, we handle things together. Sound good?"

Looking at the Captain slowly, Lucina nodded. "Yeah. It's perfect."

"Great." Glancing at his lantern which had to have burned fifteen more minutes' worth of oil as they were talking, he said, "Time is an invaluable resource to us right now. Let's keep going."

"Of course."

Although... She pondered, a sorrowful and anxious expression creeping up on her face, I...don't want you dying for my sake either...I've suffered too much loss for one lifetime.
It was an hour and fifteen minutes into their trek. Lucina couldn't help but wonder why these stony underground passages were so empty. "Captain?" She asked him.

"Yes?" He answered her.

"Do you...have any idea why these caves are so empty? We've found locations that look like they could house a family of underground dwellers. They couldn't have built all this for nothing..."

"I believe these caverns may have been where the Goron used to live before relocating to Goron Village just a bit further from the mountains," the Captain answered her. "But it's just a theory. If I can, I'll see if I can verify it with Young Link. He knows more about this world than I do."

"I see..." Lucina said. "Even so, to build these underground caverns to shield themselves from the cold...if your theory is true, I admire the Goron's will to survive against all odds."

Almost like myself...she mused. "Say, Captain?"

"Yeah?"

"Why do you...wear that helmet?"

"This?" He asked, pointing at his helmet. "I'm a bounty hunter. I have to keep my face hidden to protect my identity, don't I?"

"Fair enough," Lucina said. "I hid my identity behind a mask once, myself, in my future. And when I traveled back in time to save my father, the mask broke...I was alarmed at first, but when I explained all to my father, he accepted everything...and I felt more confident showing off the real me."

"The real...you..." Falcon murmured. "Even when I'm not in public, I don't expose my true self to others as much anymore...ever since Jody. I guess I just...don't like showing my true self to others so freely."

"You can show me," Lucina offered. "We've been traveling together this long, after all."

"Really?" The Captain questioned, a trace of uncertainty in his voice. "Even though...I fear you seeing the real me may put you in danger?"

"Don't you trust me?" Lucina asked. "I can fend for myself now even better than before. And...remember what we talked about earlier? I want to protect you this time around."

Pausing for a moment, the Captain said, "Sure."

"Great," she replied. "I want to get to know you more...know how you're feeling at any given moment...and I can only do so much if I can't see your eyes behind that visor."

"One's eyes are the window to their soul, right?" Falcon recited the old adage. "Just for you, Lucina."

"Thanks."

\textit{I want to get to know you better too, Lucina, the Captain thought. I feel like this has been more than just a training session for me...I'm getting to see more of the real you, too. It makes me...strangely happy, getting closer to you. I wonder if you feel the same...}
Another hour had passed. The lantern had only fifteen minutes' worth of oil left, and there was an intersection before them with two paths. One path seemed a bit more illuminated than the other, with what looked to be light coming from outside, possibly the exit. However, there was still the possibility that the other path also contained the exit to the surface.

"Is that…?" Falcon murmured, his gaze directed at the cavern opening on the more illuminated path where steam seemed to be coming off the ground. "Lucina, you go check the other path for an exit. Meet me back in the room I'm heading to."

"Okay…" Lucina said with an edge of doubt in her voice as the Captain ran off to the more illuminated cavern, handing her the lantern before they parted ways.

...What Captain Falcon saw in the cavern confirmed his suspicions: the cavern down that path housed a large hot spring. He remembered how Pit would tell him about how great it feels to soak in a hot spring, and he had always wanted to experience it, but had been unable to until now. It was cold outside, and his muscles were sore after a long day's worth of training, not to mention the long walk through the underground passages.

He began to remove his clothing, starting with his scarf, gloves, wrist cuffs, and shirt. When he was done removing his upper garments, his rippling chest was exposed. He then proceeded to remove his helmet, followed by the rest of his garments. Taking a towel from the bag he carried while he trained with Lucina, he wrapped the towel around his waist and walked to the spring, leaving the bag by a large rock nearby.

In order to gauge the water's temperature, he dipped his right foot into the water. "Hmm…this should be fine," he said, after determining the water was the right temperature. He stepped in and slowly sat down against the rocks. Arguably, the water felt so much better when he was immersing the rest of his body in it, the gentle liquid heat enveloping him, soothing his sore muscles. He could almost feel his tension simply evaporating.

"Ah…! My God…this feels amazing…"

...Lucina followed the other path, but unfortunately it was a dead end. She headed back to the intersection she was at before when the lantern finally ran out of oil and the light fizzled out.

"I really hope he's found the exit..." She murmured. All of a sudden, she heard his voice echoing in the dark caverns, coming from the location he said he was going to.

"Ah…!"

"Captain?!" She wasn't sure what to make of his voice, as his tone was a bit unclear.

"My God…"

She noticed his voice was a bit breathy. "Are you okay?!!"

"This feels amazing…"

It was then Lucina noticed the Captain's voice sounding very calm and relaxed. She felt the blood rush to her face, turning her cheeks a bright shade of pink.
Is...he...? She thought, her heart racing. ...No, Lucina! Cut it out with those indecent thoughts!
Carrying the lantern which now no longer provided light, she ran to the source of the sound.

Upon entering, Lucina quickly scanned her surroundings, looking up and seeing a hole in the ceiling that could be reached with the hook and rope she purchased from Clock Town, and rocks all around, as well as a wide body of water with steam rising from it, presumably a hot spring.
"Captain, is everything-"

And then she saw him.

Right there, relaxing in the hot spring, was her trainer. He had been all but bared, save for the fact that the rest of his body below his waist was submerged. He had a very impressive, chiseled physique, his tan skin glowing sensually in the light coming from the hole above them. She couldn't help but marvel at his muscular, hairless chest, biceps, and abs, no doubt a result of his own personal training. Truly, his body was like a well-oiled machine, and glorious at that.

And his face...that short, messy black hair, those aquamarine eyes...and a scar over his left eyebrow. She couldn't help but wonder how he got it. Nevertheless, she thought he had a very handsome face, and paired with that well sculpted body of his and his relaxed expression...she couldn't help but get a smidge hot and bothered.

Opening his eyes, the Captain turned to his protégé. "Oh, I didn't notice you there. I'm guessing the other passageway was a dead end?"

Startled from her flustered trance, Lucina stammered, "Y-yeah...it was."

"Heh..." Falcon chuckled. "If you want to, you can come in. The water's just fine..."

"Eh-heheheh..." She laughed nervously. "I...don't know..."

"You were complaining about your back when we were training earlier, right?"

Thinking back to earlier, the swordswoman realized her training partner was telling the truth. "Well...yeah..."

"I keep telling you, it's all about posture. I hope you'll keep that in mind for the future."

"I will..." At this point, Lucina was blushing and looking away, trying not to think of how utterly attractive the F-Zero racer was without his shirt and helmet.

"In the meantime, though...I insist. The water in this hot spring will make your aching muscles feel a lot better."

"If you insist..." The Ylissean slowly looked at him.

"You can disrobe behind that rock over there," the Captain said, pointing at the large rock a short distance to the right. "While we were in Clock Town, I picked up four towels. You can wrap one of them around you, and the other two are for drying ourselves off."

"You sure come prepared for everything," the Exalt answered him.

"What can I say?" The bounty hunter responded. "It's pretty much my code of operations."

Lucina walked behind the rock, which was large enough to remove her clothing behind without
worrying about peeping eyes, and proceeded to strip. She put her hair up in the gaudy hair clip she purchased from Clock Town before covering her naked body in the towel. It took a while for her to step out from behind the rock and join her trainer in the hot spring, though.

*Heh...why am I nervous?* She pondered, trembling slightly. Taking a deep breath, she then thought, *No... if this will help me, I should put aside all shyness. I just hope I won't put aside all my inhibitions too...*

She finally stepped out from behind the rock, her hair pinned up in the clip so it wouldn't get wet, her body clad in only a towel. When she noticed Falcon looking at her though, she couldn't help but blush again, holding up her towel to cover her small breasts.

*She's so lovely...* the Captain thought, smiling. *Is she really that self-conscious of her figure?*

"There's no need to be shy, you know," He said. "You're a bit self-conscious, aren't you?"

"A little..." She answered him.

"Don't be," He reassured her. "I, for one, think you look rather cute."

"You do...?" Lucina asked, feeling her cheeks heat up again. *He's not...flirting with me, is he...?* "I, well...I always hated that my chest was smaller than most other women my age, and that I was so skinny..."

"Well, it doesn't matter here," he said. "Come on in. You want your aches to be relieved, right? What was your issue again?"

"You're right," She nodded. "I kept feeling this...numbness close to my right shoulder blade. Your massages helped a bit, but it's still there, a little bit. My arms kinda feel like jelly too, and my legs...well, let's just say that's to be expected after walking so much." She walked over to the hot spring, and dipped her left foot in. "You're right...the water does feel pretty nice."

"It'll feel even better when you sit down."

"O-okay..." She walked in, and stood next to her trainer before slowly submerging herself up to her chest. What happened next was something she never would have guessed.

As she slowly immersed herself, the liquid warmth enveloped her, soothing every muscle in her body. Her whole body felt warmer, more relaxed. Any cramps she had just seemed to...melt.

"Ah...mm-mmmmmm..." she moaned, a slightly blissful smile creeping up on her face as she closed her eyes and savored the feeling. "You're right, Captain...this feels...so good..."

*Did I really just...moan like that in front of him?!* She briefly thought, as embarrassment flashed in her mind, but that was quickly overpowered by the sheer euphoria she felt in that moment.

*Still...he was right...this is nothing short of heavenly...*

Looking at Lucina who seemed to be enjoying herself even more than he did, Captain Falcon said, "Heh...I knew it would help."

"P-please, just..." She began, breathily, the rapture evident in her voice, her eyes still closed. "Let me enjoy this...for a bit..." She leaned back against the rocky wall, sighing deeply and smiling, holding her arms in front of her and letting them float.
The Captain looked on at her with a smile, content that she seemed to be enjoying herself so much.

A few moments of silent, peaceful relaxation passed, and then Lucina opened her eyes and made eye contact with the Captain, trying not to stare at that handsome face of his for too long. "So...Captain, I found the exit."

"You did?" He asked her. "I didn't notice..."

*Those eyes...I could get lost in them,* Lucina thought briefly, staring dreamily into them, trying with all her might not to smile. Clearing her throat, she glanced in the direction of the hole. "It's right up there."

"Heh...it was right there all along. You bought that rope and hook back in Clock Town, so we should be able to get out with those," he confirmed. "It's not too high up either."

"Good," Lucina said, nodding. "Once we're done here, we can finally head to the surface."

"Indeed," Falcon concurred. "Though, before we do...you wouldn't mind...washing my back a bit?"

"Huh?!" Lucina gasped.

"There's nothing to worry about," The Captain reassured her with a slight chuckle. "Everything below my waist is completely submerged and covered in the towel. Don't be shy, now."

"O-okay..." Lucina stuttered as the Captain inched forward just enough to grant her access to his exquisite bare back. She noticed the area he scraped himself when fighting the Territorial Rotbart a week ago had completely healed without so much as a scar.

"W...wow," she whispered to herself, quietly enough that he wouldn't notice.

*He's...gorgeous...* She shook her head. *But remember...he's my trainer first and foremost. I mustn't let any feelings get in the way.*

He dipped her hands in the water, scooping up handfuls of the warm water, and gently doused every inch of his muscular back in it.

"Perfect..." he sighed blissfully. "I can't get over how nice this feels..."

"Me neither..." she agreed. She couldn't help but become captivated by his lovely body, even though she could only see above the waist. She could feel some of her inhibitions melting away with the pain.

"Say..." she began. "You wouldn't mind if I..." Her hands emerged from the water again, tracing their way up his back, feeling every muscle. A strange desire began to build in her, as she wanted to give him the same bliss he gave her when he massaged her shoulder earlier.

"If you...what?" He questioned.

"Just...thought this would help," the Exalt said as she gripped his shoulders and began massaging them gently.

"Lu..." The Captain gasped faintly, before feeling an ecstatic sensation flow through him at her touch. "Ahhh...so...that's how it is, huh? Getting back at me...for earlier...?" His voice became breathy as he sighed deeply between his words, enjoying what she was doing to him.

"You...could say that," she said, giggling softly.

"Well, it's very much welcome...mmmm..." he moaned, closing his eyes and tilting his head back
slightly, his breathing becoming steady but deep. Hearing such a pleasurable moan awoke something in Lucina.

_Somehow...hearing him enjoying himself...it feels good for me, too...?_ She seemed to sink into a trance as her hands slowly traveled down his back, massaging all the while, his moans sounding like music to her ears. _Heehee...he's like putty in my hands, and I want him to enjoy every last second of this..._

"How did you...get so good at this...?" He sighed, quivering softly at her touch.

"I just...have a natural talent for it, I guess," she answered him. "There was this one warrior back from my future that would often complain of stiff shoulders after a battle...he really liked it when I massaged his aching muscles." She briefly giggled as she remembered an earlier memory of her little "sessions" not going so well. "Even if I was perhaps a bit too rough the first time..."

"I see..." he said, a faint moan escaping his lips. "Did you...have feelings for him, by any chance?"

"Not really..." she admitted, looking away and pausing her tender kneading of his back.

_Not compared to how I'm starting to feel for you, Captain...I can't explain it, but..._

"Why'd you stop?" He asked her.

"Oh, sorry," she said, continuing to rub his back. Just as her hands were reaching the bottom of his back, an image flashed into her mind...a tempting image of her wrapping her arms around him, caressing his torso from the top of his chest to the bottom of his abdomen as her lips were pressed to his neck, enjoying the sound of his blissful moaning. Before the mental image could go any further, she drew her hands back.

"I...I think that's enough," she stuttered, feeling a bit overwhelmed by where her mind went. _That was...awkward...to say the least._

"Heh, fair enough," the Captain said with a shrug. "Though, I do thank you for that rub down. It was really wonderful."

"Thanks..." Lucina submerged herself into the water a bit more, hoping the liquid warmth would soothe the numbness near her shoulder blade, but to no avail. "Geez...you've got to be kidding..."

"What's the matter?" Falcon asked his partner, noticing her irritated expression.

"The water...isn't doing as much for my shoulder as I'd hoped..." she confessed, a slight griping tone to her voice.

"Want me to work my own magic?" He suggested, a subtle smirk gracing his face as he drew one of his hands out of the water.

"I..." She hesitated. _The rational side of me says no, but...at the same time, I really want this bothersome feeling gone... _"Okay..." The Ylissean obliged.

_I just hope my body and mind don't go wild with desire...Naga, please watch over me...!

"Just turn around," he instructed her. She obeyed, lifting herself up a bit, and let the back of her towel dip a little, granting him more access to her back, her fair, creamy skin glistening in the light.
"Lucina, you truly are beautiful," he thought. "Just hold still for a moment..." he said, reaching his right hand to her shoulder.

Feeling a firm grip on that shoulder, Lucina questioned, "Wait, what are you—" before hearing a loud pop and feeling a dull pain as he pushed her shoulder blade back into place.

"O-Owwwwww!" She cried in pain. "What do you think you're doing?! That—" All of a sudden, a new sensation overcame her, one much more pleasant. She could feel the hot spring's warmth traveling up to that spot, relaxing every tendon, soothing every once compressed nerve.

"...Felt simply divine..." She sighed, leaning the front of her body against the stone wall, shuddering and curling her fingers. "H...how did you know...what to do...?" She slowly closed her eyes, savoring the breathtaking feeling.

"As a result of your posture, your shoulder blade began to compress the nerves in the surrounding muscles," he explained. "That led to the numb, 'rotting' feeling you felt around there. Now that they're no longer pinched, you shouldn't feel any more numbness."

"I...see..." Lucina sighed deeply, immediately followed by a moan as her mouth shaped itself into an ecstatic smile. "Where'd you...learn that?"

"Let's just say I have a friend...who's a doctor," Falcon said. "Want me to give you a rub down...?"

"Yes, please..." she sighed dreamily.

Two handfuls of warm water cascaded down her back, and what followed was something indescribably exquisite. If the way his hand kneaded the tendons around her shoulder felt amazing with their clothing acting as barriers, it felt even more so with his bare hands touching her exposed skin. Their texture wasn't too rough or too soft. It was just...perfect. The perfect balance of ruggedness and tenderness. The massaging motions combined with the liquid heat of the spring water made Lucina give in to the purest ecstasy, relaxing against the rocky ground even more, trembling softly before staying completely still, enjoying every second as she moaned softly. She didn't even care if he could hear her anymore. It all just felt so good.

So...heavenly... she thought, smiling as she sighed, her fingers and even her submerged toes curling up in pleasure as she mewled. My pain is just...melting...it almost feels like I am, too...like an ice cube in a nice, warm cup of tea. Like I'm becoming one with this warm ocean of bliss...I kind of wish this moment...would last forever.

As the Captain's hands slowly traveled down Lucina's back, her mind started to fill with...other thoughts. She could feel her body coming alive in a different sense. A more...delightfully forbidden sense.

Captain...I crave more of your touch. I want you closer to me. I want you to wrap your arms around me...I want to feel your lips on my neck... Her sighs shifted from deep and relaxed to somewhat excited and shuddering at those thoughts. Your hands on my navel...traveling up and cupping my... Her body began to shiver in anticipation at that very thought.

"You...alright there, Lucina...?" Falcon asked cautiously, noticing his training partner's odd change in behavior.

"Ah!" She gasped, his question snapping her out of her lustful daydreams. "Cap...tain...?"

Oh no...he realized...I let my urges cloud my thoughts...!
"I...I think I've had enough, too!" She cried, the sheer shame crushing her as she submerged herself up to her nose and began blowing bubbles in the water fiercely with her mouth.

*I let desire make me think those...sinful thoughts! Naga...forgive me...!*

"Heh, okay then," the Captain chuckled. "I imagine you're just not...used to being this close to someone of the opposite sex."

Lifting the rest of her face out of the water, Lucina admitted, still not making eye contact with him, "I suppose so...aside from my interactions with that one warrior, I was never this up close and personal with a man...and no man ever got this close to me..."

"Guess you weren't much for romance in your world either, huh?" He inquired.

"N-no...I don't think so."

*Are these feelings...really romantic...? I used to think it was just respect and admiration,* she pondered. "Anyway...I think I should get out."

"If you say so," Falcon said. "I'll get out after you."

"Okay." Lucina stepped out of the water, the towel around her body soaking wet. She walked to the bag behind the rock, pulling out a dry towel and drying herself off before putting her clothes back on and releasing her hair from the hair clip.

"Okay, I'm done," Lucina announced, walking to the other rock a short distance from her and hiding behind it, closing her eyes so she wouldn't see him changing.

"Thanks," he said as he climbed out of the water himself.

... After he dried himself off and dressed, the Captain put away the towels and asked, "Alright, Lucina, you ready?"

"Y-yeah..." She stammered, slowly turning toward him.

"That bath felt great, didn't it?"

"It sure did..." she sighed. "Anyway, follow me."

"Lead the way," the Captain said. As he followed her, he thought, *Am I...becoming captivated by her? I'm not just proud of how far she's come...I think I'm starting to feel something deeper, ever since that dream I had when we were at Gaur Plain...*

"Captain...?" the future Exalt inquired, noticing him seeming deep in thought again.

"...Nothing," he reassured her. "Anyway, you said it was through the hole nearby?"

"Yes," Lucina confirmed. "If you would...? I need the rope and hook."

"Of course," the Captain obliged, handing her the travel bag. Opening it up, she reached in and pulled out the rope and hook, and tied the hook to one end. "This rope should be long enough to get us up there." Turning her head to glance at her trainer, she told him, "You might want to stand back."
"Okay," The Captain said, stepping back a safe enough distance.

"Here we go," Lucina said, licking her lips as she wound the end of the rope with the hook attached around in circles before tossing it up in the hole's direction, feeling the vibrations through the rope when the hook sunk into firm soil.

"Alright, it's securely attached," she said.

"Let me go first, Lucina," Captain Falcon offered. "I'm heavier, and if anything should happen, I'll be able to lift you out safely if the rope breaks when you're almost done climbing."

"Fine by me," Lucina replied.

... The two ended up climbing out of the hole and onto the surface safely. Thankfully, the hypothetical scenario Captain Falcon described did not occur. Before them was a series of islands connected by wooden bridges above a tranquil lake, the grass green and vibrant.

"So beautiful," Lucina murmured. "It's so different from the snow covered mountains..."

"Yeah," the Captain agreed. "Anyway, it's getting late. Didn't Young Link say he'd meet us by Mountain Village?"

"He did, yeah," Lucina recalled.

"I know the way. Follow me."

... "We're here," the Captain said as he and Lucina arrived at the lone smithy's establishment. There was something serene about the area being unfrozen and full of life, unlike the rest of the mountain. The river around them flowed gently, birds sang in the leafy trees, and frogs croaked softly. The sun was setting, bathing the scene in a dusky pinkish-orange glow.

"Young Link should be here soon, right?" Lucina asked.

"I believe so," Falcon answered her. All of a sudden, he began to feel dizzy, but not in an unpleasant sense.

"Mmmmm...?" He moaned, wavering where he stood. He began to tip forward when Lucina caught him.

His body...it's...unusually warm. Is this a fever? She thought as she felt his body heat a bit higher than normal. "You alright, Captain?"

"I..." Panting, he slowly looked at Lucina. "My mind...and body...they feel so light. I feel...sleepy..."

"It's not from the cold, is it?" Lucina inquired, knowing it was bad to fall asleep in the snow.

"N-no..." Falcon murmured, his speech subtly slurring. "It's the opposite...I think I soaked in that hot spring too long. My body's a bit...too relaxed..."

"I see," Lucina said, gently setting him down on the ground.
"It's...rather inconvenient. Even if it does feel kinda nice..." Slowly looking up, he continued slowly, "Don't worry about me. I think I could just use a little nap here...if I sleep this off, I'll feel more energized than before."

"If you say so," Lucina said, gently laying him down. "Don't worry, I'll wait here with you. If it should come to it...like I promised, this time I will be the one keeping you safe."

A faint, calm smile crept upon the Captain's face. "You'll do just fine...I believe in you..." The last thing he saw before drifting off into a peaceful slumber was her serene, kind smile.

Don't ever stop smiling, Lucina. I want to protect your happiness...no matter what... Those were the last thoughts in his mind before he closed his eyes, the lights on his visor turning off automatically.

"Rest well, Captain," Lucina whispered, gently stroking his peaceful face.

I...think I want to lie down next to him too. She slowly lay on the ground next to him, the sounds of the river and the wildlife calming her, as well as the soft sound of the Captain's breathing as he slept. Seeing his chest rise and fall with each breath filled her with a sense of peace.

I don't know why, but...in this moment, lying next to him...seeing him sleep so peacefully...the tranquil sounds of nature all around us...I just feel so calm...safe, even. Her mouth curled into a content smile as she closed her eyes.

I guess I'd better savor moments of peace like this...who knows when they'll come again.

Suddenly, a rather romantic image popped up in her mind. One where the situation was reversed, where she soaked too long in the hot spring and her body became so relaxed she began to feel sleepy. In this daydream, the Captain lifted her up bridal-style, his arms supporting her evenly, making her feel even more comfortable. She imagined her whole being feeling light as air, basking in the post-hot spring afterglow, feeling as warm as the womb itself, as he carried her to a bed at the inn, gently tucking her in.

How romantic... She thought. Opening her eyes for a moment, she began to realize this was a seemingly consistent theme whenever she thought of him.

Wanting the other person to be happy...feeling joy when they accomplish something...sharing their pain...affectionate physical contact...wanting to be by their side? Is this...what love is?

Slowly standing up, she looked down, holding her hand to her chest. Is this what's happening? Do I...love him...?

"Hey! Captain! Lucina!" Young Link called from afar.

"Young Link!" Snapping out of her trance, she called out to him, waving.

As Young Link walked up to Lucina, she complimented him, saying "Heehee...you finally got my name right, Link. But...do be quiet for a bit. The Captain's sleeping."

"Oh?" Young Link asked, glancing at Captain Falcon lying on the ground in a deep, peaceful sleep. "What happened?"

"We...kinda got lost, and we found a hot spring before coming back to the surface. I think he enjoyed it a bit too much..." She chuckled.
"Heh, yeah," Young Link said. "Wanna talk someplace quieter?"

"Sure."

Lucina and the youth walked a bit closer to the river to resume their discussion, with the Ylissean sitting on the ground.

"So, what are your plans from here on out?" Young Link asked the Ylissean.

"I...don't know yet," Lucina admitted. "I think I want to take a break from training...I want to see the world he came from. I feel we've...gotten closer during our training, and I want to get to know him more."

"Yeah, you look like you could use a break," Young Link commented. "You should enjoy it while you can..."

"I suppose." She looked at Young Link, noticing him looking surprisingly glum. "...Link?"

"You know..." He began, his tone becoming a bit depressing. "You should enjoy every moment you have with all your friends. You never know when the time will come that you'll never see them again..."

"I know...it's how I lived back in my world." She was a bit puzzled at Young Link suddenly waxing poetic and sounding all philosophical.

"I don't mean it like that..." Young Link looked up, looking a bit teary-eyed. "I mean...your friends from Smash City. You know...any one of you can be told to leave at any time. I just heard the Ice Climbers had to go home after two successful tournaments."

"Oh..." Lucina felt a heaviness hanging on her heart at Young Link's words. "I guess I never thought of it like that..."

"I can only imagine...how sad they must have been." Young Link blinked, a tear rolling down his face. "I still haven't been called back either...time passes slower in our own worlds than it does in Smash City. By the time I saved Termina after returning here from Smash City, I learned from the Captain when he came to visit once, that a whole year had passed there." Tears began to stream down his face in full. "I'm now starting to worry if I ever will return. I miss everyone...so much..."

"I see..." Lucina sighed. "Even...the Captain? Any one of us can go at any time?"

"Yeah..." Young Link wiped his tears. "I want to have hope that I'll see everyone again someday...but I...hic...I don't think that day will ever come..."

"Link..." Lucina hugged the youth. "Try to hold on to that hope, okay? You never know what may happen."

"I guess..." Young Link said, his voice sounding calm yet sorrowful. "But...you should be prepared too. In case...you have to end up saying goodbye to those not from your world..."

"I'm...sure it won't come to that." Lucina answered the youth, trying to sound optimistic.

*It won't...right...?* Insecurity began to settle into the swordswoman's heart. *Will I really have to one day say goodbye to Shulk? To Zelda? To...**him**? Will I ever see any of them again?*

"You'll always have us as your friends," Lucina reassured the youth, patting him on the shoulder.
"What matters is the memories you made. Always hold them close in your heart."

"Gods...I sound so hypocritical right now. I feel like I'm giving him false hope and empty advice...the poor thing."

"Thanks...",[number] Young Link seemed to calm down. "I'll just keep hoping until that day comes...I want to believe it'll happen."

"There we go," Lucina said with a smile.

"Mmmm..."

Lucina turned in the direction of the sound and saw her trainer stirring, stretching his arms as he awoke. "That was a really nice nap."

"Captain? You're awake..." Lucina said, standing up. "You sure you're feeling okay?"

"Never better," he replied, a satisfied grin on his face. "Oh...hey, Link. Everything alright?"

"Yeah..." Young Link nodded slowly.

The Captain knew Young Link really wasn't feeling alright, that the youth knew the Captain and his new friend would be leaving, and he didn't know when they would be back. "Come on...you know I'll be back someday. I'll even bring Lucina next time again."

"Okay..." Young Link nodded timidly.

"Hey, Captain..." Lucina approached her trainer. "Would it be okay if..." She stood on her tiptoes and whispered something to him.

"You want to go to...my world?" He questioned, curiously. "So then...you want to take a break from training. Is that it?"

"Yes," Lucina confirmed. "I guess we won't need our survival supplies anymore, so what say you we..."

"What are you two talking about?" Young Link asked the duo.

"Link," Lucina announced. "We've agreed to leave our supplies with you, for your next great adventure." After the Captain handed the now unnecessary travel sack to Lucina, she walked over to Young Link and gave it to him. "You've got a lantern, though you'll need some oil for it. There's also some towels, and a hair clip, though you might want to let the towels dry whenever you get a chance. There's plenty of room to store anything else you may need, too."

"Thanks, Lucina," Young Link thanked her. "But...a hair clip? I'm a boy."

"You can...give it to your Zelda when you see her again," Lucina suggested. "In the meantime, you can think of the Captain whenever you use the lantern, and me whenever you have the hair clip nearby."

"...Thanks, guys." Young Link motioned for a hug, and the other two crouched down and hugged him in response.

*Heehee...it almost does feel like we're a family,* Lucina thought, a smile coming to her face. Her smile soon sank as she thought, *For all of our sakes...I hope we can all return to Smash City next tournament. I wonder how long it's been over there...*
After the three ended their hug, Young Link walked off in the direction of Clock Town while Falcon asked Lucina, "So...Mute City. Right?"

"Yeah," Lucina nodded. "It's time for a much deserved break..."

"Maybe you'll get to see me in action on the racetrack," the Captain bragged.

"I look forward to it," Lucina said.

*I just wanna take my mind off this lingering uncertainty...If what Young Link says is true, I want to enjoy the time with the Captain, and my friends, that I have left...I hope it'll be enough...*

Chapter End Notes

**OH. MY. GOD.**

this is. LITERALLY THE FIRST TIME I'VE WRITTEN ANYTHING, ANYTHING OVER 10K WORDS IN A SINGLE GO, LET ALONE A CHAPTER! WHOO! This is such an awesome milestone for me! I just hope the chapter itself wasn't too long in terms of pacing as a result.

Anyway, I hope you guys enjoyed this chapter.

Also, the way Young Link talked about how anyone can leave at any time...that's an analogy for cuts, and how Snake didn't return as DLC for Smash 4, as I started this fic in the 4 days. Yes, the whole "time passing slower off world than in Smash City" is a bit of a hand wave on my part after I regained motivation post-Ultimate, and this will tie in eventually to the EVERYONE IS HERE of Ultimate. Maybe...there'll be a few more surprises too.

Even so...I remember Sakurai said it was a lot of work to bring everyone back, and next Smash might not be the same...even so, we also probably won't see another Smash for another 10 years since the Switch, and Ultimate, are doing phenomenally. Maybe we'll even see more than 1 DLC season? I hope.

Oh, and if any of you wanted some delicious drama and angst...you're gonna get it. Very soon. Huhuhu...Don't worry, they'll still very much get a happy ending, but what's a story without some conflict and drama, right?
What If

Chapter Summary

a dark shadow looms over their slowly blossoming relationship...

Chapter Notes

Ok so

This *was* gonna be the big angsty chapter, but it was getting too wordy and I wanna pace better, so rest assured the big angsty chapter will be the next one. There's plenty of development in this first half anyway, I'd think.

(also I did a crazy amount of browsing the F-Zero Wiki for the characters' backgrounds and I love how developed and well written they are? seriously we need a new F-Zero game, hopefully one that doesn't try to retcon anything like the anime and its two GBA games did. X and GX had a perfect thing going on and there's several plot elements I'd LOVE for them to touch more on)

Title based on "What If" by SafetySuit

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 8 - What If

"Okay, you can open your eyes now, Lucina," Captain Falcon instructed Lucina. "And welcome...to Mute City."

"Ah...?" The sight before Lucina's eyes was unlike anything she ever saw in her life. What stood before her was a neo-urban jungle of tall, metal architecture, holograms and neon lights all around amidst the muted greenish-blue backdrop of the night sky, as "cars" that seemed to hover above the ground, much like Captain Falcon's own Blue Falcon, drove across the streets. It was very much like a futuristic version of Smash City, like in the science fiction comic books Robin and Shulk would show Lucina whenever the three decided to visit Smash City's comic store on a whim.

"Amazing..." she murmured.

"Right?" Falcon concurred. "It may be a wonder unlike anything you've ever seen to you, but to me, it's just the world I've known all my life, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Of course Captain Falcon wouldn't have it any other way," Lucina teased him, elbowing him playfully. "You're the famous bounty hunter and pilot of the famed Blue Falcon!"

"Haha, don't wear it out now," Falcon laughed, returning Lucina's mischievous gesture by softly mussing up her hair, eliciting a giggle from her lips.
We've bonded so much, it feels unreal, he thought. We're already at the stage of exchanging playful banter with one another when we're not doing anything serious. I've missed such simple joys... And above all, lately I've been feeling...that whenever she's happy, I am too...

"Hey, Lucina...?" Falcon began, softly placing his hand on her shoulder.

"Yes?" She turned her head to face his.

"Ah..." The Captain hesitated, lifting his hand off her shoulder. "I figure...if it's okay with you, that I maybe show you around the place before I go in for a racing tournament?"

"Sure," Lucina nodded, smiling. "I hope the races are televised. I'd love to see you in action doing what you're best known for outside of Smash City." Looking around, she mused, "But...wouldn't it be more practical to ride around in the Blue Falcon, or something?"

"Well, about that..." He answered her. "There's...usually not enough room in a single F-Zero machine for two people. There was this one time I had another rider with me, but that was a bit of an...emergency situation. I do know someone who can get us around town easily, though."

"You do...?" The Exalt asked the racer.

"Just one second..." Sliding a panel out from one of his wristcuffs, he input a series of commands with the buttons underneath. "Our ride should be here soon."

"You...have tech under that wristcuff?" Lucina questioned. "Why didn't you just...bring your phone?"

"I decided to leave it back at Smash City," Captain Falcon answered her. "It wouldn't be of much use outside of Smash City anyway. As for the technology you just saw, it interfaces with my helmet and provides basic functionality like bio-scanners, and contacting people in my world. It's like a bare-bones computer."

"Interesting," the Ylissean mused. "And you invented it yourself?"

"I did," the bounty hunter confirmed, "As well as the Blue Falcon itself. I will admit though, my helmet tech is nothing compared to Snake's tech, like his codecs... I hope he can return to Smash City someday. I'd like to introduce you to him. He's a good friend of mine."

"I see," Lucina said. "I'd like to meet him, too."

The Captain really is amazing... She thought. I can't help but admire him, now that we've gotten closer and I'm learning more about him. But...there's still more I want to know...

"Say, Captain?" Lucina asked Captain Falcon. "Why did you choose to become an F-Zero racer? I imagine everyone here has a reason they did."

"You're correct, but..." The Captain looked down, somewhat regretfully. "My past...and the reason I'm doing all this...to this day, I haven't told anyone. Only my sworn nemesis, Black Shadow, knows, and even then, he doesn't know the whole story..."

"I guess it's something that means a lot to you..." Lucina said, sighing.

He is secretive, but I guess it lends to his mysterious character. There's more to him than I thought...and I guess that's why I both admire him, and want to become closer still, despite the risks...
"But," Falcon began again, "Maybe one day, when you get to know more of the real me, I might tell you..."

"Thank you," Lucina answered him. "But...you don't have to do so if it makes you uncomfortable. I'm content just getting to know the person you are now."

"That's...awfully sweet of you, Lucina," the Captain chuckled, holding his right hand to his lips and blushing slightly.

_I'm...blushing? Again? He thought. Why does this happen whenever she shows kindness to me? What's this feeling...? It's a bit embarrassing to do this in front of her._

Just then, a loud honking horn broke through the sounds of city life. Turning to the direction of the sound, Falcon told the swordswoman, "Our ride's here. Follow me."

The two walked over to a yellow vehicle hovering above the ground that looked a lot like a traditional taxi, but with the typical F-Zero "flair". On its sides were written the number 38 and the words, "Groovy Taxi".

"Hey, Cap!" The driver of the Groovy Taxi called out as he rolled down the window to his driver's seat. He appeared to be a short yellow alien of a somewhat stereotypical appearance, with an oval shaped head and large black eyes that seemed to pop out a bit. He wore a yellow uniform with a green vest, a black and white checker pattern on the sides of his pants, and a green cap.

"Hey, PJ," the Captain greeted. "I need a favor...if you could please take me around town."

"Why not just use your Blue Falcon..." PJ trailed off before noticing the bounty hunter's female companion. "Wait a minute, who's she? Never saw her in these parts before."

"Lucina, meet PJ. He's a fellow racer and one of the best taxi drivers in the whole galaxy," he introduced her to the alien driver. "So now you see why, PJ. It's travel for two."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, buddy," PJ said in a slightly snappy tone. "You two ain't...an item, are ya? Cause buddy, lemme tell ya...some of my worst customers are couples, particularly those that have a hard time keeping their hands off each other."

"I- we're not a couple..." The Captain countered, only to be interrupted by PJ's continued rant.

"Lemme tell ya, man. I just wanna transport people in peace, but you know what they say. Three's a crowd, and four in an F-Zero machine just ain't allowed. _Especially_ when I have one customer in the front and a couple in the back...God forbid when they start moanin' real loudly and making my other customer reeeeeeal uncomfortable, and I end up getting a negative review because the hormonal duo in the back wouldn't—"

"T-that's quite enough, PJ!" Captain Falcon blurted, blushing intensely. Lucina was doing the same, hiding her face in her hands from hearing PJ's vivid description. Taking a deep breath, the Captain calmed down and said, "She's just a friend. I just want to show her around town."

"Well, why didn't ya say so?" PJ asked. "Come on in, you two." Glaring at the woman he never saw before, he told her sternly, "And no funny business, missy!"

"Ah!" Startled, Lucina gasped, but regained her composure. "I don't think you'll have to worry about any 'funny business'...the Captain said I'm just a friend to him."

_Why do those words...leave such a dull stinging feeling in my heart, though...? She thought,_
looking down and holding her hand to her chest. We are just training partners after all...it shouldn't make me feel this way...

"Lucina...?" Falcon asked her.

"...Oh," Lucina said, snapping out of her daze. "O-of course. Sorry."

As the two stepped into the back of the taxi-like machine with the Captain sitting on the right and Lucina on the left, PJ asked them, "So, where to?"

"Hmmm..." After a few seconds of contemplation, the Captain made a decision. "I think we'll be heading to the Dollars Lounge. There's some people I want her to meet."

"Really...?" Lucina inquired.

"Of course," Falcon said. "But you'll have to stay close to me the whole time. Just in case...those people may be around. We'll even go for a little walk together before I head in for the races. Don't you want to see more of the town?"

"A walk together..." Lucina mused, a slight dreamy look in her eyes. "Yes, that would be wonderful."

"I'm glad you think that." The Captain smiled softly at her, and she returned the serene smile.

God, Lucina, Falcon thought. Your smile is so...captivating. I feel so...at peace whenever I see you smile...

"You two SURE ya ain't a couple? Cause it looks like you're makin' goo-goo eyes at each other," PJ interrupted them.

Startled, the Captain immediately retorted, "Just shut up and get us there. And don't drive like you're in a race, ok?" A mischievous smile crept on his face as he jested, "Otherwise, I might just have to leave a not-so-great review..."

"Okay, okay, geeze!" PJ cried. "Pushy much?... Anyway, off to Dollars Lounge, Bar & Inn." He briefly muttered under his breath, "Least I still get paid for this..."

Lucina burst into giggles at the scene before her, raising her left hand for a high five, which the Captain gladly gave her.

..."Alright, we're here," PJ announced as the Groovy Taxi pulled into the Dollars Lounge's parking lot. "You two stay safe, now."

"Thank you, Mr. PJ," Lucina thanked the alien taxi driver with a bow as she stepped out of the vehicle.

"Aw, please, missy, just PJ is fine!" PJ chuckled. "And Cap, don't drink and drive!"

"Can't afford to drink, anyway," Falcon commented. "I've got a race in about forty-five minutes. Look forward to seeing you there."

"You too, Cap," PJ said with a wave before driving off.

Turning to his partner, the Captain asked her, "What about you? Do you want a drink, or?"
"...No thanks," Lucina declined the offer. "I tried alcohol once...I hated the taste."

"Heh, fair enough," Falcon said. "I guess I'll get us both non-alcoholic drinks, then."

"Thank you..." Looking down, Lucina grinned shyly and wiggled her foot. "Um...you wouldn't mind if we...had a bite to share, too?"

"You mean, like a...?" The Captain trailed off, unsure where she was going with this.

"...Oh, n-not like a date or anything," Lucina chuckled nervously, waving her hands in front of her face. "I'm just...sure you want a bite before you go in, and we haven't had dinner, so..."

"...I guess so," The Captain said with a grin. "I'll find something we can both enjoy. Just...nothing too messy, okay? Don't want to ruin these clothes after we just had them cleaned at Clock Town."

"Heh, true," Lucina giggled.

"Let's head on in, then," the Captain invited her. "Like I said, I'd like to introduce you to some people."

As the two walked in, they were greeted by a variety of unusual faces, including an anthropomorphic dinosaur-like person drinking wine right out of the bottle, spilling some on himself; a couple in costumes that made them both look like superheroes; an old man with a strange gadget on his back that had two mechanical arms protruding from it; and someone in a full-body robotic suit.

"I guess F-Zero attracts a lot of different people, huh?" Lucina asked. "Even if they're not necessarily...human."

"You might say that," the Captain said with a slight chuckle. "Just stay close." He led her to the bar, taking a seat and motioning for his companion to take the seat next to him.

"Hey, if it isn't the great Captain Falcon," the old man with the bizarre gadget said, standing behind the bar.

"Long time, Dr. Clash," The Captain greeted him. "This is my traveling companion, Lucina. Figured I'd show her around Mute City."

"From Smash City, I take it?" Dr. Clash asked. "No matter, anyone from Smash City is welcome here! Just seeing the camaraderie unfold between the Captain and anyone he brings here from Smash City just warms this old man's heart. I remember the times he brought his friend Snake here..."

"Heh, yeah," The Captain said. "Though, I wouldn't call you 'old'...not when Silver Neelsen's around. Guy's two years away from the big century and he's still at it!"

As the two racers laughed, Lucina pondered, "He's almost...100 years old?!"

"Medicine has come a long way in my world," Falcon clarified. "Most humans' maximum lifespan has been extended to around 173!"

"Interesting..." Lucina mused.

"And of course, you'd probably live even longer if you were a cyborg like Mighty Gazelle," Captain Falcon said, glancing at the person who appeared to be in a full-body robotic suit from
Following his gaze and realizing who Mighty Gazelle was, Lucina gasped, "He's a cyborg?! But he's...nothing like Fiora."

"Our cyborgs are different," The Captain explained. "Due to the Horrific Grand Finale, he was wounded so badly that they literally had to transplant his brain into a mechanical body to save his life. I remember his fiancée didn't take it too well...she straight up dumped the poor guy afterwards."

"How awful..." Lucina murmured. "I guess his fiancée didn't really love him if she left him after that."

"Apparently not," The Captain concurred. "I'm surprised, Lucina. For someone who's never actually experienced romance, you seem to be very knowledgeable about matters of the heart."

"Call it...a woman's intuition," Lucina answered him.

"Yeah...the Horrific Grand Finale was pretty bad for us all," Dr. Clash said. "I was lucky to make it out with minor injuries."

"It really was..." The Captain murmured, his voice sounding vaguely regretful. *It was terrible for me, too...I could have died...I became hospitalized, and in the process one of the worst threats to Mute City was born..."

"...Captain?" Lucina asked him.

"Ah," The Captain gasped faintly as he broke out of his deep thought. "I was doing that...thing where I'm deep in thought again, wasn't I? I know that worries you, Lucina. I'm sorry."

*I still do want to show you more of the real me, Lucina.* Captain Falcon thought. *When I do...I pray I won't have to keep anything secret from you anymore. Like you wanted, I'll open up to you more...tell you how I feel. But I don't feel safe doing that now, and I don't really know why...I have this nagging feeling in the back of my mind that something bad will happen soon.*

"It's ok, Captain," Lucina reassured him. "Don't worry about it."

"Thanks," Falcon thanked her with a reassuring smile.

"Anyway, what can I get you guys?" Dr. Clash said. As the duo glanced at the LCD menu on the wall behind the old bartender, the Captain spoke first. "Nothing alcoholic, that's for sure. She doesn't like the stuff, and I can't afford to, since I'm gonna race soon."

"Oh?" Dr. Clash questioned. "Look forward to seeing you there."

"Same here," Falcon said. "As for me...I'll take a frozen lemonade. Keep it simple."

"Got it," Dr. Clash confirmed. "As for the young missy?"

"I will..." Lucina thought out loud, looking intently at the menu. After a while, she made her decision. "I'll have the frozen cherry limeade. And, um..."

"What's up?"

"Would you happen to have...anything I can share with him?"
"Ohhhh," Dr. Clash said, holding his hand to his chin curiously. "I see what's going on here. You two are sweethearts, eh? I guess you like 'em older, missy. I ain't judging, though, haha!"

"Dr. Clash, please," Falcon urged him, sounding somewhat irritated as he blushed. "It's not like that. Sorry, I just...people have been asking if we're a couple as I went around different places training her, and the assumption makes us a bit...uncomfortable. We'd just like a quick bite before I go in. Just...nothing messy, if it can be helped."

"Sure," Dr. Clash said, chortling a bit. "I'll see what I can do. No worries."

As Dr. Clash headed to the kitchen, the Captain turned to his companion. "So, Lucina...do you feel confident enough to return to Smash City yet, or...?"

"I'll have to think about it," Lucina answered him. I can't tell him about what's weighing me down right now...I just want a distraction. "Although, when I do..."

If I do...

"...I don't want to have a do-over of the last tournament, or anything. I never cared about earning the privilege to fight Ryu or any famous new face that joined Smash City. I just want everyone to know I've gotten stronger overall."

"...That's very noble of you," The Captain complimented her. "Remember what Fiora said when we were leaving Gaur Plain? Everyone's proud of you and can't wait to see you return."

"I know, and I won't let them down. They all mean so much to me," Lucina declared. "Joining Smash has really broadened my horizons and introduced me to so many people. When we're not on the battlefield, I like to hear their stories and know why they're fighting. And just...getting to bond with them as individuals, too." Looking ahead, she continued, "Zelda and I have gotten along really well...we're roommates, after all. She's always there to hear me out on anything. And I admire Shulk for wanting a better future for his friends. It sort of rings home for me, wanting a better future for my father..."

"That's understandable," the Captain said. "I was that same way when I first joined Smash, all the way back in its inception. I was there to see some new faces join over the years...and some others leave, sadly. Some came back, but others..."

"I see..." Lucina looked down, understanding how dismayed the Captain felt as he said those words.

"Although, the fact that some old friends are coming back, it does make me a bit hopeful...I never saw it as a 'goodbye' you know? It was more of a 'see you later'. Maybe someday, everyone will be there again. I know it's a bit foolishly optimistic, but...it's like you say. Getting to know everyone at Smash City truly does broaden your horizons, and you also end up forging bonds and making memories that are just...irreplaceable. You just...can't bear being apart from them too long."

"I know..." Lucina agreed softly, trying not to think of how sad Young Link seemed over not being called back to Smash City when she spoke with him earlier.

"I know it seems a bit...sappy, sentimental even, for me to say these things, but...I guess you're getting another glimpse at the real me." The Captain smiled at her softly.

Returning his smile, Lucina complimented him, "Nothing to be ashamed of. It's actually really nice of you to think that way."
"Heh, thanks."

"Here are your drinks, you two," Dr. Clash said, handing the duo their icy drinks. "Food's on the way."

"Thanks," Lucina thanked him as the two took their drinks. Directing her gaze at the TV screens on the left wall which showed reruns of past competitions, she asked him, "So this is F-Zero racing in action, huh? It's amazing...such speed and precision."

"Indeed," the Captain agreed. "Just wait until you see me in action."

"I look forward to it," Lucina told him. Unbeknownst to her and her partner, a large-bodied man with white hair, a monocle, and a cane seemed to be watching them from afar. Without either of them realizing it, he backed away after a few seconds and vanished into the shadows.

"Captain!" A heroic, somewhat booming voice called out to the duo.

"Oh, hey, Super Arrow," Falcon greeted the superhero and his wife as they approached the duo sitting at the bar. "Lucina, this is Super Arrow and his wife, Monique L'amoreaux."

"That's Mrs. Arrow to you, Captain," Mrs. Arrow corrected the Captain in a somewhat snarky tone.

"Hahaha, sassy as ever, I see," The Captain laughed, shaking Mrs. Arrow's hand first, then her husband's. "What brings you two here?"

"We were going to ask the same thing," Super Arrow answered him. "It's been so long since we saw you here! Let me tell you, hunting down criminals across the galaxy isn't as exciting without you around!"

"So you're like... a superhero?" Lucina asked, her eyes lighting up in wonder.

"He IS one," Falcon explained. "Not quite a bounty hunter like I am, but he's a defender of justice on Earth and even makes use of his superpowers in a race. He really is a true hero."

"Oh, you flatter me, Captain!" The self-proclaimed superhero guffawed heartily. "But don't sell yourself short. You're a hero, too!"

"You also have a hit song by a band who wanted to pay tribute to you," Mrs. Arrow added. "Forever he will be my hero~!" She sang.

"I guess I am, in my own way," Falcon giggled, and Lucina and the Arrow couple followed suit. "Anyway," the Captain answered Super Arrow, "I was training Lucina here outside of Smash City, and she wanted to take a break. She's come a long way. I figure I'll even participate in a race for old times' sake. I know she's wanted to see me doing what I do best, and I couldn't say no to that."

"You can't say no to almost anything, Falcon," Mrs. Arrow teased. "Like that time someone left a baby on the train tracks and..."

"Please, Monique, not here..." The Captain grumbled, hiding his face in his hands in embarrassment. Lucina burst into giggles, knowing what Mrs. Arrow was referring to.

"Oh, so she knows?" Mrs. Arrow asked slyly.

"We've been traveling together for a while, so we've learned a bit about each other," Lucina answered her. "And thanks to my training, I hope I can one day protect him, too."
"Well, what if that 'giant' flying roach showed up here right now? What would you do then, Lucina...?" The Captain teased his companion, grinning mischievously.

"Oh?" Mrs. Arrow held her left hand to her lips curiously.

"Captaiiiiiiinnnnn!" Lucina cried, her face turning beet red.

"Hey, you made it known that you knew my dirty little secret, so it's only fair I tell them yours," The Captain teased Lucina some more.

"B-but Mrs. Arrow started it!" Lucina stammered.

"Ahuhuhuhu," Mrs. Arrow laughed. "You two just love to tease each other, don't you? If I didn't know any better I'd say you two were in the honeymoon phase of your relationship. Ah, brings back memories of how Super Arrow and I met. Whenever I tease him, he's as docile as a puppy!"

"Moni-" Captain Falcon was about to interrupt her at her comment suggesting he and Lucina were a couple, but then stopped to think. "You know...I never really thought of it like that. Though, don't get me wrong, our relationship isn't anything like that..."

"I didn't know, either," Lucina commented. "Though I do know my mother likes to make cheesy puns at my father sometimes when they flirt."

"It's the little things that make love so endearing," Mrs. Arrow sighed, holding her hands together and leaning her head on them as if she were dreaming. "And you want to protect him, miss...?"

"Lucina."

"Well, it's very commendable of you, Lucina," Mrs. Arrow complimented the Ylissean. "Reminds me a lot of myself, if I can be brutally honest. Gender roles and expectations have changed drastically over the years, and I'm proud to see another young woman stepping up and protecting the man she cares about!"

"Y-Yeah..." Lucina stammered. *I certainly care for him, that much is certain..."

"Regardless of how you feel toward him, as long as it's in positive regard, I'm glad he has someone like you willing to protect him!" Super Arrow commended Lucina, saluting her.

"Thanks..." Lucina said, trying to imitate the superhero's salute.

"I know how crestfallen Cap here must have been when he had to break up with Jody," Mrs. Arrow told Lucina. "He told my husband he felt guilty he couldn't protect her well enough, so I'm sure he's content having someone determined and strong willed like you by his side."

"Say, Mrs. Arrow," The Captain began. "How is Jody doing...? I haven't spoken to her since the Lightning incident."

"She's doing fine," Monique told him. "I saw her earlier with John Tanaka. They're happily together now, despite her not thinking much of him before the incident. They're thinking about getting married soon, too!"

"Really...?" The Captain sounded wistful as he looked down and held his hand to his chest, his face turning a bit solemn. "At least...I'm happy she's moved on."

"Captain..." Lucina looked at her companion compassionately, her heart aching slightly at seeing
him express such a bittersweet emotion. He must not have wanted to leave her...I wonder if he still has some feelings for her. I can't even see your eyes at this time, Captain...if I saw them, I could at least know more of how you're feeling.

"But above all, she misses you...as a friend," Mrs. Arrow continued, her face and voice turning serious. "A few days after the breakup, you agreed to being friends with her, and you did save her that day, after all. She feels bad she never got a chance to thank you..."

"I...see." The Captain looked up. "If I see her again, I'll do a bit of catching up...maybe congratulate her, too."

"I'm sure she'd appreciate that." Looking at the clock, Mrs. Arrow told her husband, "Come on, dear, let's go. We should get a bit of practice in before the race starts."

"Of course," Super Arrow answered his wife. Turning to Captain Falcon and Lucina, he waved and said, "See you around, citizens!"

"See you later," The Captain said, also waving. "Bye!" Lucina called out.

After they left, Dr. Clash returned from the kitchen. "Alright, guys. I got some boneless BBQ wings for ya. Not too messy, either. Enjoy!"

"Thanks, Dr. Clash," Lucina said, starting to dig in. The Captain was about to take a bite himself when he hesitated.

"...Something the matter, Captain?" Lucina asked him.

"Do you...feel like we're being watched?" Falcon asked her suspiciously.

"Not really..." She said after swallowing her mouthful, taking a sip of her drink.

"I...guess it's just my imagination," he said, proceeding to take his first bite. However, after swallowing and taking a sip of his icy lemonade, he looked back briefly, expecting to see someone spying on them in the corner. To his surprise, nobody was there, and if they were, they were especially cautious about not being spotted.

*I swear, I could feel a pair of eyes staring daggers into my back...if they've been watching us...Maybe that's why I have such a foreboding feeling in the back of my mind.*

...After the two were done at the lounge, they walked out into the city once more. "So...you up for a little walk around town...?" The Captain invited her.

Lucina felt her heart skip a beat in joy. "S-sure," she said, smiling.

Why does the idea of just spending time with him make me so happy all of a sudden? It feels like yesterday we were fighting one another...it's all just water under the bridge now. But...surely this kind of development in how I feel toward him isn't normal...is it? I'm sure he doesn't feel the same about me...he did say I was "just a friend" to PJ earlier.

"Okay, come with me," Falcon said, gesturing to her to come to his side. "It's 25 minutes till the first race, and there's a stop I need to make at our destination, but I figure I'll let you take in the sights a bit with me."
"Sounds great," Lucina told him, catching up to him. "Say, mind if I..."

Even so...I don't know if these moments will ever come again.

"If you...what?" The Captain asked before Lucina swiftly wrapped her left arm around his right arm. "L-Lucina? This is all of a sudden..."

"It's nothing, just..." The Ylissean trailed off before looking the racer in his visor-obscured eyes, "You said you wanted me to stay close to you, right? I've...never been this close to a man before, so just this once, I wanted to experience what it was like...walking together arm in arm."

"Aren't you...worried what others will think, though?" The Captain asked, chuckling nervously and faintly scratching his left cheek with his left index finger.

"It's...just for this moment, right?" Lucina questioned. "Just for those twenty-five minutes."

"Heh, okay..." The Captain said, smiling gently at her. She smiled back softly, looking away briefly, perhaps out of shyness.

Your smile...and your voice when you speak to me so kindly...they're so comforting, Lucina thought. Is this where these feelings are coming from? I feel like this is more than just respect...

The Captain was lost in thought as well. Lucina...you're so compassionate and kind, and even though you've known a lot of sadness in your life, you find reasons to smile. Not only that...you're putting the circumstances of how we met behind you and happily going wherever I go. Hell, I've long put it behind me. You've grown, Lucina, and I couldn't be more proud of you. I'm sure your father would be proud if he could see you like this too.

He felt his heart skip a beat suddenly. Am I really just proud of you...? Or is this...something deeper? I still don't know why, but I feel so...at peace around you. Like I can be myself...

Neither seemed to notice the other being lost in thought this time, so when Falcon said "Let's go," Lucina seemed a bit startled, but quickly snapped back to reality, happily staying close to the Captain as the two took a walk around the futuristic metropolis.

"Wow..." Lucina whispered as she looked around, still clinging to Captain Falcon's arm as the two walked. The sights and sounds of the advanced civilization couldn't help but fill her with wonder, even more so than Clock Town did. "It's all so foreign to me, but amazing nevertheless," she commented. "How far technology has come in your world...never in my dreams would I have imagined such things coming to pass."

"That's the miracles of science for you," The Captain told her. "Our achievements only advanced further following the invention of G-Diffuser technology."

"G-Diffuser?" The swordswoman asked.

"It's the technology F-Zero machines run on," Falcon elaborated. "Though, I imagine you wouldn't want a full explanation..."

"Yeah," Lucina agreed. "So many big words I can't fully understand..." She clung tighter to his arm, a slightly wistful expression gracing her face.

I just want to enjoy these moments with you, Captain. I...don't know how much longer I'll be able to..."
A few minutes passed and the two were close to an alley between a clothing store and a technology store. As they arrived there, Lucina heard two familiar voices calling out to them.

"Hey! Captain Falcon!" Shulk called out as he ran toward them, but what was more surprising was the voice that followed.

"Lucinaaaaa!" Fiora was right there with Shulk as they caught up to the racer and Exalt.

"Shulk? Fiora?!” Lucina gasped. "What are you two doing here?"

Scratching the back of his head, Shulk admitted, "You know how it is in Smash City. It's been a dull several months...I decided to visit Mute City on a whim, and I remembered the last time I visited the Bionis, that Fiora was excited to see Mute City for herself after what Captain Falcon told her that day. I just couldn't say no to bringing her along!"

"Hahaha, I can imagine," The Captain said, laughing heartily. "Good to see you again, Fiora."

"You too, Captain!" The cyborg girl said with a smile.

"Hey, Shulk..." Lucina began. "Has it really been...several months?"

"It has," The wielder of the Monado confirmed. "Time passes slower off world than it does in Smash City. Luckily, we can track the status of everyone off world to make sure they're fine."

"Yeah, I remember..." The Captain recalled, as that was how Ryu helped him find Lucina at the start of his journey with her.

"Plus, it's not like we age in Smash City, so by the time you two get back, it'll be like nothing's changed!"

"I see..." Lucina said.

_I hope so...that is, if we both get back. I guess Young Link was right..._

"Something the matter, Lucina?" Fiora asked her friend.

"Huh?" Lucina murmured. "No, nothing..." Turning to Captain Falcon, she asked him, "I'm guessing this is your stop?"

"Yeah," the F-Zero racer confirmed. "I'll be calling PJ over here to take you guys to the Casino. There, you can watch the races."

"Sounds great!" Shulk said.

"I'm sooo excited!" Fiora chirped, bouncing on her heels gleefully.

"Do your best out there, Captain," Lucina encouraged him. "We'll be watching."

Slowly looking at the companion he'd been traveling with all this time and her two friends, he gave them all a confident smile. "I won't let any of you down. Especially not you, Lucina. I want to make you proud of me, like how you've made me proud of you."

"Ah..." Lucina felt a bit warm inside at his words and the confident grin. "Of course...I look forward to see you do your best." She held a hand to her face and smiled dreamily.

"Heh...well, I'm off," the Captain announced as he turned around and walked down the alley, but
not before turning around and waving at the three friends. "Stay safe, guys!"

But still... He thought, his face bearing a worried expression when he turned his face away from the others' view. Why can't I shake this... foreboding feeling? Like something's about to go horribly wrong...?

"Of course!" Shulk called out.

Noticing Lucina still standing there with a dreamy look on her face, Fiora said, "...Lucina?" When the blue haired young woman didn't budge, Fiora went in to get a closer look. "Hello, what's this...?"

"...Fiora?" Lucina inquired as her face turned serious, questioning.

"Ohoho, you can't hide that look from me," Fiora teased, playfully booping Lucina's nose with a robotic finger. "Sounds like someone has a cruuuuuuuush~!"

"Fiora...!" Lucina grumbled as Fiora burst into laughter.

She's... not entirely wrong, though... she was right. I think the Captain and I are getting closer. Or at least, I'm getting closer to him...

Hearing the honking of a car horn, Shulk called out to Lucina and Fiora, "Hey girls, our ride's here!"

"Coming!"

"Hey, it's you again, missy," PJ called out to Lucina as he rolled down his window. "The Captain called me here to take you to the Casino." Glancing at Shulk and Fiora, he asked, "These your friends the Captain mentioned?"

"Yes," Lucina confirmed. "He's Shulk, and she's Fiora."

"Ahh, I see. Nice to meet ya," PJ introduced himself to the two Homs. "Just please, I'm beggin' ya two lovebirds over there, don't canoodle too much during the ride, ok?"

"Uhhhh...?" Shulk chuckled nervously, softly scratching his cheek. "What's he on about?"

"PJ... doesn't like it when couples get too close and personal in his vehicle," Lucina explained. "Are you two even... a couple, anyway?"

"Heh, I was hoping to keep it on the down low, but..." Shulk scratched the back of his head shyly, and then confessed, "Yes, Fiora and I became official not too long ago. I didn't want to make it too obvious to everyone at Smash City since our relationship is more of the long-distance type, cause I'm mostly in Smash City nowadays and she's still on the Bionis."

"Part of the reason I want to join Smash is so I can be closer to Shulk, too," Fiora added, cuddling her boyfriend. "But it's like I told Captain Falcon when you guys visited Gaur Plain: I don't care if I'm not a fighter. As long as I get to be with Shulk, and you, Lucina... I'll be the happiest girl in the world."

"That's my Fiora," Shulk giggled, playfully nuzzling noses with Fiora.

"Hehe... how nice," Lucina commented. Thinking back to Super Arrow and his wife from earlier, she thought, Love comes in all different kinds of forms, doesn't it? So many different dynamics
Holding her hand to her chest and looking down, she thought, The kind of dynamic the Captain and I share, the way we interact... It does seem like the way a couple would interact. I wonder...

"You guys coming or what?" PJ called out to them.

"Oh, sorry!" Lucina cried, snapping out of her trance. "Come on, Shulk, Fiora. Let's go."

After Lucina sat in the front passenger seat next to PJ and Shulk and Fiora sat in the back and they all buckled their seatbelts, PJ said, "Alright, to Dollars Casino!"

As they rode off, Shulk and Fiora took in the sights around them, with Fiora gushing excitedly at all the advanced technology the city and everything in it was built on.

"Mute City. Is. AMAAAAAAZIIIIING!" Fiora cheered, flapping her hands excitedly.

"Hah, it sure is," Shulk agreed calmly. "I'm amazed we're even going this fast, and we're not even feeling it!"

"That's the miracles of the G-Diffuser technology," PJ boasted. "I'm usually a lot faster than this when transporting customers, but the Captain gave me strict orders to not let loose with you guys, either."

"He just wants us to be safe," Lucina told the driver. "But thanks, PJ."

"I'm just glad your friends are enjoying themselves," PJ answered her before muttering the following under his breath, "And that they're not getting too affectionate over each other..."

"Heehee..." Lucina giggled.

"Say...Lucina, was it?" PJ began. "Do you...like the Captain?"

"I...how do you mean?" Lucina was surprised by the sudden question. "I mean, I admire and respect him, but..."

"I mean...like like him?"

"Ah..." Lucina couldn't help but feel she was being put on the spot. Leaning closer to him, she whispered, "I...think so. I'm still trying to figure out if that's it."

"I see..." PJ answered her quietly. "Your secret's safe with me, missy, and I wish you luck in figuring it out. But I must advise you...it could be dangerous. You might become a target of people like Black Shadow."

"I know," Lucina answered him. "I'm aware of the risks, and if it should come to that, I'll take my chances. I've been training with the Captain, after all...I'm sure I can handle it."

"For both your sakes, I hope so," PJ said, a trace of uncertainty in his voice as they continued to drive off.

As the Groovy Taxi passed by a corner, the figure that was watching Lucina and the Captain back at the Dollars Bar and Lounge hid in a dark alley, pulling out a communication device.

"This is Don Genie. I've got visual."
"Will you track them?" A mysterious, menacing male voice said on the other side of the line.

"I will," Don Genie confirmed. "I'll keep you posted, sir."

"Excellent..."
Solitude of the Ocean Depths

Chapter Summary

and it all comes crashing down...

Chapter Notes

Did someone say...ANGST?

cause boi

This chapter will be brimming with it. I suggest you get some tissues, my dudes - there will be feels. LOTS of them

Also, the televised races? First four are all from the Diamond Cup in GX, but the last one is the second track of the AX Cup. Felt like Phantom Road (last track of Diamond) would be anticlimactic.

Title based on the translated title of "Shinkai no Kodoku" by Houko Kuwashima (which, a character voiced by her in Japanese will probably appear later...)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 9 - Solitude of the Ocean Depths

"Alright, we're here!" PJ announced as he pulled the Groovy Taxi into the parking lot of the Dollars Casino. It was more than just a place for high rollers to get their fix - it was also a place to bet on promising F-Zero racers, and even just watch the games without betting. "You guys wanna make any bets, or...?"

"No, we're fine watching," Lucina told the alien cabbie as she, Shulk, and Fiora stepped out. "Thanks again, PJ."

"Just stay safe, you three."

"Don't worry, sir. I'm sure we'll be fine!" Shulk reassured PJ.

"We can handle ourselves," Fiora said in a slightly bragging manner, winking and slightly sticking her tongue out as she gave a thumbs up. "Right, guys?" She asked Shulk and Lucina. The two only nodded confidently.

"Okay then...I trust you guys will be able to." Starting up the Groovy Taxi again, he said, "Hit me up anytime you want a ride!"

"Will do!" Lucina called out. Shortly after, PJ drove off in his high speed futuristic taxi.
"Well, let's head on in," Shulk encouraged the two girls.

As the three entered, they took in the sights and sounds all around them. Some patrons were simply trying their hand at blackjack tables or slot machines, while others were gathered around the large television screens close to the back of the building. That was the destination of Lucina and her two friends, and the minute they arrived, the races were about to start.

"It's starting!" Fiora squealed excitedly as she, Shulk, and Lucina took a seat on a nearby bench.

The first track of the racing tournament was the Trident at Cosmo Terminal. The cameras recording the action showed a panoramic view of the course — a large track suspended over a seemingly bottomless pit that diverged into three separate tracks that twisted into a triangle, merged, diverged, and merged again. There were holographic schematics projected above, and the walls seemed to be moving from top to bottom, giving the illusion that the track was in some sort of elevator. The starting track when merged had guard rails, but when it diverged, there were no rails.

"That's the first track?" Lucina gasped. "No rails on most of it...and two of the diverging tracks are at an angle..."

"Hey, this is F-Zero racing after all, Lucina," Shulk told her, shrugging. "After all, all these racers are seasoned professionals. It'd take more than that to throw them off!"

"If you say so..."

The image on the screens shifted to the thirty racers at the start line. Captain Falcon's Blue Falcon was there, alongside Samurai Goroh's Fire Stingray, PJ's Groovy Taxi, Super and Mrs. Arrow's King and Queen Meteor respectively, Dr. Clash's Crazy Bear, and several other vehicles driven by racers neither Lucina nor her two friends were familiar with.

Tapping Lucina's shoulder to get her attention, Fiora said cheerfully, "Lucina, look! There's Captain Falcon!" She pointed to the Blue Falcon on the screen.

"I see him," Lucina nodded. Cupping her hands to her mouth, she shouted gleefully, "Show them your moves, Captain!"

"Blaze to that finish line!" Fiora joined her friend in cheering the Captain on.

"You...know he can't hear you, right?" Shulk asked the two girls, chuckling nervously.

Giggling and holding her hand to her lips, Lucina answered him, "We know." Looking at the screen again, she continued, "But we can still root for him anyway."

Rubbing the back of his head, Shulk conceded, "Fair enough..."

On the transmission, a large drone with three television screens on it displayed a countdown as the announcer's voice boomed:

"3...2...1...GO!"

Upon the "GO!", all the racers took off at blazing fast speeds as high energy music played.

"They're going so fast..." Lucina murmured, but what really surprised her was the first set of diverging tracks that seemed to twist together like a coil. The racers were dispersed between the different tracks, but even though the tracks seemed to go upside down, the vehicles stayed on the
"W-wow..." Lucina could not believe her eyes. Holding her hand to her mouth in surprise, she asked, "How are they...?"

"I'm guessing it has to do with the G-Diffuser technology PJ mentioned," Shulk said. "You know how the vehicles hover above the ground? My best guess is that the G-Diffuser technology uses some form of advanced magnetism: forces of the same polarity repel, but there is a bit of opposite polarity that attracts, and that's what allows the vehicles to drive upside down or on cylindrical platforms."

"Wow, Shulk," Lucina complimented him. "You sure know your stuff."

Opposite polarity...attracts? Her mind started to wander, but she quickly shook her head.

Oh, now you're just finding excuses to be lost in thought, Lucina. It's not that deep.

As the race proceeded, one racer fell off the tracks, and another spun their vehicle around rapidly, causing a vehicle heading toward them to be sent flying off the tracks.

"Oh no!" Lucina gasped. "They're..."

"They'll be fine," Shulk reassured her. "I did my research, and F-Zero has a lot of safety regulations in place." Holding his hand to his chin in a contemplative manner, he mused, "Although, I heard its predecessor, the F-MAX Grand Prix, wasn't so stringent on safety..."

"Hmm..." Lucina held a finger to her chin quizzically. Then...was that where that Horrific Grand Finale Dr. Clash told us about took place, or...? Best not to think about it too much.

All of a sudden, the announcer's voice echoed once again with, "You got boost power!"

"Ohhhh man, this is where it gets good," Fiora chimed, rocking back and forth in her seat excitedly. "When boost is enabled, ANYTHING goes!"

"But you still gotta be careful," Shulk added. "One wrong boost and you'll fall off and become disqualified!"

"I see..." Lucina said. The three excitedly watched the race unfold before them. Shulk and Fiora watched all 28 of the remaining racers boost and maneuver their way carefully throughout the track, while Lucina's eyes were solely focused on Captain Falcon whenever the Blue Falcon was in the camera's shot.

Come on, Captain...you can do it...

"YEAH! The final lap!" A few seconds after the announcer said that, the music became more intense with a pulsating beat drop and the whole crowd of spectators started to cheer excitedly.

"Whoooooo!" The three friends cheered as well, with Fiora waving her arms to the music.

"Come on, Captain!" Lucina shouted excitedly as the Blue Falcon boosted across the track, being ever so careful not to fall, and refueling its energy on the boost strips.

"Almost at the finish line! You're almost there!" Victory was so close to the Captain's grasp, and Lucina couldn't help but feel her whole being quiver in excitement.

"FINISH!"
And as expected, Captain Falcon took first place, as displayed on the leaderboard that came up.

"YESSSSS!" Fiora and Lucina leapt from their seats and gave each other a series of high fives and low fives followed by a fist bump in celebration.

"Hey girls, I know you're happy but try to contain your excitement," Shulk told them, laughing a bit nervously. "He's still got four more rounds to go, and he needs to maintain enough points to get first place for the whole tournament. Placing first here certainly helps, but he can't fall too far behind in the next races."

"...Of course," Lucina answered him, chuckling subtly. "I knew that...it's just...seeing all this happen before my eyes, it's..." She looked at Fiora, grinning gleefully.

"SOOOO EXCITING!" Fiora seemed to finish her best friend's sentence, and the two bounced up and down and squealed excitedly.

"Heheh...now could you two perhaps sit? You're getting everyone's attention by making all that noise."

"S-Sorry!" The two girls immediately sat down.

As the two girls sat down, the next race was starting at Sand Ocean's Lateral Shift. It was a track on a desert planet that often shifted at an angle perpendicular to the ground, going through some kind of alien temple at one point. Many of the racers from the last race were there, including the Captain. However, the two disqualified pilots were nowhere to be found, and some racers that made it past the first round were replaced with some new faces, probably to give them a chance to rank as well. That round was also similarly intense, with one racer, apparently Dr. Clash, getting disqualified by crashing. This time around, Captain Falcon ranked second place.

"Oh no...he's second?" Lucina asked anxiously.

"Just wait," Shulk reassured her. "There's gonna be a second leaderboard coming up. Hold on..."

As Shulk predicted, a second leaderboard flashed on the screen. The Blue Falcon was still in first place.

Tilting her head to the side slightly, Lucina inquired, "I don't...understand?"

"You see," Shulk began, "Since this is a tournament of five races, everyone's individual score in each race, which is depicted in the first leaderboard, tallies up to their cumulative total, hence the second leaderboard. You can score poorly in one, but as long as your scores are better for the other races, you're practically guaranteed first place."

"Ah," Lucina said, nodding. "So then, that explains some of the racers who weren't disqualified replaced by other racers too?"

"Yeah," Shulk said. "To give them a chance as well. With how well the Captain's been ranking so far, though, I think it's safe to say he'll be in all the races."

"I hope so..."

Just then, an unfamiliar female voice said, "Hey guys, mind if I drop in and watch some of the action with you?"

The three friends turned around and saw a young girl with short, silver bob-cut hair, blue eyes, a
teal vest, brown boots and gloves, a red camo bikini top, red camo pants, and teal goggles on her head.

"Who might you be?" Shulk asked the girl.

"You're...Shulk, Fiora, and Lucina, right?" The girl asked.

"Yes, that's us..." Lucina told her. "I'm Lucina. He's Shulk, and she's Fiora."

"Nice to meet you all. My name's Lily Flyer, soldier for the Galactic Space Forces and pilot of the Bunny Flash. Captain Falcon requested that I check in on you and make sure you guys are alright. And, since I've been disqualified, I guess I might as well watch how everyone else does..."

"Nice to have you here, Lily!" Fiora cheerfully greeted Lily, shaking her hand. "Come on! Have a seat!"

"Thanks, Fiora. Falcon did tell me you guys were a lively bunch..." Lily giggled. Shulk and Fiora sat back down together while Lily sat next to Lucina.

The next track was Fire Field's Undulation. It appeared to be a series of, as the name suggested, undulating tracks above a fast moving stream of molten metal.

"You SURE they'll be safe, Shulk?" Lucina felt a bit of anxiety upon seeing the course's layout.

"I know it looks intimidating, but according to what I researched, whenever a racer is about to drive off into a bottomless pit...or any other deadly hazard, the pilot is immediately teleported out of there, and their vehicle is repaired good as new after a few minutes. This is the future, after all." Noticing his friend's expression, he consoled her, "But if it makes you that uncomfortable, you can talk to Lily in the meantime. We'll keep you posted if anything exciting happens."

"...Thanks, Shulk," Lucina told Shulk with a smile. Turning to Lily, she asked her, "So...you're a soldier?"

"I am," Lily answered her. "I've been with the Federation all my fourteen years of life."

"I see..." Lucina said, before realizing a crucial detail that hit her like a bag of bricks as her eyes widened in surprise. "W-w-wait a second. You're only fourteen years old?!"

"Surprised?" Lily giggled slightly. "I never knew who my parents were. Shortly after I was born, I was placed in the Federation's care as a random mandatory enlistment, and was trained to be a supporting fighter."

"Doesn't that...make you sad, though?" Lucina inquired. "That you can't freely leave? That you never had a childhood, never even had any friends when you were small? I at least had some of those things before I started fighting for my freedom, and I'm a whole seven years older than you are."

"The way I see it, as long as I can serve the Federation to the best of my ability and ensure they can protect those that need protecting, I'm content," Lily answered Lucina. "They take great care of me, anyway. In a way, they're like my second family."

"I see..." Thinking for a moment, Lucina then asked Lily, "Why did you choose to become an F-Zero racer?"

"Good question," Lily said. "I'm not in it for any prize money or anything. I am, however, proud of
how far I came as a soldier thanks to my training, and I figure I'd step it up a bit by becoming an F-Zero pilot. Part of F-Zero racing is reacting under pressure and making split second decisions. If I can improve those skills through racing, I can become a better fighter." Her face bore a disheartened expression as she continued, "Although, I'm still disappointed I flubbed it back at Cosmo Terminal. I don't know why, but this time around, my focus was a bit off..."

"Happens to everyone, I suppose," Lucina consoled the young soldier, patting her on the shoulder. "Just keep trying."

"Thanks." Looking up for a moment, Lily said thoughtfully, "I never saw it like that though...being deprived of a childhood and not knowing where I came from. Maybe someday, I'll try to find who my real parents are. I'm sure there's a lot I've been missing in life."

Just then, Shulk's excited cry interrupted the two girls' conversation. "OH MAN! Did you see that?!"

"See what?" Lucina inquired.

"Someone took a jump too fast and crashed into one of the poles above and BAM! They're outta here!" Fiora shouted, slapping her hands together for dramatic effect at the "BAM!"

"Even crashing into things?!" Lucina gasped.

"When you're going \textit{that} fast, especially if you're wobbling like how this track tends to make you, bumping into ANYTHING will do that to you." Lily giggled as she said, "It's happened to me a fair share of times..."

Eventually the final lap came. The crowd was hyped as usual when the music intensified, and then...

"FINISH!"

Lucina stared intently at the screens, waiting for the first leaderboard, and what she saw dismayed her a bit.

"He was...18th place this time?"

The second leaderboard wasn't much better. Captain Falcon had dropped to 3rd place in the total rankings.

"Aw..." Lucina murmured, a disappointed look on her face.

"Hey, don't worry," Lily said, trying to lift her senior's spirits. "He's still got two more races after this. He was probably playing it a bit safer on this track. Rest assured, he'll get back up there and win it. I heard that he won the X tournament before this."

"Ah..." Looking at the screen as the next race started, Lucina said, "Well, I have faith in him."

The fourth race was the Dragon Slope on Aeropolis. Shulk, Lucina and Fiora all gasped in wonder at the futuristic look of the city, that looked like something straight out of a sci-fi movie they would see in Smash City. Words alone didn't do it justice.

"Welp, I guess everything's fine here," Lily told the three friends, standing up and stretching her arms. "I'm needed back at headquarters. Though I suppose I'll go for a leisurely drive around Mute City afterwards..."
"Thanks! You have a great day!" Shulk called out to her.

"Hope to see you again!" Lucina said, waving.

"Give our regards to the Captain for us!" Fiora told Lily.

"Will do," Lily said. "I hope to see you guys again, too."

After Lily left, the three focused their attention on the race as it unfolded. Midway through, however, Lucina could swear she felt somebody watching her and her friends. She could feel someone staring daggers into her back.

"Is that...?" She quickly turned around, but didn't see anyone who could possibly be stalking them.

Was the Captain right? Is someone truly watching us...? Why didn't Lily notice it?

"Everything ok there, Lucina?" Fiora asked her close friend.

"Huh?!" Lucina jumped a bit, startled. Slowly turning to Fiora, she answered her friend, "No, it's nothing."

"I hope so, cause you're really missing out!"

"Heh...sorry," Lucina chuckled, turning her attention once again to the screen. Within a few minutes, the race was over, and the Captain ranked 1st in this particular race, and 2nd overall.

"Yessss! He's back up!" Fiora cheered, pumping her fists in the air.

"He just needs one more first place and he's home free," Lucina said, a hopeful smile gracing her face.

The final track came as a surprise. The track's name was Meteor Stream, and it was in...

"Outer Space?!" Shulk cried in surprise. "Oh man, they are really pulling out all the stops this time!"

Rocking back and forth excitedly, Fiora cheered, "Oooooh!"

After the announcer said, "3...2...1...GO!", Lucina only watched silently and hopefully, thinking, I believe in you, Captain...win this...for me. She held her hands to her chest, feeling her heartbeat rapid from the hype.

"Oh, this looks like an easy one," Shulk commented. "There's guard rails on the open tracks, and most of the venue itself is an enclosed, twisting cage. It's pretty short overall too. The Captain's got this one in the bag!"

"Really...?" Watching the racers meander their way through the course, Lucina agreed, "Yeah, Shulk, you're right..."

"Leave them in the dust, Captain!" Fiora cheered, getting up from her seat.

"Come on!" Shulk joined his girlfriend in cheering Falcon on.

The final lap came, and Falcon was taking the lead.

Lucina's heart was racing almost as fast as the pilots themselves. She could no longer contain her...
excitement. Getting up, she jubilantly shouted, "COME ON, BLUE FALCOOOOON!"

"Wow," Shulk chuckled. "You're really feeling it, huh, Lucina?" Turning his attention back to the screens, he and Fiora joined in in cheering him on.

"FINISH!"

And surely enough, Captain Falcon not only scored first on this race, but his overall rank was back at the very top; first place. The cameras cut to show two other unfamiliar vehicles, belonging to the racers who placed second and third respectively, doing a celebratory lap on Mute City, with the Blue Falcon taking the lead as triumphant music played.

"He...he did it..." Lucina was trembling with an overflowing sense of joy. "He really did make us all proud...!" She slowly closed her eyes, happy tears streaming down her face as she smiled.

"...Lucina?" Fiora asked her, standing up and getting a closer look at her face. "Are you...crying?"

"O-only because I'm just so happy," Lucina answered the cyborg, wiping away her tears. "He said he would make me proud of him like how I made him proud of me...and it happened."

"Aww, you're too sweet, Lucina," Fiora cooed. Noticing the camera cutting to the three victors, she told her friend, "Hey! Look!"

Most of the other racers who didn't make to the top three were cheering on the three champions, including Dr. Clash and Lily. On the third place platform was a girl who looked to be only two years older than Lily, with a pink, genie-like outfit, heart-shaped goggles, and brown hair in a heart-shaped ponytail. In second place was an African-American woman wearing a somewhat revealing orange two-piece outfit with orange boots.

And in first place was Captain Falcon himself. As the cameras got a closer view of the three victors, Lucina saw the Captain smiling confidently and waving at the cameras. It almost felt like he was smiling directly at her.

There's that feeling again, She thought, her heart skipping a beat. I feel so...happy. No...it's more than that. I feel...warm inside. Like...if I were there, if only I could be there, I would run up to him, embrace him so tightly, and...and... She imagined herself in Captain Falcon's arms at that scene, embracing him lovingly with a content smile on her face, then lifting her face to meet his and drawing closer to him, their lips meeting in a passionate kiss.

Ah...?! Lucina brought two fingers to her lips as she blushed at that thought. C-could this mean...? "Hey, the interview's starting!" Shulk said as he stood, snapping Lucina out of her trance. The camera cut to Captain Falcon and the announcer, a strange-looking man with green hair and goggles on his eyes named Mr. Zero, as the song Mrs. Arrow mentioned back at the Dollars Bar played in the background.

"In this world you've got to be strong
You've got to fight to keep your spirit alive
And you might feel like there is nothing left to go for and fight for
But it's the fight that keeps us ready and on guard..."

"So, Captain Falcon," Mr. Zero began, "That was a stellar performance today! What brought this about?"
"Let's just say...I did this for a very special someone," Captain Falcon answered his interviewer. "Someone who I've bonded with a lot over the past few days...someone who's made me so proud of her."

"So it's a she?" Mr. Zero questioned. "This should be interesting..."

"*Even I can feel the power*
When I think of him I see no fear
Feel no pain..."

_Captain..._ Lucina felt the joy within her intensify as her eyes sparkled. She could not stop staring at the image of her partner on the screen, inspecting every gorgeous feature of his face and body, and most of all, his smile.

"To you...Lucina!" Captain Falcon gave a triumphant thumbs up at the camera, grinning confidently. "I hope you're as proud of me as I am of you!"

"Ahh...!" Lucina smiled widely at his words, her heart racing, her body feeling warm inside, her eyes gushing with happy tears.

"*Forever he will be my hero (better believe he knows the way!)*
And not just only for tonight
And now that I'm not just a dreamer (and I know I've got what he's got!)
And not just only for tonight...!"

_You will always be my hero,_ Lucina thought, brushing away her tears. _And I'm not just a dreamer anymore. I don't care if you're sixteen years older than me. There's just so much to admire about you, Captain. Your determination, your wisdom, your intelligence, your kindness...no, it's not mere admiration. I know what this feeling is, now. It can only be one thing. It's...

"Hellooooo? Lucina?" Fiora asked Lucina, who stared at the projection of Captain Falcon on the screen, almost lovingly.

"F-Fiora?!" Lucina gasped, snapping out of her daydream.

"There's that look on your face again," Fiora teased, grinning mischievously. "I knew it. You DO have a crush on the Captain!"

"Fior—" Lucina began in an irritated manner, before realizing she couldn't hide her true feelings anymore. Closing her eyes and smirking, she conceded with a shrug, "...Alright, Fiora, you got me. It's true...I do have feelings for him."

"Ohohoho! I was right! You can't hide anything from me!" Fiora leapt in the air victoriously. "I have an idea, Lucina. When he gets back, why don't you tell him?"

"Because..." Lucina began timidly as she opened her eyes, hesitating to complete the sentence. _Because these feelings are more than just a mere crush. It's something much deeper..._

"Because...I don't feel it's the right time."

"Why not?" Shulk asked. "It's never not the right time to— What...?"

"Shulk...?" Fiora asked Shulk, who suddenly went silent.
"A...vision?" Lucina pondered, noticing Shulk's eyes were glowing blue like they did whenever he had a vision. After his eyes stopped glowing, she asked him, "What did you see...?"

"It's not good..." Shulk fretted. "Some tall, strong man clad in black, with...horns on his head? I'm guessing it's part of his costume, but he storms in and attacks everyone, proceeding to ransack the place. It doesn't look like there are any survivors...not me, not Fiora...not you, either..."

"Black Shadow..." Lucina whispered vengefully, her visage turning tense.

"Come again?" Fiora asked, urgently.

"You guys need to get out of here," Lucina urged her friends. "This has to be that Black Shadow person that Captain Falcon once told me about. I don't know much about him, except for the fact that he's dangerous. I'll buy you some time to get yourselves, and the others, out of here."

"But...what about yourself?" Shulk asked, apprehensively.

"I'll do my best," Lucina asserted,必须 up all the confidence and courage she had. "The Captain has trained me well. I want to prove my strength, and if this is how it has to be, then so be it."

"I...okay," Shulk said after a moment of hesitation. "I hope you know what you're doing."

_I hope I do, too_, Lucina thought. _Here goes nothing..._ "Just trust me, guys." Lucina got into a fighting stance as she saw a figure that matched Shulk's description walk into the Casino. "It's time for me to change fate."

"Heheheh..." Black Shadow cackled maliciously as he entered, not having drawn everyone's attention to him immediately.

"Is that..." a civilian murmured upon seeing the criminal wanted all across the galaxy. Unfortunately for them, Black Shadow heard their voice and began gathering electric energy in his hands, prepared to char them to a crisp with over 10,000 watts of pure electricity. Other casino goers noticed and gasped, when Lucina shouted, "Stop right there, Black Shadow!" She ran toward him and attacked him in a leaping slash, only for him to knock her away. Thanks to the training she received, Lucina flipped around in mid air and managed to land on her feet, sliding a short ways backwards. Everyone else only looked on in stunned silence.

"Everyone, just go!" Shulk called out to the other casino-goers as Lucina and Black Shadow battled in the open space on the casino floor. People ran out in droves, screaming in terror, as Fiora calmly but worriedly led them out. Once they had all left, she called to him, "Come on, Shulk!"

As Shulk and Fiora ran out into the parking lot, Shulk suddenly stopped.

"Shulk?" Fiora asked him before noticing he was having another vision. "This isn't a good time for another vision..."

"Oh no...not Lucina..." Shulk murmured after the vision ended, his face darkening in despair.

"...She'll be fine, I'm sure," Fiora tried to console him. "She's been getting stronger, remember? I believe in her. Don't you?"

"Yes, but..." Shulk began fearfully. "Black Shadow will get the upper hand, and knock her out, capturing her..."
"And the Captain will come save her, I'm sure," Fiora tried to reason with him. "You've got to stop taking all these burdens onto yourself like this, Shulk. I love you too much to see you torment yourself like this."

"Sorry..." Shulk apologized.

"Plus, what's important right now is that we make it back to Smash City safely," Fiora added, a determined expression on her face.

"...You're right, Fiora," Shulk said. "Let's go."

As the couple ran to safety, Fiora thought, *Please, Captain...please save Lucina. She cares for you deeply, I can tell. And I'm sure you do, too...*

"You can't run," Black Shadow bellowed as he reached his fist toward Lucina, who stood on top of a blackjack table. She quickly leapt and flipped forward in the air before his attack could connect, merely flipping the table over. Lucina then slashed at Black Shadow, only for him to swiftly turn around and block the blow with his hulking large arms.

"What...?" Lucina gasped, recoiling slightly.

"Hmph...not bad," Black Shadow said, observing the casino floor which was now completely empty and some of the television screens destroyed, sparks flying out of their cracks. "Falcon has trained you well. Looks like that tip from Don Genie was right..."

"What of it?" Lucina scowled, cautiously circling the evil mastermind with her Falchion drawn. "I'm not letting you lay a finger on him."

*So someone was watching us... She thought. And they tracked me here...*

"Heh, aren't you the ever noble defender," Black Shadow taunted her. "But I don't intend to destroy him directly this time."

"What are you scheming..." Lucina murmured, her expression tense, holding her Falchion close to her as a defensive measure.

"I intend to shatter his will until he's an emotionless husk of the man he once was..." The evil F-Zero racer began, threateningly, before continuing, "And what better way than tearing the things he cares about most from him...?"

"What are you...?" Lucina questioned before hearing an oddly familiar voice behind her.

"Starting with you, young lady."

*It can't be... Lucina turned around, slowly lowering her Falchion, and saw...*

"Captain?"

The man who stood before her was the exact spitting image of Captain Falcon, except something about him seemed more menacing. His helmet was purple instead of red and had a silver skull engraving instead of a golden falcon. His clothes were also identical to the Captain's, except they were red with purple gloves and wristcuffs, and rose gold boots. The buckle on his belt appeared to be a solid silver disc with what looked like blood stains on it.

"That's Blood Falcon to you, young lady," Blood Falcon said with a sinister grin. "Though it
doesn't matter since you're probably gonna die soon."

"Not if I-" Lucina began, raising her Falchion to attack him, only for him to swiftly and forcefully punch her in the gut, knocking the air out of her lungs.

"Ughhh...?!
" She gagged, her pupils shrinking in response to the pain, her hand dropping the Falchion which fell limply to her side.

"Your first mistake was thinking you could take me on when you're clearly outmatched," Blood Falcon boasted, smirking menacingly as Lucina's vision became blurry.

Why...? She asked herself as she struggled to keep her balance before slumping to the ground helplessly.

I did it again...I got too cocky. Nothing's changed...nothing at all. I'm still weak. I'm still a burden...

Black Shadow held out his hand, lifting the woman Blood Falcon defeated with some sort of telekinetic force. "Let's see if this woman is the perfect bait for Falcon..."

And now, I'm paying the price... She was unable to move, feeling like she was just an observer to everything happening to her and lacking the power to stop it. I probably...won't even make it back to Smash City alive...and if I do, I can't even face them like this... Tears began to well up in her eyes as her vision started to go black. She didn't even feel Black Shadow trapping her in some sort of energy-based chains, or notice Blood Falcon picking up her Falchion.

Father...Mother...Shulk...Fiora...Robin...Zelda...

Her eyes slowly closed and her consciousness faded to black as these last thoughts crept into her head, a lone tear rolling down her right cheek.

Captain...I'm so sorry...

As Captain Falcon drove back to the Dollars Casino, he was not expecting to see two familiar faces running to him in distress.

"Captain! It's not good!" Shulk cried as he and Fiora ran to the Blue Falcon.

Opening the cockpit and climbing out, the Captain asked them, "What's the matter? Where's Lucina?"

"That's...the problem," Fiora panted, the color draining from her face. "This strong man with horns on his head stormed in and started attacking, but Lucina bought us time to get everyone else out and escape ourselves. It was thanks to Shulk seeing him coming through a vision."

"Black Shadow..." The Captain murmured, a trace of subtle anger in his voice. "He's stooping that low...how did he even know?"

"I do know she looked behind her shoulder after Lily left for some reason," Fiora added. "I have no idea why."

"Wait a minute..." The Captain remembered how he felt he was being watched over at the Dollars Lounge. "It must have been...someone must have been spying on Lucina and I."

"If there was, I didn't notice them there," Shulk confessed. "Or even who they might have been..."

"I see...nothing we can do about that aspect, at least." Looking around, Falcon asked Shulk, "Do
"She's...probably in Black Shadow's grasp..." Shulk said regretfully, looking down with a sad expression on his face. "As we were leaving, I had another vision that Black Shadow captured her. It was either that, or, if we didn't do anything, we all die..."

"Don't worry, Shulk," Captain Falcon consoled the wielder of the Monado. "You made the right call. I'll find Lucina, and stop Black Shadow myself. You guys just head back to Smash City..."

"Yeah," Fiora agreed. "I have some...business there too."

"Come again?"

"I...have my interview today for the next Smash tournament with Master Hand himself," the former vessel of Meyneth clarified. "I didn't tell Lucina because I wanted it to be a surprise if I make it. Though...I don't want to have to be worrying about her the whole time. I'm worried I may not make such a good impression like this..."

"I'll save her, Fiora," the Captain reassured her. "Don't worry. Just do your best, okay?"

Looking anxious for a moment, Fiora then nodded, her face now bearing a determined expression. "Of course...I'll do my best for her." She and Shulk ran off to the teleporter that led back to Smash City while Captain Falcon climbed back into the Blue Falcon and drove off in search of his companion.

"Ngh..." When Lucina opened her eyes, she found herself in an industrial area consisting of ten relatively smaller towers circling a larger tower. Or at least, what remained of it. The center tower was nothing but rubble. They were all suspended by roads floating over lightning clouds, which also infested the skies. Every few seconds, lightning flashes illuminated the dark skies. Looking down, she saw she was bound by chains of blue electric energy, and was suspended in mid-air. Her Falchion was also missing.

"So, the maiden finally awakes from her slumber," Black Shadow said in a condescending manner, a sinister grin on his face.

"Don't patronize me, Black Shadow," Lucina retorted. "I demand to know where you've taken me."

"Hahahaha! The hostage is making demands!" Black Shadow mocked her. "If you must know, though, you're in the power plant region in the Lightning area."

"Lightning...?"

"I'm just thinking of the many ways to kill you and crush Falcon's will in the process," the villainous racer cackled. "Should I drop you into the abyss below us? Fry you with thousands of volts? Or no, maybe go with what I tried to do last time with Falcon's ex, Jody, and lock you in one of these power plants and rig it to explode!"

"Just...why, though?" Lucina asked. "Why are you doing all this?"

"Heheheh...you want to know why?" Blood Falcon said as he stepped out of the shadows. Upon closer observation, Lucina noticed he was holding her Falchion.

"That's...!"
"I may be a clone of the Captain created four years ago, but I ain't thick," Blood Falcon boasted. "After defeating our previous master, Deathborn, Captain Falcon hadn't been seen in Mute City for a while. And now he returns here with someone like you? Normally we wouldn't have bothered if it was someone like Snake, but Falcon seemed very close to you...almost too close. Like you were someone special to him." Holding his free hand to his chin, he mused, "Black Shadow ordered Don Genie to stake you guys out, determine the nature of your interactions. And what do you know, when Falcon was being interviewed on F-ZERO TV, he gives a shoutout to you specifically. Gee, I wonder why that is...?"

"Ah...that's..." Lucina was trying not to blush, thinking of how close she and Captain Falcon had become.

"...So that's how it is," Blood Falcon mused. "You have a thing for him? It's probably one-sided anyway, so he probably wouldn't even come to save you."

"He will," Lucina answered him. "I don't doubt that."

**But...maybe his clone is right...I'm surprised he even has a clone. Is this something he kept secret from me...? Why?**

"Heh, you may be right," Blood Falcon said. "He always comes out to save anyone in need. It's how we know when to attack him, since otherwise he keeps to himself in god-knows-where."

Noticing Lucina's gaze shifting to the Falchion, Blood Falcon taunted her, "Oh, you want this...?"

"That's *my* Falchion," Lucina snarled, trying in vain to reach for the sword's handle. "Give it back right now, or..."

"'Fraid not, lass," Blood Falcon replied, grinning maliciously as he pulled the Falchion out of her reach. "You'd sooner take off an arm than break those chains, lemme tell ya!"

"Ugh..." Lucina groaned, her expression turning bleak. "Just...kill me now. Please."

"Oh...?"

"The Captain was taking me various places to train, so I could get stronger, to protect myself and those I care about. And I can't even do the former...please, I don't want Captain Falcon to see me like this...like a failure. Just kill me..."

For a moment, the blade of the Falchion was pointed at Lucina's throat. She gulped in fear, her heartbeat accelerating, the palms of her hands sweating, as she stared death in the face. After a while, she regained her determination as she thought, *I've faced death countless times before...this is nothing.*

Just then, Blood Falcon drew the sword away from Lucina. "You think I'd make it *that* easy?" He taunted. "You've got another thing coming. Killing you here would be no fun. I want what Black Shadow wants, and that's to watch the hope drain from Falcon's soul as we kill you so slowly you'd be begging for mercy...!"

"N-no..." For once in her life, Lucina felt true fear. She had never considered the possibility of being tortured in her home world, as most enemy nations were destroyed in her future. There was only the Risen, who possessed no intelligence, no willingness to torture, only knowing how to kill. She couldn't even begin to imagine being tortured or dying a slow, agonizing death in the first place.

"Well, speak of the devil," Black Shadow interrupted them. "Here he is now."
Surely enough, the Blue Falcon was pulling into view. Captain Falcon leapt out of the Blue Falcon and ran to Lucina. "Lucina! Are you okay?!

"Captain...?" She felt a mixture of relief, joy, and sorrow, but her face was solemn. "How...did you know where to find me?"

"It was all over the news when I was heading back. They said someone matching your description was headed here, and I knew you couldn't have come here on your own."

"Captain..." A weak smile graced her face, before turning regretful. "You...shouldn't have come here."

"Why...?" The expression on his face turned melancholy at those words.

"I...failed you, Captain. I let you down, after you did all that for me. I...don't deserve to even return to Smash City."

"What's gotten into you...?" The Captain could not believe what he was hearing. "You know what I said about blaming yourself..."

"Please," Lucina begged him. "Don't waste your time on someone like me."

"Lucina..." He slowly walked closer to her.

"Please! S-stay back!" Before she could say anything else, she felt the energy chains around her shocking her with mild electric shocks, causing a fair amount of discomfort.

"Nnn...ngh..." She grunted, wincing and squirming in pain.

"Stop this, Black Shadow!" Captain Falcon told Black Shadow. "What are you trying to accomplish from this...? You coward..."

When the shocks stopped, Lucina took a few moments to regain her bearings, breathing heavily.

This is...mortifying, she thought as she panted. I don't want Falcon to see me like this...I have to show him...that I can handle this...

When her vision stopped blurring and her ears stopped ringing, she weakly insulted Black Shadow with, "Is...that all you've got? And here your little lackey said... I'd be 'begging for mercy'. Heh...what a load of bull-

And then the shocks started up again, this time more intense, shifting from discomfort to significant pain.

"Agh...aaaaaaaaaaaaah...!"

"Lucina!"

The shocks stopped momentarily. The color was draining from Lucina's sweat-covered face as she panted weakly and groaned, her eyes still closed, before the shocks intensified and she screamed in agony.

It's no use... She was surprised she was still able to think amidst the unimaginable torture.

I...can't...

"THAT'S ENOUGH! Please, leave her out of it!" The Captain's voice was particularly anguished
as he pleaded. Almost immediately, the shocks stopped.

Noticing how pained the Captain's voice sounded, Lucina slowly opened her eyes and turned her head to him. "Cap...tain...?"

"I know...what you're trying to do," Captain Falcon told his clone and Black Shadow. "You're trying to break my will by going after those I care about...? And doing it right in front of me...that's real low, I'm not going to lie."

"What are you...?" Lucina whispered, her eyes widening in tension.

"But...your endgame goal is to destroy me nevertheless, right?" He lowered his gaze to the ground as he continued, "I don't care what happens to me anymore...as long as she's safe. Please, release her and take me instead. You can do whatever you want to me...I only want her to be safe."

_In the end, he thought, I only want you to be happy and safe, Lucina. I'm sorry I dragged you into this danger...Just know that you didn't let me down. I'm still proud of you..."

"Oh...?" Black Shadow wondered, his voice tinged with a sinister curiosity.

"Captain...?!" Lucina pleaded. "Captain, no! Don't do this! I don't want anyone putting their life on the line for my sake, least of all you! Please...!"

Falcon slowly walked closer to Black Shadow's range. "Lucina...please forgive me."

"Heheheh..." Black Shadow laughed maliciously. "Looks like we have a deal...!" Slowly lowering Lucina with his telekinetic powers, he then snapped his fingers when she was close enough to the ground, causing the chains to separate, releasing her in the process as she unceremoniously fell to her knees.

"Guh..." She rasped, before looking up and seeing the chains float to Black Shadow's side as he converted them to pure energy again and prepared to aim it at the Captain.

"No...!" She murmured. _I won't let that happen!_ Mustering whatever strength she could, she quickly stood, ran to Blood Falcon and kicked him in the arm, forcing him to release the Falchion. She swiftly and carefully caught it by the handle and dashed to the Captain's aid, blocking the energy with her sword.

"L-Lucina...?" Captain Falcon asked, seeing Lucina standing before him as the energy chains shattered into a million pieces.

"I said I'd protect you...didn't I?" She turned her head to him slightly as she spoke. "I want to be able to prove my own strength...I'm not about to let anyone else die for me. You saw me in so many moments of weakness...let me show you my moment of strength."

"So she wants to play, too...?" Blood Falcon questioned. "Two against two. I like those odds!"

"You may look like me," Captain Falcon began, "But you and I are nothing alike! Your creation was a mistake, and I'll ensure you don't hurt anyone else again!"

"You want to protect the Captain...?" Black Shadow taunted Lucina. "How can you do that when you couldn't even protect yourself?"

"I got cocky once. I won't let it happen again," Lucina huffed. "Plus, you fought dirty by having Blood Falcon attack me by surprise. This time, it's a fair fight!"
With that, Lucina and Captain Falcon split up and fought Black Shadow and Blood Falcon respectively. The Captain's clone attacked him with mostly punches and kicks, some of which he dodged, some that he didn't. Just when Blood Falcon thought he had beaten Captain Falcon within an inch of his life, however...

"Falcon...PUNCH!" A fiery fist landed smack dab into Blood Falcon's chest, causing him to keel over in pain.

"Gwah...!

Meanwhile, exhausted as she was, Lucina could barely land a blow on Black Shadow.

"Heheheh..." Black Shadow cackled. "Look at you. The torture exhausted your body so much, you can barely even land a blow. Pathetic...I guess the only thing keeping you going is your determination, and even that isn't enough. Looks like you got cocky agai-" Just then, he felt a stabbing pain in his abdomen. "U-ugh...!? How...?"

Forcing her Falchion through the part of Black Shadow's abdomen that he neglected to guard while avoiding his vital organs, Lucina bragged, panting all the while, "I was actually counting on you...to start monologuing on how you're better than me. That's why I attacked you so weakly."

Wiping the sweat from her brow, she continued confidently, "Looks like...you were the one to get cocky."

She slowly pulled the Falchion out of the wound as Black Shadow grunted in pain and clutched his side after it was all the way out. She then deftly sheathed it.

"Guh...t-this...isn't over..." Black Shadow grunted.

"Yes, it is," a young female's voice boomed over a speaker. Turning around, Lucina and the Captain saw Lily Flyer headed to them in her Bunny Flash, plus a teal vehicle with the number 26 and the words "Wonder Wasp" written on both its sides.

"The Federation...!" Blood Falcon hissed. "Master, let's retreat!"

"You haven't...seen the last of us...!" Black Shadow limped to his vehicle, the Black Bull, and Blood Falcon got into his Blood Hawk as the two wanted criminals drove away into the distance.

His eyes drawn to the Wonder Wasp, Captain Falcon murmured, "T-Tanaka...?"

Stepping out of the vehicle, John Tanaka walked over to the Captain along with another Federation soldier. "I'm actually surprised you managed to hold your own against them. I saw the news, and figured I should rush over to help as a fellow member of the Federation. Miss Flyer volunteered, too."

"I see..." Just then, the Captain lost his balance as he clutched his side in pain. "Ugh..."

"Oh no...it's a good thing I came," John said. "I'll take you back to Mute City and have Dr. Stewart give you some first aid."

"Thanks..." Falcon strained. "Where's...Jody?"

Watching the conversation from afar, Lucina thought, He still asked for Jody...they are just friends still, right...? Ugh...why am I thinking that at a time like this? Why am I so selfish...

"She's waiting for us at the Dollars Hotel. If you wanted to catch up with her like old times, now's your chance."
"That...would be nice," The Captain rasped. "Maybe I'll congratulate her..."

"For now, though, just save your breath," John urged him. Glancing at the other soldier, he said, "He'll ride your Blue Falcon over to the hotel, so there's no need to worry. In the meantime, let me take you there."

"Of course..." Falcon murmured. "I've been...dying to see Jody again..."

*Dying to see her...?* Lucina felt her heart break a bit at that statement as her expression turned sorrowful. *So he does still care for her deeply...I knew telling him how I felt wouldn't have been a good idea.*

Slowly stepping forward, Lucina feebly called out, "Cap...tain...?" Before feeling exhaustion catch up to her.

*W-what...? What's happening?* She could feel her whole world spinning, her vision blurring, as her heart throbbed weakly in her chest, reverberating loudly in her ears. *I feel so...tired...*

Climbing out of the Bunny Flash, Lily asked, "Lucina...?"

"Li...ly..." Lucina managed to utter, weakly reaching out her hand, before collapsing to the ground with a thud as her vision went dark.

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After a few minutes, Lucina awoke to find herself in a slightly more spacious F-Zero vehicle, the scene outside the vehicle appearing to be a long suspension bridge. Looking around, she recognized the pilot as a certain Lily Flyer. It was then she realized she was in the Bunny Flash.

"Lily...?"

"Ah, good, you're awake," Lily said, still keeping her eyes on the road. "I was beginning to worry if you'd ever wake up. I could tell you pushed yourself past your limit back there."

"I guess I did..." Lucina murmured. "Where's...the Captain?"

"He's en route to the Dollars Hotel, where he'll get some first aid. Our medicine is state of the art and he seems to only have minor internal injuries, so he should be back on his feet in no time."

"That's good..." Lucina trailed off before remembering something the Captain said.

"I've been...dying to see Jody again..."

"Do you know if...he still has feelings for Jody...?"

"Ms. Summer? As far as I'm aware, not romantically. Not anymore at least," Lily clarified. "They're just friends, but it seems he still misses her. I know she misses him, because they hadn't spoken ever since she was in a similar situation to yours and he saved her."

"Right..." Lucina said, remembering Black Shadow mentioning that he once trapped Jody in a power plant about to explode in an attempt to kill her.

"Why? Do you...have feelings for him yourself, Lucina?"

"I..." Lucina hesitated, feeling a dull ache in her heart at how the situation changed ever since she realized her feelings for him. Holding her hand to her chest, she confessed, "Yes...I do."
The two were almost at Mute City. Lily answered Lucina, "Huh...I didn't think he'd be your type, but at least you know that's how you feel...have you told him?"

"No..." Lucina sighed. "And...maybe it's for the best that I never do."

"How come...?"

"I...can't face him like this. Maybe I'll never see him again...I want to just be alone for a long time."

"Lucina...?" Even though Lucina couldn't tell, Lily's facial expression became concerned.

"It's for the best...I promised him and everyone at Smash City I'd become stronger, and I only let myself be defeated, tortured and humiliated by those two..."

"Listen, Lucina," Lily attempted to console her. "It's not your fault...it happens to the best of us. You said that to me earlier."

"This time, it was my fault, though," Lucina lamented. "At least I was able to protect the Captain, but...I wish he'd at least thank me..."

"I don't think he was able to," Lily said as the two pulled into a side parking on the streets of Mute City. "Remember, John and I showed up, and then Falcon was in pain."

"I know..." Lucina said, standing up slowly. There's still the fact that...he never told me about Blood Falcon. Is that man really his clone, and why?

"You know..." Lily began, "You...don't have to face this alone. You can talk to me...

"Thanks, but...I'm afraid I'll have to decline. I've...made my decision." Lucina could feel the sorrow and regret grabbing her emotions in a chokehold, refusing to let her go. Nothing could change her mind at this point.

"So...you're leaving, then?" Lily asked, sounding a bit solemn.

"Afraid so...I don't know when I'll be back. If I'll ever be back..."

"I...see." Looking down sadly, Lily opened the cockpit to the Bunny Flash, allowing Lucina to step out. Lily did the same, closing the cockpit behind her.

"Lily?" Lucina asked, looking down.

"Yes...?"

"Now that I think about it...maybe not knowing where you come from, or having anybody you love, like friends, family, or that special someone...maybe it's a blessing in disguise."

"What...makes you say that?" Lily grew increasingly concerned with what Lucina was saying, but knew she could do nothing to dissuade the Ylissean.

"Because...that way, you don't form attachments to people. It makes saying goodbye far less painful." Her voice started to crack a little.

"Lucina..." Noticing it was about to rain, Lily took out her Space Credits card and used it on a nearby umbrella vending machine, dispensing an umbrella. Opening it, she gave it to Lucina, seemingly as a last parting gift. "It's about to rain. I figured that, wherever you're going...it shouldn't be all alone in the rain."
"Thank you..." Slowly turning to the young cadet, Lucina smiled in a bittersweet manner that was betrayed by the heartbroken sound of her voice. "It was...very nice to meet you, Miss Flyer. I pray you have a happy, fulfilling life, no matter what may happen..."

"Lucina..." Lily looked to the side sadly.

Turning away slowly, Lucina softly murmured, "Farewell." She didn't even look back to see how Lily would have reacted as she began to walk to the hotel.

Heh...why...she was someone I only knew for a few minutes at best. Why then...do I feel so sad...? Lucina felt tears coming to her eyes as she softly wiped them away.

But no...as much as it pains me, this is something I have to do. After what happened...after how I let everyone down...I have no other choice.

"Alright, Captain, take this," a young woman with long brown hair said as she popped a pill into Captain Falcon's mouth as he lay down on the hotel bed. He obliged, and she gave him a drink of water.

Once the pill went down, he sighed. "Thanks, Jody...sorry you had to see me like this."

"It's no worries," Jody said. "I'm just glad I can catch up with an old friend again. You should be glad Dr. Stewart left these pills with me. He had to leave for an emergency, but these should fix you up in a jiffy."

"I see..." The Captain murmured. "So...how've you been, Jody? I'm sorry I haven't been keeping up as much as I should."

"Well, John and I are together now, as you probably know," Jody said as she sat down. "It's funny, I used to want him to just leave me alone. But after you saved me during the Lightning incident, he took me home, and we bonded so much after that day. I'm actually really thankful for him."

"I heard you two are considering getting married," The Captain began, slowly sitting up. "Congratulations."

"Thank you. And...thank you, for rescuing me that day...I never got a chance to thank you for what you did, even though we weren't...together at the time."

"Don't mention it..." The Captain consoled her. "I'd do anything for a dear friend."

"A dear friend..." Noticing it was about to rain, Jody asked him, "Say, what about that young lady everyone tells me you were with?"

"You mean Lucina?" Falcon asked. "She's someone I decided to take under my wing for combat training. We kinda grew close during our journey."

"I see," Jody answered him. "I guess she's the one you gave a shout out to on F-ZERO TV during your interview."

"Yeah, it was her," The Captain confirmed. "I hope she's okay. I didn't get to thank her for protecting me. John and Lily showed up, I was hurt, and then she collapsed..."

"John tells me Lily picked her up," Jody clarified. "She should be in Mute City soon."

"I see..." Falcon said, sounding somewhat melancholy. "I told her I was proud of her progress, and
she wanted to protect me. I guess...she felt ashamed when she was captured by Black Shadow. I
know she has a tendency to take things out on herself sometimes..."

"You should talk to her," Jody advised him. "Even though she feels validated by her training, she
must still be grappling with some unseen insecurities...she would appreciate you talking to her, I'm
sure."

"Yeah..." Falcon agreed. Standing up and looking out the window, he saw Lucina walking in the
rain, holding an umbrella. "There she is."

"Good luck," Jody called out to him as he left. "Oh, and we found out who was watching you two."

"You do?" The Captain stopped walking, turning behind briefly.

"Evidence suggests it was Don Genie, but he fled before he could be questioned," Jody replied.
"The Federation will be tracking him down. Don't you worry."

"Thank you..." The Captain proceeded to head down to the ground floor.

... As the Captain stepped out of the Dollars Hotel into the Lounge entrance's awning, he saw Lucina
standing just outside the awning in the rain, holding an umbrella.

"Lucina...?" He asked, walking over to her. "What took you so long...?"

"Why...Captain?" Lucina asked, her eyes barely visible as she was looking down. "Why'd you do
that?...Why'd you try to sacrifice yourself for me?"

"I..." the Captain paused momentarily, hesitant on how to respond. "I... told you about Black
Shadow, didn't I? The man is ruthless... I didn't want to risk anything happening to you. You don't
know what he's capable of."

"That's it?" Lucina retorted with a dry, almost spiteful laugh. "You know of the future I came from
as well...about Grima. If I could handle Grima by myself, I could hold my own against him...!

"No, you can't," Falcon scolded. "He was out of your league. I was only trying to protect you. You
weren't ready to take on someone like him. It was only a miracle you managed to injure him like
that-"

"...I wasn't ready?" Something snapped inside the normally calm and composed Lucina as
lightning flashed brightly in the distance and thunder boomed. "...I WASN'T READY?! Then... then
was the point of the training all along? I was supposed to become stronger, so I could protect
myself and those I care about!"

*Even you...* She thought deep down, anger and sadness brewing in her heart.

The Captain could feel the tension in the air hanging heavy on him. "I know...I remember that day
in the hospital. You didn't want to feel weak anymore, and it was something I could sympathize
with."

"You sure about that?" Lucina looked up, her glare burning with rage. "All your life, you've always
been victorious. You've never known the soul crushing despair of defeat like I have. The pain of
seeing those you love die all around you, *for your sake*, and you can't do a damn thing about it!
You've never known loss...like the feeling my father had when he couldn't enter the Smash
tournament. He wanted to show his worth, and was denied. *And whose fault is that, I wonder...?*

The swordswoman's words cut Captain Falcon deeper than any sword. Taking in a deep breath, he retorted, "I was only trying to protect myself, okay!!"

Stunned for a moment at those words, Lucina seemed to calm down afterwards, but the "calmness" was only a facade. "So you admit it...you were only looking out for *yourself.*"

"That's not..."

"Moreover," Lucina added, "Blood Falcon...he's your *clone,* right? Why? Why did he come into existence? Why is he evil...?"

"I..." The Captain began, only to hesitate. "I'm...afraid I can't tell you that just yet."

"So you're keeping secrets from me too...? Isn't that just great." Looking down once again, Lucina continued, her voice shifting to a remorseful tone, "But in the end...it doesn't matter anyway. You know...what Young Link told me when we were leaving Clock Town?"

..."I had...no idea." Falcon sighed, glancing away subtly with a melancholy expression, the rain battering harder. "You're saying...any one of us may have to leave Smash City at any time, never to return? Like Young Link? Like the Ice Climbers? Like...Snake too?"

"Exactly." Pausing for a moment, Lucina began, "What if my father never gets his chance...? What if he does, but I'm not there to share the joy of his dream being realized? What if Mom, or Shulk, or Zelda, or Robin, or any of my friends aren't there anymore?"

*What if you're not there anymore?*

She continued, "Then all my training, all my efforts to prove my worth would be in vain. What use is the strength I gain if I can't change fate? For once, the future is a total unknown...and that's what scares me."

"But...we don't know for certain how things will turn out, right?" Falcon asked, trying to give his protégé some hope to hold on to.

"Yes...you're right." Lucina could only feel despair gripping her, as she delved into a despondent ramble. "And that's why...I feel like my efforts are futile. I really am weak. I'm...useless."

*Can't you see it, Captain?*

"This is why I fought alone in my future after a while. I didn't want to get attached."

*Can't you see that this has taken me by surprise? I'm growing closer to you. I don't fully understand why I'm developing these feelings...but they're very much real.*

"I've always hated goodbyes. I tend to get close to people easily, so saying goodbye to them under any circumstances, knowing I'll never see them again, is a pain I cannot bear."

*I don't want to do this! Can't you see my heart shattering in front of you? I know it in my heart...these feelings of respect and admiration are becoming something...greater. But...I can't do anything about it, can I... I can never tell you like this. It hurts so much, but I have no choice. If I don't, I'd just weigh you down...*
Lucina was starting to tremble at this point. "So, I guess...I should just be alone again. Nobody gets hurt because of me, and I wouldn't have to actually tell them all goodbye and see them suffer."

*Captain...there's no mistaking it. I love you. I love you with all my heart. And it's for that very reason that I have to leave you... Fiora was right about us. We're opposites, you and I. You're the light, the sun, the fire burning bright, and I am the darkness, the moon, the deepest, loneliest depths of the ocean where the light cannot reach... And it's why we can't be together. I guess being alone is my destiny, that I have to leave all those I care about. Even you... Especially you.*

Her voice began to crack. "I... appreciate all you've done for me, I really do. And I'm thankful I met you and everyone in Smash City. But...I have no choice. It's better that I disappear...that everyone, even you, forget about me. This is for the best..."

...I'm sorry.

"Luci-" Captain Falcon tried to interject, but at that moment, Lucina let go of her umbrella in a resigned manner, the object protecting her from the rain falling limply to the side before hitting the pavement with a faint splash. Letting the rain drench her head to toe, she slowly lifted her gaze to face him again. The rain mixed with the tears streaming down her face which donned a defeated, heartbroken "smile", her wet blue hair clinging to her face and clothing. The grief could not be more obvious in her voice as she softly, sorrowfully uttered these words:

"Goodbye... Captain Falcon."

The half-hearted smile became a pained expression, as if she were about to burst into sobs at that point, as she turned away, walking away slowly in the rain, her eyes directed at the ground.

"Lucina...?"

She did not answer him. After a while, she started to run faster, shutting her eyes and weeping. All she could hear was the splashing sound of her footsteps and her own sobs.

"Wait! Come back...!" He called out to her, reaching out his hand.

At that moment, the Captain knew the true meaning of futility. Within seconds, she disappeared from his sight, vanishing into the rainy horizon.

Looking down, the Captain felt raw regret overwhelm him as he murmured with a dejected sigh, "What have I done..."

*You did protect me, Lucina,* he thought, the guilt and sorrow overwhelming him. *I was blinded by my desire to keep you safe. I didn't even know you were grappling with so many doubts and insecurities. I should have thanked you...*

He sighed once again, looking up this time. *How ironic... I wish you'd told me what was bothering you sooner, but I couldn't even tell you about Blood Falcon, or the truth behind the Horrific Grand Finale. What a hypocrite I am... And I even put you in harm's way, all because of my negligence. I'm so sorry...*

He turned away and started to walk to his Blue Falcon as a lone tear slid down his face, the sound of the rain drowning out everything around him.

Chapter End Notes
[INSERT JONTRON'S RENDITION OF "I WILL ALWAYS LOVE YOU" HERE]

this was heartbreaking even for me to write I'm crying

...but yeah like, I always enjoyed writing angsty scenes? I hope I handled it well here.

And yeah, this is another long chapter. Next one will be a bit shorter to provide a bit of a breather, hopefully. And rest assured, they WILL get back together...I just can't say how, just yet.

But yes RELISH THAT ANGST. SAVOR IT.
Chapter Notes

Content warnings for this chapter: blood and gore depictions (to an extent), partial nudity, strong language, alcohol use, and FEELS.

Also some knowledge of the Awakening locales may be a bit rusty, I apologize. It's been forever since I played it.

Title based on "Scared to be Lonely" by Martin Garrix feat. Dua Lipa

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10 - Scared to be Lonely

"I'm...home..." Lucina panted, soaking wet as she staggered through Ylisse's gates - her father's Ylisse - and entered the town.

*I figure...if I should have to head home soon and leave Smash City...I might as well get used to it now.*

She felt like she had walked a thousand miles. As she entered the town, which was mostly quiet and asleep as it was nighttime, she heard a familiar voice calling out to her.

"Lucina? Is that...you?"

Slowly lifting her gaze, she saw Lissa, the youngest child of the current Ylissian royal family and her aunt. In the back of her mind, Lucina found it a bit strange to call Lissa "Aunt Lissa" when Lissa was several years younger than Lucina, even though this was only due to the fact that Lucina had traveled back in time to when her father was still alive, so Lissa would of course be her younger self.

"Li...ssa?" She murmured weakly.

"You okay there, Lucina?" Chrom's younger sister asked her. "You don't look too good...what are you doing here, anyway? I thought you were in Smash City."

"I just..." Lucina began before letting out a cough. She could feel her world becoming distorted again, her vision blurring. Feebly, she continued, "...wanted...to come home..." Before she could say another word, she felt her body give way as the ground rushed up to meet her.

As her consciousness faded, she saw Lissa rush to her out of the corner of her eye and cry, "Lucina?!...Shepherds! Someone, help!"

"3...2...1...GO!"

*The race began like any other, with the Blue Falcon speeding off into the distance and*
maneuvering along the track. Just as the race was almost halfway into its second lap, though, Captain Falcon could hear screams of agony in the distance.

"What...?" He murmured, confused as the scene before him seemed clear, but he could not react in time to prevent what happened next.

Almost as if in a flash of light, the scene transformed into a hellish nightmare scape of twisted metal, flames, and injured racers lying on the racetrack, writhing in agony from their wounds. The Blue Falcon's windshield was damaged, and he could feel the scorching heat of the flames through the cracks.

This is...it can't be... He thought, looking out of the windshield of his vehicle and seeing the man who would eventually become Mighty Gazelle lying a distance from his vehicle, lacerations covering up to ninety percent of his body, bleeding profusely.

"I...have to..." He murmured weakly, trying to stand, but ultimately failing. "What? Why...?" He asked himself before examining his body. He realized that his upper torso and arms had several bleeding gashes on it, and almost immediately he felt a piercing pain on his head, close to his left eye. He lifted his hand to that area and felt a glass shard protruding from the area close to his left eyebrow. It wasn't in deep enough to cause brain damage, but had it struck him any lower, it may well have taken his eye. It was only then he realized a large piece of his helmet was broken off, precisely the piece that would have covered where the wound was. Moving his hand away from the wound, he saw the yellow glove tainted with a crimson smear.

"Ah...ah...n-no..." He muttered weakly, trembling in fear as his senses began to distort. His body felt weak as he slumped back into the pilot's seat, his breath shallow, his vision blurring, the sounds around him starting to sound muffled. For the first time in his life, he felt terror paralyze him as he stared his own mortality in the face. Just before he lost consciousness, he could see a paramedic affiliated with the Federation prying open the Blue Falcon's cockpit out of the corner of his eye. Even though the paramedic's speech was mostly muffled due to the Captain's senses blurring, he could barely make out the following:

"Captain...everything's...okay...we'll need...surgery..."

When he came to, he was in the hospital, clad in the customary hospital gown, with an intravenous drip attached to his arm. Standing before him was a familiar face: a tall, slender man with chestnut brown hair and eyes that looked perpetually closed. Sunlight faintly filtered through the window, glowing a dusky champagne color from the sunset.

"Dr...Stewart...?"

"Ah, I see you've come to, Captain," Dr. Stewart answered him. "Don't worry. You're safe now. You just need a few days to rest."

"What...happened...?" Falcon murmured groggily, holding his left hand to the spot on his forehead that once bled, feeling a thick gauze pad there covered by bandages wrapping around his head.

"We don't know how it started, but we can only be thankful nobody died, all thanks to my surgical skills," Dr. Stewart answered him. "I only had to use forceps to remove the glass shard on your forehead, and I sutured up the wounds on your arms and torso. You should be glad that was a relatively small glass shard...if it were any larger, or cut any deeper or lower, you'd probably lose an eye or have some brain damage...or worse."

"I see..."
“Unfortunately, even though the torso and arm wounds should heal with little to no scarring, I can’t say the same for the wound on your forehead,” Dr. Stewart told him. "I disinfected and closed the wound after extracting the glass shard the best I possibly could, but it was just too large to suture together, so I’ve had to settle for the old gauze and bandages trick. You lost a fair amount of blood and had a bit of a concussion...you should count yourself lucky, especially since one other racer had it worse than you."

“Really...?” Falcon still found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that this was no ordinary accident.

“Yes. I've had to transfer his brain into an experimental cybernetic body. It's the first time we've ever had to do something like this... He should be waking up soon.”

"Wow..." The Captain sighed, trying to take in the whole situation. "I got off easy, didn't I..."

“You can say that again,” Dr. Stewart agreed. "Although, there is something that bugs me..."

“Yes?” The Captain couldn't help but worry at the doctor's statement.

"After we were done with you on the operating table and sent you to this hospital room, I came back to find the glass shard I removed from your cranium missing..."

"That...is strange..." The Captain said.

I know exactly why that happened now... He thought.

“Either way, I have no idea why they decided to steal a shard with your DNA on it. I mean, what are they gonna do, clone you?” Dr. Stewart chuckled at his last statement.

I know you were joking then, Robert, but...that's what actually happened...

"Something the matter?" Dr. Stewart asked his patient.

"...Nothing," Captain Falcon tried to reassure the Doctor. "Is...Jody okay, at least?"

“Yes,” the doctor confirmed. "She wasn't hurt at all. I'm sure she's dying to see you again."

"I...want to see her again too," the Captain said.

But...for different reasons... He thought. If she was there, she could have been hurt, or worse...I had no choice but to...

"You sure you're alright?” Dr. Stewart asked, apprehensively. "You seem worried about something."

"...Maybe I just...need some rest." Looking up at the ceiling, Falcon said, "I was in a horrific accident, after all."

"Heh, that makes sense," Dr. Stewart admitted. "Well, I'd better get going...have to check on my next patient."

"Okay."

"Just know that none of this was your fault... Get some rest, okay, Captain?" Were the last words the Captain heard before sinking into a deep slumber.
"...Captain?"

After a few moments, he heard a female’s voice calling out to him softly but solemnly.

That voice...Jody?

"Captain...I'm sorry..." It was then he recognized who that voice belonged to.

No...it can’t be...she wasn’t here when it happened...

He cautiously opened his eyes and could not believe what he saw. Standing before him was none other than Lucina.

Why...? Why are you here...? This is not how it happened at all...!

"Lu...cina...?" He muttered weakly, his vision slowly focusing.

The Ylissean bore an expression of grief and guilt on her face, tears softly streaming down her cheeks. "You got hurt...because of me..." She uttered sorrowfully, looking to the side.

Reality seemed to distort around the Captain. The fact she was there, that she seemed so contrite over something that wasn't her fault, all of it...

This...can’t be real.

"Please, Lucina..." Falcon urged her, feebly reaching his hand out to touch her face. "None of this was your fault..."

Backing away slowly, Lucina let out a bitter sigh before saying, "I couldn’t protect you...I couldn’t put the strength I gained to the test...what use is it, then? Besides...I might not be allowed to stay in Smash City for much longer." She started walking to the door. "It's better that you never see me again...you, or anyone from Smash City. I'm so sorry..."

"Lucina?!

Turning to Captain Falcon one last time, Lucina's face was soaked in shimmering tears.

"Goodbye... Captain Falcon..."

"W-wait...!" The Captain tried to sit up and reach for her, but it was futile and she disappeared within seconds.

"N-no...!" He forced himself onto his feet, weakly staggering toward her direction before collapsing, the ground shattering like glass as he hit the floor.

"G-Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Captain Falcon awoke with a shout, sitting up abruptly and panting. His heart was pounding and his face and bare torso covered in sweat, the pupils of his eyes contracted in terror as his hands gripped the sheets tightly. He swiftly looked around and saw that he was in his bed in his own private quarters in Mute City, accessible only to him.

"What...was with that nightmare...?” He mumbled. Feeling a pounding pain in his head, he held his left hand to his forehead, his digit finger unconsciously tracing the scar left there from the accident those four years ago.

"It's been a long time...since I had those flashbacks. Why now...?” Glancing at the holographic
clock on the dresser next to his bed, he saw that it was 10:20 AM.

Overslept again... he thought. *It seems whenever something heavy happens, I find myself just wanting to sleep in, as if staying awake would be worse...as if sleep would be a solace to me. And yet, it wasn't...*

Getting out of bed, he thought, *Heh...I can't even bring myself to return to Smash City now...just what the hell am I gonna tell them all? I can't imagine even telling her mother, Robyn, or...her father... Samus must be worried about me, but...I can't say anything to her yet. And I just hope Shulk and Fiora made it to Smash City safely... Sighing, he slowly shook his head. No use thinking too much about it now...I should at least take a shower. That always calms me...*

Walking over to the shower, he stripped himself of the only garments he wore, which were his silky blue pajama pants and undergarments, and stepped into the shower, closing the glass door behind him. With the technology his world had, his shower had buttons set to specific temperature and pressure presets instead of adjusting everything manually with valves. He knew which preset he wanted, so he pressed the appropriate button and a stream of warm water at just the right pressure descended upon his body from the shower head.

Tilting his head back, he sighed deeply as the water doused every inch of him, the water's warmth and the steam that billowed calming his nerves.

"Mmm...this is nice..." he moaned, sighing afterward. For a few moments he just stood there, closing his eyes and enjoying the feeling.

*I feel so calm...I don't think anything can ruin this for me - It was then as he scrubbed around his upper abdomen with his right arm as his left was folded across his chest and gripping his right shoulder, that a thought crept into his mind. This position...and this warmth I feel...it's almost like an...embrace? He stopped, feeling his heart beat a touch faster, holding both arms to his chest as if he were embracing something. Or rather, someone. They say lonely people enjoy warm showers because it feels like the warmth of someone holding them in their arms... he thought, feeling the water pool a little in the gaps in his arms and hands. Heh...what a load of bullcrap -*

Within a few seconds, *her* face flashed into his mind. He imagined himself holding Lucina in his arms at that moment, feeling the tender heat of her body as she embraced him back in his mind.

*What...? He released his arms from around his torso. Why can't I stop thinking about her...? Shaking his head, he thought, This isn't like you, Captain Falcon. Remember, this is the reason you broke up with Jody...why you isolate yourself when you're not racing. You're a bounty hunter, and that's a life fraught with danger. Why haven't you accepted it already?"

"Just getting close to me is asking for trouble..." he murmured remorsefully. "It's why...she ran away..." Sighing, he said, "I guess...as painful as it is to admit it, what's done is done," and resumed washing his body. Once he was done, he turned off the water flow with the off button, leaning his arm against the wall next to the panel as he sighed deeply and looked down slightly with a melancholy expression, his hair and body dripping wet, steam still billowing softly off his skin.
It's why...nobody can know the real me.

After a few moments, he stepped out, dried himself off with the towel, and put on his usual uniform. Looking at himself in the mirror briefly, he hesitated to don his helmet at first.

Look at me... I have to keep hiding my true self now... Even though I want to do nothing but stay in all day... After a few moments, he put it on anyway. But then... I'd just be wallowing in self-pity. I refuse to do that.

"I should at least do something to take my mind off all this..."

As he headed back to the master bedroom, he decided to boot up his personal computer. The holographic screen turned on, and once everything loaded, he opened up the browser and logged in to his Smash City e-mail account.

"I didn't bring my phone, but I guess I may as well check in on everyone this way..." He muttered.

The first new e-mail he saw in his inbox was from Shulk. It read,

"Hey there Captain,

I know it's been a while. When Fiora and I met up with you and Lucina at Mute City, there's...something I failed to mention. We've already had several new faces join us, and we rebooted the fourth Smash tournament, which was a success. I didn't make it very far, but one of our new faces, Bayonetta, was the winner, and Samus ranked pretty high, as did another newcomer, one Cloud Strife from the world of Gaia. I told Master Hand of your situations though, and he was understanding when it came to your absences. He would like to see you and Lucina back sometime soon.

Unfortunately, Snake didn't return this time around. However, I do know Master Hand does want to bring him back, along with several others. Oh, and the interview Fiora mentioned? Master Hand decided to extend the interview program to the next upcoming tournament. I don't know the full details, but it sounds like he really wants to make this tournament one to remember. If I hear any more I'll let you know.

I hope you and Lucina are doing alright, at least. Fiora had her interview two weeks ago. We should hear the results soon.

Take care,

Shulk"

"Two...weeks? It's only been three days here." The Captain murmured, confused, until he remembered that time passed faster in Smash City than it did off world, so a week off world would translate to several months in Smash City. "Oh...right." Re-reading the message, he thought, So...Snake didn't return, I expected as much. But it seems he is wanted back at Smash City, so hopefully when the next tournament starts, I might see him there...I just hope Samus is taking this okay. I definitely can't tell her anything yet. Holding his left hand to his mouth to think for a moment, he then pondered, I can at least reply to Shulk. He should reply within a day or two in my time.

He was about to start typing his response when he hesitated. But...he's still asking about Lucina...? I...don't have the heart to tell anyone right now...what should I do...?

"I should at least get some breakfast first."
After a few minutes, he returned with a chicken biscuit sandwich heated up from the microwave, and, interestingly enough, a glass of red wine.

"Heh, I guess it's one of those days I have wine with my breakfast," he said to himself. "If anyone else knew about this, they'd be judging me so hard..." He chuckled slightly. "Not that I do it often in the first place." Setting the food and wine on the computer table, he began to type after taking a bite of his sandwich.

"Hey, Shulk.

Indeed it has. I'm sorry I couldn't be there to welcome any new faces. Cloud Strife, though...that name does sound familiar. I've heard about him."

He paused typing to think of what to write next, before continuing, "I am dismayed that Snake didn't come back, but I know Ryu told me it might be difficult for him. However, I am curious about this next upcoming tournament. You say Master Hand wants to make it one to remember? I would appreciate if you could give me more details as they arise. If it means Snake could come back, it would be great. I just hope Samus is taking this all okay.

As for"

Reaching for the wine glass, he took a sip of wine. He could feel the liquor calming his nerves and warming his insides without completely loosening his inhibitions. It was because he had already had food in his stomach that the wine had a slightly lessened effect, which in reality was all he needed. After taking in a deep breath, he resumed typing.

"As for Lucina... Shulk, I'm gonna have to ask you to keep this a secret for now, alright? I'm afraid...we're currently not traveling together. After I rescued her from Black Shadow, something...got into her head. Feelings of inadequacy, I guess? It was ever since she spoke with Young Link, a former Smasher when we were in Clock Town, that it's possible any one of us may have to leave Smash at any time, that it gave her some insecurities. I guess Mario, Luigi, Pikachu, Donkey Kong, Kirby and Link would be safe, but... It made her really worried, combined with the fact that she felt her training wasn't enough to prevent that situation."

Pausing for a moment, he sighed before saying to himself, "I can't possibly tell him that...I'm in a way responsible. If I hadn't told her that she wasn't ready to face Black Shadow... She only wanted to feel useful, that she was making a difference, and I only fueled her insecurity and sent her confidence crashing down after building it up with those words... Just like how I shattered her father's dreams... I'm amazed she didn't reject me at the hospital that day with that in mind." He reached for the wine glass, but knew another hit without nursing it with food wouldn't be good for how he composed himself afterwards, so he took another bite of the biscuit sandwich and then another sip of wine. Once the wine soothed his nerves enough, he resumed typing.

"So, Shulk... I don't know what to do know. I just hope she's safe...whenever you can, can you check the off world teleporter's logs in Smash City and see where she is? I need time to think about my next course of action. I'll be back soon though, and I promise I'll bring her back. Just please...not a word of this to anyone else. Not even Samus. I don't want her to worry about my absence too at this point in time...

See you around.
After he was done typing, he hit send, and the message on screen disappeared. After a few seconds, a notification box with the word "Sent!" appeared in the inbox.

"I...guess that's that," he said, finishing his sandwich afterward and immediately downing what was left of his wine, which was more than a few sips. The food in his stomach wasn't enough to offset the effects of such a large amount of booze in a short time. Of course, since this was all a stressful situation for him, he wanted nothing more than to numb the anxiety just for this moment. Within seconds, he felt a pleasantly intense heat in the pit of his stomach as his vision became slightly blurry and every muscle in his body relaxed as he slumped against his chair, tilting it slightly back with a relaxed sigh.

"Whoa..." he muttered with a chuckle, his cheeks turning pink. "This is one hell of a buzz...I probably shouldn't have...poured that much." Tilting his head up to face the ceiling, he slurred, "But man...did I ever...need to take the edge off..." He could feel his eyelids start to become heavy as he sighed in a slightly melancholy manner. "Heh...I feel so...numb...to everything..." Before he knew it, he closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep in the chair.

"Mmmm..." Lucina slowly opened her eyes, which for some reason felt heavy still. She could make out the fact that she was in one of the royal bedrooms in Ylisse Castle, and was tucked into such a bed, her body no longer dripping wet and having been changed into a silken nightgown. It was almost afternoon, judging by the intensity of the sunlight shining through the curtains. Most importantly, however, she felt something amiss about herself.

To be fair, "amiss" was an understatement. Her whole body felt like it was burning up inside, sapping her energy. She could feel tears consistently welling up in her eyes, and it was a little hard for her to breathe as she found herself panting almost automatically. She could feel a damp, slightly cool towel folded on top of her forehead, probably to help reduce her body temperature.

"What...happened...?" She called out, weakly.

"So you're awake," a wise-sounding woman's voice answered. Too weak to move her head, Lucina only waited there until the woman walked to her bedside. Moving her eyes to the right, she murmured, "Mi...riel...?"

"My respiratory functions ceased for a split second when Frederick brought you up here," Miriel said in a slightly chastising tone. "What ever were you doing that caused you to come down with such a case of pyrexia...?"

"Py...what...?" Lucina could barely focus.

"Oh, right, I seem to have forgotten you weren't one for 'big words',' Miriel answered her in her usual monotone voice, making air quotation marks with her fingers at the "big words". "Simply put: you have a fever."

"I... see..." Lucina shifted her gaze momentarily before coughing, feeling something thick and sticky crackle in her throat and chest as she coughed.

"...and a bit of nasopharyngitis with it." Noticing Lucina glare at her in a feeble yet irritated manner, Miriel clarified, "Or as you call it, the common cold."

"How long...until I get...better...?" the future Exalt asked, straining as she spoke, her facial expression becoming solemn.
"Probably seven days at least," Miriel answered her. "Which, I've come to administer your medicine." Lucina could hear Miriel walking to the side and setting a glass bottle on the table before returning to her within a few seconds with a spoonful of medicine.

"Please open your mouth," Miriel instructed Lucina rather bluntly. The blue-haired Ylissean obliged, and the red haired mage put the spoon in her patient's mouth, pulling it out once she heard Lucina swallow the medicine. "It's no wonder I wasn't chosen to take care of the younger you...they said I lacked that 'motherly touch'." Putting the spoon away, Miriel asked, "...Are you not going to quip back at me or something for that comment?"

"N-no..." Lucina mumbled weakly, clearly sounding ill. "I'm just...thankful you're doing this for me...and...I'm sure you must... have a lot of questions for-" She was cut off by another cough.

Sighing and shaking her head, Miriel then softly smiled. "You can tell us some other time. For now...I would advise against exerting yourself. Just rest, Exalt."

"Okay..." As Miriel left the room and closed the door behind her, Lucina began to feel drowsy, probably a side effect of the medicine. As her eyes slowly closed and her breathing settled into a steady, calm rhythm, she thought, _She still...helped me...? Just like..._

For a brief moment, _his_ face flashed into her mind.

_I...I'm so sorry, Captain. I..._ Her eyes began to tear up, this time as a response to the deep regret she felt, as opposed to being a reaction from the fever. _...No. I don't...want to think about... anything right now... I'm so... tired._ Within seconds, her eyes closed as her senses sank into darkness and she drifted off to sleep.

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"Ugh..." Captain Falcon groaned as he slowly opened his eyes. The first thing he felt was a pounding, throbbing pain in his head.

"It...hurts..." he strained. The light of the computer screen stung his eyes. "Ngh..." He covered his eyes as he slowly looked away and noticed the wine glass on the computer table completely empty.

"So...I drank the whole glass...? Holy shit... I remember... pouring a lot..." He slowly got up out of the chair and walked over to the wine glass before...

"W-what?" He could feel his whole world spinning as he struggled to maintain his balance, ultimately failing as he collapsed to the ground onto his knees.

"F-fuck...!" He cried as his motor functions failed him. "Why...isn't my body...cooperating...?!"

*Look at me... He thought. It's only when I get this drunk that I'm reduced to a clumsy, loud, swearing mess... This is not what I intended to happen. I always try to avoid getting to this point... this time, I got...careless...*_

"I should..." He uttered wearily as he slowly reached out his right hand to try to grab the empty wine glass, "G-get...some water..." That effort proved futile as his arm collapsed and he fell to the side onto the floor.

"Hah...ahahaha..." He let out a hollow, pitiful laugh. "I'm...useless..."

*Useless...?*_

Just then, he recalled what Lucina told him before she ran away.
"And that's why...I feel like my efforts are futile. I really am weak. I'm...useless."

Lu...cina...?

"It's better that I disappear...that everyone, even you, forget about me. This is for the best..."

"No..." He murmured weakly, feeling despair and heartbreak grip him. "Don't...leave me..."

Why am I even saying that? She's gone anyway... Before he knew it, he could feel tears coming to his eyes. Just then, he saw both her tear-soaked face before she ran away into the rain, and her crying face from the nightmare he had a while ago in his mind. Both images he saw in his mind said the same thing.

"Goodbye... Captain Falcon."

"I'm sorry..." he wept, tears streaming down his face. "I crushed your father's dreams, and now your own... perhaps... this is what I deserve..." He clenched one of his free hands into a fist. "I should have... noticed your pain and tried to talk you through it... how could I be so blind...?"

Might as well add "crying" to the list of what kind of mess I am... Why am I even...?

Of course, his rational side was betrayed by the primal urge to vent his frustrations and sorrow the only way he knew how: by crying his heart out. There was nobody else around, just him, so he didn't need to hide how he really felt.

"Lucina... please, forgive me..."

Just stop it, Falcon. You said you wouldn't wallow in self-pity. She accepted your offer to train her... she even confided in you back at the hospital and clung to you. She saw you as the source of her strength...and I know she still needs you. You can fix this... Only you can make this situation better.

"I... I can..." The Captain said, hiccuping slightly after shedding all the tears he could. "I have to... make this right..." His motor functions were working a bit better, as he was able to stand up without much problems. His head, however, was still pounding.

"But first...I need some water."

After he limped to the kitchen and got himself a glass of water, he slowly sat down at the table and drank the water sip by sip, the clean liquid purging his system of any remaining liquor. He could feel his head become a bit clearer.

"So... I think for the next few days... I should try to think about my next course of action. I don't know how much time passed while I was out, but..." He glanced at the holographic clock on the top of the kitchen wall. "It's 9 PM? Wow, day's almost over. Note to self: never do that again."

I don't think Shulk will reply to my email just yet, anyway.

"Even so..." He said to himself. "I definitely can't keep going like this. Without Snake around... I should do something to take my mind off my troubles for a bit. And then...maybe I'll pay the good doctor a visit for old times' sake."

Although... He pondered. I just wonder... why I was reacting so deeply to her leaving... like she meant something to me? He looked up at the ceiling as he continued in his thoughts, It's not the first time, either...the dream I had back at Gaur Plain...what could it all mean...?
"Wakey-waaaaakeeeeyyyy..." A somewhat ominous female voice said.

Opening her eyes, Lucina saw Tharja, a Plegian Dark Mage who joined the Shepherds, sitting close to her on the bed. "T-Tharja?!" She cried, alarmed. She knew that Tharja was infamous among the Shepherds for hexes and curses, as well as seeming to have no personal concept of boundaries.

"Relax, princess," Tharja tried to calm Lucina down in her usual creepy tone. "Miriel and I have been taking care of you the past four days. You were in and out of consciousness for a while, but she was able to give you your medicine and food, and after a while, the old wet towel trick didn't really do it for your fever, so I cast a hex -"

"You WHAT?!" Lucina cried in outrage.

"My, such energy. You might be better already," Tharja teased. "But rest assured, I did no harm. The hex I cast on you was only to reduce your fever. Surely you've noticed how well you've been sleeping, yes?"

"I... now that you mention it, yeah..." Lucina raised her right arm to scratch the back of her head, surprised she even had the strength to do so. Her fever was completely gone, too. "I do feel really rested..."

"Why don't you try walking, then...?" Tharja suggested, smirking slightly.

"Okay..." Lucina slowly climbed out of bed, feeling the carpeted floor under her sock-covered feet. She tried to walk to the door, but only made it a short distance before collapsing to the floor, her legs failing her.

"Oof!"

"Lucina?!" Miriel called out as she stormed into the room, having heard Lucina fall to the floor. Gently helping the future Exalt up, Miriel glared at Tharja angrily and interrogated, "Have you been pushing her?!"

"Ohohoho, of course not," Tharja replied. "She wanted to see if she if she was strong enough...right, Lucina?"

"She's right..." Lucina admitted. "I have been feeling a bit better anyway, so - " She was interrupted by a cough, which was still a bit wet and crackly, but not as much as it was four days ago.

"Even so, you're still sick, and you can't even walk much in your state," Miriel told Lucina. "I'll have Cordelia carry you to the bath. Cherche and Lon'qu will be preparing lunch, so Cordelia will help you bathe in the meantime." Standing up, Miriel continued, "I just have to ensure Stahl doesn't try to eat everything... Just stay put. Cordelia should be here shortly."

"Thanks, everyone..." Lucina said with a sigh, trying to hide her melancholy expression from the two Shepherds.

...

Within a few minutes, Cordelia arrived and carried Lucina to the indoor baths. Cordelia and Sully helped Lucina disrobe, and Sully carried the future Exalt to a tub filled with water heated to body temperature.

"How's the water?" Sully asked.
Sighing deeply as her body was submerged up to her shoulders, Lucina answered her, "Just...perfect." A slightly content smile graced her face.

"Need any help washing yourself?"

"I'm good, thanks," Lucina said.

"Okay, then," Sully replied. "Let me or Cordy know if ya need anything."

"H-hey!" Cordelia called out from the changing room, sounding irritated. "You know how I feel about that nickname, Sully!"

"What's wrong with it?" Sully teased, walking out of the tub room and into the changing room. "It doesn't sound at all like the name of a parasitic plant..."

"Sul-lyyyyyyy!" Cordelia cried in frustration.

"Heehee..." Lucina giggled. Taking the bar of soap nearby, she gently scrubbed as much of her body as she could, from her chest all the way down to her legs, rinsing herself off by briefly immersing herself completely in the water.

Holding her breath, she relaxed as the soothing, serene sound of being completely submerged underwater filled her ears and she felt herself weightless as her hair floated around her. She then let her body float a little, still remaining submerged in the warm water.

*This is really nice... She thought as she slowly closed her eyes. How I've missed such comfort... It feels like I'm one with everything, and nothing at the same time. It's just...me. Me, and nothing else. Floating freely, without a care in the world...*

Within a few seconds, however, she envisioned the moment Captain Falcon embraced her in the hospital, feeling the warmth of his strong but tender embrace again.

"You're not weak...I assure you."

*Ahh?!* Immediately, Lucina surfaced, holding her arms to her chest as she shivered softly from the sudden change in temperature. *Why... why can't I stop thinking about him...? I thought I had let him go.*

Looking down, she noticed some peculiar discolorations on the skin of her right hand. Holding it closer to her vision, she recognized what kind of mark it was. A mark with what looked like six eyes, three on two twisting branches across from each other.

The Mark of Grima.

*Haha...how ironic,* she thought, beginning to feel sorrow weigh on her. *I was upset at Falcon for keeping secrets from me and not telling me about Blood Falcon, who claims to be his clone...but I kept a secret from him, too... Nobody except Zelda and everyone from my home world know.*

"That Grima...Robyn...is my mother." She sighed, tears starting to stream down her face. "I have both blessed and cursed blood inside me... When I was growing up, my father warned me that he was told he would be killed by someone close to him, but he wasn't sure who it could be..." She leaned back against the walls of the tub and looked up. "When I was 14, he began training me in sword combat... and then he was killed a month before my sixteenth birthday, when Grima awoke and plunged the lands into darkness. Grima had killed so many... it was only years later that I found out my own mother was the avatar of the Fell Dragon, and my father's killer...but... back
then, I just couldn't bring myself to kill her... she's my mother...!" She buried her face into her
hands as she sobbed. "And...even though Grima was defeated... It was my father who dealt the final
blow, because he didn't want to lose my mother. All it did was put Grima into another slumber. The
brand is still on my hand. And... Grima is only in a slumber in this timeline, not the one I came
from. I'm afraid that Grima may be reborn through me or my brother Morgan..."
Now you see why, Captain. Why I had to leave you... I love you. And that's why I felt a need to
protect you... from myself.
"Hey, is everything okay...?" Cordelia asked Lucina from afar.
"I-I'm fine," Lucina stammered, wiping away her tears as Cordelia approached her. "Can I...ask you
something?"
"Yes...?" Cordelia was a bit perplexed.
"I know that... you once had feelings for my father, but were too afraid to tell him. Why?"
"Severa told you, huh?" Cordelia giggled. "It's true... I loved him. But I always felt I was out of his
league...that I wasn't 'good enough' for him."
"Did you...feel jealous of my mother...?"
"Only a little," Cordelia confessed. "I knew nothing I did would change the fact he only had eyes
for her. She was more special and important to him than I could ever hope to be."
"I see..." Lucina replied, looking to the side in a forlorn manner. "I guess you could say... I've
known that feeling lately."
"Really?"
"Yes..." Looking down at her reflection in the water, Lucina continued, "It's... a man from Smash
City, who comes from an entirely different world. At first, I wasn't on such good terms with him
because he barred my father from entering the fourth Smash Bros. tournament, but... within a year
of my time in Smash City, my relationship with that man changed...for the better. He saved me
when I needed saving the most... reassured me that I wasn't weak and that I shouldn't try to
shoulder my burdens all alone... He made me feel stronger when I was with him. And..."
"And...?"
Closing her eyes, Lucina began with a sigh, "The more we traveled together...the closer I felt to
him. It blossomed into a wonderful feeling... like I was floating and sinking at the same time, just
wanting to be close to him, to make him happy... I... loved him. I really did. But..." She opened her
eyes, the sadness evident in them. "I just couldn't tell him... He had an ex-girlfriend he wanted to
see again, even though he insisted they were just friends... Is it wrong of me to hope that they are
still friends? I wish I had more courage to tell him how I felt..."
Not only that... I feel I failed him...failed everyone at Smash City when...
"Heehee, I can't help but see myself in you when you describe it like that," Cordelia answered
Lucina earnestly. "But still... I know you're no quitter. You had the determination to travel back in
time to save your father. You're even a fighter in Smash City! You have so much to be proud of...
you can ask him about it the next time you see him, and if he is still friends with his ex, you can
probably confess your feelings then and there."


"Maybe..." Lucina looked down as she contemplated, *Easier said than done... I still don't think I can return to Smash City... I don't even know if I'll be called for the next tournament, or if I'll see him again. And if I do tell him... what if he rejects me...?*

"You alright there, Lucina?" Cordelia asked.

"I... I'm fine," Lucina answered her, slowly looking at her. "I'm... a bit hungry. Is lunch almost ready?"

"Should be," Cordelia answered her. "If you want, I'll get you dressed and bring you back to your room. While you eat, you can tell me why you decided to come back here after so long."

"That would be nice," Lucina replied. "I really do appreciate you all caring for me while my parents and baby brother are in Smash City."

_I wonder if my family over there is worried about me._ She thought. _I just still feel so terrible about all this... maybe spending some time in some familiar scenery will put me at ease. I might as well get used to it..._ Just then, she coughed.

"Guess I'd better get you dressed anyway before you get any sicker," Cordelia said. "I'll get you dressed into some nice, warm, clean clothes. You can tell me all you need to when you're in your room, ok? You're gonna love lunch. Just be glad Sully isn't cooking it..."

"I heard that!" Sully called out from afar.

"Thanks, guys..." Lucina looked to the ceiling once more.

_I really want to believe that there is hope on the horizon. But why... why is it so hard...?_ After Cordelia dressed Lucina and carried her back to her quarters, Lucina was lost in thought, a solemn expression on her face. *Most of all... I've been feeling lately like I don't deserve any of this. I feel like I'm just a burden to everyone around me... It's a terrible feeling, but I've come to accept it...*_

Chapter End Notes

Yeah so I'm ending this chapter here to pace things better

Anyway, Captain Falcon's accident is canon to F-Zero X/GX (and GP Legend, but I'm not counting GPL here). I remember when Brawl and Smash 4 had descriptions with their trophies, and reading the description on Blood Falcon's trophy got me really curious about the lore of the series and the characters. (Also, raise your hand if Lucas's Brawl trophy spoiled you on Mother 3.) I'm a bit disappointed Ultimate's Spirits didn't come with little lore blurbs, I loved reading those.

As for Lucina... she, Chrom, and Robyn (and Morgan) come from the timeline where Chrom dealt the final blow to Grima, which only sealed the Fell Dragon away into another slumber. In that timeline also, Lucina didn't return to the future right away. Robin (male Robin) in my Smash fics comes from the timeline where he dealt the final blow to Grima, destroying the dragon once and for all. He knows the Lucina in Smash is a different one from the one he met, but they're still close friends. I might explore
that either in a future chapter or in a series of side fics. I dunno right now.

And...writing this fic means a lot to me. Not just for what it is, but how cathartic it is for me. I've been going through a rough time the past several months, and now I'm worried I might lose a few long time friends, and my health isn't doing so great either, among other things. In a way, projecting my worries and fears through the two main characters helps me to cope. Falcon clearly suffers from some trauma and anxiety, and Lucina is intended to have a bit of depression. I hope I am portraying them realistically and my hope by the endgame is that they're not at all "cured", but they help each other brave the challenges they face and heal one day at a time. You'll see when I get there.

Speaking of...the next chapter will be HEAVILY Lucina-centric. In the earlier chapters I focused more on the Captain. His "character development arc" if you can call it that is for the most part coming to an end soon, save for a somewhat major development a little later on. I haven't been focusing on Lucina enough, so these next few chapters will hopefully rectify that.

Also, I think I know where to take the rest of the story when it comes to cameos. I'll explain probably next chapter or the chapter after that, but rest assured, there will be a buttload of surprises... :D

Hope you guys enjoyed, as usual.
Chapter Notes

ok so

when I said this chapter would be heavily Lucina centric... I decided to make it ENTIRELY Lucina centric. chapter after this will be 100% Falcon centric (albeit a bit shorter probably), then it'll have both share focuses until their paths converge again.

This title is based on the translation to "Saihyou", one of Chihaya's image songs from Idolmaster. Just look up the lyrics, omg they're perfect for Lucina at this point in the story
(also Chihaya deadass looks like Lucina and Miki like Fiora ngl)

Oh aaaaand there'll be a surprise cameo from a character I'd like to see in Smash. They already exist as a Spirit in Ultimate, but I believe the only true deconfirmations are Bosses. Anyone else? Go nuts. Also there's been like several placeholder character slots datamined, and like 15 currently for World of Light, so who's to say we can't see more characters past the 5 in the Fighter Pass?

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 11 - Diamond Dust

After her bath, Lucina was carried from the indoor baths to her bedroom, dressed in a fresh, clean nightgown. Cordelia laid her into bed, sitting her upright, as Cherche brought over a tray with her lunch and set it on Lucina's lap. After Cherche left, Cordelia pulled up a chair and sat close to Lucina. After the future Exalt finished her lunch, Cordelia asked her, "How was it?"

"It was great," Lucina answered Cordelia with a smile. "I've missed this...all of it."

"I can imagine," Cordelia said. "You said...you were going to tell me why you decided to return here all of a sudden?"

"Oh...that," Lucina sighed, her face bearing a somewhat melancholy expression. "I said I'd tell you... Don't tell anyone else except Lissa just yet, okay?"

"I swear on my Shepherd honor," Cordelia reassured her.

"Thanks," Lucina thanked the red-haired Pegasus Knight. "Anyway... there was a recent Smash tournament that ended in an incident that left me injured. After I recovered, I decided to go training off world to try to become stronger after I recovered. During the journey, that...man joined me. As you know, I grew closer to him the more time we spent together. But... some things happened along the way."

"Such as...?" Cordelia inquired. Noticing Lucina's face bearing a pained expression, Cordelia placed her hand on Lucina's shoulder in an attempt to console her. "It's okay. You can tell
Taking a deep breath, Lucina continued, "When I left for my training journey with that man, I promised myself I would get stronger for the sake of everyone in Smash City, including my friends, my family, and myself. I held in my heart the hope that by the next tournament, my father would finally get his chance as well. But...during our journey, I met a former participant in the tournaments, who seemed like he had lost all hope of returning. He told me that...there's a chance anyone will have to go at any time, and there's no guarantee they'll return... And on top of that... I got too cocky when I tried to save a lot of people from one of that man's sworn enemies..."

"And...?"

"And..." Fighting back her urge to shed tears, she continued, her voice starting to crack, "I... suffered such a disgraceful defeat at his hands... and was tortured so cruelly in front of my trainer. He must have...seen me as weak in that moment...just like how I felt after my incident at the tournament."

"Lucina... if he took the time to train you, he must have seen potential in you."

"He did," Lucina replied. "In fact... he seemed so proud of me as I progressed in my training. No, he was. I could tell he was genuine about it. But... he made me realize after he rescued me that... I wasn't ready. Even in spite of all my training. He said that his nemesis was out of my league..."

"I think... he just wanted to protect you," Cordelia tried to console Lucina. "You told me at the bath that you two got off on the wrong foot when you met. I can tell both of you put it behind you, so he was probably just trying to keep your best interests in mind."

"Maybe..." Sighing, Lucina continued, closing her eyes as she spoke, "But...it's too late now. I jumped to conclusions. I let my bruised pride get in the way of his voice of reason...that, combined with the uncertainty of whether I'd be called for another tournament, and the whole situation with his ex... I just... I couldn't face it anymore. I figured if I'm to leave Smash City soon, I might as well get used to it now."

Even so... She thought, looking away briefly. **I feel like I'm just wandering lost at this point, really.** **I don't want to return to my future just yet, knowing it'll be the same ruined future I come from... but it doesn't feel right here, either. I feel like... I don't belong anywhere.**

"I'm...sure that's not what you really want, though," Cordelia tried to encourage her. "Don't you want to see him, and your friends, again? If there's a chance your father will be chosen next tournament, don't you want to share that joy with him and congratulate him?"

"I do..." Lucina said, looking at Cordelia. "But...I don't know how I can put all this behind me."

"You can talk to us," Cordelia offered her. "We'll always be here for you."

"Thanks..." Lucina said before coughing. "I...think I should sleep on this...maybe I'll feel better when I wake up."

"I suppose that's my cue," Miriel announced, walking in with a bottle of medicine.

"Miriel...?" Cordelia questioned, turning her gaze to Miriel.

"I could not help but overhear," Miriel clarified. Turning to Lucina, she told the future Exalt, "You were always the type to be hard set in her ways. That can be a good thing, like your determination to save your father and the future. But it can also be a bad thing, like how you're thinking now."
"Miri-" Lucina began to interject, but was interrupted by another cough.

Walking over to the ill swordswoman, Miriel smiled compassionately as she told Lucina, "I know you work hard to make things better for everyone around you, and whenever you fail after doing your very best, you feel like your world just crumbles. It's a natural human emotion. But... please, it's not healthy to take things out on yourself. You can seek advice from us. And know that nothing bad lasts forever...just give it time. I am confident the situation will improve."

"You... think so?" Lucina uttered weakly, turning to Miriel.

"Indeed," Miriel confirmed. "Once you get better, you can change back into your clothes. We managed to get them cleaned and dried like new. Although... when we cleaned your sword, we could not help but notice some bloodstains on it..."

"Ah?!" Lucina gasped, her face bearing a shocked expression. "That's... when I was training, I slayed a few indigenous beasts."

*That's only half the truth...* She thought. *I can't possibly tell them that... I plunged it through the abdomen of Falcon's nemesis, even though I avoided his vitals... why do I still have to hide the truth from everyone...?*

"...That makes sense," Miriel conceded after a pause. "In any case, you appear as though you could use some much deserved rest. You've been through a lot." Walking to the table on the side of the room, she poured some medicine into the spoon and walked back to Lucina with the spoon in hand. Without Miriel saying anything, Lucina opened her mouth, after which Miriel administered the medicine.

"Thank you, everyone..." Lucina murmured, lying down and resting her head on the soft pillow below her.

"Anytime," Cordelia answered her. "Just rest well..."

As Miriel and Cordelia left the room, closing the door behind them, Lucina looked at the ceiling as drowsiness began to overtake her and her eyelids grew heavier with each passing second.

*I hate it...* she thought, tears flooding her eyes. *I hate that... I still have to keep the truth from those I care about. But...* She could barely stay awake as these last few thoughts slipped into her mind.

*If I told them the whole truth, I have a feeling they would leave me...that I would truly be all alone. I...really...don't want that...* With a sigh, she closed her eyes, tears streaming down her cheeks as she drifted off to sleep.

...

"Lucina...?"

Lucina found herself at Mute City once again, standing in the rain, holding an umbrella. Captain Falcon stood before her under the Dollars Lounge's awning.

*Captain... She thought. I wish I could tell you the truth... about everything... I'm sorry about that day. Please, I need you... I love you. Don't leave me.*

"Captain... I've failed you. I've failed everyone."

*No...!* She thought as her dream self refused to convey her thoughts to the Captain. *Please... I*
don't want to say goodbye to someone like him again...

"I have no choice...but to leave. I can't face anyone in Smash City like this... I don't even know if I'll be chosen for the next tournament, anyway."

"Lucina, please..." Falcon pleaded. "You don't know for sure if that's how things will turn out... don't you want to see your friends and family again?"

"I do," Lucina answered him solemnly. "But... I know it's impossible now. I can't face them... not like this..."

Please... stop... it's too painful...

Just like that day, Lucina dropped the umbrella, letting the rain drench her completely, unable to stop the events from repeating as she felt her body was on autopilot. Looking at the man she loved, but was too afraid to admit her feelings to, square in the eye, she said:

"Farewell..."

Almost immediately, the Captain seemed to vanish into thin air.

"Captain!?" Lucina cried. Running to the spot he once stood at, she shouted, "Captain, no...!"

Collapsing to her knees in the rain and burying her face in her hands, she began to weep.

"Please... come back... I don't want to be alone..."

After a while, she heard the rain stop. Lifting her gaze, she noticed her surroundings changed to a dark miasma. "...What?"

Such a dark, dark heart... A mysterious voice spoke in her mind. So full of hopelessness and despair... pushing those she loves away... truly beautiful.

"What?!” Lucina exclaimed. She could feel an ancient, dark energy coursing through her as she stood against her will, her body surrounded by a dark aura. "What is going on?!” Soon, all became clear to her. Standing before her was Captain Falcon, his body surrounded by an aura of light. But this light did not seem welcoming... it seemed oppressive. Behind him were prismatic, metallic "wings" of some sort.

"No...!" She cried as he dashed toward her. "Please, Captain! I don't want to hurt you...!" Without her realizing it, she raised her sword, swinging it down and hearing his cry of agony.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaagh!" Lucina awoke with a shout, panting, her face sweating. Sitting up and looking around, she saw she was in the safety of her bedroom at Ylisse's castle, letting out a small sigh of relief at the realization.

"How long has it been... since I've had a nightmare like that...?" She thought aloud. "What could it even mean...?" Remembering the prismatic wings surrounding Captain Falcon, and the voice that whispered in her head, she wondered, "And... what were those things...?" She began to shift over to climb out of bed, but then said to herself, "I shouldn't... they'll know if I tried to get into the library. Plus, I don't think I've fully recovered yet... this isn't like how it was at Smash Tower."

Zelda... Robin... Shulk... I miss them too, she thought solemnly, recalling her life at Smash Tower. Looking out the window, she saw the night sky alight with stars that shimmered ethereally like diamond dust.

How pretty... She thought. It's strange, but those shimmering stars... fill me with a strange sense of
hope. I know time passes slower off world than it does in Smash City, but I wonder if my friends or family are looking at this same starry sky right now, wherever they are...maybe...he's looking at it too. Laying back down, she thought, I don't want to have to keep hiding my true feelings... I don't want to keep crying for no reason. I... want to get over these feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, and guilt. The only person I want to say farewell to is the person I used to be, who would shed tears all the time. I want to believe in that first step... Within seconds, she closed her eyes and fell back asleep.

Morning came as sunlight sifted through the windows and birds chirped. Lucina slowly opened her eyes, yawning and stretching her arms before sitting up. "Morning already... I don't feel the slightest trace of the cold anymore. That's great..." She mumbled. Just then, she heard a knock at the door. "Come in," she called out.

Slowly opening the door, Lissa called out, "How are you feeling, Lucina?"

"I feel much better," Lucina answered her earnestly. "I believe it's been a whole week since I first arrived here..."

"It has," Lissa confirmed. "Just hang tight. I'll bring your clothes here."

"Thank you..."

Within a few minutes, Lissa returned with Lucina's clothing and the Falchion in its sheath. "Here they are," Lissa said, laying the clothing out on the bed before walking out to give Lucina privacy as she dressed. After she put on her clothes, Lucina stepped out of the room. Looking at Lissa, she said, "Thank you... Aunt Lissa."

"...Aunt...?" Lissa questioned, slightly surprised but giggling afterwards. "You've never called me that before, Lucina."

"I...just wanted to express gratitude for all the royal family has done for me, even though I come from a different timeline as all of you..." Looking down for a moment and holding her hand to her chest, Lucina continued with a slightly wistful expression, "I don't want to take anything for granted anymore."

"Where's this coming from...?" Lissa asked, tilting her head to the side slightly.

"Miriel or Cordelia told you why I'm here, right?"

"I believe so," Lissa answered Lucina. "The important parts, at least. I must ask, though... why here? Why not your future?"

"I... don't want to return to that bleak future just yet," Lucina clarified. "I only ensured this timeline would be safe, but it wouldn't change my future. And for the time being... I wanted to be around people and things that make me happy."

"I see..." Lissa said, looking to the side for a moment. "I guess...you came here specifically so you wouldn't have to face your parents?"

"Yes..." Lucina sighed. "I still love my father and mother. But... considering what happened to me, I don't want them to know I've let them down..."

"I'm sure they don't think that," Lissa tried to reassure her. "I remember when you were first
accepted into the Smash tournaments, your father... my brother couldn't be more proud of you."

"Even though... he couldn't participate?" Closing her eyes briefly, Lucina pondered, *And I know Fiora told me my father was proud of me when he heard of my training journey starting. But... I wonder if he knew I was training with the Captain...*

"Just seeing his daughter show her strength and prove herself was enough," Lissa reassured her. "I'm sure he would also be content knowing that no matter what, you never stopped doing your best. I'd imagine your mother and brother would feel the same."

"Perhaps..." Lucina said, looking up at the ceiling. She frowned as she thought, *I know things aren't always the worst case scenario like I keep thinking they'll be. Why then... why do I keep thinking the worst and taking it out on myself, after all I've accomplished...? What's wrong with me?*

"Something wrong, Lucina?" Lissa asked her niece from the future.

"N-nothing," Lucina stammered, making eye contact with Lissa. "I... think I want to take a little walk around town."

"Okay," Lissa said cheerfully with a nod. "I'll be here if you want to talk!"

"Thank you, Lissa..."

...

After exiting the castle and walking into the town of Ylisstol, Lucina was surprised to see a familiar face greet her in the town square.

"...Morgan...?"

Noticing Lucina standing a short distance away, Morgan jubilantly shouted, "Sis!" and ran to his older sister, hugging her tightly once he caught up with her.

"I've missed you too, my dear brother," Lucina said with a smile, hugging Morgan back. "What brings you here?"

"You...promise not to tell mom or dad?" Morgan asked shyly, letting her go.

"As long as you didn't try to use father's Falchion to slice an apple like you did that one time with mine," Lucina jested, making a teasing gesture with her left hand.

"Ha-ha, very funny, sis," Morgan grumbled, puffing his cheeks as Lucina giggled, before bursting into laughs himself. "Anyway, it's been a long time since we all saw you in Smash City, and I mean a very long time. And you know me, sis. I can't sit still and wait too long, so I snuck over to the off world teleporter center, and saw you were here, so I decided to drop by."

"That's really nice of you, Morgan," Lucina told him, patting him affectionately on the head. "How are father and mother?"

"They're fine," Morgan answered his sister. "They miss you a lot, you know? And..."

"And...?" Lucina held her right hand to her mouth quizzically.

"Dad...he... he finally got his chance. He's joining Smash!" Morgan's face lit up as he said that, grinning excitedly as his eyes sparkled with excitement.
"R-really...?!
" Lucina gasped, fighting the urge to shed tears of joy.

"Yeah! Part of the reason I came here is because I wanted to let you know and ask if you wanted to congratulate him!"

"I..." Lucina hesitated, looking down. "I... shouldn't. Not until I... complete my training."

*I have to hide the truth from my own baby brother, too...?*

"I understand," Morgan said, sounding a bit dejected. "You really wanted to dedicate yourself to that cause, and you're sticking to it. I really admire that, you know? Once you're ready, you can return to Smash City and congratulate him. I'm sure he'll be even happier when he sees how much you've improved." Looking around, Morgan then commented, "But... you were training with a partner, right? Where are they?"

"Ah..." Lucina softly gasped. "I... decided to take a bit of a break from training. It... gets to be tiring after a while."

*Again... that's only half right...*

"I see," Morgan replied. "I'm sure I'll run into them here. It's gotta be someone from Smash City, right?"

"Yes." Glancing to the side, Lucina thought, *But eventually... Morgan will realize who was training me, and that... he's not here with me right now.*

"What's wrong, sis?" Morgan asked Lucina.

"...Nothing," Lucina answered him. "I figured taking time to unwind in familiar territory would be a nice change of pace. Why don't we have a bit of a walk around town?"

"Sounds fun!" Morgan cheered. "Lead the way, sis!"

As they began walking, Lucina thought, *Heh... I'm doing the exact same thing Falcon did when we trained together... I'm getting lost in thought more often, and people are noticing...* Frowning slightly, she continued to ponder, *It's funny. I always try to put on this air of self confidence and calmness to others, and I make sure not to neglect my physical well being. But there's still an ache in my heart... an emptiness... why...?*

... An hour had passed. Lucina and Morgan would visit the various shops in the town, grabbing lunch from one of their favorite establishments, and passing by a few stores, including a clothing store, during which Morgan witnessed his sister's infamous fashion sense, or lack thereof, in action while she eyed some articles of clothing. As they walked out, they heard two familiar voices calling out to them.

"Lucina! Morgan!"

"Cynthia...?" Lucina asked.

"Hey, Owain!" Morgan called out.

"Cynthia, Owain," Lucina greeted her fellow comrades from the future. "Good to see you're well. I guess you didn't return to the future after Grima was slain either?"
"Well, you wanted to stay for a while after defeating Grima, Lucina," Cynthia explained. "Shortly after, you and your mother were approached to participate in the next Smash tournament, and Morgan didn't want to return to the future without you."

"And if Morgan stays, we stay," Owain bragged. "The Justice Cabal sticks together, no matter what!"

"Heehee..." Lucina giggled. "Thanks, guys."

_I have so much to be thankful for... family, and friends. But... for some reason... I still don't feel completely happy._

"Anyway, what were you guys up to?" Cynthia asked.

"We were just having a stroll around town," Lucina answered Cynthia. "Care to join us?"

"Sure!" Cynthia said cheerfully.

"Eh, I could kill some time," Owain obliged with a shrug.

After the four walked around town some more, conversing about various things as they walked, Owain commented as he saw a certain someone in the distance, "Hey, isn't that...?"

"Heeeeey! Tiki~~~!!" Cynthia called out to the green haired Manakete enthusiastically.

"Mar-Mar! Everyone!" Tiki called out to the group, waving before walking over.

"Tiki, what have I told you about calling me Mar-Mar?" Lucina said with a slight chuckle. "But it's good to see you again."

"My apologies, Lucina," Tiki apologized with a bow. "I guess, as the saying goes, old habits die hard...right?"

"I suppose." Running her hand through her hair as the wind blew gently by, Lucina asked Tiki, "What brings you here, Tiki? Never expected to see you in town of all places."

"Good question." Glancing in the direction of the church, Tiki said, "I was just heading over to the church to pray to Naga for continued blessings and prosperity on this land...among other things."

"Sounds good," Lucina said with a nod. "I...think I want to pray too. For...different reasons."

"No worries," Tiki said with a reassuring smile. "Naga will guide everyone who prays to her."

Turning to the others, she asked them, "Would anyone like to accompany us?"

"I'll pass," Owain declined Tiki's offer. "I've got other plans."

"I'll go!" Cynthia beamed. "There's some things I want to pray about, too."

"How about you, Morgan?" Lucina asked her younger brother.

"Hmm...if that's the case, I think I'll follow Owain around a bit," said Morgan after a moment of deep thought. "It's been too long since we hung out together."

"I understand," Lucina told them both. "Have fun, you two."
As the three women entered the church, they noticed Libra speaking to some townspeople praying at the altar, so they decided to find a pew close by and knelt down to pray. Waiting until Tiki and Cynthia closed their eyes, Lucina then closed hers, seeking a deep spiritual connection to the goddess.

_Naga... She began praying in her mind. I don't want to feel the way I've been feeling as of late anymore. I feel...hopeless, worthless, perhaps even... like I do push away those I love... like I just run away from all my problems. It's not like me at all. I have so much to be thankful for, but... I keep doubting myself and thinking the worst will happen. I already did that when I ran away from... him... perhaps things would have been different if I'd only heard him out, but my jumping to conclusions and bruised pride got in the way._

Pausing for a moment, remembering her discussion with Young Link and how Captain Falcon offered to let himself be captured in exchange for her safety, Lucina then continued to pray as her mouth shaped itself into a slight frown, And...there's these feelings of uncertainty that weigh me down. Even though father was finally accepted into the Smash tournament, I worry I might not be there, or any of my friends might have to leave. Maybe... he might have to leave too. And... the biggest reason I ran away that day... was so I wouldn't risk losing him by him attempting to sacrifice himself for me again, and actually following through. I don't... want to lose people I love anymore... Please, Naga... I pray that you will set my thoughts straight...

Opening her eyes, Lucina then slowly stood in a way that wouldn't disturb Tiki or Cynthia from their prayer, and walked over to Libra, waiting until he finished conversing with a fellow believer at the altar.

"Excuse me...Libra?" She asked the devout priest of Naga once the person he was talking with walked away.

_Slowly turning to the source of the familiar voice, Libra's face lit up with a soft, caring smile as he greeted her, "Greetings, Lucina. Is there anything burdening you lately?"

"I... as a matter of fact, there is," Lucina answered him somewhat regretfully, looking down with a forlorn expression as she held her clenched left hand to her chest. "I've been...very insecure lately, and finding that... I don't bounce back from things going wrong as easily as I used to. The only thing keeping my heart and mind from sinking into the despairing darkness within my soul... is obligation. Knowing that I have to at least carry out certain tasks just to get by. I often just feel like doing the opposite and staying in my room alone all day... I don't want to be reduced to that. But... I also feel like... I don't even deserve to have the company of others. Maybe I'm just afraid of losing them suddenly, but... There's a dark side within me that just... instills in me a desire to be alone so I don't hurt others unintentionally with my words or actions. But... I don't want to be alone at all..."

_Placing his right hand on Lucina's shoulder in a comforting manner, Libra consoled her, "It seems you've been grappling with a lot. I can sympathize with your feelings of having a dark side to you that you want to hide. A part of you that is just not like you and goes against what you really believe. I can understand those feelings of emptiness and lacking motivation, too. I must ask...is there anything that brought this about?"

"Well..." Lucina hesitated, but then began, "I always hated the notion that I would have to one day say goodbye to people I cared about in any way. Because I lost my father when I was only a teenager, I tend to get attached to anyone who shows me kindness, so the thought that one day I'd never get to see them again...never get to talk to them or create memories with them again...it's too painful. I used to think spending as much time as I could with them would help alleviate those feelings, especially with my father, but... lately an uncertainty has been arising. As if...time's just..."
"Is it not better to have loved and lost, than never loved at all?" Tiki interrupted her.

"Tiki?" Lucina asked, turning her head to the green haired Manakete woman.

"Apologies, Lucina. I could not help but overhear," Tiki apologized, bowing slightly.

"It's fine," Lucina reassured her. "Where's Cynthia?"

"She told me she wanted to find Owain and Morgan and spend time with them. They are her two closest friends, after all." Tiki explained. "Anyway, I wanted to give my input, if you believe it would help you feel better."

"Yes?" Lucina questioned curiously.

Bearing a nostalgic expression on her face, Tiki began, "The fact that you tend to get attached to others... I can't help but be reminded of myself when I was younger those millennia ago. I bonded with the Hero-King Marth and his friends so easily, and I often have moments where I feel lonely without them... that I still live while they have passed into the great beyond. And someday, you and the others will do the same while I still remain. Such is the life of a Manakete, I suppose. Despite all that..." Closing her eyes as her mouth curled into a gratuitous smile, she continued, "I am still thankful for the memories I formed with them. Even though the lifespans of humans are transient compared to mine, the memories I make with them are irreplaceable and last forever. Just the fact that I experienced life with them makes me happy, so... that's why I want to continue making memories with everyone."

"If you put it like that, I suppose it makes sense," Lucina agreed with a nod.

Even so... She thought, glancing to the side sadly. What if... something happens that cuts your time with someone short? That you don't get to make all the memories you want to with them? That... you're not even ready to say goodbye? ...Heh. How ironic. I wasn't ready to say goodbye to him, and yet...

"Is something the matter?" Libra asked the Exalt.

"Libra...?" Lucina began, turning to the priest. "Tiki's words did help somewhat, but... I feel like there's still a lot burdening me that... I don't want to go too in depth about right now. I would appreciate if you could please pray for me."

"Of course," Libra obliged. "Naga's light will always shine her hope into the most darkened of souls. I pray you will find peace and happiness and overcome whatever burdens you."

"I shall pray too," Tiki added. "Remember, Lucina: you're never as alone as you think. And people do care about you. We're all thankful for you."

"Libra, Tiki...thank you both," Lucina said softly, wiping away tears from her eyes. "I must be going now. Take care, and may Naga watch over you."

"Same to you," Libra replied, waving as Lucina walked to the church doors. Tiki did the same.

After waving back to Libra and Tiki and looking ahead of her, Lucina pondered, Their conversations...I hate to say it, only helped a little bit. I still feel this emptiness and hopeless within me... I had to hide my true feelings from even them... Naga... please forgive me. Only you know my
The sun was beginning to set, the cloudless skies turning a dusky pink and town activity slowing to a crawl as shop owners were ready to go home for the day. After walking around Ylisstol for a few minutes, Lucina finally caught up with Morgan, Cynthia and Owain.

"Hey, sis!" Morgan called out with a smile.

"Hey, guys," Lucina greeted her brother and his friends. "I hope you all had fun."

"Yeah," Owain confirmed, then covering his mouth as he yawned. "It's getting late, though. I think I'll head back to the barracks."

"I think so too," Cynthia murmured, rubbing her eyes tiredly. "What about you, Morgan? You heading to the barracks, or...?"

"...I think I'll spend the night with Sis in the castle," Morgan answered her. "I'm sure she'd appreciate the company. She must have missed her dear little brother after training off world for so long!"

"Thanks, Morgan," Lucina said with a smile.

"Well, guess we're off," Owain announced. "See you guys later!"

"Bye!" Morgan said as he and Lucina waved Cynthia and Owain goodbye as they walked off. Turning to his sister, Morgan offered, "Shall we get going?"

"Sure," Lucina answered him as the two began to walk toward the castle.

The two siblings were only one-third on the way to the castle when Morgan began, "Say...Lucina? Can I ask you something?"

"...Yes?" Lucina asked, a slight apprehensive tone to her voice.

After a brief pause, Morgan dropped the figurative bomb with, "...Why'd you lie about your trainer being here...?"

Lucina gulped as she stopped walking, feeling her throat constrict a bit and her heart race. Beads of sweat formed on her forehead and she started to tremble as she thought, Of course... he realized. He's my brother... I cannot hide anything from him.

"What's more," Morgan continued as he also stopped walking, his voice sounding concerned, "While I was still at Smash City, I saw many other Smashers around, except for one. By process of elimination, I found out who was training you."

"I..." Lucina timidly uttered, her anxiety rendering her unable to complete her sentence.

"...It's Captain Falcon, isn't it? He's your trainer, right?" Morgan inquired. "Why aren't you with him right now?"

Sighing, Lucina shamefully conceded, "I guess you know me too well, little brother."

"Please, sis," Morgan urged her. "Please don't hide anything from me anymore. You can tell me what's wrong."
"...Very well," Lucina obliged with a solemn facial expression, slowly turning to her brother. "I'll tell you...everything."

... After hearing Lucina's story, Morgan concluded, "So...if I'm understanding correctly...you feel that you don't deserve to return to Smash City because of what happened to you...even though you know it wasn't your fault?"

"Is it, though?" Lucina asked, her voice sounding tense as she looked down, her eyes starting to flood with tears. "I just wanted to become stronger, to protect others better as well as myself, so I don't suffer a disgraceful defeat or lose anyone I love...and I let myself get cocky and just...blew it. What's more...there's no guarantee I'll stay in Smash City much longer. I was thinking of...heading back to my future at last. That bleak, lonely future...at least I'm content with how my time in Smash City turned out...I know nothing I could have done would have changed this outcome."

"I know that's not what you really want, sis..." Morgan implored, his visage turning sorrowful. "The Lucina I know wouldn't want to cut the time she has with those she loves short on her own volition. And...about the other thing...I overheard Shulk talking with Pit one day. He said that he heard Master Hand wanted all of the Smashers back for the next tournament. Everyone. That includes you, sis..."

"R...really...?" Tears began to gush down her face as her voice began to crack. Slowly tilting her gaze up to meet her brother's, she asked him, "Morgan...this time, I want to ask you something."

"Go on, sis..."

"Morgan...your intuition about me is spot on. I really don't feel like myself lately...I haven't for a while now. There's this emptiness within me, that I can't seem to regain the happiness I once had. And it feels like...I'm still wearing a mask. I hide my true feelings because I fear that if they really knew, if they saw the person they thought could overcome anything showing any sort of weakness, they would leave me...And with the Captain, I...despite how we met, I grew closer to him as we trained together." Sniffling for a bit as she wiped away her tears only for them to stream down her face again, she continued, "I'm not going to try to sugarcoat it. I fell in love with him. And yet...I...after that incident...so that he wouldn't try to sacrifice himself for me again...I pushed him away. I ran away from him. Him, the one I loved but to this day still don't have the heart to tell him how I feel..."

"Sis..." Morgan slowly drew closer to his anguished older sister.

"Tell me, Morgan..." Lucina pleaded tearfully, unable to repress the sorrow flooding her heart. "Do I have a dark heart? Do I really push others away...? Am I...weak? A burden...?"

"Sis...you're such a dummy." At that moment, Morgan tightly hugged Lucina. "You're one of the strongest, kindest, most determined people I've ever known in my life, Lucina. I am truly glad to be your younger brother. That's why it hurts to see you take it out on yourself like this..."

"M-Morgan..." Lucina hugged her brother back, her chest heaving as she sobbed, tears raining from her eyes.

"You remember how it was in the hospital that day, right? Everyone came to see you...even him. I noticed him standing by the door when me and my parents visited you, and that one evening, I thought I'd check in on you again when I saw him in your room, comforting you...None of us want you to suffer."
"Really...?" Lucina wiped her unceasing tears away with her left hand. She couldn't help but remember what Captain Falcon told her in the hospital that day.

"Everyone is worried about you...they see you trying to carry more than you can handle. They all care about you deeply...and...so do I... Circumstances that are out of our control get the best of each of us all the time...please...I ask of you...don't take it out on yourself..."

Captain... She thought. Your words...your kindness...they were such a blessing to me, and I took them all for granted. If I could see you right now... I would tell you I'm sorry...and that I love you. Please...wherever you are... I hope you can forgive me.

"Please, sis... Just know that it'll get better. I just know it. Just take it one day at a time, ok?" Briefly releasing Lucina from his embrace and waiting for her to do the same, he then reached into his pocket and pulled two flowers out.

"...Daisies?" Lucina asked, her tears slowly drying up. "My favorite flower..."

"Just for you, sis." He placed them in her right hand. "I love you, sis, and I'll be there for you no matter what."

"I love you too, my dear brother," Lucina declared, hugging her little brother close to her again for a few moments. Hearing the crows caw as the sun continued to set, she said after putting the daisies in her pocket, "Let's get to the castle before nightfall."

"Good idea," Morgan concurred. "I'll sleep in the guest room nearby, so if you need anything, just knock, okay?"

"Thank you, Morgan."

_ I feel like...a great weight has been lifted off my shoulders, _ She thought as she resumed walking, with Morgan following a distance behind her. _But...once again...this feeling of emptiness doesn't seem to want to go away so easily... I worry it may overwhelm me again._

... The next morning, Lucina was awoken in the early morning hours by yet another nightmare, one similar to the one she had the night before. Panting as she sat up, she murmured, "Again...? It barely showed anything new from last time, either...what could this mean?"

Slowly getting out of bed, she quietly opened the door after changing into her everyday clothes and walked over to the guest room Morgan slept in. Softly knocking at the door, she murmured as quietly as she could that only he could hear her, "Morgan...?"

Within a few seconds, Morgan quietly opened the door. "Sis...?" He whispered groggily, rubbing his eyes. "Why are you up so early...?"

"Could you...help me sneak into the library?"

"What for...?" Morgan was a bit confused.

"I'll explain when we're there."

... After Morgan carefully picked the lock open, he and his sister entered the castle library. After
quietly closing the door behind him, he asked Lucina, "What is it, sis? Why did you want to visit the library?"

Sighing, Lucina began, "Lately, I've been having a recurring nightmare...it involves a war between the forces of light and darkness. I am always chosen to be on the dark side, while... he... is on the light side. And...the light seems to be just as bad, if not worse, as the dark in this scenario."

"That's...a bit strange to be a recurring dream," Morgan murmured. "Anything else you recall?"

"In fact, there is," Lucina confirmed. "There's always these...strange, floating, metallic wings with a iridescent surface, like an opal...is there anything in our legends that details of a being with such characteristics?"

"I'm not sure..." Morgan muttered. "I'll lead you to where we can look."

The siblings looked through the library, finding the section on legends native to Ylisse and their world as a whole, but finding nothing on what Lucina described. They then left the library, leaving the section as they found it by putting all the books back, and locking the door on the side they were exiting from before closing it on the other side, effectively making it as though the library was never snuck into.

"That was...disappointing," Lucina murmured dejectedly.

"So...what now, sis?" Morgan asked his sister quietly.

"I..."

*I don't want Morgan to get involved... I don't want to lose anyone else, in any way..."

"Morgan... I think I need a little more time to think about what I'm going to do from here on out. And... for that, I need to do it alone..."

For me, my dear little brother.

"Sis..." Morgan's face bore a sorrowful expression. "Are you sure you'll be alright?"

"I'll be fine. I can take care of myself well enough," She tried to reassure him. "Just don't tell anyone else, promise?"

"Okay..." Morgan agreed reluctantly. "Know that I love you, sis... and everyone misses you."

"I know..." Lucina quietly embraced Morgan. "Tell father I'm beyond happy he finally got his chance... and that I'm sorry I can't be there right now. Just... tell him I'm still training."

"O-okay..." Morgan said. "Where will you be going, though?"

"For now...I just want to clear my head a little more," Lucina answered her younger brother. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the two daisies Morgan gave her the other day, and gave one to him.

"Lucina...?"

"Think of it as a reminder of me while I'm away. I'll keep the other one and think of you wherever I am..."

"Of course..." Morgan said. "I'll take good care of it."
"Thank you," Lucina replied with a somewhat wistful smile. "And thank you, also, for reminding me that I'm never alone. I...really needed that."

"You...look like something's still bothering you," Morgan commented. "Is there something else on your mind?"

"...I'm fine. Just...putting things into perspective," Lucina said, slowly turning away and starting to walk. "Take care, little brother."

"Sis..." Morgan murmured sadly as Lucina slowly walked away.

_I did it again_, She thought as she quietly snuck out of the castle. _I hid the truth from someone I love...how much longer will I have to do this?_

...

After using the off world teleporter again, Lucina found herself at her destination: Green Greens on the planet Popstar, which was Kirby's home world. The world was just as she imagined: happy, colorful, vibrant, and for the most part, peaceful.

"Heehee, this is Kirby's home world? It's...charming," Lucina commented. "I feel calmer already. Think I'll walk around a bit..."

And so she did, taking in the cutesy, charming sights and sounds as the wind softly blew through her hair. "I wonder if I'll run into Kirby here by any chance..." Within a few seconds, she spotted two familiar figures in the distance, presumably interviewing a potential newcomer from Kirby's world. "Or, better yet..."

"Is that...?" Robin murmured, noticing Lucina a short distance away.

"Robin...?" Lucina ran to her close friend, hugging him when she caught up. Breaking the hug, she asked, "What are you doing in Green Greens, of all places...?"

"Good to see you too, Lucina," Robin greeted her happily. "I'm an interpreter for Zelda as she's interviewing the candidate assigned to us by Master Hand. His name's Bandana Waddle Dee, but he seems to take a liking to the nickname 'Bandee'."

As if by magic, a small Waddle Dee dashed to Lucina and leapt up into her arms. He seemed to have brighter orange fur than other Waddle Dees, and he wore a bright blue bandana on the top of his head.

"Oh...hello little guy," Lucina cooed, a bit surprised but welcoming the sudden interaction from the Waddle Dee. Bandee waved his arms joyously and closed his eyes in a happy manner as Lucina giggled and beamed, "Aww, aren't you a cutie!"

"Looks like he likes you already, Lucina," Robin commented with a chuckle.

"...Lucina?" A vaguely familiar voice asked. Lucina turned in the direction of the voice, and saw...

"Zelda...?"

There was no mistaking that the young woman standing before Lucina was the roommate she hadn't spoken to in several months, Zelda. However, a lot of things were different about her. She was a bit shorter and looked to be about four years younger than Lucina, unlike the Zelda Lucina knew who looked closer to her age. This Zelda wore a brighter pink dress, open-toed boots, gray
tights, and had longer, unbraided dirty blond hair and sky-blue eyes.

"It's been so long, Lucina!" Zelda walked over to Lucina and hugged her.

Hesitating at first, Lucina hugged her friend back, Bandee joining in in a little group hug. "Same here, Zelda." After Zelda broke the hug, Lucina asked her somewhat nervously, "So, um... I...like your new haircut...?"

"Oh, Lucy," Zelda giggled. "It's okay, you can say that I look a bit different since I saw you last, and there's an explanation for it."

"Oh?" Lucina tilted her head to the side slightly, bemused.

"When Master Hand announced the next tournament would be starting, Crazy Hand decided that some of us — or rather, just myself, Link, Sheik and Ganondorf, should switch incarnations. This was done without our knowledge, but we've come to accept it pretty quickly. Link comes from a different timeline, and from what I can gather, Sheik is now the Zelda from this Link's world. Ganondorf's now from the world that Young Link originally came from, and as for me...I'm from neither of those." She chuckled bashfully.

"I see..." Lucina murmured, trying to wrap her head around what Zelda explained. "But...why are you able to remember me?"

"Apparently, after Crazy Hand did what she did, Master Hand decided to rectify it by giving us the memories of Smash City and all our relationships from our previous incarnations. So..." A soft smile graced her face as she affirmed, "Even though I may look a bit different, and maybe act a bit different from the Zelda you knew... I'm still your Zelda."

"I know," Lucina told Zelda, giving a reassuring smile. "It's been a long time since I set foot in Smash City. Hopefully, when my training is done, I'll be able to return."

"Your training...with Captain Falcon, right?" Zelda questioned. "I remember my previous incarnation told him about how you felt shortly before the day you initially went missing."

"I..." Lucina was surprised Zelda caught on. "I know I can't hide anything from you either, Zelda. I remember all the times you noticed I had a nightmare before the fourth tournament..."

"Heehee, told you I'm still your Zelda," Zelda teased with a giggle. "How have things between you and him been lately, if I may ask?"

"Zelda...?" Lucina asked apprehensively.

"I remember...the night before the tournament, everyone was training intensely...and you seemed concerned about something from what Lady Palutena tells me she observed of you. I can only imagine it was about him."

"Ugh, I'm so tired," Lucina sighed as she entered the apartment suite she and Zelda shared, plopping tiredly face down on the couch in the main living room. She lay there like that for a few moments, then slowly rolled over and sat upright on the couch. "Looks like Zelda's not here yet."

Remembering Zelda telling Lucina she had a few errands to run after training, Lucina decided to draw her bath in the bathroom.

"Ahhh...my sore muscles needed this," she sighed as she submerged her body into the perfectly heated water, leaning her back against the back of the tub as she relaxed. As she proceeded to
lather, she began to have flashbacks of her rigorous training. Upon being told that the famous "world warrior" Ryu would be joining the Smash tournament, everyone had put forth more than their maximum effort in their training. She seemed to do well enough against ranged combatants, including Robin, and Shulk was a fairly challenging match up for her, even though she ended up victorious when she spared against him. However, she had trouble holding her own against some close-ranged fighters like Bowser, Samus whenever she fought outside of her Power Suit, Mewtwo, and Sonic. And then there was Palutena, who gave Lucina trouble in both long and short ranged combat.

"That smarts, Palutena," Lucina griped, wincing as she massaged her sore right wrist. "You could have gotten me to drop my Falchion without smacking my wrist with your staff..."

All that aside, there were just two combatants who refused to fight Lucina. One of them was her own mother, Robyn. The other, to her bewilderment, was none other than...

"Him..." She murmured. "Was it out of honor? Repentance maybe? He seemed... distant when he approached me, and it was always when I messed up during training...not every time it happened, but still..."

The past is the past, after all, she thought. My father has accepted that he'll get his chance another day... and any "anger" I had at him... at Captain Falcon... has long since dissipated. But... he still seemed so guilty around me...

Just then, a knock at the bathroom door interrupted her deep thoughts. "Lucina? Are you in there?"

"Zelda?!" She gasped. "Y-yes... I'm almost done bathing."

"Okay," Zelda called out from the other side of the door. "I got take out for dinner...your favorite. I knew it would cheer you up after a rigorous day of training."

"Coming!"

... 

"Orange chicken and honey walnut shrimp? You remembered my Thursday evening favorite," Lucina thanked Zelda.

"No need to thank me, just dig in," Zelda said rather bluntly, winking with a smile afterwards. 

As the two roommates ate their dinner, Zelda could not help but notice Lucina looking deep in thought after a while. "Is...it not as good this time...?" Zelda asked her friend.

"Oh, no, I still enjoy it," Lucina said, shaking her head. "It's just... I was thinking about some things..."

"About today's training?" Zelda's intuition was spot on.

"H-how did you know...?" Lucina stammered. I guess I shouldn't be surprised she figured it out that fast. She's the bearer of the Triforce of Wisdom, after all.

"Lady Palutena ran into me when I was waiting in line to order our food. She told me you seemed a bit on edge today."

Just by hearing Palutena's name, Lucina felt her wrist ache again. "Still wish she didn't... try to
"Like Captain Falcon did that day?" Zelda once again seemed to know what Lucina was thinking. "Palutena told me she saw him approach you a couple times whenever you lost a sparring match, but he seemed to back away almost immediately. Afterwards, you seemed to be losing focus a lot. She's just looking out for you...you, and practically everyone else here in Smash City."

"Ah..." Lucina sighed. "I was just...confused. I had long put what happened with him behind me...it was a whole year ago, after all. But the fact he seemed so...guilty, but wouldn't say anything...it made me have second thoughts about facing him in a rematch one day..."

"You know, he refused to spar against you as well," Zelda pointed out. "With the way he approached you, though...I think he has some lingering regrets about that day, and...I'm even starting to think he's developing a bit of a soft spot for you."

"Him?" She snickered, trying not to choke on her food. "Developing a soft spot...haha...for..." Halfway through her sentence, her voice became more serious, but at the same time timid-sounding as her mirth faded. "...M-me...?" She held her hand to her chest pensively. "You...might have a point..."

"I can tell he's coming with good intentions," Zelda advised Lucina. "Next time you see him...just hear him out. It might be for the best, to at least help him move on if you've already done so."

"Okay...if you think that's best," Lucina said. "Thank you, Zelda."

"Yes...I remember too," Lucina recalled. "And we've...gotten closer as he helped me train."

"Close...in what way...?" Zelda asked coyly, a curious smirk on her face. If there was anything that set this Zelda apart from the old Zelda that Lucina knew, it was her more outgoing, playful, curious personality as opposed to the previous Zelda's chill, somewhat blunt personality.

"Z-Zelda...?" Lucina stammered, blushing as she felt she was being put on the spot. Within a few moments, she calmed down, her face turning a bit regretful. "It...doesn't really matter anyway. I...I'm taking a break from training."

"You two had a disagreement, and you decided to part ways from him...am I right?"

"I...I didn't say anything..." Lucina gasped softly.

"I can see it in Bandee's eyes," Zelda commented. "He can tell how sad your voice sounded."

Looking at the little Waddle Dee she was cradling in her arms, Lucina noticed Bandee's eyes opened, a sad look in them. "Sorry, little guy..." She cuddled him closer, not wanting to see such a sweet, innocent creature so sad for her. "Don't worry...I can handle this. I think I'm ready to head back to him."

Yes...She thought. Even if I'm lost in my negative feelings, I want to move on to a hopeful future...with you again, Captain. You're the light to my dark, we're two sides of the same coin...Just by being by your side, this pain can blossom into love...

"You are certain about this?" Zelda inquired.

"That's right," Lucina confirmed. "I'll probably not return to Smash City until I'm ready, but...at least I'll hopefully be back soon. Thanks, Zelda." Lucina released Bandee from her arms, and the
Waddle Dee ran back to Zelda's side.

"Stay safe!" Zelda bade Lucina goodbye, waving happily. Bandee did the same.

As Lucina began to walk back to the teleporter, Robin caught up with her. "Lucina...there's...something Zelda forgot to mention, that I figured I'd tell you."

"Yes, Robin?"

"About Charizard...the incident at the last tournament...you won't have to worry about something like that happening ever again. The previous Pokemon Trainer, Red, is returning, along with a female trainer named Leaf. They'll be keeping Charizard in check from now on..."

"I...see..." Lucina murmured, noticing the palpable regret in Robin's voice. "Listen, Robin...it wasn't your fault. Don't blame yourself for what happened that day..."

"Lucina..."

Smiling at him serenely, Lucina said, "Thank you for everything, Robin. I don't know how much longer I'll be gone, but... I hope to be back soon. And..."

"And...?"

"When you return to Smash City... could you look into any myths involving prismatic wings for me?"

"What for...?" Robin asked quizzically.

"Just...wanted to know what my dreams meant this time around..." Lucina trailed off. "See you around, Robin. Take care of yourself, okay?"

"Of course," Robin nodded. "I look forward to seeing you again, Lucina."

As she walked in the direction of the teleporter, she thought, It... may be a while before I return, though. I... don't know what he thinks of me ever since that day... I just hope he'll accept my apology, at least... Sorry, guys. I had to hide the whole truth from you, too...

...

"Alright," Lucina murmured to herself, stepping on the teleporter's platform. "Guess I'd better head back to Mute City...if he's still there."

However, after inputting the coordinates to Mute City and hitting the GO button, something strange happened. Lights on the panel began blinking and flashing as purple sparks shot all around the console.

"What?!" Lucina cried in surprise. "What's happening?!" Within seconds, a purple light enveloped her.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAah!"
anyway, I hope I portrayed Lucina's character, and depressed characters overall, well enough. I deal with depression on and off, so I hope my depiction was realistic and believable.

as for the dream/prophecy subplot, that might be covered in some side fics, which I might do if there's enough interest.

finally, Bandana Dee is a good boi and he deserves to be in Smash
Chapter Notes

This takes place around the same time frame as the previous chapter. This one is entirely Falcon centric, though it'll prolly be shorter than the previous one. After this, it's back to your regularly scheduled standard format until they reunite. Next chapter will have a ton of surprises...

Title is based off a non-English song again, this time a Korean one (dun dun duuuunnn). Based on Tell Me What To Do by SHINee. (RIP Jonghyun... I'm not much of a K-pop fan but when he died, I decided to search a random song to listen to out of tribute. This one was just perfect... the feels ;-; the lyrics are also perfect here)

and there's a couple more cameos, but since they're third party, I have to put them in this disclaimer in the start (even though one already exists as a Spirit in Ultimate). I've seen people include their own dream third party picks in their fics, so I may include cameos from some of mine.

Without further ado: KOS-MOS, Xenosaga © Bandai Namco; Shantae © WayForward.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 12 - Tell Me What To Do

"Captain..."

Captain Falcon found himself standing on some cliffs overlooking the ocean as the sunset dyed the skies dusky hues of orange and pink. Standing a distance to him to the left was Lucina, looking at the ground in a dejected manner, her eyes barely visible beneath her bangs. Standing a distance behind them both were everyone else - Mario, Link, Kirby, Samus, Zelda, Shulk, several other familiar faces, and a few the Captain didn't recognize. Interestingly enough, Snake was there too, as were Young Link and the Ice Climbers.

"Lucina..." Falcon murmured, turning to his former training partner. "What's going on?"

"It's hopeless..." Were the only words that came out of the Ylissean's lips, her voice sounding devoid of all hope.

"What is...?" The Captain questioned, his voice sounding somewhat forlorn. It was in times like this he felt he didn't know her. He always knew her as a determined soul who never let anything discourage her, not even seeing her father defeated when they first fought. So, whenever he saw her so despondent, like back at the hospital, or when she was in Black Shadow's grasp... the sight of her feeling like she had given up on almost everything, somehow made his own soul ache too.

Looking up, Lucina told him, her smile bittersweet and sorrowful, her eyes bearing a sad but desperate look, "Everything...it's over. There's nothing either you or I can do now..."
"What are you...?" Before he could finish his sentence, Captain Falcon noticed a flash of light to his left. Looking in that direction, he saw everyone trying to either run or fight against powerful homing beams of light, ultimately failing and turning into dust.

"No matter how hard you or I try," Lucina began as the chaos unfolded before their eyes, "We just can't save anyone. This is the cruel hand fate has dealt us. It was over before it began...sometimes it's pointless to go against what destiny has planned. It's what I've learned."

"Lucina..."

Turning to him, Lucina continued with a frown, "Captain Falcon... before it all ends, I just want to say...that I'm sorry. For everything."

Turning to her, the Captain tried to console her, "There's nothing to apologize for..."

"Please," Lucina pleaded, tears streaming from her face. "I need you to accept my apology... I don't want to leave this world with any regrets."

"I..." Falcon hesitated. Almost immediately, Lucina drew closer to him and wrapped her arms around him tightly. Almost as if by instinct, the Captain embraced her back, surprised that it somehow came to him automatically.

"Captain, I..." Lucina murmured, only for the rest of her sentence to be muffled as Falcon looked to his right, noticing a beam of light heading to them both, growing larger and brighter.

"Luci-" He managed to utter as he quickly turned his gaze back to her before the beam of light hit...and then...nothing.

"Gwaaaaah!" Captain Falcon awoke with a shout, his heart racing, his face and torso covered in sweat. Just like that morning.

Huh...deja vu... He thought. Last time I was awoken from a nightmare like this was...just yesterday...? Looking at the date on the holographic clock close to him, his suspicions were confirmed.

"I can't believe it... it's been almost a week since she left... since I said those words to her. Those uncaring words that wounded her deeply that day...words that made me realize that I was the idiot all along." Climbing out of bed, he said to himself as he stood, "I wish I could take it all back...somehow."

As he stepped into the shower just like that morning to calm down, he thought, Even so... that was a peculiar dream, even for me. Why was Snake there? Why did those events unfold? And... He briefly remembered Lucina's words to him in the dream, as well as her embracing him before the two were vaporized, with him embracing her back.

What...could that mean? He pondered as he drew two fingers to his lips, tracing across them.

"Lucina..." He murmured, looking at the ceiling as the water from the shower head drenched him and the steam billowed softly around him. "Please...tell me what to do."

After getting dressed, he decided to quickly check his emails before deciding what else to do with his day.

"I wonder if Shulk responded..." He murmured as he booted up his personal computer. "I've been
keeping myself busy these past two days since I sent the email, so I haven't had a chance to see..."

Once the main interface loaded, he logged in to his Smash City email account once again. Surely enough, just yesterday, in Mute City's time, did Shulk reply.

"Okay, good," he murmured to himself. "Let's see what it says..."

The reply read:

"Hey Captain,

I understand. I'm sorry it had to happen, but I have faith that you'll bring her back home safely. If I may be frank... I had a feeling this might happen. I was surprised when she went missing that morning, but Robin and Zelda told me she had been acting strange and distant just a few days before. It seems she's going through a lot... Fiora and I consider her a dear friend of ours, and we just hope she'll be okay. I promise, I won't tell anyone else unless you tell me to, or if you tell them yourself. Just take all the time you need to think about your next course of action.

Speaking of Fiora... looks like she'll be like Chrom was last tournament... she'll fight alongside me when I use my Final Smash. However, and this is just hearsay, I'm hearing Master Hand is considering letting Chrom join while still being apart of the Robins' Final Smashes. Fiora's content with where she is now, but I know how much she deep down wanted to fight alongside us all as a fully fledged fighter. I'm hoping there's a loophole somewhere that'll enable her to join. I know it'll make her even happier than she is now...and maybe when Lucina returns, she can tell her if it happens. I'm sure it would be a welcome surprise to Lucina too.

We've begun interviewing and bringing onboard several more new faces for the next tournament, too. Two of our most recent additions were some half-human half-squid youths called the Inklings, and Princess Daisy from the Sarasaland Kingdom. We'll be bringing Samus's old nemesis, Ridley, and Donkey Kong's long time rival, King K. Rool, onboard pretty soon from what I hear. Some of us have also been sent to various worlds to interview other potential candidates as well. Mega Man was in charge of interviewing a friend Fiora met in that off-world quest she first met Lucina at; a blue-haired female android who goes by the name of KOS-MOS. I got to interview someone, too: a teenage half-genie girl named Shantae who hails from Scuttle Town. I think she's got potential, but in the end, it's up to Master Hand to make the final selection. Samus is also interviewing a young boy named Rex from the world of Alrest, who calls upon the power of a legendary life-form known as the Aegis to fight.

Finally, I can confirm Lucina is indeed safe. Last I checked, she had returned to her home world, and is currently situated in the Ylisstol kingdom. She's safe there, so you have no reason to worry. However, it is curious that she decided to return to her home world at a time like this... I just hope she's doing fine there.

I wish you luck in reaching out to her again and bringing her home. Just know that... if by any chance you're blaming yourself for what happened, know that it wasn't your fault, Captain. Just be sure to take care of yourself as well. And if you need anything, you know where to reach me.

Until then,

Shulk"

"Alright," Captain Falcon murmured to himself, "Let's try to unpack everything one at a a time..."

Rereading the email starting with the first paragraph, he commented, "I remember Zelda and Robin said such things to me too the day she first went missing. And... being captured by Black Shadow
Lucina... he thought. Those feelings of worthlessness and not being good enough... why do you hide it? You want me to know, but you won't tell me. You showed me a glimpse of how you felt back at the hospital, but then hid it all again... why? Was it because... after traveling with me for a while, you became too used to me...?

Moving on to the second paragraph, he commented, "I see... I asked Fiora how she would feel if she were in such a situation back when Lucina and I visited Gaur Plain..." For a moment, he recalled the time he and Lucina spent in Gaur Plain after training, her tending to his wounds and talking about various things with Fiora as well as each other. Their own experiences and lives back home... their somewhat embarrassing secrets... his vow to keep her safe... but what resounded in his mind the most was Fiora's "other half" comment.

Heh... He thought regretfully. Fiora... the fact you see me as her "other half"... could it be that... she really is...? Is that why I can't stop thinking about her, why I feel so strongly about all this...? He quickly shook his head. No... Get a grip. After Jody, it's best I not get close like that to anyone... they'll only be hurt because of me, just like Lucina ultimately was... All I have to do is patch things up with her, then bring her home...

Noticing the email mentioning Chrom, he then murmured as a bittersweet, somewhat sorrowful smile crept on his face, "Looks like you'll finally be getting your chance, Chrom... I wonder if you've put what happened that day behind you. I wonder if you even know that I was the one training your daughter... If only I had more courage, I would say I'm sorry..." He sighed in a melancholy manner.

It's funny. In a way, this all started because of that day...

Moving on to the next paragraph, he took note of the newcomers and newcomer hopefuls. One name in particular caught his eye. "Ridley...huh. Samus has told Snake and I about Ridley, all the horrible things he put her through... I just hope Master Hand knows what he's doing."

I guess... no word on if Snake came back yet...

Reading on, he saw KOS-MOS being mentioned. "She must be that android lady Fiora once mentioned. All in all, I wish every potential newcomer the best of luck..."

At last, he moved on to the most important part of the message: Lucina's current whereabouts. Upon seeing the words, "I can confirm Lucina is indeed safe", the Captain let out an audible sigh of relief. "She went to her home world...? At least... I'm glad she's safe. If that's the case, I think I'll just...leave her be for -" He sighed, resting his forehead on the palms of his hands.

Cut it out. Just... cut it out. If there's one thing Captain Falcon never does, it's run away. Screw "waiting for the right time". Just do it!

"I wish I could..." Falcon lamented in response to his innermost thoughts. "I'm not even sure what I'm afraid of. I'm just...afraid. It's not like me..."

After reading the final few sentences, the Captain felt an even greater weight on his heart. "You're too kind, Shulk. But... you're also wrong. It technically is my fault. It's because of something that I did, no doubt about it. And I feel I must take accountability for it all if I'm to have any luck with all this."
Looking at the rest of his inbox for a moment, he then decided to browse to another page as none of the other emails in his inbox were worth reading at the moment. "There's gotta be something I can do to just... not think about all this right now." After browsing for a while, he found an announcement of another racing cup. With a sigh, he said as he stood, "Welp... guess I'm gonna have to don that figurative mask again... those fake smiles, that aura of hollow confidence... none of it reflects how I really feel right now. I can't help but feel like the biggest hypocrite in the world..." Taking a deep breath, he managed to calm down a little. "It's just for an hour. You can do this, Captain Falcon. Just be strong..."

... Just like the last cup he raced in, Captain Falcon once again came out in first place. It was somewhat of a miracle to be honest, as his concentration slipped a little a few times. On the winners' podium, however, he managed to smile and wave like usual. Like it was nothing.

Lily Flyer had managed to score second place, and interestingly enough, Black Shadow was in third. The Captain assumed that Black Shadow had received medical attention after their last encounter, and that Lucina's attack didn't strike his vitals. He wasn't too worried about him, though, as Black Shadow had left once preparations for the champion's interview began. Falcon had bigger things to worry about.

The time was approaching for him to be interviewed by Mr. Zero on live television. The Captain merely stood behind the curtains, looking on and feeling anxiety grip his mind.

"I don't know if I can do this... everyone watching probably noticed I was a bit off today..." Taking in a deep breath, he then told himself, "Better to just get it over with... you only gotta wear the plastic smiles for a little while longer. C'mon, me, you can do this."

After calming himself down, he walked on stage where Mr. Zero was, waiting for the cameras to start rolling. Once they did, the F-ZERO TV jingle played, before the cameras focused on Captain Falcon and Mr. Zero.

Holding the microphone, Mr. Zero announced, "F-ZERO TV, who has brought you heated race after heated race, will now present an interview with the champion!"

Just keep smiling... Falcon thought. Hopefully Mr. Zero asks a mundane question like the secret to my victories or something, then I can go on with my day...

"Okay then... I'd like to ask you something," Mr. Zero said, turning to Captain Falcon with microphone in hand. As the camera panned to the Captain, he just grinned confidently.

Like always. Always showing a confident, can-do attitude to all his fans.

An attitude that contradicted how he really felt inside.

"Are you...thinking of settling down with someone in the near future...?"

That question surprised Captain Falcon so strongly, he felt as if a bag of bricks struck him in the chest and knocked the air out of his lungs.

Dammit... he just had to ask that... why, though?

Desperately trying to hide his distress, the Captain only chuckled and replied, "I...fail to see how
that's relevant to my performance today, or my overall career..."

"I was just wondering," Mr. Zero replied, "Since I'm sure you have a lot of female fans, and you
did mention that young lady during our interview last time... Lucille... was it?"

Lucina...? The Captain could feel his heart beating anxiously in his chest, his mouth feeling dry,throat constricting slightly, vision starting to blur, and the tips of his fingers beginning to feel numb.No... I wanted a distraction to not think about her and this whole situation, and... no no no no no no...

"I..." Falcon began, his voice starting to crack, his facial expression starting to show clear signs of distress. Unfortunately, he could not finish his sentence as the remaining words seemed to form a metaphorical lump in his throat.

"Or perhaps... a fellow racer? Kate Alen, maybe?"

Trembling where he stood, the Captain looked down, grimacing. I don't have time to deal with this bullshit... if I stay here any longer... I...

"I-I'm sorry," Falcon stammered. "I'm... afraid I'm not accepting any more questions for the day."

He then briskly walked out of the studio as Mr. Zero only looked on with a stunned expression.

Stepping out of the building into the dark alleyway, the Captain panted nervously, clutching his chest with his right hand and trembling. His face was dripping with sweat, yet he felt an icy cold chill travel up his spine.

"Goddammit..." he muttered under his breath. "I reacted that way on live TV... and whenever I close my eyes, I... her face... I feel like I'm losing it..."

Breathe, Captain, he thought. Don't panic. Just take deep breaths...

He took a few moments to do just that, breathe in deeply through his nose, exhaling from his mouth. He did this several times until he felt himself calming down, his body no longer feeling the side effects of extreme anxiety.

"C-can't believe I was this close to having a panic attack on live TV..." he murmured with a sigh.

Slumping down to the ground, he leaned back against the wall, looking at the sky. "Lucina... it's only now I realize you were the one keeping me in check. I always thought you had changed during our journey, but maybe... I was the one who changed the most. I... I don't understand why I'm feeling so strongly about you being gone, but I know this: I took you for granted. And now I just can't stop thinking about you..." Closing his eyes briefly, he first saw Lucina's tenderly smiling face flash into his mind. That lovely, heartfelt smile. Seeing her happy made him inexplicably happy as well. Within a few seconds, the image in his mind changed to Lucina's tear-streaked, rain-drenched face as she told him goodbye that day, her eyes full of pain and heartbreak.

"I... keep thinking about the fact you're not here, Lucina... and what I've done..." he lamented, tears beginning to well up in his obscured eyes. "And it hurts... it feels like... my very world is crumbling..." He silently wept there, where nobody could see him.

Where nobody could see the real Captain Falcon.

Hearing thunder booming faintly above him, he looked up and saw it was about to rain. "I should get going..." He mumbled, slowly standing up and wiping away his tears. "Thinking a nice bite will
calm me down a bit more...

...After driving a fair distance, Falcon found himself at one of his favorite spots to unwind after a long day of either racing or bounty hunting: a quaint little sushi bar at the edge of town. Ironically, said establishment was co-owned by Falcon's rival, Samurai Goroh, but as long as Falcon was a paying customer, Goroh let bygones be bygones and served Falcon whatever he wanted, albeit somewhat begrudgingly.

As the Captain walked through the door, he was greeted by the Furikake racers Gomar and Shioh, who always partnered up wherever they went, even for part time jobs such as this. "Heh, you guys sure are inseparable, huh?" He asked them.

"Please let us know," Gomar began, followed by Shioh completing his partner's sentence with, "If you need anything!"

"Will do," Falcon replied with a chuckle. "You guys are in almost perfect sync, I see..."

Perfect sync... He thought as he walked to the main bar. I promise, Lucina... I'll fix all of this...

As he arrived at the main bar, he was surprised to see it unmanned. "Hello? Anyone here?"

"Down here!"

Peering over the counter, Falcon saw none other than Samurai Goroh's own son, Dai Goroh, behind the counter, getting up from crouching down, presumably looking for something before the Captain announced his presence.

"Aren't you a bit young to be working at a sushi bar, kid?" Falcon teased the young boy.

"Piss off!" Dai Goroh retorted. "I'm only working the counter this time cause dad's at Smash City, undergoing some interviews. Though, knowing Master Hand, dad will probably be an Assisting Fighter for what, the third time in a row?" Sighing dejectedly, he continued, "Why can't dad have something awesome happen in his life for once...?"

"Don't worry, kid," Falcon tried to reassure Dai Goroh. "I'm sure he'll get his chance some day."

Like Chrom did... the one person in Smash City I'm still afraid to face to this day...

"...I hope so," Dai Goroh said with a somewhat hopeful smile, before his face bore a grumpy expression again as he then said, "So you gonna buy something, or?"

"Easy, kiddo," Falcon said. "I never come here without ordering something. For the main meal... I guess I'll have the Pink Spider Roll." He then murmured under his breath, "Really? Naming sushi rolls after F-Zero machines? Guess Goroh's not the creative type..."

"Anything to drink?" Dai Goroh asked. "Dad gave me orders not to touch the drinks though, alcoholic or not. Spade will be in charge of that."

"Understandable," The Captain said. "I suppose I'll have a mango bubble tea. Wondering what's so buzzworthy about that..."

"You got it," Dai Goroh said. "I'll need you to pay up first." The Captain did so, handing Dai Goroh his Space Credits card, receiving it back after the transaction was completed.
A few minutes passed and Dai Goroh served Falcon the sushi roll he wanted, but not without putting on a little show of slicing the ingredients up expertly with his sword and putting them all together. The Captain couldn't help but be amazed at the ten-year-old's impressive katana skills that would usually take at least a decade and a half to master. Shortly after, Spade handed Falcon a plastic cup of mango tea with some strange solid bubbles at the bottom.

"What the heck are these?" The Captain asked, pointing to the curious round objects at the bottom of the cup.

"They're tapioca pearls," Spade clarified. "They don't flavor the tea itself, but part of the reason people enjoy bubble tea is how these tapioca pearls suck up some of the tea, as well as their texture."

"Interesting..." Falcon commented before taking a single sushi roll with some chopsticks, dipping it in the small cup of soy sauce, and taking a bite. After he was done with the one small roll, he gave a thumbs up and commented, "Excellent, as usual."

"Lemme know if ya need anything, I guess," Dai Goroh said before washing his sword in the sink.

"Okay." Before taking his next bite, he momentarily thought, _I kinda wish Lucina was here... She'd love this_. He then slowly ate in silence, taking occasional sips of his mango bubble tea, before hearing the bell close to the entrance ring. Looking around, he saw a face he wasn't expecting to see.

"Dr. Stewart...?"

"Oh, hey, Captain," Dr. Stewart greeted the Captain. "I figured I'd find you here."

Once Dr. Stewart took a seat at the bar, the Captain broke the ice with, "You saw... didn't you...?"

"You know me too well," Dr. Stewart chuckled. "It wasn't very like you to just storm out of the F-ZERO TV studio like that..."

"I know..." Falcon sighed. "I've...been meaning to talk with you, actually."

"Hmm? Is that so?" The Doctor questioned.

"Yeah," Falcon confirmed. "Though...I'll let you order first. Don't mind me."

Once Dr. Stewart placed his order, he then turned to the Captain, and asked, "So, what's up? You'd usually consult Snake for things like this, right?"

"Yeah..." The Captain admitted, "But...Snake's currently not in Smash City, so... Since I'm here, I might as well bring you up to speed."

..."I see," Dr. Stewart commented. "I remember seeing the broadcast that day when Black Shadow took that young woman - you said her name was Lucina? - to the Lightning area, but I had no idea what happened after..." Receiving his steak fried rice, he took a bite before continuing, "And...you said you two initially got off on the wrong foot when you first met...?"

"Yeah..." The Captain admitted. "It was only in the days before the fourth Smash tournament that I actually began to approach her, cuz I felt guilty for what I did for the longest time..."
“Damn, that duck and dog duo is a lot tougher than I’d anticipated,” Captain Falcon muttered as he left the training arena and entered the waiting room. He seemed to be all alone.

"Looks like everyone’s giving it their all for Lucas and Roy’s return, and most importantly, the great world warrior Ryu’s Smash Bros. debut." Sitting down on the couch and leaning back, he sighed, staring at the ceiling.

"I'm almost done with training for today. There's only one person I won't fight, because I told Master Hand I don't wanna fight her..."

By her, he of course meant Lucina.

"Why can't I move on...?" He murmured wistfully, holding his right hand to his chest. "I've been feeling only more and more guilty about what happened that day as the days go by..."

Yes... He thought. I was only trying to protect myself that day... her father made the first strike, and he was certainly a formidable fighter... I was starting to worry for my own safety a couple times as we fought, no joke. But... Master Hand said that of him, Lucina, Robin, and Robyn, only three could move on to be selected for the fourth tournament.

"I suppose I'll get my chance another day..." Chrom's anguished words echoed in the Captain's mind.

Chrom... I hope you’re at least feeling better about all this. I'm sorry it had to end up that way... I hope... you can forgive -

His train of thought was interrupted by a young woman's sigh. Entering the waiting room was the only other person who refused to spar against Lucina - her own mother, Robyn.

"Robyn...?" He said, turning his head to her.

"Hello, Captain," Robyn said, taking a seat next to him as she looked through the pile of magazines nearby. The two spent several minutes in silence, not looking at each other. All of a sudden, Robyn broke the silence with, "I couldn't help but notice...you also requested to be matched up against everyone except my daughter...?"

"Ah..." The Captain gasped faintly. "I just...still, to this day, feel horrible about how the events that day transpired. Call it a sense of honor, or repentance, if you want, but... I can't face her like this right now. Not until I atone..." Sighing, he continued, "I even feel a bit remorseful talking to you right now... I don't deserve to talk to you so openly like this after what I put your husband through..."

"Captain..." Robyn said, sounding somewhat melancholy. "I've long since moved on. I'm sure my daughter has, too."

"You think so...?" Falcon questioned.

"I think...the fact you're even trying to make strides to make things better with her, shows that your heart is in the right place," Robyn commented. "I know it must sound corny to hear this, but...it's true. I noticed you wanted to help her up after Sonic wiped the floor with her, but you hesitated... Don't. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"If you say so..." the Captain conceded with a shrug. All of a sudden, they could both hear Lucina's pained cry in the direction of the sparring room. Captain Falcon and Robyn left the waiting room
and got a glimpse of what happened. They both saw Lucina sitting on the mat, clutching her wrist.

"Oooh, that Palutena...!" Robyn fumed. "I don't care if she's a goddess, I'm going to have a word with her for using such a dirty tactic...!"

Gulping for a moment at seeing Robyn going into "mama bear" mode, afraid she would be doing that to him if he had actually hurt Lucina that day, Captain Falcon asked Robyn, "H-how did you know?"

"Palutena was Lucina's next match up after Mewtwo," Robyn clarified. "And I knew the goddess would do something like that. She tried to disarm me by smacking my wrist with her staff too, but I managed to block it with my tome."

"Can you blame her, though?" The Captain asked. "Everyone wants to be at their very best when it comes to facing against Ryu... nobody's gonna hold back. Hell, I sure didn't when sparring against everyone else. It's...also why I refused to fight Lucina, y'know?"

"I...never saw it like that," Robyn confessed. "And yes... I've been giving it my all, too. It's another reason why I didn't want to fight my own daughter." Turning to the Captain, she commented, "You're so insightful, Captain."

"Don't mention it..." Falcon said, waving his left hand in front of his face somewhat bashfully. "Anyway, just stay there. I'm gonna get some medicine and a bottle of water for her...and I'll give it to her myself."

"Good luck."

Within a few seconds, Captain Falcon returned with a bottle of water purchased from the vending machine, and a small two-pill pack of painkiller pills. He stood by the entrance to the sparring room, hesitating.

Why can't I bring myself to...?

"Captain?" Robyn questioned. "Is something wrong?"

"N-no," Captain Falcon stammered. "I'm fine. I can do this..."

"That's the spirit," Robyn cheered the Captain on as he walked slowly to Lucina, hiding the water bottle and medicine behind his back. Unexpectedly, Lucina turned her gaze in the Captain's general direction with a somewhat puzzled look on her face. Startled at her making eye contact with him, he immediately backed away.

"Captain...?" Robyn asked.

"S-she made eye contact with me...and she looked confused..." Falcon sighed, looking down. "I'm only human... I don't feel ready to face her even now. If you could please give them to her for me..."

He silently handed Robyn the medicine and bottle of water.

Looking remorseful for a moment, Robyn then said, "...I understand. I appreciate the thought... maybe someday, you'll be able to patch things up with her. Know that you're welcome to talk to me anytime, Captain."

"Thank you, Robyn," the Captain thanked her. "I think I'm done with training today, actually. Hope you have a great day, Robyn."
"Same to you," Robyn said, bowing at the Captain as he waved at her before he walked off.

**One thing's for sure... He thought as he walked off. I can't do this alone... I, the 'great' Captain Falcon, have encountered a situation where I actually, for once, need guidance...**

"...and then, that night, I messaged Snake about my situation, and everything unfolded as I told you," the Captain explained. "And now... even though Lucina is safe in her home world, I can't let time slip by and let this all fester... but I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what, exactly?" Dr. Stewart questioned.

"That's just it," Captain Falcon said with a sigh. "I'm just...afraid. I dunno how to explain it. If I had to pinpoint what it was, though... I'd say I'm afraid of the many 'what if's. What if she doesn't accept my apology? What if...something bad happens to her...or me?"

"You can't be worrying about the 'what if's," Dr. Stewart tried to encourage the Captain. "The fact Lucina even agreed to train with you in the first place is a result of you ignoring the 'what if's, and being courageous and taking that first step. You remember what I told you when you were recovering in the hospital after the Horrific Grand Finale?"

"Yeah..." Falcon answered him. "That no matter how bleak things look, to never give up on anything it is that I do? To not let past bad experiences deter me?"

"You remember after all," Dr. Stewart said. "It applies even more so now. Just put aside any fears, but also plan what you're going to do and say when you see her again. I know you can do it... you seem to really care about her."

"You could tell...?" The Captain asked. Taking the last bite of his sushi and taking another sip of his bubble tea, he confessed, "Y'know... I think that is the case... I've been missing her dearly. I've been dreaming about her a lot, thinking about her a lot... it's amazing, really."

"What is?"

"How close I got to her in such a short time..." Looking up, Falcon continued, "We were two lonely souls drifting through life, but after I spoke to her at the hospital...after we agreed to train together...it felt like we weren't lonely anymore. There's no denying that we bonded a lot... I know she felt as happy as I did to be able to connect with someone we once thought we'd never be able to relate to. And... I'm not exaggerating when I say her smile really brightened up even the coldest of days for me... For crying out loud, I even gave a shoutout on F-ZERO TV to her specifically that day."

"What could this all mean? In what way, exactly, do I care for her...?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to figure the answer to that question out for yourself," Dr. Stewart told him. "But you at least have a reason to work toward your goal. Only you can take that first step."

Placing his hand on the Captain's left shoulder in an encouraging manner, he told Falcon, "I have faith in you that you'll find a way to make things fall into place. You're the great Captain Falcon, after all."

"Heh, you're very right," The Captain agreed, standing up. "I'll keep it all in mind. Thanks, Doc."

*I don't think I should tell him about how she learned about Blood Falcon, though... that should stay between me and her. When I see her again, I'll explain everything.*

"Anytime," Dr. Stewart replied, waving as Falcon left. Falcon waved back before walking out the
door as he called out, "Later."

"See you around," Dr. Stewart called to him.

The sun set over the clear sky, the remnants of a rainbow fading among the clouds. As the Captain hopped into his Blue Falcon and drove back to his private quarters, he thought, *I promise, Lucina... even if everything but us fades away... I'll find my way back to you, no matter how long that road may be. Just, please... wait for me.*

...

Before heading to bed, he decided to boot up his computer once again.

*I figure... I can finally tell Samus what I'm up to, and put her worries at ease. She's a good friend of mine... I shouldn't make her worry anymore, especially since I know what I must do.*

Once the email page loaded, he immediately began composing a new email to Samus. He wrote, without hesitation:

"Hey Samus, I'm afraid something has come up, so Lucina and I may be gone a little while longer. Don't worry about me, I'm fine. I'll do my best to make sure she's fine too. I don't doubt her ability to take care of herself, but after what happened between us, I want to make sure she's alright. Just...hold tight until then, yeah? Take care of yourself. - Captain Falcon"

*I won't back down now. Captain Falcon never backs down.*

With the same determination he possessed when composing the message, he immediately hit Send without a moment's hesitation.

*I hope this message finds you well, He thought. Now... I just gotta plan what I'm gonna do within the next few days. Hopefully... she'll be waiting for me..."

---

**Four days later...**

"Ugh..." Falcon mumbled as he awoke. Glancing at his alarm, he saw he had once again overslept - it was precisely 11 AM.

*I've gotta try to stop oversleeping. He thought. Why do I keep doing this...?* Noticing the date, he remarked, "Been a week and a whole day, huh..."

*I won't hesitate anymore. After some days to think, I know what I must do now..."

After getting ready and having his breakfast, he heard his landline holo-phone going off. "Who could be calling at a time like this...?" He wondered out loud, before ultimately going over and picking it up.

"Captain Falcon?" A familiar young female's voice asked. When the holo-phone's projection revealed the face of the caller, it became known who was calling him.

"Miss Flyer...?"

"You can just call me Lily, Captain. A lot of my superiors do that," She gently corrected him. "Anyway, could you meet me by the electronics store at 1200 hours? There's...something I need to show you."
"12 noon. Got it." He hung up the call.

Standing outside the electronics store, Captain Falcon mumbled, "She should be here by now..."

"Captain!" Lily's voice called out. Turning in the direction of the voice, Falcon saw the young soldier girl running to him, along with...

"Wait a sec, you're..." Falcon muttered upon seeing what Lily wanted to show him. Or rather, who.

"Are you... Captain Falcon?" A young boy asked. The Captain recognized this boy.

"You're... Lucina's little brother..." The Captain murmured, dumbfounded.

"Yup," Morgan confirmed with a nod. "Name's Morgan. I remember you came to visit Lucina in the hospital that day..."

"You...did?" The Captain held his right hand to his lips in surprise. Regaining his composure, he continued, "So...what brings you here?"

"I..." Hesitating for a moment, Morgan continued, "I need you to help bring Lucina home. She's... left Ylisstol."

"She...what...?" The Captain was a bit shocked. "Last I checked, she seemed to be just fine over there..."

"I don't know what's gotten into Sis either," Morgan replied. "When I ran into her at Ylisstol after arriving there from Smash City, all seemed well with her, but then... she said she needed to clear her head for a bit, and left..."

"I can believe it," Lily commented. "When I took her back to Mute City that day, she seemed... so despondent. I tried to change her mind, but... There was no stopping her. I found the umbrella I gave her by the Dollars Lounge just a few hours after I last saw her..."

"She was the same way with me that day..." The Captain said. "Right before she left...she seemed so resigned to what she believed was the outcome. She believed everything was over for her, despite her best efforts. It seems she has a tendency to take things out on herself when they don't go the way she hopes, and it's so strange...in all the time I knew her, she wasn't like that until recently."

It was like you were silently screaming, Lucina...

"I'll never forget how she tried to fend off Black Shadow and save all those people in the Dollars Casino that day," Lily remarked. "It was the bravest thing I've ever seen anyone do. I just wish I could have noticed the potential spy, who I heard was possibly Don Genie, and prevented all of this..."

"You did the best you could," Falcon consoled Lily. "And...speaking of Black Shadow, you should have been more careful, Morgan. If Black Shadow knew you were related to Lucina... She managed to wound him during our last encounter, but it seems he recovered, and if he sees her again, or learns you're her brother... who knows what he'll do."

"Really...?" Morgan gulped. He and Lily then looked at each other in a melancholy manner, as if they wanted to say something. Something they both knew, but decided it was best for Lucina to tell
him herself.

"Something wrong, you two?" Falcon asked the two youths.

"...Nothing," Lily said. "I think you should perhaps escort Morgan back to Smash City and ascertain Lucina's current whereabouts."

"Fair enough," The Captain conceded. "Thank you, Lily."

"Glad to be of service," Lily said, giving Captain Falcon a salute as he walked off with Morgan to the off world teleporter.

...

"Alright, Morgan," Falcon began, "Before I let you go...do you remember where she was headed last?"

"I... I went back to Smash City real quick, and found out she was in Green Greens, on Planet Popstar," Morgan explained. "Please, Captain...please bring Sis back..."

"Don't worry, little one," the Captain comforted Morgan, placing his right hand on the youth's shoulder. "I'll bring your big sister home safe and sound, no matter what it takes..."

"Thanks," Morgan said before stepping onto the teleporter's platform, inputting the coordinates to Smash City, and teleporting away.

"Alright," Falcon murmured, stepping onto the platform himself. "Green Greens it is..."

The minute he input the coordinates, however, something strange happened. Lights began to flash and the information panel's image became garbled as yellow sparks shot from everywhere.

"What is this...?!" The Captain gasped, before a bright yellow light enveloped him.

"G-Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Chapter End Notes

so, that email Falcon sends Samus? If you've read Don't go away, I will stay for you, it's the same one. I decided to throw in a few other newcomer mentions in Shulk's email just because, even though the only newcomers mentioned in that fic are the Inklings.

I know also I was gonna write a follow up to that Snakus oneshot...maybe I'll do it soon. I hope the whole lapses of time thing is believable.

Also, don't get wrong. I don't hate Palutena... I actually like her. It's just... and I know this is a VERY unpopular opinion in the Smash fandom, but I don't like her shipped with Lucina. At all. I feel it's a little too prevalent and I'm honestly sick of it. If you like it, though, more power to you.

Finally, next chapter is gonna have a few more biiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip surprise cameos, including one I may or may not have been hinting at for a while
Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 13 - Calling

"Guh..." The Captain groaned as he slowly came to his senses. He could hear the sound of footsteps overlapping and the chatter of a crowd of people. Slowly standing up, he observed his surroundings, and was surprised by what he found.

"Looks like I'm not in Green Greens anymore, heh..."

He appeared to be standing in the middle of a crosswalk in a heavily populated city area. There were no cars, just people crossing in all directions. Upon closer examination of the buildings around him, he deduced this had to be the Shibuya district in the city of Tokyo, Japan, circa 2007 A.D.

"Shibuya's Scramble Crossing..." he muttered. "I've read about the world in the 21st century, but...I never imagined I'd actually get to see the past for myself..." He began to walk to the left, when something strange happened as he thought he was about to bump into a couple of pedestrians. They passed right through him instead.

"What the hell?!!" He exclaimed. "Did they just...?!" Feeling a chill travel down his spine, he murmured, "Am I...dead...?" He began patting various areas on his torso, and much to his relief, he was very much still a solid flesh-and-blood human, not a ghost. He could even still feel his heart beating.

"That's a relief..." He said with a sigh. "But still... What does this mean...?"

"You a Player too?" A young man's voice asked a short distance behind Falcon. He turned around, and saw a young man with spiky orange hair, purple headphones, a black shirt with a purple stripe in the center surrounded by two smaller yellow stripes, and white-and-purple pants and shoes. He looked to be no older than fifteen years old.
"Player...?" The Captain questioned, a bit confused. "What are you talking about? What's going on? Who are you?"

"One question at a time, old man," the youth said, walking up to Captain Falcon.

"O-old man?!" Falcon stammered, a bit irritated. "I'm only 37, kid!"

"Still an old man to me," the young man quipped with a shrug. "Anyway, when I say Player, I mean-" He stopped mid-sentence, looking around quickly.

"What's wrong?" Captain Falcon asked the young man.

"I think there's Noise nearby..." the youth murmured.

"Noise...?" Falcon muttered. "What do you-" and all of a sudden, his question was answered for him. A strange-looking red penguin with bizarre symbols on its fur and golden "wings" that were just a bunch of hollow angled lines walked up to the Captain and the youth.

"THIS is what you're so worried about?" Falcon asked with a smirk, smacking his left fist into the palm of his right hand. "I can take 'em, no problem!"

"No, you can't," the youth told him, prompting Falcon's confident smirk to sink. "You don't have a partner, and from what I can observe, you can't use Psychs either. Taking it on as you are now would be suicide."

"Partner? Psychs...?" The Captain held his right hand to his head in confusion.

"I'll explain when this Noise is taken care of. In the meantime, you just leave this to the seasoned pros." Turning around, the young man called out, "Beat!"

On cue, another young man, who looked to be the same age as the other youth, rode on over on his skateboard. He had blonde hair covered by a knit black cap with a skull insignia, a white sleeveless shirt, beige pants, red and black sneakers, and a chain necklace with a skull charm.

"Yo, Phones!" Beat greeted, picking up his skateboard. Noticing the Captain standing behind the youth, he asked, "Who's dis geezer?"

"G-Geezer?!" Falcon griped, his grimace twitching in irritation. "Did the young people of the 21st century have this much of a lack of respect for their superiors?!"

"Dunno what you're on about, dude, but just stay behind us," Beat told the Captain. Turning around to the Noise, Beat declared, "Aight, Phones. Let's give dis Noise a good ol' fashioned BEAT-down!"

"Uuuh...what...?" Lucina murmured, slowly standing up. Looking around, she saw she was in an ancient castle of some sorts. The halls were faintly lit by candelabras on the wall and the dim light of the stormy sky outside shining through the stained glass windows. Every once in a while, lightning flashed through the windows.

"Looks like I'm a long ways away from Mute City..." She muttered. She couldn't help but feel the haunting aura of her surroundings instill a sense of unease in her as she cautiously explored the castle. The halls and stairways were long and winding and she was beginning to fear there was no end to it all.
"This...doesn't look like any castle from my world..." Lucina commented, shivering slightly as a sense of dread crept up on her. "Such a menacing aura...where is everybody?"

Hearing the sound of footsteps on a concrete floor echoing down the hallways, she quickly found a stone pillar and hid behind it, not knowing who was approaching, or if they were friend or foe. Peering quietly from behind the pillar once the footsteps were close enough, she saw a familiar face.

"Luigi...?" She whispered to herself.

Luigi was wandering the halls with a calm, content smile, his Poltergust 3000 equipped on his person. "A castle full of monsters?" He thought aloud. "I've-a faced worse. If I can brave various mansions filled with ghosts, this should-a be a piece of cake!"

Waiting for Luigi to leave the hallway, Lucina then headed in the opposite direction, continuing to explore the castle while not making her presence known to the green plumber.

_I don't understand..._ She thought, stopping for a moment. _Why am I still avoiding everyone from Smash City...?_ She shook her head as she continued walking. _No... after Zelda and Robin, I promised I wouldn't return to Smash City or meet up with anyone from there again until I made this all right... Until I saw him again. Until I told him I was sorry, and..._

Stopping again and holding her fingers to her lips as she blushed, she thought as she felt her heart skip a beat, _...until I told him...my true feelings_. She resumed her trek as she pondered, a determined expression on her face, _Just wait for me, Captain...father...everyone. I will come home soon... I'll make it out of here alive, then I'll find the Captain, and we'll both finally head back to Smash City._

... Unfortunately, finding a way out proved to be harder than expected for the Ylissean. "I swear...this is the fourth time I've passed that statue..." She panted. Feeling despair overwhelm her, she slumped to the ground on her knees hopelessly.

"Will I ever find my way out...?" She murmured despondently. "Will I ever...see everyone again...?" Tears began to well up in her eyes before she closed them and silently wept.

"Haha...why...am I already losing hope? Why am I crying...? Before I left Zelda and Robin, I felt so...determined. Like I wasn't going to give up. But now... the reality of the situation is kicking in, and..." She buried her face in her hands as she sobbed.

"I'm sorry...everyone..."

"You alright there, miss?" An unfamiliar male voice asked her.

Gasping faintly, Lucina uncovered her face and turned her head to the source of the voice. Walking up to her was a young man who looked to be around Shulk's age, maybe a bit older, but also almost as physically fit as Captain Falcon. Almost. He was clad in blue with gray pants and brown leather boots and a brown leather belt with a holstered dagger on it, as well as a holstered chain whip with a morning star at its end. He wore a white bandana on his forehead, had short, messy brown hair, and blue eyes.

"Who...are you?" She asked the young man, wiping away her tears.

"You can call me Richter," he introduced himself with a smile, reaching out his right hand. "No
idea how a lovely lady like yourself ended up in Dracula's Castle, but I just can't leave someone in
need such as yourself. I can help you find your way out. What do you say...?"

"Dracula's...Castle?" Lucina questioned. "And...thank you." She took his hand as he helped her up.
"But..." She looked away from him briefly.

"But...?" Richter inquired.

"But... I'm sorry, Mr. Richter, but my heart...belongs to someone else."

"Mister...?" Richter chuckled playfully. "Seems you're the formal type. But...if you're really head
over heels over someone else, I won't pursue the issue any further. My offer to get you outta here
still stands, though. I know this place like the back of my hand."

"You've been here before?" Lucina asked Richter, making eye contact with him.

"You could say...it's my occupation," Richter answered her. "And also...I'm looking for someone."

"Luigi...?" Lucina blurted out before holding her hand to her mouth.

*Why did I blurt that out?! Like he would know who Luigi is...*

"Luigi...? Is he someone from Smash City?" Richter inquired.

"Wait, so you know about Smash City?" Lucina asked Richter.

"Yeah. I've been invited for the fifth Smash Bros. tournament," Richter replied. "Along with...the
person I'm looking for." The expression on Richter's face quickly turned apprehensive as he then
asked, "Wait...you said a Luigi was here too?"

"Yes...?" Lucina wasn't sure where Richter was coming from.

"I heard of his ghost hunting adventures when Master Hand first reached out to me, but... this place
might be too dangerous for him."

"D-Dangerous...?" Lucina gulped.

"Indeed," Richter confirmed. "This is Dracula's Castle, after all. Dracula is lord of the vampires,
and he has almost every monster you can think of under his command. Mummies, Frankenstein's
monster, werewolves, even the Grim Reaper himself..."

"Point taken..." Lucina murmured fearfully. "A-all the more reason we should get to safety soon,
right-"

Just then, a howl broke the silence, and faint moans filled the air and grew louder as the two turned
their gaze to the direction of the sound. Surely enough, a werewolf and two mummies were slowly
approaching the two humans.

"Speak of the devil..." Richter mumbled, drawing his chain whip from its holster. "What a terrible
night to have a curse, huh... just stay behind me, miss. I'll keep you safe."

"Thank you, but..." Lucina drew her Falchion and, standing next to the monster slayer, got into her
stance. "Let me fight too."

*I want to...no, I need to be able to prove my strength to others. I won't let anyone see me as weak
anymore.*
"You sure about this, miss...?" Richter asked.

"My name is Lucina," She answered him, her eyes shining with the fire of determination. "And I am the daughter of Chrom of Ylisse, and the kingdom's future Exalt. I fought to save my family from a doomed future, and with the additional training I've received, I will not go down without a fight!"

*They're just...run of the mill monsters, right? Lucina thought. This won't be like that time with Black Shadow. I won't get cocky again. And with this Richter fighting by my side, I know I won't lose...!*

"Holy hell..."

Captain Falcon just stood there, stunned, as the two youths finished off the penguin Noise like it was nothing. Beat laid a smackdown on it by slamming into it on his skateboard, and the other youth, whom Beat nicknamed "Phones", fighting it with various powers, from pyrokinesis to shooting energy bullets at it. Falcon assumed those were the "Psychs" he mentioned earlier.

"Pretty dope, right?" Beat bragged, turning to the Captain. "After this, I think we're home free. There's some more Noise 'round here, but they'll leave us alone if we don't attack 'em."

"I... I see..." Falcon stammered. "If you don't mind... I'd like to talk to your partner. You called him 'Phones', but I seriously doubt that's his name."

"Ya think, Captain Obvious?" Beat quipped.

"I- I am a Captain, but not 'Obvious'," Falcon complained. "Just...call me Captain Falcon. I assume Beat is a nickname of yours too?"

"Yeah..." Beat admitted. "It's just...I'm not proud of my given name. It's kinda a mouthful and makes me sound like a total nerd, ya know? I take my nickname from my last name, Bito."

Glancing at his partner, he then elaborated, "Anyway, 'Phones' is just a nickname I give my friend, Neku."

"Neku, huh..." Captain Falcon muttered. Walking over to Neku, he approached the youth with, "Excuse me... Neku, was it?"

Neku did not seem to hear the Captain, as he stood there with his eyes closed and his hands close to his headphones, tapping his foot to the rhythm of the song he was listening to. With a frustrated sigh, Falcon moved one of the headphones off Neku's ears carefully.

"H-Hey!" Neku cried in protest. "You don't mess with the jams, man!"

"The 'jams' can wait, young man," the Captain scolded. "I believe you owe me an explanation of why I'm here, and what's going on."

"Fine..." Neku began with a sigh. "I dunno how exactly you got here, but you're in Shibuya, during the Reaper's Game."

"Reaper's Game?" The Captain held his right hand to his chin quizzically.

"It's a game where people who have just died are forced to participate. They have seven days to survive by following a game master, or Reaper's, set goals for them, otherwise, they're erased."
"Just...died...?" The Captain felt anxiety weigh upon him again as his heart began to beat faster. "So then, I'm...?"

"Wait, I never did confirm if you were a Player or not," Neku stated. "I didn't see a Player Pin on your person, but you wouldn't mind checking your pockets...?"

After taking a moment to calm down, the Captain did just that. "Nothing," he answered Neku.

"Hmmm..." Neku pondered. "Then...may I see your hands?"

"Not sure why, but alright," Falcon obliged, opening the palms of his hands to Neku. After Neku took a closer look, he remarked, "Yup. Looks like you're not a Player. If you were, you'd have been erased within a couple more minutes without a partner. Therefore, I guess you're still alive, but that doesn't explain why you can see us or the Noise."

"That's a relief..." Captain Falcon commented with a sigh.

Neku then reached into his pocket and pulled out a black pin with a white skull insignia. "That's my Player Pin. Beat has one, too. And that's not all..." Neku opened his right hand and showed it to Falcon.

"By God..." Falcon uttered in shock. What he saw was what looked like a countdown on Neku's hand, counting down from 55 minutes. "H-how...?"

"Apparently, Players have to carry out their daily goals the Reapers assign them before time's up."

"So...if I understand this correctly," Falcon began, "If you don't carry out your goal before the allotted time ends, you're...erased?"

"Yup," Neku confirmed. "We've got some time to kill, though, so I figure I'll explain a little more about the Partner system and Psychs."

"No need to," the Captain said. "I think I understood it by watching you guys fight that Noise. Seems that Psychs are powers that only Players can use, and they need a partner to utilize them. It's why you told me to stay back, right?"

"Not bad for an old guy," Neku quipped, much to the Captain's chagrin. "But yes. Since you weren't a Player, you'd be erased within seconds. I've seen Noise attack non-Players and erase them, too, so..."

Gulping, the Captain stammered, "P-point taken..." Looking around for a moment, he then explained, "Anyway, I came here through a teleporter malfunction... Neku, I guess I should formally introduce myself to you. You can call me Captain Falcon, and I come from Smash City."

"Smash...City?" Neku questioned. "As in...home to the Super Smash Bros. tournament?"

"Yoo, Smash Bros.?!" Beat cried in excitement, a gleeful smile creeping up on his face. "That's frickin' awesome, man!"

"The very same," Captain Falcon confirmed. "I guess the fact I can see you is because Master Hand granted me the ability. I guess you could say I'm on the same metaphysical plane of existence as the Players, without actually being one."

"Master Hand...?" Neku asked. "Hold on...A while ago, I got this weird email from someone whose username was 'M45T3R_H4ND'. It was just a picture of a disembodied white hand floating in
space. I was a bit weirded out by it, to say the least."

"That sounds hella wack, bro," Beat remarked.

"That must have been Master Hand reaching out to you for consideration," Falcon explained. "The fifth tournament is starting soon."

"Really?" Neku queried. "But...if I'm selected, what about the Reaper's Game? Will I need a partner there, too?"

"Hopefully not," Falcon explained. "Since your partner appears to be your lifeline for the Reaper's Game, if Master Hand takes you onboard after you complete the game, you won't have to worry about erasure or anything. He'll probably even grant you the ability to use Psychs in Smash City without a partner." Pausing for a moment, he then said, "Which...what do you gain from winning the Reaper's Game, anyway?"

"Seems legit," Beat commented, scratching the back of his head, and continued, "Anyway, a Player who beats the Reaper's Game can return to the world of the livin' if they did well enough. Thing is, Neku has beaten it twice already but is always dumped back at the beginning. This is his third time in the Reaper's Game, yo."

"Huh..." The Captain pondered.

"Anyway...Captain?" Neku inquired. "If Master Hand reached out to me, that means I'm to be interviewed by someone from Smash City, right? But... I haven't seen anyone else introduce themselves as such toward me yet."

"Well," The Captain offered, "Even though I'm probably not the Smasher assigned to you, since I haven't been in Smash City for a while...is it alright if I ask you some questions? I guess you could see it as a screening interview before the actual interview."

"Sure, why not," Neku said with a shrug.

"Yo, Phones!" Beat called out to his partner. "What 'bout our mission, yo?"

"I dunno, what WAS the mission?" Neku asked Beat. "You were sneezin' real loudly when Uzuki was giving you the instructions."

"C'mon, Phones, I know it!" Beat exclaimed. "It was...uhhh... Reaper Spurt 4, right?"

"Sport, you mean," Neku corrected the blonde youth. "But what exactly is it?"

"It's, uhhh..." Beat trailed off before he and Neku noticed a middle aged man on the street mumbling, "Maybe it's time to break out Reaper Creeper..."

"That's it!" Beat announced. "It's Reaper Creeper!"

"...You just pulled that out of thin air, didn't you," Neku replied flatly.

"D-Did not! Hey, I used to be a Reaper, yo! We cool," Beat answered him.

"He was once a Reaper...?" The Captain asked Neku.

"Long story short, he defected and became my Partner when I was entered into the Game again just a few days ago without one," Neku explained. "Do you know how Reaper Creeper works, though?" He then asked Beat.
"You just gotta act like the Reaper and creep into people's heads and stuff, right?" Beat scratched the back of his head.

"Sure..." Neku murmured in a somewhat doubting tone.

"Aight Phones, we should find us some peeps to Creep," Beat said.

"Just hold on, Beat," Falcon told Beat. "I promise, it'll only take a few minutes."

"...Fine," Beat conceded with a sigh. "Just don't take too long, geezer!"

"Geez..." The Captain gripped under his breath. "Anyway, Neku? I'd like to start with..."

"Hyaaaah!"

Lucina had managed to slay the werewolf on her own by plunging her Falchion into its chest. Creating some distance between herself and the mummies, she then lunged toward one of the mummies, plunging her Falchion into its chest as well. She watched as it fell backward slightly, only for it to stand upright again and resume walking toward her.

"W-what...?" She shuddered, slowly stepping back.

After finishing off the mummy walking toward him by whipping its head off, Richter turned his attention to Lucina, noticing she was in trouble. "Get down!" He called out to her.

Lucina immediately ducked, prompting Richter to throw a large glass bottle of an unknown liquid at the mummy. When it came into contact with the monster, the bottle burst in an explosion of glass and blue flames, burning the mummy to ash. When the smoke cleared, there was Lucina's Falchion lying amidst the ash, completely intact.

After she picked up the sword of legend and holstered it, Lucina turned to Richter and inquired, "What was that just now?"

"Good ol' holy water," Richter replied with a confident grin. "Trusted by the Belmont family for generations!"

"Belmont...?" Lucina then noticed the chain whip Richter wielded having a cross-shaped hilt. "Wait a minute, you're..."

"I see you've heard of us," Richter answered her, holding two fingers of his right hand to his forehead and flicking them away in a somewhat prideful gesture. "Sorry I didn't elaborate earlier, but... it's true. My full name is Richter Belmont, and I am a part of the legendary Belmont clan. Across the generations, we Belmonts have been entrusted with the task of slaying Count Dracula and other creatures of the dark. The whip I'm using here is called the Vampire Killer."

"I see..." Lucina said. "And the person you're looking for...?"

"That's none other than my great-grandfather, Simon Belmont," Richter answered her. "I thought he was long dead, but when I was walking through town earlier, I heard someone saying they saw a man who looked just like him headed toward the castle a few hours before it started raining."

"Maybe...he's been selected for the next Smash Bros. tournament too?" Lucina reasoned.

"Maybe," Richter shrugged. "I'm not gonna lie, I always wanted to meet him. I heard tales of his heroics growing up, and fighting alongside him...haha, I'm getting excited thinking about it!" His
eyes sparkled with excitement as he balled his other hand in a fist to his chest triumphantly.

"Just like me with my own father..." Lucina commented, looking down slightly. "It would seem Simon was sent forward in time, while in my home world, I traveled back in time to save my own father, who wields the same Falchion I do. The one I wield was a gift from him before he died in my future."

"Where's this coming from?" Richter chuckled, a bit confused.

Looking up at Richter, Lucina sheepishly grinned as she said, "Oh...nothing. Just...makes me nostalgic for when I would fight alongside him after traveling back to his time. Two Falchions at the same time...and now it seems, two Vampire Killers in your case. I can see why you're excited at the thought."

"Never thought of it like that, but that sounds even more awesome now!" Richter exclaimed, pumping his fist in the air excitedly. "I still wonder why Master Hand would be interested in both me and Simon, though..."

"He must have seen equal potential in the two of you," Lucina commented. "You and your grandfather surely have something special. Unlike myself...there's nothing special or remarkable about me, when all I do is fail and make things worse..." She looked down solemnly, her hair hiding her eyes.

"W-what?" Richter asked Lucina, his voice tinged with concern. "What are you talking about...? You handled yourself pretty well back there. You even took out that werewolf faster than I could!"

"Yes, but..." Lucina sighed as she made eye contact with Richter, smiling in a bittersweet manner as her eyes had a solemn look in them. "Remember when I mentioned my father and the situation that led to me traveling back in time? I suppose I might as well explain in depth why I'm feeling this way as of late..."

She proceeded to explain everything to Richter - the accident that led her to train, her history with her trainer, and the incident that made her doubt herself. However, she did not mention that the person she had feelings for and her trainer were the same person.

"...As for why I'm here, I was originally headed to Mute City, where I last saw the Captain. I guess something went wrong with the off world teleporter though, as I ended up here instead. I have no idea why."

"That is strange..." Richter murmured, holding his free hand to his chin quizzically. "I imagine Luigi is here to find me and Simon and bring us to Smash City, but I have no idea why you'd end up here."

"Even so, maybe this is for the best..." Lucina's voice held a twinge of sorrow as she spoke. "I don't even know if the Captain will accept my apology for acting so rashly and running away... I promised I would let him train me, and that I would return to Smash City as a new, stronger version of myself. And... I guess that's why you saw me crying earlier. I felt it was all pointless at that moment. It's ironic... earlier, I was so determined to find him and set this all right, and... I got lost."

"Don't be so hard on yourself, Lucina," Richter consoled her. "You know what I see when I look at you? I see a woman who's strong, not only in combat prowess, but in character as well. You have a strong will and are driven by duty, but you seem to take it out on yourself whenever something goes wrong."
"Ah..." Lucina stammered. "You're too kind, Richter. But... I feel guilty whenever I have to rely on others. In my future, I led my comrades against the forces of the Fell Dragon, Grima, and I fought valiantly. I always thought that... if I am ever in need of help myself... if I have to depend on someone else, it would be a sign of weakness. That, combined with the mistakes I've made...not only leaving the Captain, but also getting too cocky when facing his nemesis, instead of picking my battles and running away once my friends had saved everyone that day."

"Everyone makes mistakes," Richter told Lucina, placing his left hand on her shoulder. "What's important is what you learn from them. I'm sure your trainer will be understanding when you see him again. And there's nothing wrong with depending on others when the need arises. Sometimes, there's things we can't do on our own."

"I know, but I also... feel I may have pushed them away. Not just the Captain, but my friends as well..." A flash of lightning shone through the windows for a second before Lucina continued, "You wouldn't mind if we continued as you led me out?"

"Of course," Richter obliged. "Follow me."

..."...And I just feel terrible for not telling them the whole truth," Lucina explained as she and Richter wandered into a section of the castle that had red stained glass windows, bathing the surroundings in a dusky red glow. "There's a reason for that, too. It's because... at this point in time, I feel I'm not ready to tell them, especially considering what my brother told me about this tournament."

"Which is?" Richter inquired.

"That everyone from past tournaments is returning... however, I have a feeling that... this may be the last time something like this happens. When the next tournament comes, some of us may have to part ways, and I might have to say goodbye to people I've grown close to... like my friends, or the person I have feelings for... I haven't even told him yet."

Richter doesn't know that Falcon's the one I have feelings for... I shouldn't tell him. I shouldn't let anyone at Smash City know just yet.

She continued as they continued walking, their footsteps echoing through the halls, "The worst thing is, I don't know if I'll see any of them again should it come to that. I've always had a tendency to get attached to others easily, and the closer I get to someone, the more painful it is to tell them goodbye."

It's why... when I said goodbye to him, it felt like my heart was ripped out of my chest. I wasn't even ready to say goodbye... I felt it was my only choice at the time.

"And...I don't think I'll ever be ready. That's why... I've been distancing myself from others lately. So that when that day comes, it'll hurt less." She stopped in her tracks, looking down sorrowfully.

"But if you do that... you'll miss out on making so many great memories with them all, right?" Richter asked, also coming to a standstill. "It doesn't matter how far away you are from someone. People can come and go, but memories are forever."

"Memories...?" Lucina questioned, making eye contact with Richter as a hopeful smile crept up on her face. "You're right, Richter. I didn't get to have such moments to bond with people in my future, so... I might as well make the most of the moment right now."

"That's the spirit!" Richter cheered Lucina on, giving a thumbs up. "There's so much to look
forward to, that you shouldn't let your worries and circumstances weigh you down. People care
about you the same way you care about them."

"Of course," Lucina said with a nod. "And..." Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out one of the
daisies her brother gave her.

"A daisy?" Richter inquired.

"Before I told my brother I would be away for a little while longer, I gave him a daisy just like this,
so he would think of me in my absence, and I would do the same for him when I would look at this
daisy. He's waiting for me...he, and everyone else." She put the daisy back into her pocket.

"There you go!" Richter said. "You have a lot to be thankful for, and I'm sure just the thought of
seeing them again is something to look forward to. Don't worry about the future or the past. Just
live in the here and now, and everything will fall into place." Walking in front of Lucina, Richter
then extended his hand for a handshake. "It's very nice to meet you, Lucina, and I look forward to
fighting alongside you and everyone else in Smash City. It's truly an honor to be selected."

"Same to you, Richter," Lucina agreed, shaking his hand.

*An honor... yes, I should look at it like that. It's an honor to get to know everyone at Smash City,
and form so many experiences and memories with everyone...including him. I will not take
anything for granted ever again. I know what I must do now.*

All of a sudden, a familiar scream rang through the castle halls. An unmistakable scream.

"Is that... Luigi?!" Lucina gasped.

"I'll handle it," Richter volunteered. "Hoping I'm not too late... maybe I'll run into Simon, too."

"But what about...?" Lucina asked, her eyebrows furrowing in concern.

"Allow me," an unfamiliar male voice said. Floating out of the shadows was a tall, pale skinned
man with long blonde hair and a black cloak.

"A vampire?!" Lucina stammered in fear.

"It's okay," Richter reassured her. "This is Alucard, a dhampir. He's half-human. And he can be
trusted; he's been helping the Belmont clan fight Dracula for generations."

"Good to see you, Richter," Alucard greeted Richter. "I've seen the green-clothed plumber and a
man in a raincoat heading that way." The dhampir pointed in the direction he saw those people
heading in.

"Simon..." Richter murmured. "Alright, thanks Alucard. Think you could do me a favor, too?"

"Which is?" Alucard inquired.

"Lead Lucina out of the castle," Richter explained, glancing at Lucina. "And, Lucina..."

"Yes?" She turned her gaze to meet his.

"...I believe in you. I believe you can accomplish anything you're determined to. You've already
come so far, and I just know everyone else believes in you too and can't wait to see you again. Just
don't let any setbacks weigh you down. You gotta believe in yourself, too."

He... believes in me? Lucina thought. Yes... that's right. Robin, Zelda, Shulk, my parents, Morgan... even him. They all believe in me. And most of all, I have to believe in myself.

"Thank you, Richter," Lucina thanked him with a bow. "I promise I will do my best." Turning to Alucard as Richter ran off, she told him, "Pleased to meet you."

"And you," Alucard returned the greeting. "Follow me."

..."We are here," Alucard announced when he and Lucina arrived at the castle's entrance, the teleporter not far off. It had ceased raining, and the moon shone brightly in the sky.

"Thank you, Alucard," Lucina thanked Richter's ally.

"Where do you wish to go now?" Alucard asked the Ylissean.

"I have to return to Mute City to take care of something, then I will return to Smash City."

"Smash City..." Alucard murmured. "In addition to taking on Master Simon and Master Richter as Smashers, the Hands told me I would be joining as an Assisting Fighter. I am truly glad to continue to be of service to the Belmont clan."

"I see," Lucina told him. "I look forward to seeing you at Smash City."

"And you," Alucard said. "Until next time..." He left, entering the castle once again.

"I've met so many interesting people during my stay at Smash City," Lucina thought aloud. "Not many people get to have that opportunity. I won't let it go to waste."

I've even made a new friend... I've missed that simple happiness. But right now, I have to pursue that greater happiness: finding him again. I just hope... he'll forgive me, and also accept my feelings...

Walking over to the teleporter, she heard Luigi's scream once again pierce the silence.

"So I guess he's okay, then..." She said to herself. "I have no reason to worry. Not anymore... just wait for me, Captain. I'm coming."

Booting up the teleporter, she once again input Mute City as her destination, but when she hit enter...

"What?!"

This time around, both yellow and purple sparks were flying off the machine. The screen said something different as well: the "MUTE CITY" text became garbled and eventually became something else.

"MIRA".

"N-not again!" She cried as alarms blared from the teleporter panel. Eventually, a huge flash of light enveloped her.

"Aaaaaaaaah!"

Around that same time, Luigi came dashing out of the castle, shrieking in terror before tripping on
the ground. He managed to step outside just in time to see the teleporter malfunctioning and Lucina disappearing.

"Huh?" Looking around curiously, he called out, "Lucinaaaaaaa?"

There was no response.

"I got a bad-a feeling about this..."

"...I see," Captain Falcon said as he, Neku and Beat stood in the center of the crosswalk, everyone else not noticing them. "So this... 'CAT' guy...he's your inspiration? I can tell from what you've told me that you're the imaginative type. Master Hand would be pleased to have someone with your creativity as a Smasher."

"Thanks," Neku replied. "And yes, he is. I've met him, in fact. He gave me some advice that I keep to heart to this day."

"I'd like to hear it," Falcon told him. "What he told you, I mean."

"Of course." Looking at the sky, Neku recited what CAT - whose real name was Sanae Hanekoma - told him, word for word.

"Listen up, Phones. The world ends with you. If you want to enjoy life, expand your world. You gotta push your horizons out as far as they'll go. Enjoy every moment with all ya got."

"Wow..." The Captain murmured.

Looking at Falcon again, Neku explained, "Those words made an impact on my outlook on life. I used to be a loner, even before I was entered into the Reaper's Game. I was never good with people... I thought friends would weigh me down and society only existed to force its ideals on me. But when I became a Player and met Shiki, Joshua, Beat and Rhyme, I began to listen to everyone around me and trust others more. And if there's one thing I've learned, it's that if I don't clash, I don't change." Looking up again briefly, Neku continued, "It's like CAT said. The world ends with me, and if I don't expand my borders, I miss out on a lot of the best moments life has to offer."

"Expand your borders, huh..." Falcon looked down somewhat regrettfully.

Noticing the Captain's somewhat anguished look, Neku asked him, "What's up?"

"Heh... in many ways, I guess I can see bits of myself in you, Neku," Falcon answered the youth with a dry, somewhat regretful chuckle. "I'm mostly a loner myself, too. When I'm not participating in a tournament at Smash City, or racing in my home world, I often keep to myself. I have only a small circle of friends I trust, and I often avoid pursuing new relationships out of...fear, I guess."

"Fear...?" Neku questioned. "You seem like the kinda guy who could take on almost anything. What do you have to fear?"

"I'm afraid...that people I get close to may be hurt because of me."

"Oh..." Neku softly gasped, his expression turning solemn.

"You're young, so you probably won't understand much until you get older, but... in my field of work, I've made a lot of dangerous enemies who will stop at nothing to break me. When they saw they couldn't do much targeting me alone, they would go after anyone they deemed 'vulnerable'
enough that I would get close to. I had to end a past romantic relationship to protect the woman I was seeing... And lately, I've been feeling regretful again because I fear I may have put my former training partner in danger. She knew of what I did to protect my first love, so... instead of me parting ways with her, she ran away..." Sighing briefly, he continued, "She only wanted to become stronger following an incident, and be able to prove it to everyone at Smash City. When that happened, I guess she felt like she failed, like all her progress meant nothing in the long run... I feel it's my fault for letting it happen. I was originally headed to where she was before the teleporter malfunctioned. I didn't even get to tell her I was sorry for it all..."

**Why am I telling a teenager my life problems...? Like he'll get it...**

"You should definitely get to that," Neku suggested. "Don't let yourself be burdened by any regrets. It's something I've learned, too. My last partner, Joshua... I didn't fully trust him, and I made him feel like he owed me something." Looking down remorsefully, the young man continued, "In the end, he didn't, and...he's gone. Because of me. I never got to tell him I was sorry... Don't let it be too late for you and her."

*Don't let it be too late...? Truth be told, right now that's what I'm more afraid of than anything else. I don't wanna take anything for granted anymore... least of all her.*

"...I won't," Captain Falcon answered Neku. "I'm surprised. You're so young, but you've been through a lot. You seem to understand people and emotions really well, you can put yourself in the other person's shoes."

"You can thank the Reaper's Game for that," Neku replied. "I understand why you did what you did to keep your ex-girlfriend safe too. With the Partner system in the Reaper's Game, paired up Players have to look out for one another, otherwise, well...it's Game Over."

"Ah, of course," the Captain murmured. Placing his hand on the youth's shoulder, he told him with a smile, "You're a smart, empathetic young man, Neku, and I'm sure you'll go far in life."

"Ya done, old man?" Beat called out to the Captain.

"I- Hold your horses, kid! I'm finishing up just now!" Falcon answered Beat, sounding somewhat annoyed.

"Hope so." Turning his attention to Neku, he announced, "We've got 47 minutes remainin'!"

"Um, excuse me..."

Beat, Neku and Falcon turned their attention to Lucas, who was standing behind Neku.

"Are you... Neku Sakuraba?"

"Huh? Yeah, that's me..." Neku told the PSI-powered blonde boy.

"I'm Lucas from Smash City. Master Hand assigned me to your case so I could carry out your Smasher interview."

Lucas, huh? The Captain pondered. *Upon first glance they may seem like polar opposites, with Neku being more brash and Lucas appearing more timid on the surface, but they have more in common than meets the eye. Especially when it comes to what they both went through... Master Hand made the right choice.*

For a moment, Fiora's words to him and Lucina echoed in his mind, her remarks of them being...
polar opposites, but bringing out the best in each other.

*Lucina*... Falcon thought. *I know that in our short time together, we were able to see eye to eye and bond with each other, there's no denying that. I brought out the best in you, and... I'm starting to think you brought out the best in me, too. Just hold on, Lucina. I'll find you again and bring you home... I hope you can forgive me.*

"Geez, another one?!" Beat griped. "Better hurry it up, blondie!"

"We've got 47 minutes, right?" Neku asked Beat. "We've got plenty of time still."

"Yes," Lucas confirmed. "It should take no more than 10 minutes, Mr. Daisu... Daiske—"

"BWAAAAAAAAH!" Beat cried, alarmed, as his eyes widened and his jaw dropped in surprise. "Don't say that naaaaaaame!"

"W-what...?" Lucas stammered, a bit startled as his eyes bore a frightened look in them.

"He...doesn't like it when people say his real name," Neku told Lucas. "He prefers everyone just call him Beat."

"Heh, if he thinks that's embarrassing, he should know my real name," Falcon quipped.

"...And what is your real name?" Beat teased the Captain, smirking slightly.

"...Not tellin' ya, kid," Falcon bluntly answered him with a smug grin.

"Killjoy..." Beat muttered before snickering at how the situation played out.

"Anyway, Lucas," Captain Falcon asked Lucas, "Did anyone else from Smash City come with you?"

"As a matter of fact, Mewtwo did," Lucas answered him. "He's calibrating the off world teleporter for this world. He's a few blocks to the right, in the Cadoi City area."

"Got it," Falcon said as he began to run off, before Neku and Beat called out to him.

"Hey, Cap," Neku said with an honest, heartfelt smile. "If I'm selected, I look forward to fighting against, and alongside, you and everyone else in Smash City."

"And I'll be cheerin' him on!" Beat declared jovially. "And for an old dude, ya ain't half bad. Stop by Shibuya any time, hear?"

"Of course!" The Captain waved at the two Players and Lucas before dashing off.

*Enjoy the moment with all I've got? Expand my horizons...?* He pondered as he ran. *Maybe... once this is all over, I'll start opening up to everyone else at Smash City too... once Lucina is safe again. I opened up to her the easiest, moreso than with Snake when I met him... What could it mean?*

...  

"Captain," the Psychic-type Pokemon greeted Captain Falcon once he arrived in the Cadoi City area. Apparently, the citizens in that area didn't notice the teleporter, just in front of the main shop building, being there, either. "Long time, no see."

"Same here, Mewtwo," Falcon greeted Mewtwo back.
"So, what brings you here?" Mewtwo inquired.

"Well... I didn't teleport here of my free will. There was a malfunction when I tried to teleport to Lucina's last known whereabouts from Mute City..."

"She is not with you right now?" Mewtwo inquired.

"Long story, but yeah," Captain Falcon confirmed. "For some reason, I ended up here. I can't say for Lucina, though... you've finished calibration on this teleporter, right?"

"I believe so," Mewtwo answered him. "As for the malfunction sending you here, that is certainly bizarre. I will mention it back at Smash City to see if they can look into it."

"Thanks," Falcon told the Pokemon. "I'll be headed to Green Greens now. It's where Lucina was last —"

Before he could finish his sentence, a pillar of light materialized on the teleporter's platform, revealing Robin after a few seconds.

"Robin?!" Falcon gasped.

Noticing Robin's shocked expression, Mewtwo asked the tactician, "What is wrong, Robin?"

Panting, Robin began somewhat shakily, "I returned to Smash City after interviewing Bandana Waddle Dee with Zelda not long ago, and found an anomaly in the logs. Lucina had meant to return to Mute City after departing from Green Greens, but she ended up in another world... Dracula's Castle? It was where Luigi was meant to retrieve two newcomers, Simon and Richter Belmont..."

"Like how I ended up here..." Falcon concluded, holding his right hand to his chin. "I meant to teleport to Green Greens, but a malfunction dropped me here." Resting his right arm by his side again, he asked Robin, "And you were able to return to Smash City safely?"

"Yes," Robin confirmed. "It seems to be a random occurrence, but it seems Lucina was a victim of teleporter malfunctions again."

Gulping anxiously, Captain Falcon asked, "W-where is she this time...?"

Taking a deep breath, Robin answered the Captain, "It would appear she has ended up in the world of our next potential candidate, on the planet of Mira...but...there's a catch."

"What's the catch?" Falcon inquired.

"...Promise you won't panic too much?" Robin questioned, somewhat timidly.

"There is no need to worry yourself, Robin," Mewtwo tried to reassure the tactician. "I am sure it cannot be that big of an issue. You can tell us."

"O-Okay," Robin stammered. Taking a deep breath, he explained, "The thing is...Cloud and Bayonetta are on Mira right now calibrating the teleporter close to New Los Angeles on the Primordia continent, even though it's probably still a bit buggy at this point in time. But... Lucina ended up a long ways away from the teleporter...on the Sylvalum continent. It's pretty dangerous for someone to be there all by themselves."

"Oh God..." The Captain murmured under his breath, the terror apparent in his voice.

"We need to hurry," Mewtwo emphasized. "Someone should let those two know and head to
"Sylvalum as soon as possible."

"I'll go," Falcon volunteered. "I swore to keep Lucina safe, and if something happened to her...that would fall on me."

"Captain...?" Robin asked, the uncertainty apparent in his voice.

"Are you certain about this?" Mewtwo inquired.

"I am," The Captain confirmed. "I feel like I'm somewhat responsible for getting her into this mess. It's only fair I get her out of it."

"...Very well," Robin conceded. "I must warn you, though: since Cloud and Bayonetta are still calibrating the teleporter, you may not arrive near the main hub city of New Los Angeles where the teleporter is supposed to be."

"It's a chance I'm willing to take," Captain Falcon told Robin. "If it sends me closer to Lucina, it'd be for the best. I won't give up until I find her again."

"Okay," Robin said. "I'll head back to Smash City real quick to confirm on their end if you made it to Mira."

"Sounds good."

After Robin teleported back to Smash City, Falcon stepped onto the teleporter's platform. "So...Mira, right?"

"Correct," Mewtwo confirmed. "I hope you are ready."

"Heh...I was born ready," Falcon said confidently, selecting Mira as the teleporter's destination. After confirming his destination, he vanished in a flash of light. Within a few seconds, Robin reappeared on the teleporter's platform.

"So?" Mewtwo questioned. "Did he make it?"

"Yes, but..." Robin began. "As expected, he's nowhere near NLA..."

"Hopefully he is safe," Mewtwo replied. "Where exactly is he?"

---

**Meanwhile, on a whole different planet...**

"Secretary Nagi!" A tall, muscular blond man with tattoos on his biceps called out to the man named "Nagi": a fifty-something man with short black hair, black eyes, a scar around the left edge of his lips, and clad in a black uniform.

"Yes, Commander Vandham?" Nagi addressed his fellow ranking officer.

"There's an incoming transmission," Vandham told the Secretary. "The weird thing is, it's coming from a...Smash City?"

"Smash City..." Nagi murmured, a sense of nostalgia coming to him. "...Put them through."

In the conference room they were standing in at BLADE Tower, a projection appeared on the window overlooking the city of New Los Angeles.
"Salutations," Snake said on the projected video feed, saluting the Commander and Secretary. "You can call me Snake."

"Salutations to you too," Nagi told Snake, saluting back. Vandham did the same. "If I may ask, what's the reason for this transmission today? The last time we received a transmission from Smash City, it was from Master Hand himself because he wanted to reach out to potential candidates for the next Smash Bros. tournament here in New Los Angeles. He had selected one, and invited her to Smash City for a screening interview and tour of Smash City."

"Correct," Snake confirmed. "And you'll be glad to hear that I've been selected to conduct a second interview with the candidate. If I may ask where she is...?"

"So you're Solid Snake, I presume?" A woman's voice interrupted, coming from the doorway to the conference room.

"Elma, right?" Snake asked the candidate as she walked into the room. "Once setup for the off-world teleporter on Mira is complete, I will be arriving in NLA to conduct our interview."

"I await with bated breath," Elma answered him confidently. "Fortune favors the bold, and if I am selected, I cannot wait to set forth into the brave new world that is the Super Smash Bros. tournament...!"

"Heh, your determination is admirable," Snake praised Elma with a slight chuckle. "I look forward to seeing what-

"Elma!" A young female's voice interrupted them both. "It's an emergency!"

"What is it, Lin?"

Chapter End Notes

Ok so first off: SNAKE HAS HIS FIRST IN PERSON (NOT BY PHONE) DIALOGUE IN THE STORY! ALSO, ELMA IS HERE; JUST IN TIME FOR XENOBLADE X'S 4TH ANNIVERSARY IN JAPAN! (Give or take, its precise anniversary was April 29. And yes, she's the character I hinted at a few chapters back by referring to her Japanese VO.) God that game needs a Switch port so badly I swEAR (and I also really hope Elma makes it as DLC, even though she, like Shantae and Bandana Waddle Dee, has a Spirit in Ultimate already)

Second; we're now halfway into the story officially! I think there's like...6 more chapters planned, debating on an epilogue.

I might write a follow up to last year's Snakus oneshot that will most likely tie into this too. Starting to wonder if a larger spinoff of the plot I was teasing will be worth it though. I guess I'll keep pressing on for now... you'll see later.

And I honestly do hope you guys are enjoying this so far, I mean it. If there's any part of my writing, characterization or plot you particularly enjoy, or think can be done a bit better, ANYTHING, don't hesitate to let me know as well. And thank you all for sticking by from the bottom of my heart.
Over Night

Chapter Notes

Good lord writing Bayonetta and my perceived Cloud and Bayonetta dynamic is fun

Also, these next few chapters take place just after chapter 7 of Xenoblade X, and the events of chapter 8 will happen soon. There is spoilers for chapter 4 of X (all the more reason we NEED a port of Xenoblade X for Switch... it's a game that made a really positive impact in my life). Cross isn't present, however. I'm kinda putting my own spin on the events that follow, as after all, Elma is considered the true protagonist of X. She's even a DLC Blade in Xenoblade 2.

Content warnings for this chapter: blood, and a spoiler for an over 20 year old PS1 JRPG. namely the one Cloud's from, not that it really counts as a spoiler anymore tbh with how everyone and their mom knows it

Also, Bayonetta leans on the fourth wall at one point, and there's some possibly hinted Cloutena. Maybe even one-sided Bayotena and BayoPit if you squint. Some of the events Cloud and Bayonetta discuss are tied to my first Snakus oneshot, "Don't go away, I will stay for you". Which reminds me, soon I'll write a follow up to that. Probably.

Title based on "Over Night" by Aya/CruelSHE, ending theme to the anime "Le Chevalier D'Eon"

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 14 - Over Night

A gentle breeze blew through the grasslands of the outskirts of New Los Angeles, on the Primordia continent, as the afternoon sun shone brightly in the sky. About five miles from the West Gate, the former AVALANCHE mercenary Cloud Strife got to work calibrating the off world teleporter that connected Planet Mira to Smash City. Bayonetta, the Umbran witch, was in charge of keeping Primordia's wildlife away from the machine, especially the bloodthirsty ones. Naturally, being a witch of immense power, taking care of the monsters was a walk in the park for her, and the two were fortunate enough to be situated in a location where the stronger enemies, or as Lin called them, "Tyrants", wouldn't find and ambush them.

"What do you think of NLA, Bayonetta?" Cloud asked his partner as he performed the necessary calibrations on the machine.

"A little too technologically advanced for my tastes, but it's good to see humankind thriving like this." Seeing a hostile creature rushing to them, Bayonetta aimed her Love is Blue pistols at the monster as she asked, "And you? Does it remind you of your Midgar?"

"It's better, actually," Cloud said. "Back in Midgar I had to deal with Shinra soldiers, pollution, government corruption, and practically everyone below the plate lived in poverty. NLA is miles better in comparison." He heard shots ring and the sound of an animal corpse limply hitting the
ground before continuing his work.

"Pardon me, Cloud?" Bayonetta asked the swordsman after blowing the smoke from her pistols, getting bored of her duty.

Temporarily ceasing his mechanical tinkering to sigh and pinch the bridge of his eyebrows, Cloud stated, "This is the second time you've asked to trade places, Bayonetta. I already told you: I'm the only one with the technological know-how to calibrate this thing, and after Master Hand sent us here for that purpose, it's imperative I get it done so we can return without any problems and Snake can arrive here to interview the candidate, Elma."

"But," Bayonetta began with a somewhat desperate sounding sigh, "You wield a sword that's almost half your body's bloody size, not to mention the weight of that thing! I can't be doing this alone all day!"

"Gonna say it again, Bayonetta. Not. Interested." Resuming his work on the machinery, Cloud commented, "You may be a witch who's been around for almost five centuries, but I have the experience necessary to gauge decision-making in situations like these. I'm the one who saved my world from both a greedy organization destroying the planet with their Mako Reactors AND a giant meteor threatening to do the job for 'em, after all."

"W-well," Bayonetta scoffed, hoping to then get an edge in the perceived bragging contest, "I stopped both Jubileus, the Creator, and Aesir, the God of Chaos, from ruling over the human realm, so...!"

"Yeah, that's cool and all, you do you. Now please, let me focus on finishing this." All the while, Cloud was intensely focused on his task even as he spoke.

"He's always got some kind of comeback, doesn't he..." Bayonetta grumbled under her breath. "Why Master Hand thought pairing me with him for this task was a good idea is beyond me." Just then, a thought clicked in her mind. "Wait a tick..."

"...And there. That should do it." Cloud announced he was finished with calibrations, screwing everything else back onto place.

"Can I ask you something, Cloud?" Bayonetta inquired.

"Yeah? What's up?" Cloud answered her, standing up.

"Remember when Master Hand announced the fifth tournament and introduced one of the newest fighters, the Inklings?"

"It was just a week ago, yeah," Cloud replied. "And...?"

"Don't you think it's a little weird how he just said he would inform us of any updates and just floated away? He wasn't there to welcome Princess Daisy, Ridley, Chrom, Dark Samus, or King K. Rool after that..."

"I honestly never noticed..." Cloud admitted with a shrug.

"Well of course you didn't," Bayonetta quipped, teasingly flicking Cloud's forehead. "You have a reputation for being a bit of a lone wolf, you know."

"T-that's not true," Cloud countered. "That was... the old me. It's just... I'm not all that used to making new friends after being thrust into a totally new crowd."
"And yet I saw you with that goddess once," Bayonetta said matter-of-factly.

"P-Palutena?!” Cloud stammered, blushing slightly. "Don't get the wrong idea...she's just a friend. She even reminds me of someone back home. Someone... I lost." He sighed, looking to the side wistfully as he recalled the memory of the flower girl he lost along his journey.

"So you can make friends easily," Bayonetta teased the mercenary. "It's rather interesting that you chose the company of that cheeky goddess, however. Ooh, how I'd love to tease her like I do her little underling, Pit, from time to time..."

"Sounds like you're jealous," Cloud jested.

Flustered, Bayonetta stammered, "I-I am not! Have you forgotten I practically hunt angels for a living?!” Calming down, she continued, "Anyway, as I was saying, I can't quite put my finger on it, but something seems a bit strange with Master Hand. Perhaps Crazy Hand as well..."

"I'm sure it's just a coinci-" Cloud began before being interrupted.

"Cloud! Bayonetta!"

Running to them was Lin Lee Koo, the 13-year-old expert engineer at BLADE. She had short bob-cut black hair with small Monado hair pins in it, gray eyes, and white and black body armor.

"Lin?” Cloud asked the young girl after she caught up to them.

"Are you two done calibrating the teleporter?" Lin asked the two.

"Well, Cloud here did all the work, but yes," Bayonetta confirmed. "Is something the matter?"

"It's not good," Lin explained, her eyebrows furrowing in concern. "Snake and I confirmed two people from Smash City ended up on Noctilum and Sylvalum, respectively. And right now, it's extremely dangerous in Sylvalum. We need to hurry if we're to save Miss Lucina."

"What's in the bag?" Cloud asked, glancing at the knapsack Lin had on her person.

"I'll explain when we get there," Lin told him.

"What of the other person?" Bayonetta asked Lin.

"According to Snake, Captain Falcon ended up in Noctilum. Elma's en route right now to make sure he's safe." Turning in the opposite direction, Lin beckoned the two helpers from Smash City, "Come with me, you two. We'll take a ride to Sylvalum's Lake Ciel in my Skell. Time is of the utmost essence!"

"Won't it get cramped in there?" Bayonetta asked in a somewhat griping tone.

"We don't really have a choice," Cloud told his partner. "C'mon. Let's go."

"Ngh..."

Lucina slowly opened her eyes and saw that she was lying in what felt like sand. Unfortunately for her, she was lying face down, and almost immediately felt some sand in her mouth, which she promptly proceeded to spit out. However, something else was horribly amiss - surrounding her in every direction was a thick cloud of grayish-blue spores that blocked out the sunlight, as if a dense fog.
"A...again?" She murmured, looking around. "I remember the teleporter's display changed from 'MUTE CITY' to 'MIRA' at the last minute...is this Mira...?"

Slowly getting up, she tried to determine the direction she should head in based on the direction the wind would blow. Only problem was, there was no wind.

"You've got to be kidding..." She murmured in disbelief. She tried to take in a deep breath to calm herself, only to end up coughing.

"S-spores?!" She gasped. Once she was done coughing, she said under her breath, "To hell with it. I should at least try to find a way to safety as soon as possible. It beats staying here..."

She cautiously took a few steps ahead of her, her footsteps making faint crunching noises in the sand, when she heard a piercing cry. She couldn't tell what it was in the fog, but whatever it was bodyslammed into her, knocking her on her rear. She could hear a faint snapping sound as she landed.

"Ow..." Wincing, she got back up and immediately drew her Falchion, inching toward whatever it was that attacked her. Once it drew near, she immediately slashed at it, slicing it in two. When its sliced up corpse hit the ground, she walked slightly closer to examine it. It appeared to be a small creature with a bizarre alien physiology, with a gel cap on its "head" surrounded by curved, spiked tendrils.

"What manner of world is Mira...?!" She gasped. Just then, she remembered the snapping sound she heard earlier. Feeling her heart race faster, she immediately checked her pockets for the daisy she took with her. The daisy that was a symbol of her promise to herself and her loved ones that she would return to Smash City. She pulled it out with her right hand.

It was snapped in two close to the head.

"No..." Lucina mumbled, terrified and sorrowful, as she held her left hand to her mouth and tears streamed down her face.

Why... She thought. It seems... I've already broken my promise...

She let go of the broken daisy, the tattered flower slowly falling to the ground in a frail manner.

I'm sorry, everyone... I guess this is what I deserve for pushing you all away.

Looking down to the ground sorrowfully, she trudged on forward sluggishly into the fog.

As Captain Falcon slowly came to his senses, the first thing he noticed was that he seemed to be floating in something. Water, perhaps, as the sound of being submerged in what was seemingly an ocean filled his ears. When he opened his eyes, his suspicions were confirmed. He could see daylight shining softly through the water.

It was then he realized he had to surface for air. Gasping faintly, he quickly swam to the surface and inhaled deeply once his head emerged above the water. Once he caught his breath, he looked around as he treaded the water.

Surrounding him were tall cliffs covered in foliage, and a lake flowing into the ocean just ahead of him, with some strange machine lying in shambles in the center of a semi-circle of rocks. In that same lake area was a large, twisting tree branch that led to the ground above.
"I definitely don't think I'm anywhere near NLA," he commented. "Guess Robin was right. I imagine Cloud and Bayonetta haven't calibrated the teleporter here yet. Now I just gotta figure out where I am exactly..."

He swam in the direction of the lake, and once he was in, curiosity overtook him as he inched slowly over to the tattered machine between the rocks. "What is tha-" he said before warning signals went off on the scanner on his visor, indicating that the "broken" machine was, in fact, a dormant mechanical alien of immense strength. "...Yikes. Curiosity almost killed this cat here, heh." Changing course, he swam to the nearby shore, then walked up the twisting giant tree branch to the cliffs above, the sun drying him off during his trek.

As he got to higher ground, he saw mountains of jungle-like terrain before him, sprawling with alien wildlife.

"One thing's for sure," he thought out loud, "I'm stuck on a whole different planet."

Heading in the direction he was facing, he suddenly heard a loud squealing noise close by. Soon, multiple loud, angry squeals followed. Looking around, he saw himself surrounded by alien pig-like creatures with gray leathery skin.

"Heh, bring it on," Captain Falcon boasted as he was surrounded by a small pack of three Forest Suids. He managed to dodge all of their charging attacks and kicked two with immense force, sending them flying into the ocean off the cliff.

"Nothing but small fry," he murmured before noticing the last Forest Suid charging at him. "Hoho, I'm saving the best for last." Gathering energy in his fist, he shouted, "Falcon...PUUUUUNCH!" and punched the last Suid with such great force that it was sent flying ahead of him.

"Hah, keep 'em coming. I could do this all -"

He then noticed that Suid slamming into and bouncing off what looked like a large rock covered in foliage. Within milliseconds, it was revealed to not be a rock at all. A strange, enormous, part-turtle-part-bug-like creature emerged from the ground, and the Captain couldn't help but feel that he had somehow bit off more than he could chew.

"...day...?"

The creature marched over to Falcon slowly. He trembled slightly in fear, but quickly shook it off and got into a defensive stance. "I'm not scared of you. Do your worst!"

"You should be," an unfamiliar woman's voice called out to him. "This is no ordinary opponent!"

"Huh...?" Before he could respond, a tall, dark-skinned woman with silver hair and green eyes emerged from the bushes, sliding on the ground as she fired from the twin guns she wielded and shouted, "Sliding Slinger!" Standing and aiming her guns at one of the creature's appendages on its head, she then shouted, "Executioner!" and fired at the appendage, causing it to burst and fall off the creature's head.

"What's going on? Who are you...?" Falcon asked the woman. Judging by her attire, which consisted of a red vest, orange-red metallic greaves and purple pants, she had to be a somewhat high-ranking military official.

"I'll introduce myself later," the woman told him. "For now, we have to take out this Tyrant. Alfombra, the Transcendent...if you're not careful, it can make quick work of you."
"What should I do, then...?" The Captain asked the mystery woman. *This is strangely nostalgic...* he thought.

"Just follow my lead," she instructed him. "You could use these." She then handed him some simple weapons – a combat dagger as a melee weapon, and what looked like floating laser drones as a ranged weapon, which came with a small adhesive device the Captain would attach to the back of his upper neck. "When fighting Tyrants, it's best to switch between melee and ranged combat on the fly."

"I see..." Activating the drones which hovered behind him, Falcon cautiously twirled the dagger around in his hand. "But...I've never really used these weapons before."

"Don't worry, it'll come to you," the woman reassured him. "Now get ready. Here it comes!"

Alfombra, the Transcendent began to lift its body up on its hind legs. "It's going to do a body slam attack. Right when it lowers its front legs, it's about to slam its body onto the ground. Move out of the way immediately!"

"Got it!" As the woman predicted, after a few seconds Alfombra lowered its legs, at which point the Captain and the unknown woman leapt out of the way as the creature slammed its body into the ground, sending seismic shockwaves around it.

"Now! Using your Psycho Launchers, perform Shooting Star at the other appendage on its head!"

"Psycho...Launchers?" Falcon questioned before realizing what the woman meant. "Oh...gotcha." The drones seemed to be connected to his brainwaves, so he focused, and the drones seemed to suspend him in midair briefly before sending him flying forward, spinning like a drill. His dagger drawn, he shouted, "Shooting Star!" and slashed as he passed the appendage, slicing it off. The creature cried in pain as the Psycho Launchers gently set the Captain onto the ground safely.

"That put a dent in them," the woman announced. "Let's move in and keep the rhythm going!"

"Now you're speaking my language," the Captain boasted. Noticing a potential weak spot on the monster's abdomen, he gripped his dagger tightly and shouted, "Slit Edge!" as he dashed to it and sliced at it, causing the fluid sac on its abdomen to burst.

"Impressive," the woman complimented him. "I'm ready to finish this thing in style. Care to give me a hand?"

"I think I know what I have to do," the Captain answered her. "It's amazing how this is all just coming to me..." Focusing again, he shouted, "Jetstream!" His Psycho Launchers aimed at Alfombra and shot a stream of ether energy at it, stunning it. The woman then dashed and leapt forward, flipping in midair and landing behind it. Before the Tyrant could react, she leapt again in the air with twin swords drawn and shouted "Shadowstrike!" before descending, striking the monster with her swords. She then called out to Captain Falcon, "You might want to get out of the way for this one."

After Falcon backflipped a safe distance to the side, the woman shouted, "Hundred Shells!" and slashed at the air with her swords, sending shockwaves of pure energy to the monster that slowly tore it apart, before slashing both of her swords in an X formation, sending an X-shaped shockwave that disintegrated the beast.

"Astonishing..." the Captain murmured in wonder, holding his left hand to his agape mouth.

"Don't look so shocked. I saved you, after all," the woman chuckled. "By the way, I figure now
would be a good time as any to introduce myself. My name is Elma, BLADE Colonel and leader of the Reclaimer division at New Los Angeles. This here is Noctilum, a continent on the vast planet of Mira."

"I see," the Captain said. "I imagine BLADE is the name of your military organization?"

"That is correct," Elma confirmed. "It stands for Builders of a Legacy After the Destruction of Earth, founded this very year of 2056 A.D. We escaped through a spaceship called the White Whale and crash landed in the heart of the Primordia continent."

"Earth was destroyed…in this timeline?" Falcon wondered out loud.

"Timeline…?" Elma was a bit confused. "I'm not sure I follow."

"Ah, I guess it'll make more sense if I introduce myself," Falcon answered her. "You can call me Captain Falcon. I hail from Smash City, though I'm originally from a world…or should I say, a timeline where Earth still stands in the 26th century."

"That makes sense," Elma replied. "And…Smash City, huh…"

"Something the matter?" The Captain asked her curiously.

"It's just…I've been there once," Elma answered him. "When the fourth tournament ended, Master Hand decided to reach out to potential fighters in different worlds. I received a tour from Palutena once when I first signed up for consideration. And… I'm to be interviewed by someone from there soon… one Solid Snake…?"

"Snake's here? He's back in Smash City?!" The Captain gasped.

"Seems that way," the silver haired BLADE colonel answered him. "I was conversing with him via transmission to confirm his arrival in NLA once Cloud Strife and Bayonetta had finished calibrations for the teleporter, when…"

"Elma!" A young female's voice interrupted them both. "It's an emergency!"

"What is it, Lin?" Elma asked Lin.

"Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Snake," Lin apologized, bowing before the projection before continuing, "But when checking FrontierNav, I found two spatial distortions in Noctilum and Sylvalum. I don't think a xenoform warped there… could it be any of yours, Snake?"

"Strange..." Snake said over the video feed. "Let me check." Walking away from the camera, Snake inspected the teleporter's logs, as the room he was broadcasting from was the same room that Smash City's off-world teleporter was situated in. Within a few seconds, he returned.

"It seems you're right, Lin," Snake confirmed. "Looks like Captain Falcon's coordinates are situated in the Noctilum continent on your planet, and Lucina is at the Lake Ciel area in Sylvalum."

"Sylvalum…oh no..." Lin murmured fearfully.

"What's wrong?" Snake asked the young engineer.

"According to FrontierNav, Sylvalum is covered in spore clouds right now," Lin elaborated. "It's dangerous to people who aren't Xenoforms or Mimeosomes like Elma and myself..."
"Hurry to Sylvalum with Cloud and Bayonetta, Lin," Elma ordered Lin. "And don't forget to bring the necessary gear. I will head to Noctilum to retrieve Mr. Falcon."

"Roger!" Lin said, saluting before running off.

"Snake," Elma continued, turning back to the video feed. "I will inform you when the situation has been resolved."

"Sounds fine," Snake obliged. "I will meet up with you after you give the all clear."

"Roger."

"So I guess I found you, then," Elma said.

"I see..." Captain Falcon murmured. "And...what about Lucina? Didn't you say a crew was dispatched to find her?"

"Yes," Elma confirmed. "Lin is en route to Sylvalum's Lake Ciel with Cloud and Bayonetta."

"I just hope she's alright..." Falcon said with a sigh as he removed the adhesive device for the drones and handed it, the drones, and the combat dagger back to Elma, who placed the weapons in a bag she was carrying.

"Is something the matter?" The leader of the Reclaimers asked the bounty hunter.

"Well..." Turning to look at the ocean he found himself in earlier as the waves crashed against the rocks at the bottom of the cliff, the Captain began, "She was my protégé at one point. Following an incident, she wanted to train to become stronger, and I took her under my wing. But...something happened along the way and we ended up going our separate ways."

"I...see..." Elma murmured. "I imagine you grew close to her, based on how you seem so concerned about her safety."

"You can tell...?" The Captain murmured. "It's...true. We've gotten close, you could say." Noticing the sun starting to set, dyeing the sky blazing hues of orange, he turned to Elma and said with a somewhat sheepish grin, "The way we were fighting that Tyrant earlier... it's a bit nostalgic, really. I fought a similar powerful monster on another world with Lucina and one of her friends."

"I understand..." Elma told him. "You're a very noble man, Captain. I'm sure Lucina is glad to have someone like you as her trainer."

"You think so?" Falcon questioned. "Even after... what happened between me and her?"

"You said you two had gotten close, right?" The BLADE colonel asked the Captain. "I'm sure you two can talk it out. I can tell you really care for her, and I know you'll find the right words."

"Ah..." Falcon looked away for a moment timidly, but then said, "Thank you, Elma."

"No problem." Hearing a beeping from her pocket, she pulled out a green device with a holographic screen.

"What's that thing?" Captain Falcon asked the silver haired woman.

"It's my FrontierNav device. It acts as a communicator, radar, and more." Checking her messages on the device, Elma then announced, "Looks like Lin and the help from Smash City found her safe
and sound."

"Oh, thank God..." Falcon let out a sigh of relief.

"Do you want to see her?" Elma offered him.

"Y-yes, please," he replied with a nod.

"Very well," Elma said. "Follow me. We'll hitch a ride in my Skell. It's not far from here."

"Skell...?" Falcon followed Elma to her destination. Standing before them was a giant mech suit built for transportation and combat.

"This thing?!" The Captain gasped. "My world has high-tech vehicles that drive without wheels, but this is something I wasn't expecting at all!"

"Amazing, isn't it?" Elma asked Captain Falcon. "The only thing is, Skells don't have a flight module yet. We're working on that." Jumping into the cockpit, she called out to him, "You'll have to tell me more about your world sometime later, okay? In the meantime, hop right in!"

It was only a few minutes, but it felt like hours. The more of the spore cloud Lucina breathed in, the sicker she felt. She tried to stay close to the safe path, judging by the sounds of the nearby Progen, but she was quickly becoming dizzy, her movements growing more sluggish, struggling to keep her balance. She could feel her heart palpitating, the strength draining from her body.

*What is it...about this place...?* She thought. *How long have I been wandering like this...?*

She could hear voices whispering to her in the fog – at least, she thought.

*Voices...I can't see anything...I feel so weak, and if a monster spots me now, I'll become its lunch.* She stumbled and fell to the white sandy ground below her.

*Am I going to die? Is this...how I die...?* She struggled to get up. *N-no...I can't...die here...not without seeing my friends and family again...Zelda, Robin, Shulk, Mother, Father, Morgan...and...*

For a brief moment, *his* face flashed into her mind.

*Why am I suddenly thinking about him...?* She stood up again slowly, limping. *I guess...if I were to die here...I'd want to tell him...that I'm sorry...*

*This isn't real.*

"Huh?!" She gasped, turning around in place quickly but being unable to identify the direction the voice came from. The same voice she heard in her nightmare in Ylisstol not long ago.

*None of this is real.*

"Agh..." She collapsed to her knees, covering her ears with her hands, but she could still hear the mysterious voice whispering to her.

*The truth is...you will die all alone.*

"No...! Shut up!" She cried, shutting her eyes.

*And if you don't die alone, there's only one other choice for you...and it's to destroy everything*
"you love, with your own hands.

"No!" She shouted, opening her eyes…

And what she saw, she could not believe.

The ground beneath her changed to some form of solidified volcanic soil, surrounded by lakes of lava on either side, the heat blistering. The sky was blazing red. Approaching her were strange, terrifying humanoid creatures about to attack her.

"S-stay away!" She cried, stumbling away and trying to escape, only to see that there was a tall cliff wall behind her. Seeing no choice, she briefly dipped the tip of her Falchion into the lava, and started hacking and slashing at the enemies close to her before plunging it into the chest of the remaining monster.

Panting, she muttered, "I can't…afford…to die here."

"L-Lucy…" a voice behind her called out weakly. She turned around and saw Zelda and Fiora standing in the place of two of the monsters, a glowing, burning gash across their abdomens, sparks also flying out of the wound in Fiora's mechanical exoskeleton.

"Fiora? Zelda?!"

"What…happened to you…?" Fiora strained through pained rasps.

"I told you…you could talk to me about anything…why…why did you…push me away…" At that moment, Zelda's and Fiora's bodies glowed a bright yellow before turning into glowing ashes and scattering in the wind.

"No…" Frightened and saddened, she shook her head in disbelief.

"Sis…"

She turned her head to the right and saw her own family: Chrom, Robyn and Morgan, suffering the same fatal wound Zelda and Fiora had.

"My dear daughter…" Chrom solemnly and painfully murmured before he, his wife and son faded away in the wind.

"Mother! Father! Morgan!" Tears began to well up in her eyes.

"Lucina…"

Turning to the left this time, she saw Robin, Richter and Shulk, once again about to die and turn into ashes.

"Lucina…this isn't…like you…" Robin rasped.

"I never…stopped believing in you…" Richter strained.

"We just wanted…to make sure you were alright…" Shulk groaned before he and Robin were no more.

"Why…" The tears were already streaming down her face, but there was one more agonizing surprise in wait for her.
"Why…" a male voice seemed to parrot her. She turned around, and saw none other than her former trainer, Captain Falcon, with the ignited Falchion sticking through his chest.

"F…" she started to tremble, trying to process what she was seeing. Once she registered in her mind what had happened…

"FALCON!" She pulled the sword out of his chest, catching him in her arms as he fell, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Oh Naga, no…Falcon…please…don't do this to me…" She wept, tears falling from her eyes like hail. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry…I'm so…sorry…" She embraced him tightly, in the vain hope that he wouldn't fade away.

"I just wanted…" he weakly began, lifting his face to meet hers, a small stream of blood trickling from his mouth. "…to tell you…that I'm…sorry…" And with those words, his head nodded downward and stayed there as he breathed his last, a single tear streaming down his face.

"Fal…con…?"

But there was no response. Shortly after, his lifeless body began to glow gold.

"Falcon?!" He began to slowly disintegrate and blow away into the wind as she cried in protest… and in vain. "No! No, no, no, no, no! Stay with me!"

But it was too late. He was gone.

"I…did this…" She solemnly uttered, the tears never ending. Her Falchion fell from her hand and shattered into nothingness as she collapsed to her knees and closed her eyes, weeping softly, then wailing loudly, lifting her head up to the burning red sky.

"Nooooooo!"

Before she could do anything else, she felt a pricking pain in the side of her neck, and she felt her mind becoming cloudy as everything she saw turned black and she fell into a deep slumber.

…

"Mmm…"

The sun hung low in the Sylvalum sky as Lucina opened her eyes to a clear, cloudless but dimming, sky. Standing over her were three people she didn't recognize: a young man with glowing green eyes and spiky blond hair about her age; a more mature-looking woman with short black hair, glasses, and a small mole on her chin; and a young girl with Monado hairpins in her black bob-cut hair, who looked no older than thirteen years old.

"You're awake," the young girl said. "I heard about the potential effects of Sylvalum's spore clouds on non-Mimeosomes, but I never expected I'd actually use the antidote. Of course, L didn't exhibit any symptoms when we surveyed Sylvalum before, though that could be because he's a Xenoform…"

"What…happened?" She slowly sat up and looked around at her surroundings. It was unlike any world she had ever seen – white sand, strange flowers that looked like dandelions about to disperse their seeds, but with a more cottonball-like consistency; a shallow lake that seemed to reflect the sky itself; and green crystals protruding from the ground. Looking at the people surrounding her, she asked, "What am I doing here? Who are you guys?"
"My name is Lin Lee Koo," the young girl introduced herself. "While we made preparations for Elma to be interviewed for the next Smash Bros. tournament, some people from Smash City decided to accompany me to find you, as we received a tip you might be here."

"Name's Cloud," The blond introduced himself.

"And I'm Bayonetta," the older, bespectacled black haired woman greeted.

"And you're in Sylvalum, on the planet Mira," Lin continued from earlier. "Apparently, the spore cloud was making you hallucinate. It's a good thing we showed up when we did, and that I always keep things like these handy for emergencies."

"We had to put one of the oxygen masks we were wearing on you after Lin administered the antidote, to keep you from breathing in any more," Cloud explained, glancing at a pile of three oxygen masks nearby.

"I hope I never have to wear those things again," Bayonetta griped. "They were so…tacky."

"Maybe, but we needed them to stay safe from the spores' effects too," Cloud clarified.

"Hallucinating…?" Lucina questioned, before suddenly going into a panic. "My sword…? My friends…!" She began frantically checking her body for any trace of her sword.

"Your friends are safe," Cloud comforted her, placing his right hand on her shoulder. "Just don't panic. None of what you saw was real. You're safe now."

"And we put your sword back into its sheath," Bayonetta said, glancing at the holstered sword on Lucina's belt. The blue haired swordswoman looked down to notice it, then breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"What were you saying about…Mee-mo-zomes?" She asked the young technician who had seemingly just finished sending a message to someone on the communicator device she was holding.

"Ah, of course," Lin said, turning her attention to the swordswoman. "Elma and I, as well as the bodies of almost everyone in New Los Angeles…they're not organic bodies. We use some mechanical bodies that emulate the functionalities of human bodies to a T, and they're called Mimeosomes. Mimeosomes also have a lot of advantages over normal human bodies, such as immunity to certain pathogens, and we can replace lost limbs or even transfer our consciousness into new bodies if something happens to our current ones. Of course, there are some things only human bodies are capable of, and Mims have their own vulnerabilities as well."

"So…" Lucina tried to wrap her head around all Lin was saying. "You're saying that…it's more dangerous for an…organic being like myself to be out here all alone?"

"Well…you could put it like that…" Lin said, her face looking somber. "We have a Mimeosome Maintenance Center back at NLA, but if something happened to you… If you stayed inhaling the spores any longer, or received a critical wound…"

Gulping nervously, Lucina stammered, "I…I see…"

All of a sudden, a ringing came from Lin's pocket. Pulling out her FrontierNav device, she answered it. "Elma? ...Really? And you're...? ... Got it." She then told the swordswoman, "Elma's on her way in a Skell. She's bringing along someone, too…it seems this person was really worried about you, from what she tells me."
"Got any idea who it could be?" Cloud asked Lucina, who looked lost in thought.

As she slowly stood to her feet, she murmured, "Was he really worried about me all this time…?"

"Who…?" Cloud questioned.

Pausing for a moment, Lucina continued, "…My personal…trainer. We had a pretty big argument before I got here. I thought he would be mad at me, but…even I couldn't stay mad at him…I kind of want to see him again."

Placing her hand on Lucina's shoulder, Bayonetta encouraged her, "Well, the important thing is that you two realize it, and when you see each other again, you can kiss and make up!"

"K-kiss…?" Lucina stuttered, her cheeks turning pink. "We don't have that kind of relationship, I-I swear!"

The truth is, though...my feelings for him still haven't faded, after all this time. In fact, they've only gotten stronger. I don't know why I tried to deny it just now...maybe because I don't know how he feels about me.

As Bayonetta chuckled, Cloud looked into the horizon behind them and saw a large mechanical looking creature with a glowing synthetic looking core heading their way. "Guys…"

"Oh no," Lin gasped. "That's a Xe-dom...those things are trouble. One of you should go escort Lucina to the rendezvous point at the shore." She said, pointing in the direction of the shore.

"I'll go," Cloud volunteered. "Bayonetta can help you just fine, Lin. Lucina and I would be in trouble if we stayed here any longer. Plus, it's not exactly the first time I've been a bodyguard…"

"O-okay," Lin obliged. "Come on, Bayonetta, show me what you've got."

"With pleasure," Bayonetta boasted, preparing a Wicked Weave attack as Cloud hastily escorted Lucina to the shore. Within seconds, a giant demon's fist appeared out of a portal and smacked the Xe-dom to the side.

"That's sooooo cool!" Lin gushed at the display. "Summoning powered-up weapons through an interdimensional portal?! I should incorporate something like that into my Skell fanfiction!"

"That's just how demon summoning works, little one," Bayonetta clarified. "And…what's a 'fanfiction'?"

"I'll explain later," Lin said, noticing the mechanical monster recovering. "For now, let's give it all we've got!"

…

"Alright, Mr. Falcon, looks like your protégé is safe and sound," Elma told the Captain, pointing at Lucina standing by the shore as night fell. "I'll leave you two to it. I have to catch up with Lin and the two assistants from Smash City. But before I do..." She handed him a spare FrontierNav device. "You two can rest in the BLADE bunker nearby, it's got two beds. And when you need a ride back to New Los Angeles, just give me a call."

"Alright," Falcon said. "Thank you all for your help."

"No problem," Elma said with a smile before running off.
Lucina looked out into the darkened horizon, the wind blowing softly in her hair. "Such a strange planet… and I'm so far from home. It scares me when I think about —"

"…Hey."

Turning in the direction of the voice, she saw the one man she thought she'd never see again since their argument.

"Falcon…" she looked down slightly in regret.

"Listen, Lucina…" Captain Falcon began. "I know I was out of line when we argued that day. You were grappling with so many fears and insecurities, and I should have been more understanding. I should have chosen my words better…"

"No, Captain…" Lucina interrupted him. "I'm the one who should be saying sorry."

"Huh?"

Turning away for a moment, she continued, "I don't know if Elma told you, but Lin told me. This world is very dangerous, which is why a lot of the residents of Mira use these…synthetic bodies called Mimeosomes. They put life and limb on the line on a daily basis, but if something happened to a flesh-and-blood person like myself…"

"Those spores…were making me hallucinate. Terrifying, painful visions… if it had continued, I could have become food for the nearby creatures, or become mortally injured… and…the thought of dying and never seeing anyone I care about again… my friends, my family… you…"

"I…"

As Lucina turned around to face her trainer, her cheeks were soaked with streaming tears as small, soft white lights started to emerge and float upwards from the ground. "This is the closest I've ever come to dying, and I've never been as scared as I am now…the incident at the last Smash tournament doesn't even compare. You were right…I've been an idiot. I'm sorry."

"Lucina…" He slowly drew closer to her before she clung to him, wrapping her arms around him tightly, burying her face in his chest and weeping.

"Please…forgive me…!" She sobbed. "I thought I could do everything by myself… I pushed away so many people I cared about…I don't want to be alone…!"

He tightly embraced her back, one hand tenderly touching the back of her neck as the glimmering firefly-like lights floated all around them. "Don't worry, Lucina. You didn't push anyone away… I'm just glad to see you again, safe and sound…"

"I've missed everyone…and I've missed you…so, so much!"

"I know, Lucina…" Even though she couldn't tell from behind his visor, he closed his eyes. "I've missed you too…more than you could ever imagine."

She could hear the honesty, the longing, the unbridled happiness in his voice. She felt a sense of comfort and relief wash over her as she hugged him tighter and thought, *I was a fool, Captain… All this time, I thought I would need to see your eyes beneath that visor to know your true feelings. But*
Having calmed down and shed all the tears she wanted to, Lucina opened her eyes and, looking up at the Captain's face, asked him, "But…after all I've said and done…you're still so kind to me…?"

"Don't worry about it…" he comforted her. "I was never mad at you, not even for a second."

Looking at the floating lights around him, he decided to come clean. "I, well…I want to apologize about that day…about your father. I know that's part of what caused our last argument… I was just trying to protect myself that day and it was never my intention to hurt any of you… I could only take you, Robin, and your mother onboard at that time, and I can imagine how much being accepted to the tournament must have meant to him, so to have his dreams crushed like that…that I myself crushed said dreams…"

"It's okay," Lucina said, letting go of him and stepping back. "He seems to have moved on. If there's anything I've learned, it's how to let go of the past…and try to focus on a better future."

*Of course, Captain Falcon thought. Chrom finally got accepted... One of these days I should congratulate him. But... what Lucina said just now... and what Young Link told her...?*

"The future…" Falcon murmured. "Even if…you or I…or both of us have to…"

"Why worry, though?" Lucina answered him, looking up at the starry sky bathed in the firefly-like glow. "Anything can happen, and whatever happens, happens. We shouldn't cross that bridge before we get to it…for now on, I'd like to try to live life in the now."

"Yeah…" Thinking back to the argument a few weeks ago, the Captain said out of the blue, "Y'know...you were wrong about me. I have experienced loss and defeat."

"What...happened?"

"I had a terrible accident of my own. There was a terrible crash in a race those years ago...the Horrific Grand Finale. I had to be hospitalized. It was from the DNA obtained from the glass shard pulled out of my forehead on the operating table that Blood Falcon was born."

*So that's what the Horrific Grand Finale he talked about was. That explains the scar I saw on his left eyebrow that time in... Lucina thought, immediately thinking back to the time they bathed together. Trying to push the awkward intimacy of that moment out of her mind, she asked, "How did it affect you?"

"I was devastated. I tried to protect everyone else, several others were hurt because of me…one of them had to become a cyborg, as you know. If the glass shard cut any closer or deeper, I might have died...and I didn't want to put others in danger because of me again. Not to mention, it was an underling of Black Shadow's that stole the shard. It was in the hospital, though, that I met Doctor Robert Stewart, who helped me recover and convinced me to not give up on anything I do, be it racing or fighting."

"I see…" Lucina said. "I guess this is what you meant when you said your story might have been a bit too dark for Young Link back at Clock Town?"

"Yeah…" The Captain confirmed. "If you wanted to know how long I've been at my career, I've been racing since I was thirty, and I became a bounty hunter a few years earlier at the age of 27. Before that... it's all a blur. The only thing I remember about my youth right now is my name..."
"You don't have to push yourself to remember," Lucina reassured him. "And you don't have to tell me your name right now, either. The only Captain Falcon I care about is the one you are now."

Lucina... Falcon thought as he looked on at her with a soft smile. "Thank you, Lucina."

"Ah..." Lucina softly gasped, feeling warm inside at the sight of the smile she thought she'd never see again. "Of course, Captain..."

That smile... She thought, looking away and blushing as a blissful smile crept up on her face. I feel so... happy... Before she realized it, she felt her knees go weak and she collapsed to the ground. Thankfully, Captain Falcon caught her in the nick of time.

"Lucina...?" He asked her.

"C-Captain..." Lucina murmured, somewhat groggily.

He's... holding me... in his arms, her drowsy mind thought. It's so... nice... I wish I could tell him, but...

"I'm so... sleepy..." were the words that came out of Lucina's lips.

"I can imagine," Captain Falcon told her, his voice ever so comforting. "After all you've been through... if it were me, I'd be tired too."

"Thanks..." Lucina tiredly murmured.

"We can spend the night in the BLADE bunker nearby," Falcon told her. "Want me to carry you?"

"A-ah...?" Lucina stammered, looking away shyly.

"Don't worry, there's two separate beds," Falcon answered her with a chuckle. "My offer still stands, you know."

"O-okay..." Lucina whispered, the urge to fall asleep tugging at her more. Feeling Falcon lift her bridal style and hold her close to him, she relaxed against his chest.

Looks like... that scenario I imagined back at Clock Town as he fell asleep at Mountain Village... it's happening. She smiled softly, her slowly closing eyes looking at the Captain and the soft rising lights.

I wish... I could tell you... Within seconds, she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

"Looks like she's already asleep," Falcon said to himself softly. Carrying her as he walked, he briefly and carefully pulled out the FrontierNav device Elma gave him to gain access to the BLADE bunker. Once the door opened, he carried the sleeping Lucina to the bed on the right, gently setting her down and tucking her in.

Rest well, Lucina. He then quietly closed the door behind them, the lights of the rising energy mist faintly visible through the window on the door, and climbed into the bed opposite Lucina. Looking at the ceiling, he thought, Heh... for a bunker, these beds aren't half bad... and fell asleep within a minute.

…

I could have...died today.
"Ugh..."

The thought of dying and never seeing anyone I care about again...

"Where am I?" Falcon asked himself aloud, finding himself at Lake Ciel as a thick cloud of spores clouded his vision.

My friends...my family...you...

He cautiously walked forward when he heard an agonized shriek break the eerie silence. He immediately ran forward as the spore fog cleared, and he could not believe what he saw before his eyes.

He was too late.

Lying in the sunlit shallows, the radius around her tainted crimson with her own blood, was Lucina, her right arm holding her Falchion sliced clean off at the elbow, a gaping wound in her abdomen that stained her clothing red around the wound's area.

In that moment, Falcon heard Neku's words echo in his mind.

Don't let it be too late for you and her.

"Oh God no..." he Shakily murmured, panicked. Shaking his head as fast as he could, he thought the heartbreaking image before him would go away.

But it didn't.

"No, no, no, no..." He immediately ran to her body, lifting it out of the water. It wasicy cold, her skin devoid of color and life.

"Please, no...Lucina..." He started to weep.

"U...uh..."

Noticing the former training apprentice he thought had breathed her last for sure was stirring, he quickly turned his face to meet hers and wiped away his tears, his voice trying to sound hopeful but still with a hint of sorrow. "H-hey there...Lucina...you're gonna be okay, alright? I'm gonna get some help and—"

Before he could continue, Lucina grabbed onto his shoulder with her remaining arm, pulled herself closer to him, and her lips met his. The two shared a very brief, but intense, kiss, tears streaming down both of their faces. Her lips were surprisingly still warm, unlike the rest of her.

"What...?" He questioned, surprised. A sense of despair grew in his mind and soul as he knew she was beyond help now.

"I'm so glad..." she began weakly, shivering softly, her dull, lifeless eyes overflowing with tears. 
"...that I could see you...one last...time..."

"It won't be the last time. Please, just hang in—"

"I've been...so stupid...I hope you can...for...give...me...." With those words, Lucina breathed her last, her head bobbing low as she closed her eyes one final time, her arm sliding off the Captain's shoulder and falling to her side limply.
"Lucina…?!

There was no response. Bitter sobs wracked his body as he tightly embraced Lucina's soaked, bloody, lifeless corpse, his tears falling into the lake whose reflection of the sky was now dyed a deep scarlet.

After all I've said and done, you're still so kind to me…?

I'm sorry, Captain…I'm so sorry...

At that instant, Captain Falcon awoke with a panicked gasp, his breathing tense and his face covered in sweat, sitting upright in the bed attached to the left wall. Quickly examining his surroundings, he saw that he was still in the safety of the bunker. He looked to his right, and saw Lucina peacefully asleep in the bed attached to the right wall. Slowly getting out of bed, he quietly drew nearer to her.

She was sound asleep, snugly curled up in the sheets, her head facing the wall. He could hear her softly breathing.

It was both a relief to his ears — she was safe and alive — and a bittersweet epiphany.

Taking a deep breath, he softly walked away from her and to the bunker's door leading outside.

As he stepped outside, he saw the skies alight with another of Mira's natural wonders – the Crimson Aurora. "Crimson" was a misnomer as the auroras were more of a pinkish hue, but the lights bathed the ground below in an ethereal, rosy glow, and the starry skies seemed to shine a brighter blue, complementing the pink aurora.

It was a beautiful sight…but it hardly did anything to calm the Captain down.

Such a horrible nightmare… he thought, catching his breath. It could have actually happened, too. To think…if I had found her like that without reconciling for our argument…

All of a sudden, he remembered one vivid scene from the nightmare — when she leaned in to give him one last kiss while at death's doorstep.

Huh?! He unconsciously brought two fingers to his lips, tracing across them. It may have been just a dream, a horrifying and heartbreaking one at that, but the kiss felt very real.

Why am I thinking of that? Why did that happen in my dream…?

Gasping softly, he realized a fact that made his heart ache more.

I…it can't be.

Looking down, he held the hand that traced his lips before in a fist to his chest.

I…I'm in love with her.

Joy and sorrow filled his heart simultaneously as tears rained from his visor-obscured eyes, his teeth clenched in intense sadness.

Can't you see it, Lucina? I'm in love with you. If I had lost you, I'd never be able to live with myself…if I could, I would protect you with my very life…I know it's probably not what you would want. But I would still do it...just for you.
Unbeknownst to him, Lucina was watching him through the cracked door, his chest heaving as he wept. The sight of such a strong, independent man crying like this surprised her, but not in an unpleasant way.

*Is he...crying?* She thought, slowly sitting up. *He looks so...pained. I wonder what's wrong...? Is this another side to him I've never seen before? Is this...the real Captain Falcon?*

She quietly slipped through the wide opening and just stood there, watching him vent his sorrow for a while, unsure of what to say. He seemed oblivious to her presence as he continued to weep.

*This is why...this is why I don't get too close to others. Emotional attachment...the pain at the thought of losing those I love...how can I protect anyone when just being close to me can be dangerous...? ...I would truly rather die for you than helplessly watch you die in my arms...*

He remembered what Lucina told him in Mute City before she ran away.

"*This is why I fought alone in my future after a while. I didn't want to get attached. I've always hated goodbyes..."*

*Perhaps...you and I are alike in that regard...*

"...Cap—" Lucina began.

"Ah?!" The Captain gasped, startled, as he hurriedly wiped his tears away and looked in the direction of the voice. "...D-did I wake you?"

"Is...everything okay?" Lucina asked him, her head tilted curiously to the side, holding a finger to her chin quizzically.

"Y-yes," He stammered nervously. "I'm fine. Please, don't worry about me."

"I see..." She looked up at the glowing pink sky. "Oh, wow, how pretty!"

"Yeah," he said, looking up as well. "According to the FrontierNav device Elma gave me, this phenomenon is called a Crimson Aurora."

"Isn't it more of a pink, though?" She asked. "Come to think of it, I've never heard of auroras being pink before..."

"Same here," he replied. "Most auroras are green or light blue. This is an interesting planet indeed..."

"You think Cloud and Bayonetta told everyone in Smash City that we're doing alright?" She suddenly changed the subject, her face looking deep in thought.

"Hopefully," he reassured her. "I hope your father is okay with me helping you train."

"I'm sure he's fine with it," she consoled him. "Father is not the type to hold a grudge against anyone, no matter what." Looking down, she said with a slightly depressed sigh, "I miss my father...and my mother, and my younger brother Morgan, and my friends...Robin, Zelda, Shulk...I hope Fiora's doing okay, too..."

"I have some people I miss too," he sympathized with her. "But don't worry. As soon as Elma takes us to New LA tomorrow, and after Snake finishes interviewing her, we can finally go home. If Master Hand picks her for the tournament, maybe she'll come with us, too."
"That would be wonderful," she said with a soft, gentle smile.

_Such a beautiful smile…_ Falcon thought, his heart subtly skipping a beat at the sight. _No matter what, Lucina… I want you to always be happy._

"Yeah…" he said, returning her smile briefly before turning away, trying to cover his blushing face with his hand.

_H-how embarrassing…_ he thought. _I wonder how many times she's noticed me blushing…being caught crying is nothing compared to this._ Lowering his hand, he turned to her once again. "Hey, Lucina…"

"Yes…?" She questioned curiously.

"I…" He began, but the words seemed to form a metaphorical lump in his throat.

_You're so bold and confident when you make public appearances in your home world and in Smash, Captain Falcon! What's four little words in comparison?! Go ahead and tell her how you feel! Say, "I love you, Lucina!" Go on, say it!"

"I… think we should get some rest…" he trailed off after a moment of hesitation, looking to the side subtly.

…I can't do it. I can't tell her…not now. And maybe not ever…

Yawning, Lucina said, "You're right. Depending on when Elma's interview ends, we may be staying at NLA a while. We've got a long day ahead of us." She began to walk back in before turning back to him. "And…Captain?"

"Y-yes?"

This time around, Lucina was the one struggling to encourage herself to confess her feelings.

_Every time I see him, I fall in love with him more and more…Come on, Lucina. You almost died today, you were so overjoyed to see him again…You can say it. "Captain Falcon, I'm in love with you." How hard can it be?!"

"You know…you can talk to me about anything. You've been so nice to me, giving me kind words and advice. I figure…I should return that favor."

...No. Not now, not when I don't even know how he feels about me, not after all that's happened. I don't even know if he's done with our training… A rejection at a time like this would be too awkward…

"I'll keep it in mind…" he answered her as he walked in behind her and closed the door. As the two climbed into their respective beds, Lucina seemed to drift off into a deep sleep within seconds, a serene smile on her face, her head facing the ceiling. The Captain, however, spent the first several minutes awake, looking on at her.

_I love you, Lucina. I truly do. But…I don't know if you feel the same way about me. And…for the sake of your safety, I think we should just go our separate ways once more when we arrive back at Smash City. You deserve to live a happy, fulfilling life with your loved ones._

As his eyelids started to grow heavy, the lights on his visor automatically turned off.
I'm just glad I was able to train you like this... and that we could put aside our differences, talk things out, and become just a little bit closer.

His consciousness faded to black as he closed his eyes.

I'm glad I met you.

After a few seconds, Lucina opened her eyes and briefly glanced at Captain Falcon, who was fast asleep. A melancholy expression crept on her face as she pondered, *It feels like I'm so close to you... and yet, so far. Why can't I bring myself to tell you...?* She looked up at the ceiling once more as sleep slowly overtook her.

*Naga... I pray you'll give me the courage I need to tell him my true feelings...*
Walk You Home

Chapter Notes

Y'all want fluff and cute moments? Yer gonna get it :3
also the layouts of New Los Angeles's Commercial and Residential Districts may not be accurate. just go with it idc
Title for this chapter based on "Walk You Home" by Karmina

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 15 - Walk You Home

The morning light filtered softly through the small window on the door of the BLADE bunker on the shores of Sylvalum that Lucina and Captain Falcon spent the night in. Stirring from his slumber, Captain Falcon slowly opened his eyes, the lights on his visor turning on mere milliseconds afterwards.

"Morning already...?" he mumbled softly, quietly turning over in the bed he rested in.

For once, I didn't oversleep... maybe it's because... I have more to look forward to now...? Like Snake returning, and... He glanced over at Lucina, who was still sleeping peacefully.

Lucina... He quietly got out of bed with a sigh, his lips shaped into a subtle frown. It's kinda bittersweet... these next few hours may be the last I spend with you, for the sake of your safety. I'm sorry... I wish I could tell you. He hesitantly walked over to his slumbering companion and, after a moment of reluctance, gently shook her awake.

"Rise and shine, Lucina..." The Captain murmured gently.

"Uhh..." Lucina faintly groaned, slowly opening her eyes. Sluggishly turning over, she directed her somewhat still groggy gaze to meet the Captain's. "What... time is it...?"

Pulling out the FrontierNav device Elma gave him, Falcon turned on its holographic screen and looked at the time. "It seems to be 9:25 AM. We should give Elma a call to take us to New Los Angeles."

"Sounds like a plan," Lucina said, climbing out of bed and fixing her bedhead as best as she could. "Let's go."

Falcon opened the bunker's door and the two stepped outside. Walking down the steps onto the shore, Falcon pulled out his FrontierNav device and began to contact Elma. Within seconds, Elma's face appeared on the holographic screen.

"Yes, Captain?" Elma asked him.

"Hey, Elma," The Captain greeted her. "We're ready to head to NLA. Could you come pick us up?"
"Of course," Elma confirmed. "I'll be there soon." The holographic projection ended, and the Captain put his FrontierNav device away.

"Say... Captain...?" Lucina questioned, walking over to the Captain.

"Y-yes?" Captain Falcon asked, slowly turning to her.

"I... have a couple of questions to ask." Looking down and wiggling her left foot shyly, her first question was, "Are we...done with our training?"

"Ah..." The Captain stammered for a moment, then answered her, "...Do you feel satisfied with your training?"

"...Yes," Lucina said after a moment of hesitation. "I realize in hindsight that... even with all the training I've received, there are some times that it's best to run away... that I can't let pride or an unrealistic desire to do more than I'm capable of take over." For a second, Black Shadow's words echoed in her mind.

"Falcon has trained you well."

Even my enemy acknowledged it... and knew it still wasn't enough as he fought dirty...

"It wasn't your fault..." The Captain tried to reassure her, noticing her worried expression. "I should have warned you about Black Shadow and Blood Falcon more in advance."

"No, please, don't worry about that anymore," Lucina answered him. "It's just..." She looked to the side somewhat regretfully.

It's just that, despite the danger I was in, I didn't want you sacrificing yourself for me... and I still don't...

"Something wrong?" Falcon asked Lucina.

"Ah!" Startled, Lucina turned her gaze to meet his. "I-it's nothing... I think from here on, we should strive to protect each other. Just do what's already within our power to do."

"Sounds fair..." Falcon trailed off.

Truth be told, he thought, after Elma's done with her interview... I think the best way I can protect you... is for us to go our separate ways.

"Captain?"

"Y-yes?" He stammered. "Geez... I did it again... guess old habits die hard, huh."

"Don't worry about it," Lucina reassured him with a giggle. "There's... actually something I've been meaning to tell you, but didn't have a chance to last night." Her face changed to an expression of worry.

"Which is...?" The Captain's curiosity was piqued.

I... still don't think it's right to tell him how I feel right now, she thought. Taking in a deep breath, she began, "You...told me your dark past last night, about the Horrific Grand Finale and Blood Falcon. I... think it's only fair I tell you mine."

"About your father and the future you come from?" The Captain inquired.
"No..." Lucina said. "It's... something deeper and darker than that." Her left hand slowly inched to the glove on her right hand when she noticed a large red mecha suit approaching them. Drawing her sword, she said, "Something's coming...!"

Turning around, the Captain recognized who it was. "At ease, Lucina," he reassured her, prompting her to sheathe her sword again. "It's fine. Elma's here in her Skell."

Within a few seconds, the Skell stopped hovering a few centimeters above the ground and landed, then shifted into a docking position as Elma exited the cockpit. "Good to see you, Captain."

"Same here," Falcon greeted Elma with a brief wave.

"Elma...right?" Lucina asked the silver-haired woman.

"Ah, so you must be Lucina," Elma said, walking over to the blue-haired swordswoman, extending her hand. "Captain Falcon told me about you. It's good to finally meet you, and see that you're well."

"It's nice to meet you too," Lucina said, shaking Elma's hand. "So this...machine...it's called a Skell?"

"Indeed," Elma confirmed. "This model is called the Verus. All Skells are capable of transforming into land or sea vehicles, advanced combat, and high traveling velocities. Of course, we're still working on getting it to fly."

"No problem," Falcon told Elma. "As long as you can get us there."

"Of course," Elma said. "Hopefully by the time we arrive, Snake will be waiting for us. I told him the situation was resolved a few hours ago." Beckoning Lucina and the Captain, Elma called out, "Alright you two, hop on in."

After the two hopped in, Lucina looked around and saw the cockpit was virtually transparent. "Wow..." She murmured in amazement as she and Falcon walked to the back behind Elma's chair. "You can see everything around you, even in the Skell."

"It certainly helps in combat and travel," Elma said. "Now... you two might want to hold on to something."

"What do I hold on to-" Lucina began before the Skell jolted as it transformed into a wheeled land vehicle. "W-whoa!" She gasped, losing her balance from the sudden jolt, when Captain Falcon caught her.

"You alright?" He asked her.

Slowly looking at him, she felt her heart race. "Y-yes. Thanks..." She smiled, then shifted her eyes away bashfully as he helped her stand.

"Sorry about that jolt, but it's otherwise a smooth ride," Elma commented as the Skell drove over the strips of beach connecting Sylvalum to just short of Noctilum.

"Amazing..." Lucina murmured as she observed the natural surroundings from the cockpit. "Mira has a lot of natural wonders, doesn't it..."

"It does," Elma answered her. "I found Falcon in Noctilum, the jungle continent. There's also Primordia, where New Los Angeles is, as well as Oblivia, the desert continent, and Cauldros, the
volcano continent. Of course, Cauldros is more dangerous than the other continents, so we haven't gotten a lot of exploration done there..."

"Volcano...continent?" Lucina's face bore a look of visible discomfort at those words.

"What's wrong?" Captain Falcon asked Lucina.

"Nothing..." Lucina answered him. "Just... it's just a coincidence that my hallucination was also of a volcanic area..."

*Everything will be fine...right...?* She thought.

"Now both of you, hold on tight," Elma announced out of the blue. "I know a quicker way to Primordia. You're gonna love this!"

"Huh?!" Before either Captain Falcon or Lucina could react, Elma drove the Skell off the sandy path into the deep ocean.

"Elma, are you cra-" Lucina began to protest before an even bigger jolt knocked her off her balance. The Skell shifted once again to its default position, only this time it was hovering above the deep waters and moving at a faster pace with the jet boosters on its back. The jolt caused Lucina to bump into Falcon, who held on to her tightly.

"Ah..." Lucina looked at Falcon slowly, blushing, with a slightly dreamy look on her face.

*He's... so close to me...* Her hand unconsciously rested on his chest.

"L-Lucina...?" Captain Falcon questioned, somewhat flustered, his heart racing.

*This is...not what I was intending...* He slowly leaned his face closer to hers almost automatically as he thought, *Even so, why can't I...?*

"Everything okay back there, you two?" Elma asked them.

"Y-yeah, of course," Falcon stammered as the two snapped out of their trance. He then gently released Lucina from his arms and set her against the back wall of the cockpit before leaning back himself. Noticing a strange alien whale-like creature "swimming" through the sky, he pointed at the creature and said, "Hey, Lucina. Look at that."

"Huh?" Tilting her head up, she saw the creature in all its alien majesty. "Wow..."

"Mira's also home to a lot of interesting and diverse creatures and races," Elma elaborated. "Of course, some of them... aren't that friendly. Luckily, we have a lot of friendly alien races living within NLA's walls."

"I see..." Lucina murmured.

...

Several minutes passed, and the Verus arrived by the shores of Primordia. Primordia was a rather basic grassland continent with rivers, mountains, lakes, waterfalls, and several coral-like "trees".

"So this is Primordia," The Captain commented.

"Indeed," Elma confirmed. "We're almost there. Brace yourselves."
This time around, Lucina and the Captain did just that as, after maneuvering the Verus onto the shore, Elma once again shifted it into vehicle mode. The ride to NLA's West Gate only took a minute and a half, managing to avoid any dangerous enemies along the way. Once they arrived, Elma stepped out, followed by the Captain and Lucina.

"So here we are," Elma announced. "If you look to your left, there's the teleporter leading to Smash City that Cloud and Bayonetta were calibrating the other day. Snake should be in NLA right now, which we can get to through the gate on our right." Holding her hand to her chin in thought, Elma then said, "Although... just for you two, why don't we take the scenic route?"

"How do you mean?" The Captain asked the BLADE colonel.

"Just follow me," Elma said. She led the two up some stairs close to the gate, leading up to a freight elevator. As the three rode up, Falcon asked Elma, "Say, Elma? What's with these blue-green crystals around NLA's base?"

"Oh, that?" Elma answered him. "When NLA crash landed from the White Whale onto Primordia, the structure's defense systems emitted a cushioning gel. It solidified into the crystals you see here."

"You mentioned something about a White Whale before," Falcon mentioned. "Am I right in assuming it's the ship your people escaped Earth on before it was destroyed?"

"Your planet... was destroyed?" Lucina asked, a somewhat solemn look on her face.

"To both questions, yes," Elma replied. "Part of our mission is salvaging what remains of the White Whale."

"What for...?" The Captain inquired.

Noticing the elevator coming to a stop at the top of the structure, Elma said, "I'll explain in a bit. Looks like we're here." Lucina and Captain Falcon followed Elma as she led them across the top platform into the hallway overlooking the city.

The trio's footsteps made slight metallic echoes across the steel walkway as a towering city skyline slowly came into view. Slowly walking a short distance behind Elma, Lucina and the Captain briefly exchanged glances before pressing onward. Within seconds, the two could see an even larger tower standing taller above the rest in the sunlit sky, with a digital LCD display on the top showing a timer and a percentage - 41%, to be exact.

"Whoa..." Captain Falcon murmured in bewilderment.

"What is that, Elma?" Lucina asked Elma.

"That is BLADE Tower," Elma clarified as she walked to the railing and rested her arms on it, the wind softly blowing in her hair. "It's NLA's base of operations, in the Administrative District. As for the timer... our most important mission is to find the Lifehold Core and restore backup power... otherwise, everyone here... their Mimeosomes will cease to function, and then that's it. If we can restore backup power, however, there's a chance we can get everyone back into their real bodies."

"I...see..." The Captain said, somewhat timidly. "And... District? Are there others?"

"Yeah," Elma confirmed. "If you think the view is amazing now, wait till I take you guys on a little tour. It's the least I can do to repay Smash City after Palutena gave me a tour there."
"Ah..." Falcon and his partner walked over to the railing and looked at the scenery below them. There was a series of interconnected roads above a large body of water. Or, judging by what Elma told them, the cushioning gel. The roads weren't fully connected, but there were indeed several districts, two notable ones being an area with a lot of shops and restaurants; and a residential area with various houses, a sports complex, and a cathedral.

"Impressive, isn't it?" Elma asked Captain Falcon and Lucina, who were looking at the cityscape below in wonder. "It may not be much for a beached up space ship, but to all of us here at NLA, we couldn't be more proud to call it home."

"I see," Lucina commented. "Even though you're all fighting for your survival... you're also enjoying your lives, almost like how you remember it. I wish I had that privilege..."

"And with such amazing technology too," Falcon said. "Say...that commerce area... I've read historic records from the Earth I come from, and it looks like Los Angeles, California, around the 21st century..."

"That's why we named it New Los Angeles," Elma told him with a smile. "It was modeled after the very same city." Turning to the staircase just next to them, she said, "But enough talk. I think it's time I take you guys up on that tour offer. Follow me."

As the three headed down the stairs, they were greeted by Skells walking around, as well as a test hangar, production plant, and a diner in the distance. "This here is the Industrial District. It's where the Outfitters develop new weapons and technology for Skells and infantry alike."

"Elma!" Lin called out to them from afar. After she ran to them, Elma told her, "Good to see you, Lin. I take it Cloud and Bayonetta returned to Smash City safely?"

"They did," Lin confirmed. "I wouldn't mind seeing them again someday... especially Bayonetta. She was soooo cool and strong! And I even got to show her some of my Skell fanfiction!" Remembering something all of a sudden, Lin then said, "Oh, Elma! Your interviewer is waiting for you by BLADE Tower."

"Snake..." Elma murmured. "I'll be there soon, but first I wanna show Lucina and Captain Falcon around NLA. It's the least I can do to repay them..."

"Lucina's here?" Lin walked up to Lucina. "Great to see you again! I guess this guy is your trainer?"

"Yeah," Lucina confirmed, glancing at her partner.

"Say, Lin?" Captain Falcon asked the young genius. "Elma's a member of the Reclaimers... I guess everyone here in NLA has some kinda division they belong to, but... what division are you?"

"Oh, that," Lin began. "Elma's division, the Reclaimers, seeks to reclaim the pieces of the White Whale and, most importantly, find the Lifehold Core, though I imagine she told you about that already." Glancing at a nearby Skell, she looked at him again and continued, "As for me... I'm an Outfitter."

"Developing tech and weapons for Skells and soldiers, right?" Falcon asked. "But...aren't you a bit young to be working with such things?"

"I may only be thirteen years old, but I know this is what my parents would have wanted," Lin answered him, somewhat wistfully. "So... I'm glad to be of service to NLA and BLADE."
"You're only thirteen?!!" The Captain exclaimed in surprise, recoiling slightly.

"Hey now, your world has a fourteen-year-old support soldier," Lucina told Falcon with a slight chuckle. "Which, I'm sure if they somehow ever met, Lin and Lily might be pretty good friends..." Looking down solemnly, she mumbled, "I wonder if Lily knows how sorry I am for that day..."

"Lucina..." Falcon looked on at her, somewhat regretfully, as he thought, *Don't worry... when I see Lily again, I'll tell her on your behalf...*

"Something the matter?" Lin asked them.

"...Oh," The Captain murmured. "Lin...it's very admirable that you're lending your skills and knowledge to a noble cause."

"What he said," Lucina said, lifting her gaze to meet the young Outfitter's. "And... just stay safe and happy, okay, Lin? I know what it's like to lose your parents at a young age... In everything you do, just keep their memory alive in your mind and heart."

*I can't help but see some of myself in Lin, Lucina thought. At least she'll probably have a happier future...unlike me...*

"Of course," Lin told them. Just then, a ringing came from her pocket. As it turned out, Secretary Nagi was trying to contact her on her FrontierNav device.

"Secretary Nagi?" She asked as she answered the video call. "You want them there as soon as possible? Got it." Hanging up, she turned to the three and said, "Looks like you'll probably have to take a rain check on that tour. Nagi wants you guys at BLADE Tower on the double."

"Well, that's unfortunate..." Elma said. "I suppose we'll take the transport over there and you can give them an abridged version of the tour." Elma glanced in the direction of an orange and gray vehicle with hover boosters and windows on its sides.

"Sounds good," Lin said. "Follow me, guys!"

After Lin, Elma, Lucina, and Captain Falcon boarded the transport vehicle with Elma at the driver's helm, the vehicle took off above the ground and began hovering above the city at a reasonable altitude, en route to BLADE Tower.

As the two people from Smash City looked at the more in-depth view of the city, Lin announced, "Not bad, huh? You can see everything from up here."

"It beats walking, that's for sure," Elma commented.

"Can't argue with that," Falcon said, followed by him and Lucina chuckling in unison.

"It really is the best way to see NLA," Lin declared. "Everytime I see the view from here, it's like it's a different city." Pausing for a moment, she then said, "Oh, right. I forgot, I may as well give you an 'abridged' tour." Clearing her throat, she continued, "New LA is divided into four districts. You guys were just in the Industrial District. It focuses on food production, Skell and weapon development, and there's even the Repenta Diner to grab a bite after a long day of work. It's also where the West Gate is."

"Is there another gate outside of the city?" Lucina asked Lin.

"As a matter of fact, there is," Lin clarified. "The East Gate is in the Administrative District, where
we're headed. It's where BLADE Tower is, as well as the BLADE Barracks, Mimeosome Maintenance Center, and Armory Alley, where weapons, Skells, and gear are sold. You can also find L there selling his odd knick-knacks.” Giggling, Lin continued, "If you should choose to peruse his wares, I should inform you: their intended use isn't what it looks like at first glance."

"I'll take your word for it," Falcon remarked.

"Yeah," Lin said with a slight chuckle. "And that's just on the first level. The second level below that, which connects to the rest of the districts, is the Skell Hangar. Any maintenance and repairs are carried out there."

"I see..." Lucina mused.

"Anyway," Lin continued, "To your left is the Commercial District." Lucina and Captain Falcon looked out the windows to their left and saw a sprawling commercial area with modern-looking but nevertheless traditional cars.

"The Commercial District is where the fun is," Lin explained. "A lot of different shops, restaurants, art galleries, almost anything you can think of! Perfect place for a date - you'd get to do so much stuff!"

"A date..." Lucina murmured quietly enough that the Captain wouldn't hear, holding two fingers to her lips, smiling dreamily.

"And to your right," Lin began, prompting Lucina to break out of her trance. She and the Captain looked out the windows to the right as Lin continued, "...is NLA's Residential District. You can expect to see a lot of different houses there, big and small. There's also a park, a sports complex, and a cathedral. The park is one of my fave places to just chill."

"Is that a water purification plant around there too?" The Captain asked.

"Indeed it is," Lin said. "We have a second one outside the city walls, close to Biahno Lake."

"Makes sense," Lucina commented. "You guys are making do with what you already have... I admire your ability to adapt to any situation."

"Aw, you flatter me," Lin giggled bashfully.

"Hold on, Lin," Captain Falcon interrupted them. "What's that ship in the sky close to the Administrative District?"

"Oh, that's the Ma-non ship," Lin explained.

"Ma-non...?" Lucina tilted her head to the side quizzically.

"They're a friendly alien race we met in Oblivia," Lin clarified. "They provide us with some tech for the gear we develop, and in return, we allow them to dock their ship in NLA. If anything bad should happen that we'd need to temporarily evacuate the civilians, they can provide us with the means to do so."

"I see..." Lucina mused.

"They also just love pizza. Can't get enough," Lin giggled. Noticing they were close enough to the landing dock, Lin then said, "Welp, we're here, guys!"
And sure enough, the transport had already made it to the Administrative District's top level, with BLADE Tower within eyeshot. Maneuvering the vehicle just a bit closer, Elma then landed it on the landing dock gently.

After the four stepped out of the vehicle, Lin asked Elma, "So, should I head back, or...?"

"You can come along," Elma told her. "Follow me, guys." Elma led the other three to the stairs leading to BLADE Tower. On their way there, Captain Falcon recognized a familiar face.

"No way... is that really...?"

Waiting for them just outside the door to BLADE Tower was a face Falcon thought he would never see again. It was none other than Solid Snake himself.

"Snake...?" He murmured as he stopped in his tracks, his mouth open in a surprised look. Elma, Lin, and Lucina also stopped walking momentarily.

Noticing his longtime friend standing at the foot of the stairs, Snake called out to the Captain with a confident grin, "Kept ya waiting, huh?"

"Nnnn..." Falcon looked down for a moment, biting his lip.

He's really... back...? Without another second of hesitation, he briskly walked up the stairs and embraced Snake, who hugged him back. As he ascended the steps, his FrontierNav device fell out of his pocket. Lin immediately dashed over to pick it up as it fell.

"Hey, Captain, you forgot -" Lin began, before looking to her side and noticing Lucina just looking on at Falcon and Snake, a longing expression on her face. Elma calmly followed after Falcon.

"Um... Lucina...?" Lin asked the Ylissean, to no response. Lucina still stood there with the same look on her face.

Look at him... Lucina thought. How happy he is to see his friend again... How tightly he's embracing Snake, even if it's the embrace of platonic camaraderie... I'm just so happy to see him happy. Looking to the side briefly, she thought, I wish... he'd hold me too. But... in a different way...

Lin slowly stood up and covertly hid the device in one of her pockets, then walked over to Lucina. Meanwhile, just in front of the entrance to BLADE Tower, the Captain and Snake were still engaged in their brotherly hug.

"It is just so... so very good to see you again, Snake," Captain Falcon said, his voice starting to crack slightly.

"You... you startin' to cry on me, man?" Snake asked him with a slight chuckle.

"W-what?!!" Letting Snake go, Falcon complained, "N-no I'm not...!"

"Hahahaha," Snake laughed heartily. "But yeah, it's great to see you again, Cap. I'm just glad you didn't try to strike me in the chest like Samus did when she saw me again."

"She did what...?" Falcon snickered upon learning what Samus did when she and Snake were reunited.

"She said she wanted to make sure I was real," Snake said with a slight laugh. "But... all in all, she
was very happy to see me again. I was, too. I missed her a lot...and you, and everyone else."

"...Everyone?" Falcon questioned.

"Would you believe me if I said... that everyone is back at Smash City?" Snake told him. "The Ice Climbers are back, Young Link is back, Red is back with his friend Leaf, Squirtle and Ivysaur too... hell, there's even a smaller Pikachu I've never seen before that tends to hurt itself in its attacks..."

"Pichu's back?!" The Captain exclaimed, part in disbelief, but part in amusement. "Get outta here!"

"Would I lie about this? If I'm back, everyone is!" Snake then placed his right hand on the Captain's right shoulder. "It's like the Colonel - God rest his soul - once told me. Once a Smash Brother, always a Smash Brother."

"Hahaha, yeah," Falcon said joyously, placing his right hand on Snake's and flashing him a confident, but grateful, smile. "Speaking of Colonels... you'll be interviewing one."

"Snake?" Elma asked Snake as she headed up the stairs. The Captain stepped aside to give her and Snake space, still oblivious to the fact Lucina wasn't standing near him.

"Great to finally meet you in person, Elma," Snake told her, extending his hand for a handshake.

"Same to you," Elma responded, shaking his hand. Meanwhile, Lin subtly approached the blue haired swordswoman who was traveling with Snake's friend.

"Hey... Lucina?" Lin called out to her.

"Ah... L-Lin?" Lucina stammered, snapping out of her daydream.

"I couldn't help but notice... the way you were looking at your personal trainer," Lin commented in a somewhat teasing tone, a smug grin creeping up on her face.

"W-wha?!" Lucina gasped, her eyes widening in surprise as she blushed vibrantly. "I-it's not-"

"C'mon, it's written all over your face," Lin giggled.

Closing her eyes as she sighed, Lucina opened them again and confessed, "Yes... it's true... I admire him. But... I can't bring myself to inform him in a subtle manner." Holding her hand to her chin in thought for a moment, she then asked Lin, "I'm... actually thinking a little... date may be the best way." Looking down slightly as she shyly touched the tips of her index fingers together, she continued, "Like, for the two of us to just spend time together outside of training. We've done it once before... You said the Commercial District was the perfect place for that?"

"Well, yeah," Lin admitted. "The FrontierNav device Mr. Falcon dropped has a map of NLA. Wanna have a look?"

"If it'll help me decide where I want to go with him, sure," Lucina agreed. Lin brought the device to Lucina while Snake and Elma were conversing.

"...I think to start off, I'll ask you some questions inside BLADE Tower. After that, I want to be able to gauge your combat abilities," Snake told Elma.

"Sounds good," Elma replied. "We're pretty close to the East Gate, so we can be in and out pretty easily. You want to start now, or?"
"Not just yet," Snake answered her. "I need to discuss something with Falcon real quick."

"Of course," Elma obliged. "You two are good friends, after all. I'll let you guys talk about whatever you need to. Let me know when you're ready." She stepped aside, and Snake walked back to the Captain's side.

"Yo, Cap?" Snake asked Captain Falcon.

"Y-yeah?" Falcon snapped out of what was seemingly a daydream from staring off into the horizon, and turned to Snake. "What's up?"

"Listen," Snake began. "I don't mean to be the bearer of bad news or anything, but you know how I said everyone is here? Now, it's just hearsay for now, but... something like this might not happen again..."

"You mean...?" The Captain trailed off, a trace of uncertainty in his words.

"Yeah..." Snake said with a solemn sigh. "There's a chance some of us may have to go our separate ways after this tournament, and... you get the idea. On the bright side, the Hands plan on making this their biggest tournament ever, so they're probably gonna bring over a lot of potential newcomers."

"I see..."

"I'm not saying... you should feel sad about this right now," Snake tried to reassure his friend. "The tournament might go on for quite a while, including the recruitment of newcomers. You've got plenty of time to enjoy hanging out with the other Smashers."

"But... you know me, Snake," Captain Falcon told his friend. "I've always been a loner in Smash City. Aside from Samus, you were my only other true 'friend'. Everyone else was just a fleeting interaction here and there..."

"No time like the present to change that, though," Snake encouraged the Captain. "I can tell you've changed a lot in my absence. You seem more... open, willing to open up to others. I'm happy for ya, Cap." Glancing at Lucina, Snake then asked his friend, "And what about her? Did you two get to patch things over yet?"

"You mean Lucina?" Falcon questioned. "Yeah... we have. More than that, in fact. We've... gotten close, you might say."

I certainly got closer to her than I was expecting... He thought, looking away subtly.

"That's progress, then," Snake commended the Captain. "You're stepping out of your comfort zone, making new friends... you're just full of surprises today, Cap." He chuckled heartily.

"Yeah... she's a friend, pretty much," Captain Falcon commented, trying to hide his true, deeper feelings. "You saying I should...?" He began, before noticing Lucina heading up the steps all on her own.

"Heh, looks like she's comin' to you," Snake remarked. "Go get 'er, pal," he encouraged Falcon, giving him a playful slap on the back, nudging him a bit forward. Regaining his balance, he made eye contact with the blue-haired young woman.

"Um... Captain?" Lucina asked her partner.
Hesitating for a moment, Falcon then asked her, "What's up, Lucina?"

Reaching into her pocket, Lucina pulled out the FrontierNav device that Captain Falcon dropped when he headed up the stairs earlier. Bowing as she extended the object to him, she said, "You dropped this..."

"Oh..." The Captain calmly took the device and put it away, prompting Lucina to stand up straight again. "Thanks... I didn't notice I dropped it." Noticing Lucina looking down and touching the tips of her index fingers together shyly, he then asked, "Is... something the matter?"

"Ah!" Lucina gasped, startled. She quickly looked behind her and saw Lin giving her a thumbs up in encouragement. Regaining her confidence, she took in a deep breath, and then said, "Lin... showed me a map of NLA on that device. I was wondering if... while Elma is interviewed, we could take it easy and see everything NLA has to offer...?"

"You mean... like a date?" Falcon questioned.

"Wha-!?" Lucina gasped, her cheeks turning beet red. "D-don't be silly! It's just... time to bond outside of training..."

"A date, eh?" Snake asked the Captain teasingly, playfully elbowing him with a smug grin. "You sly dog, you!"

"Shut up, Snake!" Falcon protested, blushing. "I-it's not-"

"I say go for it," Elma interrupted them. "You two have been training for a while, right? And you just crossed paths again after so long... you guys deserve to relax a little."

"I guess..." The Captain obliged. "We are pretty much done with training, so we'll be heading back to Smash City pretty soon. I imagine your interview will take a while too, Elma."

"It will," Snake confirmed. "And you two really should unwind and spend some time together. I imagine you've slowly gotten to know each other during training. I think this will help you guys strengthen your relationship outside of training, too."

"Yeah, it will..." The Captain murmured. Afterward, both he and Lucina looked away from each other awkwardly, shyly covering their mouths with their hands.

"Oh... I see what's going on here," Snake commented teasingly. "So it is a date, then..."

Lowering his hand, the Captain blurted out in protest, "Snake, I swear to God I'm-"

"...Going to see the town with Lucina RIGHT! NOW!" Lucina took the initiative and completed the Captain's sentence for him, grabbing his hand and trying to drag him along.

"W-whoa!" Falcon cried in surprise, trying to keep his balance. "Careful, Lucina! You want me to drop the FrontierNav device again?!

Elma giggled at the scene before her, and told Lucina and Captain Falcon, "You two have fun, now!" Turning to Snake, she asked, "Shall we?"

"Yeah. Let's begin." After that, Snake and Elma entered BLADE Tower.

"Oh Naga, I can't believe I actually..." Lucina murmured to herself softly, holding the fingers of the hand that once held Falcon's for a few seconds to her lips, before turning to him and saying, "S-
"Sorry about that."

"No problem," The Captain reassured her with a soft smile. "I figure I could use a break anyway." Looking away bashfully for a moment, he then stammered, "B-but... It's not a date, got that?"

*It's just... I still can't bring myself to tell you,* he thought.

"Of course," Lucina said. "We're just... going to do some sightseeing."

*Even if you don't think it's a date, it is to me,* She pondered. *Maybe this way... I'll gain the courage to finally tell you...*

"Lucina?"

"I-it's nothing, Captain," Lucina stammered. Turning to Lin, she then asked the young engineer, "Shall we get going, then?"

"Commercial District, right?" Lin inquired. "Follow me."

The two followed Lin into Armory Alley, with L, a humanoid Xenoform with blue skin, blue hair, downward pointing horns on his head, and who spoke in the royal "we", trying to get them to buy his "wares" for a moment, before Lin dissuaded him, saying they were busy. The three then found an elevator nudged away into a nook of the Armory Alley, and rode it down to the Skell Hangar.

"Wow..." Lucina murmured, looking at the Skells all around, some of which were being piloted for test drives.

"Oh, right... the Skell Hangar connects to the other districts," Falcon recalled. "So what are you gonna do, Lin?"

"I have to do some Skell maintenance, so I'll see if one of our fellow BLADEs can give you a ride," Lin explained. "Where do you guys wanna go?"

After a moment of thought, Lucina decided, "It's pretty early, so... I was thinking the Liz-Santa art gallery?"

"Hmm... didn't know art was your thing," The Captain commented. "I'm in too."

"Okay." Taking out her FrontierNav device, Lin spent a few seconds seemingly messaging someone, then announced, "Just head up that ramp over there," pointing in the direction she wanted the two to head in. "Lao will come pick you up soon and take you guys there."

"Okay," Lucina replied. The two followed Lin's directions and headed up the ramp, which led to the roads connecting the districts. Within a few minutes, a man in his early thirties with long black hair, black eyes, slight stubble on his chin, and a black skin tight body suit drove up to them in an uncovered vehicle.

"Lin told me about you two," the man introduced himself. "Name's Lao Huang. I'll give you guys a ride to the Commercial District. Hop on in."

The two did just that and climbed into the back seat, sitting next to each other. Noticing this, Lao chuckled and quipped, "You guys sure are inseparable, huh? Sweethearts, or...?"

"U-um..." Lucina looked away, blushing, before continuing, "We... we've been training partners for a while. And I guess, we've gotten close enough to call ourselves really good friends."
"I see," Lao said as he shifted the vehicle into drive and began driving over to the Liz-Santa art gallery, situated in one of the high rise towers in the Commercial District.

"Yeah, we're just gonna enjoy ourselves in town while Elma has her interview," Captain Falcon explained. "After she's done, we'll return to Smash City."

"Ah," Lao replied. His eyes still focused on the road ahead of him, he then commented, "You guys should definitely enjoy the time you have together. Don't take it for granted... you never know when you'll be separated from each other..."

"I..." Lucina hesitated, looking down and holding her left hand to her chest pensively.

"Don't worry, Mr. Huang," Falcon told Lao as Lucina looked up at her trainer. "After all we've been through... I won't take anything for granted anymore."

"Captain..." Lucina murmured. Turning her gaze into the city horizon, she pondered, _I... won't take anything for granted anymore. That's why I want to enjoy every moment with you. That's why... I'm hoping soon, I can finally tell you. But... how Lao said it, it made it seem like we will be separated some day. I don't know how, but... I'm not looking forward to that day. That's why -

"Alright, we're here," Lao announced as the vehicle came to a stop. Gasping as she snapped out of her trance, Lucina looked around and saw they had indeed arrived at their destination.

"Everything okay there, Lucina?" The Captain asked her.

"Y-yes," Lucina stammered.

"Well then, let's go," Falcon invited her, stepping out of the car. Lucina followed suit, then turning to Lao and saying, "Thank you, Mr. Lao."

"Don't mention it." His eyes half-closing in a melancholy manner, Lao continued, "I mean what I said, though. The day will come when you guys will be separated, and you won't be able to find your way back home to each other again... Just take it from me."

"I...see..." Lucina solemnly looked on as Lao drove off.

_Are we really... going to be separated...?

"Hey, Lucina?" Captain Falcon called out to her. "You comin' or what?"

"Oh!" Lucina gasped before turning to the man she had feelings for. "Coming!" She ran up to his side, and without a moment of hesitation, held on to his hand.

_I shouldn't dwell on that. For now... I really should enjoy myself...

"Where's...this coming from?" Falcon asked.

"Oh...nothing," Lucina said coyly, with a dreamy smile on her face. "L-let's go in."

"Yeah."

As the two walked into the gallery through the glass automatic double doors, Lucina could not wipe the enamored smile off her face.

_It's a date._
It had been only ten minutes, but the two had covered a bit of ground on the first floor of the gallery. Having seen a lot of different types of artwork, from paintings to sculptures to murals of varying styles, Lucina decided to ask Captain Falcon, "So... what piece of artwork catches your eyes the most so far?"

"Hmm..." After thinking for a moment, the Captain answered her with, "I would have to say... that polygon based scenery art we saw earlier. It's somewhat minimalistic, but that's part of its charm - how the colored triangles seem to blend seamlessly to create the illusion of a submerged iceberg."

"It's definitely your style," Lucina commented.

"Huh...?"

"Oh... I didn't mean to insult you or anything," Lucina said, scratching the back of her head shyly. "I just figured that... since you're someone with a very technical mind, this would be something you'd like."

"Ah..." Falcon giggled a bit. "Don't worry, you didn't offend me or anything like that. I'm just surprised you made the connection that easy. I never gave it much thought..."

"Heh, yeah..." Lucina only looked on at Captain Falcon with an adoring smile.  

It feels like... I'm getting even closer to him... Getting to know him more, and... just falling in love with him more and more.

"And you, Lucina?" Falcon asked her. "Which piece of art stood out to you the most?"

"Ah..." Looking around for a moment, Lucina saw one particular painting that caught her eye. "This one." She motioned for him to come over. It was an abstract painting consisting of blending colors without a defined shape or form.

"Abstract, huh?" Captain Falcon commented. "Never would have pegged you as liking this type of art style."

"Art can be about interpretation too, right?" Lucina questioned. "That's the hidden beauty of this painting, I think. It can represent whatever you want it to."

"Heh, here you go with the deep thoughts," The Captain chuckled.

Puffing her cheeks in an irritated manner, Lucina grumbled, "What's that supposed to mean...?"

"Whoa, no offense meant," Falcon replied. "I think it's nice actually, how you think about things like this."

"Oh...of course..." Lucina giggled. "I think Fiora's words left an impact on how I analyze things sometimes, too."

And... he's getting to know me more, too.

"Oh please, you two, if you want to see a real masterpiece, come over here!"

"Is that...?" Lucina ran off in the direction of the voice, and the Captain followed. Standing in front of a classic painting was none other than the Umbran witch, Bayonetta.
"Bayonetta...?" Lucina asked. "I thought you went back to Smash City?"

"I did, but I got a bit bored, and decided to check out some more of New Los Angeles on my own," Bayonetta answered her. Noticing Falcon close by, she walked over to him and introduced herself. "So you must be the famous Captain Falcon. Charmed." She extended her hand for a handshake.

"Oh, please, Bayonetta, you flatter me," Falcon chuckled, shaking her hand. "But it's nice to meet you too."

"Anyway," Bayonetta began, "They call this one, *Primavera*. It's from the Renaissance Era, which I actually lived through!" She stepped aside, allowing the other two to look at the painting she was looking at previously. It was an intricately painted portrait of a group of mythological deities in a garden of sorts.

"They don't call it a classic for nothing," Bayonetta commented. "Perfect composition, and an unknown meaning that's open to interpretation... based on your art tastes from earlier, it's the best of both worlds!"

"Hmm, you're right..." Lucina mused.

"Heh, never would have imagined you as a patron of the arts, Bayonetta," The Captain teased the Umbran witch.

"Never would have pegged you an artsy person at all, Captain," Bayonetta remarked. "Now Lucina here, I expected, but I wasn't expecting her to like abstract art..."

"Heh, yeah..." Falcon turned to where Lucina was standing, only for her to have left the immediate room. "...Lucina?"

A short distance from them, Lucina walked over to a room with a kinetic ceiling sculpture that emulated the look of waves on the ocean. "Wow..." She murmured in amazement, looking on as if mesmerized before hearing a couple's voices break the silence.

"Babe!" The girlfriend said to her boyfriend. "Look at this!"

Walking up to his girlfriend, the boyfriend said, "Yeah, darling. This is really something."

"Babe? Darling?" Lucina murmured to herself. "Is this...how couples communicate...? Calling each other affectionate nicknames?"

"Hey! Lucina!" Captain Falcon called out to her. "Wandered off, didn't ya?"

"Oh! S-Sorry!" Lucina called to him back. "I just wanted to look at this!"

"Hmm?" Both Captain Falcon and Bayonetta walked over to where Lucina was standing, and directed their gaze to the kinetic ceiling sculpture.

"Heh, interesting," The Captain commented.

"Maybe modern art has its own merits as well," Bayonetta said.

... Once they were done browsing the gallery, Captain Falcon and Lucina bade Bayonetta a "see you later" before stepping out and trying to decide their next destination.
"So, where to now?" Falcon asked Lucina. "Wherever you wanna go. You suggested we have this outing, after all."

Turning her head to look at him, Lucina answered him with a smile, "Thank you." Looking ahead, she asked, "...What time is it?"

"Lemme check." Pulling out his FrontierNav device, the Captain read the time. "It's 12 noon."

"Then...how about lunch?" Lucina asked innocently. "I'm sure you must be hungry... I sure am." She looked down, smiling giddily.

_Eating together... yes, that sounds very romantic. Every little moment with him is a glimpse into the real him, and vice versa..._

"Yeah, I'm pretty famished myself," The Captain agreed. "But... how are we gonna pay for it? That gallery was free entry..."

"Say no more, dudes, Yelv is on the case!"

Turning to the right, they saw a physically fit young man who looked about twenty-two years old walking over to them. He had messy, shoulder length blonde hair, green eyes, tan skin, and a tattoo below his right eye. He was also wearing orange and grey body armor.

"Yelv... right?" Lucina inquired.

"Yup," Yelv told Lucina. "You guys wanna have a lunch date, right? I'll cover your bills, no prob, Bob!"

"Well, it's not a date per se, but yeah," Captain Falcon told Yelv.

Gasping, Yelv announced, "Yo, hold up! Are you... THE Captain Falcon?!"

"I... take it you've heard of me?" The Captain asked.

"Heard of you?! Dude, Elma TOLD me all about you! How you're a famous racer and bounty hunter. AND how Earth is still around in your world! I'm standing in the presence of a celebrity, here!" Yelv could not stop geeking out around his idol.

"Heh, never thought I'd gain a fanboy here," The Captain quipped. "Have you decided where exactly you wanna go, Lucina?"

"Ah..." After a moment of thought, Lucina declared, "I think... we should visit Restaurant Rose Moss."

"Oof, that upscale place?" Yelv griped slightly before shrugging. "Eh, no matter. You guys are visitors, so you probably want the finest stuff NLA has to offer. And let me tell ya, you're gonna get it!"

... After Lucina and the Captain claimed an outdoor seating connected to the restaurant and sat across from each other, with Yelv standing close by, the waitress walked up to the two and handed them some menus. "What would you two like?"

"Hmm..." After perusing the menu, Lucina decided, "I think I'll have some Shepherd's Pie and a glass of raspberry lemonade."
"You... know that despite its name, it's not really a pie, right?" The Captain asked Lucina.

"I know," Lucina giggled. "It's just... the ingredients they use in the description, they remind me of dishes they'd make back home. Plus, the name... my father's army is called the Shepherds."

"I see... so comfort food's your thing," The Captain answered her.

"And you, mister?" The waitress asked the Captain.

"I think... I'll have some fried calamari and a glass of cola."

"A fine choice, sir," the waitress commented.

"Cala...mari?" Lucina asked, tilting her head quizzically.

"It's basically squid," The Captain told her.

"So you like seafood?" Lucina asked the Captain.

"You could say that." The Captain smiled at Lucina softly. "It's too bad there isn't an aquarium here in NLA. The sight of seeing those fish and other such sea creatures in water tanks all around you...it's truly, for lack of a better word, majestic."

That smile... Lucina smiled back, somewhat affectionately. "I see... so you're just fond of the ocean in general."

"My Falcon Flier ship is over in Big Blue, so yeah."

"Excuse me," Yelv told the waitress. "They're from Smash City, and are visiting for a bit, so... is it alright if I foot their bill?"

"Of course, Yelv," the waitress replied. He handed her his credit card, and she went off to use it at the cash register before walking back to Yelv and giving him his card back.

"Thank you, Yelv," Lucina thanked the young BLADE.

"No problemo," Yelv said. Waving to them, he announced, "And I gotta take care of some stuff. See ya guys later, and enjoy!"

"Later!" The Captain called out to Yelv as he ran off into the distance. Turning back to Lucina, he said, "New Los Angeles really is something else, huh?"

"It really is..." Looking at the sky briefly as a gentle breeze blew through her hair, Lucina commented, "I wish the future I would one day have to return to would be this bright. But... when that day comes, I would still have to return to the same bleak future I came from... such is how time travel works."

"I see..." Falcon's mouth shaped itself into a timid frown.

"It's fine..." Lucina tried to dissuade him. "At least... the younger me, the me from the timeline I saved... She will get to live a happier, more fulfilling life." Looking to the side, she confessed, "I... overheard some of what you were talking about with Snake. That this might be the last time everyone's back together..."

"I know..." Falcon sighed. "But... try not to worry about it too much, okay?"
"I'll try..."

_I should try to tell him now. I don't know if I will get another chance..._

But before she could, the waitress arrived with their food and drinks. "A Shepherd's Pie for her, fried calamari for him, and your drinks. Enjoy, you two!"

"Thank you!"

...

"Mmm, this taste makes me think of home," Lucina commented, enjoying her meal which consisted of a mixture of ground beef, carrots, onions, peas and mushrooms in mashed potatoes and covered with gravy. "I wonder if Lon'qu would like to make a recipe like this. He's the fastest potato peeler in all of the Shepherds." Noticing the Captain grabbing a miniature fried squid and examining it up close, she asked, "Um...? What are you doing?"

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Falcon said, looking at the piece of calamari from every angle. "These... tiny little squids, you can see the suction cups on their tiny tentacles if you look close enough..."

Resting her fork, Lucina held her hand to her mouth and giggled. "You're like a little kid when it comes to these sort of things, Captain!"

"Hey! I resent that!" Grumbling for a bit, he motioned for Lucina to come closer. "I'm serious! Take a look at this!"

Leaning in closer, Lucina could see what the Captain meant. "You're right..."

"Pretty cool, huh?"

"It certainly is..." Sitting back down, Lucina winked as she teased Falcon, "Now, I think you should eat your food before it gets cold."

"Whatever you say, _mom_," Falcon said sarcastically before they both burst into hearty laughter.

_This is nice..._ Captain Falcon thought, looking on at Lucina with a serene smile. _It's like Neku told me... I should expand my world, and enjoy every moment with all I've got. And I certainly am enjoying these moments with you, Lucina._ His smile sank as he pondered, _At first I was afraid to tell you how I felt, but... now... I'm not sure what I should do anymore._

...

After they finished their meal, they decided to take a leisurely stroll around town, briefly stopping into a flower shop, a jewelry store, and a gift shop, but not purchasing anything. However, something caught Lucina's eye as she and the Captain passed a clothing store for both males and females.

"Oh, wow, that outfit looks nice..." Lucina murmured, stopping in her tracks.

"Clothing?" Falcon asked after catching up with Lucina after she stopped walking. "If you wanna take a look, I guess we could..." He then looked away briefly, covering his mouth with his hand and muttering, "Just... don't expect _me_ to try anything on..."

"Hmm?"

"...Nothing," The Captain reassured her. "Let's go."
As they entered, they saw a man who looked to be 28 years old with short brown hair, green eyes, and black thick rimmed glasses; and a woman who had to be about four years younger with shoulder length black hair, a white shirt with a cream colored vest, and a case of heterochromia, with one eye being brown and the other purple, although the difference was so subtle that one wouldn't notice at first glance.

"You must be those visitors from Smash City I've heard about," the woman said, walking over to the Captain and Lucina.

"Are you enjoying it so far?" The man added as he approached them. "I would hope so, I've seen you two have impeccable taste in art and cuisine. As for clothing... I'll be the judge of that."

"H.B., please," the woman tried to dissuade the man, who was apparently named H.B. Turning to the other two with a somewhat sheepish grin, she introduced herself. "My name's Hope Alanzi. This is Hector Birtwhistle, or H.B. for short. And welcome to Mall Cruz, one of New LA's premier clothing stores. Is there anything in particular you're looking for?"

"We're just browsing," Lucina told Hope. "And maybe trying some on, but we unfortunately won't be buying anything as we don't have any money for NLA..."

"That's perfectly fine," Hope reassured her.

"Oh," Lucina said as she saw two pieces of clothing that caught her attention. "Let me have a look at this..." She came back with a t-shirt and skirt that did not coordinate with each other at all.

Hope and the Captain looked on in visible confusion, while H.B. promptly unleashed his no-holds-barred critique of Lucina's fashion sense. "...Really, miss? And here I thought you had a good track record..." Turning to Falcon, H.B. then asked him, "You're her traveling companion, correct? I imagine you could do better."

Stammering for a minute, the Captain turned away and told H.B., "With all due respect, Mr. Birtwhistle... I don't do 'fashion'. But..." Turning around, a mischievous grin flashed across his face as he continued, "I bet you I could pick out something better for Lucina here."

"Oh! You're terrible!" Lucina scoffed. A cocky grin crept up on her face as she challenged him, "Well then, I bet you I could pick out something for you that you're sure to wear!"

"You're on!" Falcon accepted Lucina's challenge.

"What have I gotten myself into..." H.B. murmured in shame.

"...That's it!" Hope's eyes lit up with inspiration. "If she has no sense of fashion for herself, and he feels too self-conscious picking an outfit for himself... why don't they pick an outfit for the opposite sex, for their partner to wear?"

"Huh?!" Both Lucina and the Captain looked at Hope, surprised.

Giggling, Hope explained, "I'm a Mediator. It's my job to settle disputes and help NLA's citizens in any way possible. And I guess... this is one way to settle a dispute..."

"Hmm, very well," H.B. agreed.

"...This means I'm gonna have to take off my helmet, aren't I..." The Captain grumbled.

"It'll be just for this," Lucina giggled.
"Alright then," H.B. announced. "For this first round, each of you pick out a full outfit with this theme: a gathering. Lucina, you give the outfit you picked out for the Captain here to me, and I'll give it to him. Captain, you give the one you pick out to Hope. Afterwards, you two wear the outfits and show it to each other. Go!"

... 

After their outfits for their partners were selected, Lucina and the Captain headed into the changing rooms, changing into their designated selected outfits, with the Captain of course removing his helmet.

"Are you two done changing? If you are, you can step right out," H.B. told them. Lucina stepped out first, in a dazzling navy blue ballroom-style dress with gloves made of the same material that went up to her elbows.

"Wow..." Lucina murmured happily, looking at the dress she was wearing. "The Captain picked this out for me? It's so pretty..." She twirled around in place for a bit, her eyes closed, a dreamy smile on her face.

"So you like it, huh?" Falcon stepped out from his changing room. As expected, he was without his helmet, so Lucina got to gaze upon that handsome face of his again. Moreover, the outfit Lucina picked for him seemed to go well on him, too. It was one of the few times a mismatched style actually meshed so well; the Captain was wearing a rather "punk rock" getup of a black leather jacket, disheveled green and red plaid tie, a t-shirt with a band logo below the jacket, denim jeans that looked "slashed up", a studded belt, and black leather boots.

"You look stunning, Lucina," The Captain complimented her with a gentle smile, the genuine kindness reflected in his aquamarine eyes.

Blushing, Lucina cupped her face in her hands and said, "S-so do you... H.B. told me this look I picked out for you was very 'punk rock', and our styles, despite being so different, complement each other... it's like the good girl meets the bad boy and falls in love..."

"Bad boy?" Falcon chuckled dryly, scratching his cheek softly with his left index finger. "I look like someone who's going through a midlife crisis..."

"No, you actually look great, Captain," H.B. complimented the Captain. "The punk rock look suits you."

"And you look absolutely gorgeous, Lucina," Hope told Lucina.

"Heehee..." The two giggled, then looking at each other smiling. As they did, Lucina couldn't help but get lost in the Captain's eyes once more.

*Imagine... if this was actually a ballroom date or something. I'd love for him to take my hands and slow dance with me, holding me close...*  

"...Lucina?" The Captain asked her.

"Oh," Lucina said, snapping out of her trance. "This is... pretty fun. Is there another challenge, H.B.?"

"As a matter of fact, there is," H.B. said with a sneaky grin, pushing his eyeglasses up by the bridge with his index finger. "For the next round... you'll be each showing off some skin."
"Uh..." Captain Falcon and Lucina blushed at that announcement.

"It could be a costume that shows some skin, or a swimsuit. Be creative." Looking around, H.B. then announced, "And... go!"

..."And...you two may step out now if you've changed," Hope announced.

"Um... Hope?" Lucina called out from the changing room. "You wouldn't mind helping me with this hair ornament...?"

"Of course."

After Hope assisted her, Lucina stepped out. This time, she was wearing a costume reminiscent of an Arabian belly dancer, with some modifications. Her hair was bound up in an intricate golden hair ornament and she wore some kind of dark blue veil over her mouth. She had on navy blue fingerless gloves with golden wrist bangles that ended in a short section of transparent blue fabric at her elbows. She also wore a silky dark blue top, an exotic silky blue "skirt" of sorts, and intricate wooden sandals.

"Oh my..." she mumbled, looking down at the ground. "I can understand why Olivia feels so self-conscious when she wears outfits like this..." Her daze was broken by Falcon whistling at the sight of his partner clad in such a costume.

Gasping softly, Lucina looked up and was not prepared for the alluring sight before her. Falcon was clad in only a pair of close-fitting swim trunks that stopped just short of the knees, with a somewhat mesmerizing pattern of light and dark blue shapes among a white background, and blue sandals.

"Not bad..." Falcon said with a confident grin. "You pull off that look really well, if I say so myself."

"Ah..." Lucina felt the blood rush to her cheeks and her heart beat faster at the sight of that gorgeous chiseled body of his. She promptly looked away, cupping her face in her hands, to keep from getting too turned on. "Y-you look...great too... Captain..."

Gods... his body is just... exquisite. She quickly shook her head. Stop it, Lucina! Naga, help me rebuke these indecent thoughts!

"Impressive, you two," H.B. complimented them. "Lucina, you may not have much fashion sense for yourself, but it seems you have a better taste for men's clothing. You picked a simple, yet effective, swimsuit here. Kudos."

"And Captain, you've got rather sophisticated taste when it comes to picking out women's clothing," Hope commented.

"I guess..." The Captain chuckled, scratching the back of his head with his right hand. "You might say...this is the kind of clothing I'd like my ideal woman to wear..."

"Ideal... woman...?" Lucina looked down, wiggling her right foot shyly as she smiled coyly. Does he really think of me that way...?

"Say, you guys," Falcon asked H.B. and Hope. "There wouldn't happen to be a community
swimming pool in NLA, would there?"

"Unfortunately, no," Hope fretted with a sigh. "There are swimming pools in some houses in the Residential District, but none open to the general public at this time..."

"Well that sucks," The Captain admitted. "Still, thank you guys for this little... competition, if you can call it that. It was pretty fun."

"Yeah..." Lucina agreed. "Sorry we couldn't buy anything, again."

"No worries," Hope reassured them. "I'd like to see you guys stop by again sometime!"

After the two changed back into their original clothes, with the Captain once again donning his helmet, and exited the store, Lucina asked the Captain, "So... what now?"

Holding his left hand to his lips in thought, the Captain then announced, "I... lied about being done with training. There's actually... one more training exercise I have planned for you."

"Really?"

Motioning for Lucina to come closer, the Captain pulled out his FrontierNav device and pulled up the map. "This one... is endurance training. We start running from here, to..." He pulled up the map to the Residential District and traced a route from their current location, to their destination, Deliverance Park. The rather roundabout route passed by the sports complex and the cathedral. "Whomever can make it there without feeling completely exhausted wins."

"You're awfully competitive today," Lucina teased with a giggle.

"And... GO!" Falcon shouted, taking a running start.

"H-Hey!" Lucina protested. "Guess I should have expected this..." She ran after him.

The two ran into the Residential District, past several crane machines and the sports complex, through the neighborhood, and past the cathedral as expected, before finally ending up at Deliverance Park. While Captain Falcon arrived first, Lucina was the one who had managed to make it without being short of breath.

"Well, looks like... I beat ya..." The Captain strained between exhausted gasps for air as he crouched over.

"Technically, you did get here first," Lucina corrected him, "But... you did say whomever made it all this way without being worn out wins and... I feel fine, so really, I'm the victor here."

"Ah, right. I forgot..." Standing upright once again, he commended her, "It's good you remembered. So... yes, you also passed endurance training. I'm proud of you, Lucina."

*I wish I could tell you more than just that*, the Captain thought at that moment. *This whole training journey with you... has made me happy in ways I can barely put into words...*

"Thank you..." Lucina said, smiling contentedly.

*This feeling...* She thought as the ever so nostalgic blissful emotion she'd known during their journey whenever he commended her, welled up within her. *I've missed this feeling... this is part of why I...*
"...Anyway," Lucina began, "Why don't we sit down? There's a bench nearby."

"Sounds good," Falcon agreed with a sigh. "Man... I thought I still had it, but... guess the years are catching up to me."

"You're fine," Lucina encouraged him as she sat down. "You always do your best. And... I will too."

"Heh, thanks," Falcon thanked her as he sat down next to her.

"You think... Snake's almost done interviewing Elma?" Lucina asked Captain Falcon, looking straight ahead.

"Probably," Falcon answered her. "They have to at least have finished the combat prowess part of the interview, which Snake said would take place outside the city walls. Elma can give me a call on the FrontierNav device I have when she's done."

"I see..."

The sun was already beginning to set amidst the slightly cloudy sky as a gentle breeze blew through the trees around the two. Lucina silently observed the idyllic city life around her, the setting sun giving everything a dusky amber glow. People were going about their daily lives, walking their dogs, driving around town in their cars, playing tennis or basketball at the sports complex, attending mass in the cathedral, or even staying at home.

"So... this is what it's like to live a normal life," she commented. "Even though they lost their home planet, and fight for their survival on an almost daily basis, they can still enjoy their life as they once knew it. I... wish I knew such a life in the future I came from after I lost my parents..."

"Yeah, I've almost forgotten what it was like myself, outside of bounty hunting, racing, and Smash," the Captain concurred. "But... don't you get to experience that kind of life in Smash City too with your friends?"

"Well, yes, but... it somehow felt... more special with you." Lucina looked down, smiling shyly and blushing slightly.

"You think so?" The Captain inquired. "Well... if I may say so myself, this was pretty nice."
Looking to the side briefly, he admitted, "I... would often keep to myself whenever I wasn't racing or fighting. The Captain Falcon that everyone else sees in public events and Smash... that's just... a persona. A mask, if you will."

"Oh?"

"All it is is keeping up appearances for my 'fans'," the Captain elaborated. "But... thanks to this journey, I'm opening up more in ways I hadn't before, not even to Snake or Dr. Stewart or anyone else. I'm forming new relationships, and... it's times like this I feel I can finally be myself, y'know?"

"Be yourself...?" Lucina tilted her head slightly in wonder.

"Yeah. It's truly a wonderful feeling... so liberating." He looked at her and smiled serenely.

Feeling that same joyful feeling from when he smiled at her at Restaurant Rose Moss within her, Lucina smiled back. "It's great for me too... This journey has been amazing for me too. It's helped me realize that I'm stronger than I give myself credit for... and that I'm not alone." This time, it was
Lucina who looked to the side shyly.

"...Lucina?" Captain Falcon asked her. "What's up?"

"C-can I ask you something, Captain...?" There was a trace of timidness in her voice as she spoke.

"...Yes?"

"Ah..." Slowly looking straight ahead of her, Lucina began, "You... remember when you mentioned Jody Summer back at Mute City?"

"Yeah...?" The Captain wasn't sure where this was coming from.

No more hesitating... it's now or never. Tell him...

"Jody... she's just a friend, right...?" Lucina began to touch the tips of her index fingers together nervously.

"Huh...?!" Surprised for a moment, the Captain then stuttered, "Y-yeah... she is. She and I have no intention of getting back together as a couple. Why do you ask...?"

"W-well..." Turning her face to the Captain's but still looking down, she then asked him, "What... do you think of me?"

Is she...?

"How do you mean?" Falcon questioned, sounding as calm as possible, but feeling his heartbeat speed up a little.

"I mean, do you... well..." She gulped nervously and murmured, "Do I really have to spell it out?"

This time around, Captain Falcon... you're the idiot... the idiot I couldn't help but fall for...

"What are you -" Before the Captain could finish his sentence, he felt Lucina's right arm wrap around him and pull him closer to her.

"H-huh?!" Captain Falcon was surprised to say the least, but he did not find the situation unpleasant in the slightest.

"I..." Lucina began, looking him in his visor-obscured eyes, "I just... ask that you forgive me for this." She slowly drew her face closer to his, lips slightly parted as if for a kiss, as she slowly closed her eyes. The Captain did nothing, not even protest or pull away, nor did he even feel the need to, as deep down, this was what he wanted as well. He only remained still, slightly parting his lips as well and closing his eyes, even though Lucina could not tell. Time seemed to slow down as they both anticipated the culmination of this joyous event.

That is, until the sound of explosions broke the moment. They could feel the ground shake with the explosion's aftershocks...

...And before they could react, they just looked in the direction of the sound and saw a flipped over car that appeared to have nobody in it, starting to hurtle at them.

Chapter End Notes
SURPRISE MOTHER FRICKERS IT'S ANOTHER CLIFFHANGER

and I swear my chapters keep getting longer and longer lmao... just wait till the final chapter, it's gonna be a BIG one

Anyway! I hope you guys got your fill of fluff and that almost kiss (I'm still YAAAASSSSing in my head over it lel) and that everything is enjoyable thus far.

Next chapter... it may be short, or at least shorter than this one, but... it's the moment y'all have been waiting for... in more ways than one...(₀ ₅₀)
Waves

Chapter Notes

Yeah boiiiiiii

It's the moment y'all have been waiting for...and I have one more surprise at the end. A BIG surprise.

Content warning for this chapter: LIME/MILD SMUT FRICK YEAH

also, recommended background music for "that scene" (start at when Lucina finally confesses) - Lights of Life from the Trauma Team OST. (no relation to Lifelight from Ultimate I swear)

title's namesake - Waves by Dean Lewis

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 16 - Waves

"STARFALL RONDO!"

As the car flipped through the air and was about to strike Captain Falcon and Lucina as they huddled together out of fear on the bench, a young BLADE leapt in front of them and flipped forward several times with his Photon Saber out, slicing the vehicle in half. The duo sitting on the bench cautiously opened their eyes and saw the two halves of the car a distance from them, and Yelv standing before them.

"What are you two sittin' around for?!" Yelv urged them as the sound of air raid sirens blared throughout the city. "Find Elma! Go! Now!"

Standing up, Captain Falcon began, "But..."

"Don't worry about me," Yelv reassured him. "I'll be assisting the Harriers in taking down the enemy forces that have infiltrated, while the Interceptors will keep any more of 'em out. You guys just head for that elevator past the cathedral." He pointed in the direction of the elevator.

"Got it!" Lucina said as she stood up as well. She held on to Captain Falcon's hand as the two made a beeline for the elevator leading to the top floor of the Administrative District as explosions went off around them, some a bit too close for comfort. By the time they made it to the elevator, the explosions seemed to have thankfully stopped, as did the air raid sirens, and after he pressed the button to go up once he and Lucina got on, Captain Falcon could see the BLADE forces regrouping, presumably to assist the Interceptors outside the city walls. However, the sound of thunder boomed loudly above them. Looking up, he and Lucina saw the sky quickly covered in rain clouds, which then proceeded to drench them.

"You think... Snake made it back?" Lucina asked the Captain, staring at the cloudy sky as the elevator continued its ascent.
"Elma had to have noticed, so hopefully he made it back in with her," Captain Falcon answered her. "We should find Elma first, though."

"True," Lucina agreed. Looking to the side with an anxious expression, she fretted, "I just hope the civilians were able to evacuate, too... and what about Bayonetta?"

"I'm sure that... in the midst of the chaos, the BLADE forces were able to get everyone to safety," Falcon tried to reassure her.

"Hopefully..."

Once the elevator made it to the top, the two immediately started running in the rain, trying to find a way to BLADE Tower. Luckily, they didn't need to go far to run into Elma and Lin once again.

"Lin!" Lucina cried, relieved to see that she was okay.

"Elma," Captain Falcon began, panting slightly. "I guess you saw the invasion happening a mile away while you were interviewing with Snake outside NLA's walls. Speaking of which, where is he?"

"You could say that," Elma confirmed. "As for Snake, he, Bayonetta, and the unarmed civilians of NLA are onboard the Ma-non ship, which has temporarily vacated the premises."

"I see..." Lucina said. "But...what about us?"

"Can we at least join you in keeping the invaders out?" Falcon volunteered.

"Nuh-uh, no way Jose," Lin refused him. "It's WAY too dangerous for non-BLADEs. I don't want to be responsible for the deaths of anyone from Smash City, especially since we could well have lost Lucina had we arrived in Sylvalum a few minutes after we did..."

Gulping, Lucina conceded, "I...see..."

"So what now, then?" Falcon asked Lin and Elma. "I imagine it's too dangerous to try to make it back to the teleporter... which, I hope that will be safe..."

"Some of the Interceptors and Harriers will be protecting the teleporter back to Smash City, so don't worry about that," Elma reassured him. "I know where you guys can be safe. Follow us."

Following Lin and Elma as they were being drenched head to toe, Lucina and Captain Falcon eventually found themselves at the entrance to BLADE Barracks.

"The BLADE Barracks...?" The Captain questioned.

"It'll serve as a makeshift bunker of sorts," Lin explained. "Come on in." She took out her FrontierNav device and swiped it in front of a panel on the side of the door, opening it. Captain Falcon and Lucina promptly entered.

The interior of the BLADE Barracks was high-tech, yet homey. There was a small conference room up a ramp, and on the main floor were a kitchen and dining area, a room with holograms, and a bedroom behind sliding doors. Just as they were looking around, however, they heard beeping on the other side of the door, followed by a clicking sound.

"Huh?!" Lucina immediately turned around and dashed to the door and banged at it, while Falcon walked up to her.
"Please, Lin!" Lucina cried desperately. "Don't do this! You're so young! Don't let your parents' deaths be in vain, not after you saved me too...!"

"Please, Lucina, don't worry about me," Lin comforted Lucina from the other side of the door. "I can handle myself. I may not look like it, but I'm trained in combat, too."

"Lin..." Lucina collapsed to her knees and started to weep.

Crouching down next to her, Captain Falcon gently took Lucina into his arms and held her close. "It'll be okay..." As she sobbed into his soaking wet chest, he told Elma, "Just... stay safe out there, Elma. Wouldn't want to lose you after Master Hand considered you for the tournament..."

"I promise, we'll make it back safely," Elma reassured him. "You two will be safe in there. If you need anything to eat or drink, it's in the fridge, and there's a bedroom too. I'll contact you on your FrontierNav device when everything's taken care of, Captain."

"...Okay," Falcon said. "Let me know of anything."

"Will do."

A few seconds passed, and there was no sound on the other side of the door except that of the pouring rain. Still embracing Lucina, Captain Falcon could hear her sobs slowing down and her voice becoming quieter until she seemed to have completely calmed down. "You alright there?" He asked her.

"Y-yeah," Lucina stammered, wiping her tears away. She and the Captain stood up and walked to the dining area before she stopped in her tracks to shiver.

"Cold?" Falcon asked her. "Wouldn't want either of us to get sick, especially since we're soaking wet..."

"I-is there a t-t-thermostat around here somewhere?" Lucina asked, her teeth chattering from the cold.

"I'll check..." Looking around, the Captain found what looked like a thermostat that was easy enough to operate. "Lemme just... here... and that should do it." Within seconds, the air conditioning in the BLADE Barracks adjusted to a more comfortable temperature.

"Thanks, Captain." Walking over to a couch in the dining area, Lucina sat down. "I kind of feel bad sitting on such a nice couch when I'm drenched... and we kinda left some puddles back there..."

"It's no skin off their backs, I'm sure," Falcon reassured her as he removed his scarf, leaving it to hang on a nearby chair, followed by his wristcuffs and gloves, placing them on the granite dining table. "They have an Industrial District, right? Producing another couch should be no problem, and cleaning the place up shouldn't be a big issue either." He then began to unbutton his jacket, letting it hang half-open on his chest, his bare torso partially visible.

"Ah?" Lucina gasped at the sight, the blood rushing to her cheeks. "W-what do you think you're doing, Captain?! You... p-perv!"

"Whoa, now," The Captain chuckled nervously, holding his hands in front of him as if making a gesture for her to calm down. "I'm allowed to get comfortable too, aren't I? You have no idea how icky wearing this jacket feels when it's this soaked..."

"F-Fair point..."
The Captain proceeded to sit down next to Lucina on the couch. "I see what you mean, though," he commented. "This couch does feel pretty nice... it'd be a shame to ruin it."

"Yeah..." Lucina's eyes wandered from the Captain's face to his partially exposed torso, the sight of such rippling, tan-skinned abs that glistened faintly from the rainwater making her heart skip a beat.

He's so... sensual... she thought, licking her lips subtly as her right hand began to reach for the exposed skin. Stop teasing me like this, Captain Falcon...

"Lucina...?" He asked, a trace of uncertainty in his voice. At that moment, Lucina's hand shifted to his wet jacket, proceeding to feel it between her fingers before she drew her hand back and shuddered in disgust.

"Gross..." she murmured. "You're right. Wearing something like that while wet must be very uncomfortable for you..."

"Heheh," he chuckled. "Say, I couldn't help but notice..."

Oh gods, Lucina thought anxiously as her pupils shrank. He didn't notice... how I tried to touch his abs, did he? Or how, at Deliverance Park, I...

"...You seemed so...protective of Lin when she locked us in. Why?"

"...Oh," Lucina replied, sounding somewhat relieved. "It's just... the thought of someone so young risking her life to save others... I felt a little shocked when I learned that Lily Flyer was a support soldier at only fourteen, but... the thought of Lin, who's just a year younger, marching into battle and risking her life just there... maybe it's a maternal instinct, like how I found myself acting when I thought I lost my mother, and how I looked after Morgan after father died." Looking up at the ceiling, she continued, "And... maybe part of it... is because I saw my younger self in Lin a bit there, and didn't... want her to witness the same horrors of war I did growing up..."

That's right... with what she went through... I can see why she would take on such habits. "I see..." The Captain replied, at a loss of what else to say.

The two sat in silence for a few moments, listening to the faint sound of the rain pattering against the BLADE Barracks's metallic roof. Lucina decided to break the silence with, "I... think I should take a nap for a bit... we are going to be here for quite a while, after all..."

As she got up, Captain Falcon noticed the melancholy look on her face. "Is something the matter?"

Slowly turning to him, Lucina forced a somewhat hollow smile that was betrayed by the pained look in her eyes. "I'll be fine..."

...I'm such a coward. This might be the last time we get to be together like this... and yet I'm still walking away...

Captain Falcon watched Lucina walk off in the direction of the bedroom, looking on with a slight frown. "I know you're not really fine..." he murmured under his breath. Standing up, he said to himself, "She is right, though. Who knows how long we'll be locked in here... Elma said she'd contact us when it's all clear."

At least, when everything's clear, we can go home. But... when that time comes, I... I'm not sure what I should do anymore...
Deciding to be useful and not leave a mess for Elma and Lin when they returned, he took some paper towels from the kitchen and dried up the puddles he and Lucina left on the floor. When he was done, he sat down again for a few minutes before he murmured, "I am a bit thirsty..."

Walking back over to the kitchen, he grabbed a glass, setting it on the table, then opened the fridge. "Hmm... feel like having some apple juice..." He took the bottle of apple juice from the fridge, poured himself a glass, and downed it in several gulps. Letting out a refreshed sigh, he commented, "That hit the spot." It was then he found himself thinking of Lucina.

"I'm sure... this would at least cheer her up a little..."

Putting his glass in the sink, he grabbed another, poured some juice into it, and placed the bottle back in the refrigerator. Carrying the glass, he then walked over to the bedroom and entered. Upon entering the dimly lit bedroom, he saw Lucina curled up in the bedsheets, clearly still awake with a sad expression on her face. She appeared to have removed her cape and boots, as they were lying on the carpeted floor which appeared to be wet in a few spots, presumably from wringing the water out of her cape and hair. He could feel a lonely, longing feeling hanging heavy in the air.

"Can't sleep?" He asked her.

"Not really..." she timidly answered him. Eyeing the glass he was holding, she asked, "Is that... for me?"

"Figured you were probably thirsty too," he answered her. She climbed out of bed and sat up, prompting him to hand her the glass. As she drank the juice, Falcon took out the FrontierNav device, which surprisingly still worked despite being in a damp pocket, and set it on the dresser opposite the bed.

"Ahh," Lucina let out a refreshed sigh once she finished her drink. "That was... awfully nice of you, Captain..."

"Don't mention it," he replied, turning to her. "Want me to...?"

"No, it's ok," Lucina dissuaded the Captain. "Let me." She stood and placed the glass on the dresser next to the FrontierNav device when Captain Falcon suddenly looked down to the ground.

She's too close to me... I can't just...

"Um...?" Lucina was somewhat confused by the Captain's timid behavior around her.

"Lucina...listen to me." Captain Falcon said, turning away from her as he spoke.

"Captain...?"

"When this is all over...we'll head back to Smash City and continue with our lives like nothing happened. I'm just glad I was able to train you like this."

Lucina was perplexed. "Where's this coming from...?"

The Captain's heart was racing, his breath uneven, the palms of his hands sweating. "I...didn't want to admit this, but..."

"...?"

"I...I really wasn't expecting this to happen. Lucina...I've...fallen in love with you."
"Ah…?" Lucina was caught off guard by his confession.

"Since we've met, your strong spirit has captivated me. These past few days were no different. Getting to know you and grow closer to you instilled in me a happiness I've not known for the longest time. Like I said back at Deliverance Park, being around you... it helped me feel like I could finally be the real me. And…" Turning around, he took her in his arms and held her close to him. Lucina felt a gentle sensation wash over her as she felt the soft heat emanating from the exposed part of his chest, even though his jacket was wet from the rain.

"Can't you see it? Whenever I close my eyes to sleep at night...you're always in my dreams, without fail. "Always." His voice was inviting, comforting, filling Lucina with an unusual sense of peace. She felt her cheeks heat up upon being held in his tender embrace, her breath becoming tense. She wasn't used to the customs of romance and courtship in her home world, so this confession caught her by surprise. However, the feeling that came over her was far from unpleasant; in fact, deep down she wanted to feel even closer to him at that moment. "And it pains me, because...being close to me is dangerous. I don't want to lose you as a result of my own carelessness...especially considering I almost lost you not once, but twice..."

"I'm aware of the risks," Lucina answered him. "As for you...is...that how you really feel?"

After a pause, Falcon replied, "...Yes." He released her from his embrace. "...I'm sorry. It's just...I guess I got too carried away again. I've probably broken your trust enough right now... This won't happen again --"

"No." Lucina demanded, gripping his bare left hand as she looked down, her eyes obscured by her bangs. "Please...don't go."

"Lucina..." the Captain responded, drawing closer to her.

"I...have something to confess, too." Taking a deep breath, she continued, "Ever since you saved me that day...ever since you came to comfort me in the hospital...I've come to realize something."

"...Yes?" The Captain asked.

"I've realized...that you were the one to give me the determination to keep going no matter how bleak the circumstances. You helped me develop the strength I needed... no, there's no other way to say this. You were my strength. Getting to know you during this journey, hearing you say those encouraging words... instilled such a great joy in me as well...and yes, back at Deliverance Park, I tried to kiss you..." She let go of his hand and gently touched his face. "And...I...I didn't tell you earlier because I was afraid you would reject my feelings."

Seeing Lucina trembling and about to cry, the Captain wrapped one of his arms around her and reached his other hand to her cheek, delicately wiping away her tears. "Lucina..."

"I've...fallen in love with you as well. I've felt this way ever since Mute City...maybe even before that." She looked up at him, the tears flowing from her eyes. "I never thought I'd get so close to you like this...and I'm afraid for what will become of us...but I just want to be with you, forever...!"

"Is that...what you want?"

"It is..." Lucina confirmed, her free hand grasping the hand on her face. "Will everything be fine? We'll be safe and happy together, right? Do you promise...that you'll never let me go? That we'll never be separated? That you'll always be by my side...?"
"I…” Falcon bit his lower lip, his heart beating faster.

"I mean what I said, though. The day will come when you guys will be separated, and you won’t be able to find your way back home to each other again... Just take it from me."

"And if we do get separated…” Lucina only looked at him with a determined yet pleading look in her eyes as she remembered Lao's words to her, the tears still flowing. "...That no matter the circumstances…that we'll find our way back to each other…?"

The Captain could no longer contain his intense joy. Those were the only words he needed to hear.

"I promise."

It was at that moment that Captain Falcon immediately pulled Lucina closer to him and their lips met in a passionate, yearning kiss. Lucina closed her eyes, enjoying the moment as they both felt a warm, blissful feeling building in both of them, savoring the way his lips felt on hers. She could feel their warmth, their texture which was the perfect balance of rugged and soft, and his kisses made her feel like she was in heaven. Falcon's bare hands reached for Lucina's gloves, and removed them swiftly but carefully, after which Lucina gently caressed his face with her right hand. After breaking the kiss for a moment to catch their breath, Falcon brought his lips close to Lucina's eyes, tenderly kissing the tears away as she sighed, her right hand resting on his chest all the while. Lucina then proceeded to remove Falcon's jacket by running her hands from the bottom of his abdomen to the top of his shoulders, all the while gently kissing his neck. She enjoyed the sound of his soft moaning as his half-open jacket fell to the floor.

"So then…” Captain Falcon began, sighing at the sensation Lucina's silky touch elicited as her hands slowly traveled up his bare, rippling back before her arms pulled him closer to her. "This is…what you want, truly?"

"I've never been more sure of anything in my life." Lucina looked him in his visor obscured eyes, a look of pure yearning on her face, savoring the feeling of his chest rising and falling with each breath as it was pressed against hers. "It's one thing to say you love me, but in this moment…I want us both to 

'demonstrate it.' Guiding one of his hands to softly cup her face once more, she continued, "I need...to feel the full joy of loving and being loved…"

The Captain and Lucina then collapsed to the bed, their lips once again locked together as he began to remove more of her clothing. She caressed his finely sculpted bare back, her hands working their way up to his helmet. She giggled as she momentarily broke the kiss and said, "What? I've seen your face before, you know." She removed his helmet and put it aside on the floor. She never tired of seeing his handsome face, ever since that time they bathed together in the hot spring. And unlike that time in the hot spring, she wouldn't tense up now. She would relax and enjoy everything he did to her without feeling shy. She loved him, and wanted him to continue being intimate with her like this. And gods, it felt so good.

Lucina was down to her undergarments and stockings when Falcon began to trail kisses down her abdomen, starting at the top of her chest, while his hands stroked her back and unhooked her bra as his kisses reached the gap between her breasts. In those moments, Lucina knew the meaning of ecstasy. One of her hands gently mussed up his messy raven black hair while the other grabbed the bedsheet tightly, as she moaned all the while. He stopped shortly when he was about to reach the bottom, and he went back up and kissed Lucina on the neck as his hands slid up her thighs. At that moment, Lucina's body heated up with the flames of desire so intensely that she almost felt like she could just melt. She felt him removing her stockings, and at that time she focused on removing his lower garments. Everything seemed to go by in a pleasurable blur until they were both completely nude, partially covered by the bedsheet.
"Are you nervous?" the Captain asked, his hand stroking the blue haired Ylissean's face.

Feeling the warmth of his hand as he caressed her face, Lucina replied, "Mmm… a little..." She reached out her hand to touch his face.

"Don't worry…like I promised, I'll always be by your side..." he whispered as they came together in an indescribably blissful union.

"I'm so glad…that I could be with you."

Everything about this moment felt so right, so wonderful. She loved how sheer rapture washed over her – and him, as well – as it felt like their bodies, their hearts, their souls, everything, were fusing together and becoming one. Both of them felt the purest affection and yearning pulsing throughout every last inch of themselves. Everything was just perfect: how her hands caressed his abdomen once again from the bottom to the top before she wrapped her arms around him; how he held her close; how lovely her fair-skinned, slim frame meshed against his sensual, tan-skinned, muscular frame; how their movements were slow and sensual and how they eventually felt themselves in the throes of rapture.

"Oh…Naga…" Lucina whispered, opening her eyes for a brief moment, then closing them again as she surrendered to the tides of the warm sea of bliss engulfing her. The sensation was powerful, yet delicate, and she couldn't help but moan softly and hold him closer to her. After a while she heard him moaning too, his very being experiencing the same ecstasy, his mind being clouded by a rapturous haze.

"Lucina..." Captain Falcon whispered in Lucina's ear as he held her tighter and shuddered softly, sighing deeply, enjoying what was happening to him. At that moment, they had truly become one.

Afterward, they lay side by side in a passionate embrace, their bodies pressed close together still, lying there skin to skin. It almost felt like their hearts were beating as one. Lucina thought this was all the stuff of fairy-tale romances, how the maiden and the hero let down their barriers and came together, how the afterglow was a peaceful, lovely experience. It was ironic how only a few weeks ago, she felt intense pain in that incident. Now, it was nothing but sheer pleasure. She loved being held by him, feeling his body heat as well as the warmth inside her that was the result of their union. She looked at that handsome face of his, a calm expression on his visage, and noticed he was starting to drift to sleep. She couldn't blame him, as what they just experienced felt amazing for them both.

"Captain?" She asked, gently stroking the scar above his left eyebrow.

"Mmm..." He moaned as he opened his eyes, seeing Lucina's smiling face. He always thought she had the most beautiful smile.

"That was truly wonderful," she said, looking into his aqua eyes. "I'm just glad I've fallen in love with you...the real you."

Falcon smiled softly, and replied, "I can say the same. I'm glad you're with me...I'm glad I got to see the real you, as well. And I am truly happy to be in love with you." He kissed her once again, his left hand running its fingers through her silky blue hair. As that was happening, Lucina softly caressed his face with her right hand, before opening her eyes for a moment and seeing...that reminder.

The mark of Grima.
Noticing Lucina stopped kissing him back, the Captain asked, "...What's wrong, Lucina?"

"I..." Closing her eyes for a moment to calm down, she opened them again as she asked him, "Remember when we were leaving Sylvalum? That I was about to... show you a secret tied to a darker part of my past as well?"

"Go on..."

"Remember how I said that when that day comes, I would have to return to my doomed future? Well..." She showed him the back of her right hand. On it was a mark with what looked like two twisting branches across from each other with three eyes on each "branch", six eyes in total.

"I'm surprised I didn't notice this sooner..." The Captain murmured.

"This... is the Mark of Grima," Lucina explained. "In the timeline I saved when I traveled to the past, my father dealt the final blow to the Fell Dragon, because he didn't want to lose my mother... Robyn. The woman who became the avatar of Grima in my future. While the version of me that was born in that saved timeline will live a happy and safe life thanks to Grima being put to sleep for a thousand years... those changes won't apply to my timeline. I still have the mark, as does Morgan. Even when we defeat Grima in my future... Grima could return through me or my brother..." Resting her hand on the mattress, tears began to flood her eyes as she began to sob. "That's why... that's why I ran away from you back at Mute City after you saved me from Black Shadow... not only because I didn't want to risk you dying for me... but... I was also afraid that... directly or indirectly, I would cause harm to befall you too... I couldn't live with myself if that happened..."

"Lucina..." The Captain softly stroked Lucina's crying face, tenderly wiping the tears away.

"I loved you, even then..." Lucina wept. "I wanted to protect you... Not only from outside dangers, but also from the greatest danger of all if we were ever to be together... myself."

"Heh... you really are an idiot, Lucina." At that moment, Falcon grabbed Lucina's right hand with his left and held it, their fingers interlacing. "Even if the world turns against you... Didn't I promise I would always be by your side? I would even save you from the influence of Grima, or any other such being, if it should ever come to that."

"Ah..." Lucina's eyes widened, feeling a reassuring peace wash over her at his words.

"I should apologize myself for not telling you about Blood Falcon and my own past earlier... but it's because I didn't want you to get hurt either, and look what almost happened. But that's all in the past now, isn't it?" Smiling tenderly at her, he reassured her, "What matters is how we handle things from here on out. With all the training you've received... why don't we protect each other?"

"...Of course," Lucina nodded, a soft smile gracing her still tear-streaked face. "I can be stronger than I've ever been with you by my side, Captain... And if anything should happen that we get separated... you'll be the light guiding my way out of the dark."

"And you'll be the gentle shade I can retreat to in the blinding light," Falcon said. "Heh... look at me waxing poetic..."

"It's charming, really," Lucina giggled. "Thank you... for taking the time to train me, too. Once Elma and the others take care of this situation... let's finally go home."

"Yeah," Falcon agreed. "For now though, we should just rest." Holding her close to him, he whispered, "Sleep well, sweetheart..."
"He... he's calling me a term of endearment...?"

"Same to you... b-babe..." Lucina stammered shyly.

"...Babe?" Falcon chuckled softly. "Where'd you learn that?"

"At the art gallery, I noticed a couple calling each other affectionate nicknames like 'babe' and 'darling'... hearing you call me 'sweetheart' from your lips... it sounds really nice..."

"You calling me 'babe' sounds just as wonderful," Captain Falcon told Lucina. "Just... take it easy, okay? You have nothing to worry about as long as I'm here."

"Okay..."

"Elma will give us a call when everything's taken care of... just rest. I'm sure you must be tired..."

Embracing him back, Lucina told him, "And I imagine you are as well... rest well, babe." Within seconds, he was the first to fall asleep. She looked on at his peaceful slumbering face with an affectionate smile.

There's something indescribably beautiful about watching the one you love fall asleep in your arms... Her smile sank as sleep slowly overtook her. Naga... I pray that you won't let anything take this happiness... away from me... She closed her eyes and drifted off to sleep.

... An hour and a half had passed, and Captain Falcon's FrontierNav device began to sound with the alert of an incoming call. Slowly opening his eyes, he shifted over and climbed out, carefully enough that he wouldn't wake Lucina, who was still deep asleep and didn't stir at the sound of the call. Putting on his clothes as quickly but quietly as he could, he took the device with him and exited the bedroom, answering the call when he walked to the kitchen, putting on his remaining scarf, gloves and wristcuffs.

"Elma? Is everything taken care of?"

"It is," Elma answered him, the device's screen showing a holographic video feed of her at one of the streets in the Commercial District. It looked like it was still raining even as night fell, the streetlights illuminating the city in the dark. "The strange thing is, this invasion... it seems to have started covertly, as if there was someone on the inside feeding them info and granting them access... they knew where to strike, too..."

"Any idea who the informant might have been?" Captain Falcon asked Elma.

"Not really," Elma said, shaking her head. "And I really don't wanna have to suspect a fellow BLADE, but... it looks like we might not have a choice. Based on the circumstances, one person does seem particularly suspicious...someone we left in charge of guarding the strange Skell we found in Dead Man's Gulch..." Her face bore an expression of dread at the realization. "Oh no..."

"Just don't worry about that for now," Falcon reassured the leader of the Reclaimers. "Is the Manor ship with Snake, Bayonetta and the citizens returning at least?"

Looking up for a moment, Elma confirmed, "Yes, I can see it pulling into view above BLADE Tower. And how are you and Lucina holding up?"

"We're fine," The Captain told her. "We just rested for a bit...there wasn't much else to do."
"I apologize for the inconvenience in that case," Elma said. "I'll be at the West Gate in the Industrial District after I meet up with Snake and Bayonetta at BLADE Tower. Lin will come over to you guys and unlock the door."

"Gotcha." After hanging up the call, Falcon walked back to the bedroom and gently shook Lucina awake.

"Mmmmm...?" She groggily moaned as she opened her eyes.

"Hey, sweetheart," Falcon greeted her with a smile. "Sleep well?"

"Y-yeah...I slept really well." She smiled at him as she added, "That... that moment we shared... it was wonderful."

"Indeed it was."

"I guess everything's safe now?" Lucina asked Captain Falcon.

The Captain only nodded and said, "Elma took care of it. She'll be waiting for us outside the West Gate at the Industrial District. Once you get dressed, we can meet her there."

"O-okay." Lucina got up and changed back into her clothes, and followed her lover to the door.

... Once Lin unlocked the door, as signaled by a series of beeps, the two exited the BLADE Barracks, arm in arm, as Lin led them to the transport vehicle on the docks close to BLADE Tower. The rain had apparently stopped, a crisp breeze cooling the night air. Lin briefly looked back, seeing the couple happy together, before smiling at Lucina, wordlessly congratulating her on finally confessing her feelings to him.

After they boarded and Lin began to drive the hover-based vehicle to the Industrial District, Lucina looked out the window, this time eyeing the clear, starry night sky above instead of the city below. In the dark sky, she spotted something curious.

"Babe!" She called out to the Captain. "Take a look at this!"

Looking out the same window and directing his gaze to the sky, Falcon saw what his new girlfriend was talking about. There, shining in the starry night sky... was a rainbow.

"A rainbow? At night?" Lucina's new boyfriend commented. "Mira really is something, huh..."

"Well, it was just raining for several hours," Lucina giggled. "Plus, this is the same planet that has pink auroras..."

"Heh, you have a point..." Captain Falcon then quietly wrapped one of his arms around Lucina and pulled her closer to him as they admired the scenery for the rest of the ride.

... When they arrived at the Industrial District, it was as if nothing had changed. Workers got back to work in their respective production plants. After Lucina and the Captain disembarked, Lin noticed Elma, Snake and Bayonetta standing close to the West Gate. "There they are," Lin told them. "I'll leave you guys to it. I have to head back to the Administrative District with some other BLADEs to ask Lao some questions..."
"Lao...?" Lucina's face bore a confused, yet concerned look. "What did he...do?"

"You don't think he's the potential spy Elma told me about...?" Captain Falcon asked Lin.

"I would hope not," Lin fretted, "But we have to try to rule out as many suspects as possible. And as much as I hate to say it, right now the cards are stacked against his favor..." Shaking her head, Lin tried to put on a cheerful disposition as she smiled and waved. "But I don't wanna keep you guys. You've been dying to get back to Smash City, so..."

"No worries," Falcon told the young engineer. "Hope to see you and Elma again someday, Lin."

"Feel free to visit any time!" Lin told the Captain and his lover before they walked off.

... 

"Hey, Elma," Falcon greeted Elma as he and Lucina walked up to the BLADE Colonel, who was accompanied by Snake and Bayonetta.

"Hey, guys," Elma greeted them back.

"Guess I won't be needing this anymore..." The Captain pulled out the FrontierNav device Elma gave him, and returned it to the silver-haired soldier woman.

"I'm glad I was able to help nevertheless," Elma told him, putting the spare device away.

"Yo, Cap," Snake waved at the Captain. "You're a sight for sore eyes... that damn ship was a little too crowded for my tastes, and those Ma-non... ugh, what I wouldn't give for them to just shut up..."

"Oh come now, they were rather endearing," Bayonetta giggled. "And they're pretty genius inventors."

"Well, yeah, I'll give 'em that," Snake shrugged. "At least we had some pizza to eat while we waited."

"You call THAT greasy, fatty mess a 'pizza'?'" Bayonetta retorted. "That's a gross bastardization of the original recipe invented 130 years ago!"

"Wouldn't it be over that many years here? It's 2056 A.D. in this world," Snake commented. "Plus, does it really matter how it's prepared? To me, pizza is pizza."

Lucina burst into laughter at Snake and Bayonetta's banter about pizza. "Heehee... you guys... if I didn't know any better, I'd say you guys could make a really cute couple with your banter!"

"Uh... thanks, I guess," Snake said, scratching the back of his head with his right hand. "But... I'm taken."

"Right... Samus is your girlfriend... almost forgot." Lucina chuckled nervously.

"Plus, I like to keep my options... open," Bayonetta asserted.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Snake inquired.

"...Nothing," Bayonetta dismissed Snake's inquiry.

"Heheheh..." Chuckling at the interaction that unfolded, Elma then said, "Nevertheless, it was nice
having you all here at New Los Angeles. I look forward to hearing from Master Hand should I be selected."

"We will gladly be the first to let you know," Snake reassured Elma. Turning to Lucina and Captain Falcon, he commented, "Say...something seems...different about you guys..."

"How so?" The Captain asked.

"Well..." Before Snake could finish his sentence, Cloud ran in through the West Gate.

"Guys..." Cloud panted.

"What's the matter, Cloud?" Bayonetta asked the former AVALANCHE mercenary.

"Bayonetta... you were absolutely right... about the Hands... something's up with them..."

"Easy now, Cloud," Captain Falcon tried to calm Cloud down. "Try to regain your bearings, and give us a rundown."

"Okay..." After catching his breath, Cloud stood upright and began, "When Robin returned to Smash City from Shibuya, he remembered what Lucina had told him about her visions in her dreams, about a strange orb of light with metallic prismatic wings. I had just returned from New Los Angeles, and while Bayonetta wanted to return to NLA, her words about the Hands' behavior seeming strange as of late couldn't get out of my mind. Robin and I decided to investigate the information archives with Palutena, who had top secret access, and Shulk, so his visions could prepare us in case something were to go wrong. And sure enough... if you'll pardon my French, shit hit the fan."

"Is everyone okay at least?" Lucina asked Cloud.

"Yeah," Cloud confirmed. "I'll explain what exactly happened later, but once everything was taken care of, we received a... clue of sorts telling us all to head for the cliffs on the outskirts of Smash City. We believe that may have been the real Master Hand's last known whereabouts."

"So all the Smashers are over there waiting for us?" Falcon asked Cloud.

"Yeah," Cloud said. "Some of the Smashers sent their visiting loved ones back to their home worlds. Shulk sent his girlfriend, Fiora, back to Gaur Plain before heading to the rendezvous point."

"Alright, I'll be there as soon as I can," Captain Falcon said.

"Cloud... are my parents at the rendezvous point yet?" Lucina asked Cloud. "And is Morgan still in Smash City?"

"As far as I'm aware, your parents are over there," Cloud replied. "But Morgan is still in Smash City. If you wanna send him home, do so before heading to the cliffs. We don't know what might happen."

"No matter what happens, I'm ready," Lucina announced, her eyes bearing a determined look. "With the training I've received... with my father, my mother, my friends... and the Captain by my side... I won't lose."

"Good," Cloud said.
"You guys just stay safe," Elma advised the five from Smash City.

"We will," Cloud reassured Elma. Turning to Captain Falcon, Lucina, Snake and Bayonetta, he declared, "Alright, everyone. Let's mosey."

As they ran off to the teleporter leading back to Smash City, Elma looked on and said to herself, "I wish you all the best of luck. Stay safe." She began to walk to the transport vehicle when her FrontierNav device began to beep. Pulling it out, she saw it was a call from Lin.

"Lin? What's the matter?"

"Elma! It's not good!" Lin's face on the video feed bore a concerned expression. "As Lao was being investigated, I suddenly noticed Tatsu went missing."

"Tatsu... oh, right." Elma recalled that a Nopon named Tatsu followed Lin around everywhere she went, and that he had a penchant for getting into trouble.

"I looked around everywhere in the immediate vicinity for him, I even called out to him, but he was nowhere to be found... Then I heard some screams, and when I turned around, Lao and the BLADEs who were interrogating him vanished as well."

"That... is bizarre," Elma mused. "Be careful, Lin."

"I just really wish I knew what was..." Lin's train of thought was interrupted when she looked up. "What's that light...?"

"Lin...?"

"Elma, this is..." Just then, light filled the screen as Lin seemed to be vaporized.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

Within seconds, the video feed became static.

"Lin, can you hear me? Lin?!"

But there was no response. Hanging up the call, Elma looked up and saw various people and even Skells engulfed by beams of light and vanishing.

"What the hell is going on..." She murmured. Before she could react, a beam of light honed in on her, and then...

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGH!"

Chapter End Notes

YEAH THAT'S RIGHT MY DUDES. Y'ALL KNOW WHAT'S COMING NEXT. GET HYPE.

I have actually had this chapter, or rather the, ahem, "pivotal scene" planned for years, haha... it was one of the first scenes I brainstormed when developing the idea for this fic. I wanted to craft a story that would lead up to that point, with appropriate character
and relationship development, and now with Ultimate, it sure as hell ain't ending there, hoho...

Oh and... if any of you wanna see the side story involving what Cloud described, let me know... I have another side story idea too that I'll mention in the next chapter.

But most of all, fam: we're in the Endgame now.
As The Rush Comes

Chapter Summary

(where is she...?)

Chapter Notes

Yeah, that's right. This fic ties into Ultimate in all its entirety. So not only is EVERYONE HERE(TM), but also...

IT'S WORLD OF LIGHT TIMEEEEEEEEEEE and there will be a buttload of feels. Get some tissues, my dudes.

Content warnings for this chapter: Strong language, and Adventure Mode/World of Light spoilers. I'm also trying to like... put my own unique spin on the interpretation of what happens in WoL. I'm even adding I guess... a survival aspect to it? You'll see what I mean.

Also, Galeem and Dharkon use they/them/their pronouns in this fic. And Samus and Zero Suit Samus are (obviously) counted as one character in this fic so I'll count her awakening as the Zero Suit version's. The only time she's in her Power Suit (for now) will be the opening scene. However, as established in a previous chapter, Sheik and Zelda are separate characters. Or rather since Sheik is technically Zelda, she's just the Zelda from BOTW in disguise while Ultimate Zelda is from ALBW.

title namesake - As The Rush Comes by Motorcycle

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 17 - As The Rush Comes

The sun set over the cliffs overlooking the ocean on the outskirts of Smash City, dyeing the cloudy sky shades of dusky pink and orange. The only sounds that could be heard were the wind blowing and the waves crashing upon the cliffs. Just then, Fox McCloud, leader of the space squadron Star Fox, broke the silence by pulling out his blaster and announcing, "Don't let a single one get away!"

By that, he was referring to the swarm of fake Master Hands that floated in the sky. Behind Fox, ready to follow his orders, were all the other Smashers - Mario, Kirby, Link, Samus, Palutena, Zelda, the Ice Climbers, Solid Snake, King K. Rool, Mega Man, Isabelle, Mewtwo, Simon Belmont, Captain Falcon, Robin, Rosalina and her Lumas, Shulk, the Inklings, and many more. Everyone was there.

And sure enough, in the sky above all the fake Master Hands, was that mysterious creature Lucina saw in her dreams - the mysterious orb of light with metallic iridescent "wings" of some sort. The fake Master Hands followed the commands of this strange, menacing being.
"We'll each need to take down about ten," Marth suggested, in an attempt to strategize.

"Stow your fear," Zelda tried to encourage everyone. "It's now or never!"

"We'll win this," Pit declared, determined to emerge victorious. "I know we will!"

However, before any of the Smashers could act, the fake Master Hands seemed to unravel and convert themselves to pure energy before gathering into the core of the mysterious creature. Just then, a vision came to Shulk.

"What...?"

In the vision, he saw himself and all his allies being vaporized by beams of light. He turned around and tried to warn them all, but the words couldn't come out.

He knew, deep down, that it was futile.

A black hole seemed to materialize where the creature once was, and then... came the beginning of the end. Beams of prismatic light shot at everyone. Link was the first to try to fend them off, slashing at them with his Master Sword and blocking one with his Hylian Shield, before another one engulfed and vaporized him. Samus didn't fare any better. Overcome by despair, Shulk just stood there and didn't fight back as another beam wiped him out.

In an attempt to divert the beams, Zelda tried to use Nayru's Love and Mewtwo attempted Confusion, but neither worked and the two were vaporized. Meanwhile, on the ground, Pikachu and Sonic were fleeing from the beams. Sonic reached out to Pikachu only to see it vaporized, and soon, Sonic himself faced the same fate.

Bayonetta tried to dodge the light beams using Bat Within, but that only got her so far before she, too, was engulfed by the light. Red commanded Squirtle, Ivysaur and Charizard to attack the beams with Triple Finish, and Bowser breathed fire at them, but as expected, the light claimed them as well.

It was becoming clear this situation was hopeless to everyone pretty quickly. Snake only hid in a cardboard box, resigned to his fate after seeing his girlfriend vaporized before his eyes, joining her soon after. The Inklings, holding on feebly to hope, splatted some ink on the ground and tried to hide in the puddles in squid form, but that proved useless.

Lucina... Captain Falcon thought in the midst of the chaos, frantically looking around as he saw his comrades vanish one by one. *I have to find her... we have to escape together!*

Meanwhile, a distance away, Lucina was running toward the light, hoping to try to save whomever she could, when her parents, Chrom and Robyn, embraced her in an attempt to shield her.

"Mother! Father! What are you two doing?!” Desperately trying to break free, she reached out her left arm as she cried, "I have to...!"

Seeing Lucina a distance off, Captain Falcon dashed to his Blue Falcon and leapt into the open cockpit in the hopes of driving to Lucina and getting her to hop in and escape with him, but before he could land, the beam of light vaporized both him and his vehicle. The last thing he saw was Lucina's shocked, heartbroken face before... nothingness.

"Captaiiiiiin-!” Lucina cried before another beam of light swallowed her and her parents.

After that, nearly everyone else followed. Lucario... Greninja... Palutena... Falco... Pit... Dark Pit...
Rosalina... Diddy Kong... Duck Hunt... Ryu... Cloud... everyone, even the Assisting Fighters and the visiting non-Smashers who still remained in Smash City like Pigma Dengar, Kazuhira Miller, Rex, Spring Man, Yuri Kozukata, Dunban, all of them were gone. Even some potential fighters who weren't currently at Smash City but were reached out to by someone there were vaporized, as well as people from the Smashers' own worlds that weren't reached out to. Bandana Waddle Dee... Fiora... Elma... Shantae... Black Shadow... the Chorus Kids... Rayman... and more...

The only one who had managed to escape intact was Kirby, who rode his Warp Star at a fast enough velocity to completely warp out of the danger zone, and crash landed onto the cliffs, where the world before him appeared to have changed. A new, lifeless world, full of Spirits... and the allies he lost who were sealed away, that he had to try to save.

Nobody was there... except Kirby.

"Ugh..."

As Captain Falcon came to his senses, the first thing he noticed was a droning, "angelic" yet ominous chorus-like sound filling his ears. He felt weightless, as if he were floating in water or even the zero gravity of outer space.

What the hell just happened...? He thought as he began to muster the energy to open his eyes. The Master Hands... and that creature... there were beams of light... I saw everyone vaporized by it. Including... me. I...shouldn't even be alive...

Just then, he remembered Lucina's panicked face as the last thing he saw before he was vaporized.

"Lucina-!" He cried as his eyes flew open, and could not believe what he saw.

"What in the shit...?!"

Surrounding him, as if a bubble, were clouds of pearl-like light, shining in various light colors, as the prismatic wings from the creature he saw earlier circled around the clouds. It was beautiful, but also deceptive, empty, oppressive.

"Where the hell am I?" He looked around frantically and saw he seemed to be the only one in this bubble of light.

"Am I...the only one here...?" He asked himself, feeling anxiety creeping up on him. Taking a deep breath, he calmed himself down. "No... I should at least... try to call for help. See if anyone else can hear me."

At the top of his lungs, he began to call for whomever came to his mind.

"Snaaaaaake...!"

His voice echoed into the light-filled nothingness. Even so, he didn't give up just yet.

"Samus...! Shulk...! Cloud...! Bayonetta...!"

Is she okay, at least...? He then immediately called out for the woman he loved.

"Lucinaaaaaaaaaaa...!"

But nobody answered him.
"No..." He murmured, curling into a fetal position as his voice started to crack. He could feel an emptiness in his heart and loneliness weigh heavy on his soul. "I'm... all alone...? Is everyone else... gone...?"

Did I... lose her...? I was careless... I tried to protect her, and... now I'll... probably never see her again... This is exactly what I hoped to avoid...

He closed his eyes and began to weep. "What kind of guardian... what kind of lover... am I, to let you slip through my fingers like this...?" His chest heaved as he held his head close to his knees and sobbed.

"Lucina... please... forgive me..."

Just then, as he opened his eyes, he saw an image surface through the clouds of iridescent light. "Huh...what is that...?"

Floating as close as he could, he saw what looked like... himself. He was standing upright, his arms bound to his torso by glowing chains, the lights on his visor off, as the same metallic wings, one golden and one light blue, seemed to surround his body. "Is that...my actual body? Then... am I seeing things through my conscious, which is sealed away in this dimension of light...?"

Just then, the lights on his visor turned on, but instead of their usual white, they were a menacing red. "W-what the hell?!"

Captain Falcon's body, which seemed to be under the control of that mysterious creature, then sprang to life under its control, as a light blue aura surrounded him and he pushed his arms outward, breaking the chains on his torso.

"That... thing is controlling me? The bastard..."

As the corporeal Captain Falcon stepped off the platform he was standing on, the scenery seemed to change in a flash of light. Particles of light floated upward, changing the indiscernible landscape to a platform floating around Port Town Aero Dive. Just then, the real Captain Falcon, the one who was observing everything from the light dimension he was in, heard a familiar voice break the silence.

"Galeem!" Solid Snake grunted. "Let go of my friend right now, you asshole!"

"Snake...!" Falcon gasped, his heart filling with hope. Perhaps, everyone else was alive and in the same situation as him. Maybe even Lucina, too. Just then, the Captain recalled the name Snake called the being controlling his real body. "Galeem...?" He pondered. "Is that... the name of the creature we saw...?"

"So you must be Solid Snake," were the words that came out of Captain Falcon's lips, but the voice was not his own. "How did you break free from my control?"

"Galeem controlled Snake too...?" The real Captain thought.

"Kirby saved me," Snake answered Galeem, who was controlling Captain Falcon. "He was the only survivor of the first wave, and he managed to save so many of us so far. Mario, Pikachu, Mega Man, Link, Little Mac, Fox, Lucas, the Villagers, Peach... And we won't give up until everyone's been saved and we can finally go home to Smash City."

"Kirby...survived?" Falcon questioned. "Is that why... we all didn't just cease to exist when we were vaporized?"
"Ah, I see I indeed missed one," Galeem spoke through Captain Falcon. "If I had only captured him, I would erase all of you and shape the world in my perfect image... but it is no matter to me right now. I will not let any of you ruin the progress I have made in shaping the world to my will. Just try to save your friend...!"

"Snake...!" The real Captain Falcon tried to call out to Snake from the dimension of light he was in, to no avail. "Can you hear me?!

Snake did not seem to hear the real Falcon, however. He only got into a fighting stance as he declared, "Oh, I will, Galeem. I'll do anything to free him, and everyone, from your scummy mind controlling grasp...!" He then ran toward the controlled Captain Falcon, who also rushed in for the attack.

"Galeem...!" Captain Falcon shouted angrily, hoping for his words to somehow reach Galeem. "Don't you dare make me hurt him!"

But nobody replied. The Captain, the real one, could only watch in horror as his body, which was controlled by Galeem, hit Snake with a Falcon Punch.

"Ugh..." Snake grunted as he fell to the ground. "So, Galeem... you're not pulling any punches, are ya?..." Looking at the Captain Falcon standing before him square in the eyes, he declared, "Cap, can you hear me? I promise I'll get you out of there, buddy... If you'll pardon the cliché, I'd sooner die than hurt someone who's been like a brother to me all this time..."

"Snake..." The real Falcon whispered, starting to tremble. Gritting his teeth and clenching his fists, he thought, He's right. I don't want to hurt him either... and I won't let it happen!

"Do you hear me, Galeem?" Captain Falcon, the real one whose consciousness was sealed away in the bubble of light, yelled. "You're not gonna use me to hurt my friends any longer...!" He began to punch at the wall of iridescent clouds when the prismatic wings closed in on him and encircled him.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me...!" Gathering energy in his fist, he shouted, "FALCON PUUUUNCH!" and punched the prismatic wings, which shattered upon impact. As this was happening, Snake had grabbed Captain Falcon's body from behind as Galeem, controlling the Captain, tried to make his body squirm out of Snake's grasp.

"Unhand me, fool...!" Galeem berated Snake through Captain Falcon's lips as they made their puppet struggle in Snake's grip.

"Hey, Cap..." Snake strained, trying to keep Falcon's body still. "If you're in there, now would be a good time to give me a sign...!"

"I'm here, Snake...!" The real Captain Falcon called out as he drifted to the image in the clouds. Once he managed to touch it, he could see everything clearly, and feel Snake gripping him.

"S...Snake...?" He grunted in his own voice. He could still feel a lingering remnant of Galeem's control gripping him, but in this moment, he had enough mental fortitude to resist.

"I'm glad..." Snake slowly released Captain Falcon from his grasp. In an attempt to keep Galeem at bay, Falcon slowly turned to Snake as Snake backed away a bit, remaining perfectly still afterwards. It was more like he had tried to will his body to stay still, as Galeem could seize control again at any moment.

"Snake... you're alive...? And this... Galeem is controlling me?" Falcon slowly moved his head...
around. "Where is everyone? Where are we...?"

"Apparently, when Galeem vaporized everyone but Kirby, they recreated the world to their liking. We've been dropped in a dimension that's...clearly not Smash City."

"We're...far from home...?" Looking down, he asked timidly as his voice began to crack, "Where is Lucina...?"

"I...I don't know..." Snake answered him solemnly. "She might be close by, though."

"If I lost her... I..." Tears began to stream down his face as he lamented, "If anything happened to her...if she's not here... I..."

"I'm sure she's alright," Snake consoled him. "You want to save her, don't you? Come with us."

"Snake..." he wept, trembling, as he collapsed to his knees. The gratitude that was overcoming his heart was quickly weakening Galeem's control over him.

"I know you must have been scared and alone in there," Snake said, crouching down next to the Captain and placing his right hand on Falcon's left shoulder. "But you're not alone anymore... you're safe now..."

"Snake... I..." The aura of light around Captain Falcon dissipated and the lights on his visor returned to their original white hue, signaling his breaking free from Galeem's control over him.

"I know you must have been scared and alone in there," Snake said, crouching down next to the Captain and placing his right hand on Falcon's left shoulder. "But you're not alone anymore... you're safe now..."
"Yeah... Galeem even brought that thing here?"

"Yeah," Snake said. "From what Mario tells me, Bowser transformed into Giga Bowser when he
tried to save him, and defeating Giga Bowser weakened some of the barrier. It looks like we may
only need to defeat one more such enemy before we can defeat Galeem and go home."

"I see..." Captain Falcon replied. "Only thing is, we don't know where it is... and we should at least
try to find everyone else first..."

"Yeah." Standing up, Snake reached out his hand to his friend. "Can you stand?"

"I think so..." Taking Snake's hand, Captain Falcon slowly stood. Thinking for a moment, he then
said, "...We should try to find Shulk."

"Shulk?" Snake questioned. "What for?"

"Remember what Cloud said before we left New Los Angeles?" Falcon asked Snake. "He said that
Shulk, Palutena, Robin and himself were investigating something about Galeem and the Hands... if
we can find any of them, we could, if you'd pardon the pun, shed more light on this matter. They
have to know something about why this is all happening."

"Fair point..." Holding his right hand to his chin, Snake wondered, "Why Shulk specifically,
though?"

"I don't know why..." Falcon began, "But... I have a feeling he's not far. Plus, with his visions, he
can help us find everyone faster." Looking to the side pensively, he then said, "Maybe even find
Lucina..."

"I see," Snake replied. "Mario, Link and Lucas have been searching the upscale town area for
Spirits, and some supplies we can use."

"Supplies...?"

"We don't know how long we'll be here, and at the very least, I'll say Galeem is merciful enough
that they made it possible for us to survive. We're searching for materials like first aid supplies,
food, medicine, firewood, anything necessary for setting up camp whenever we need to rest... that
kind of thing."

"Makes sense," Falcon answered him. "It's always good to be prepared."

"Yeah," Snake agreed. "Mario said to meet him and the others by the bridge over there once they
finished searching the city." He pointed in the direction of the bridge. "Follow me."

"Alright."

...

When they got there, they ran into Mario, Link, and Lucas, along with Simon, Pit, the Inklings, and
Marth.

"Greetings, Snake," Simon greeted Snake. "It is good to see you well."

"And you, Belmont," Snake greeted back. "You managed to get any supplies?"

"Indeed," Simon confirmed. "Mario split some of the supplies he found with Lucas, Marth and
myself."
"Snake brought you up to speed, right, Captain?" Pit asked Falcon.

"Yeah, he did," Captain Falcon confirmed. "I guess you guys are able to cover more ground when you split up."

"Naturally," Marth concluded. "If you have any more ideas to find everyone faster, however, I'm all ears."

"As a matter of fact, I do," The Captain answered Marth. "We should try to find Shulk. His visions can help us find everyone faster, as well as where to find that last enemy to break Galeem's barrier."

"Sound plan," Simon approved of the idea. "Lead the way, Captain."

As the group crossed the bridge, they came to a crossroads: the north path leading to a mountain range filled with train tracks; the east path leading to an alien-looking teleportation-based maze; and the south path leading to a beach area that wound around the aforementioned maze.

"So...what now?" Simon inquired.

"Hmm... we should definitely split up," Snake suggested. "But first... I want to do some reconnaissance of the lower path first. Just wait here." Motioning to the male Inkling, he told him, "Come with me, kid."

"Ngyes!" The Inkling boy cried happily as he and Snake ran down to the beach. Within a minute, they returned, with the Inkling boy looking dismayed.

"Blaugh..." The Inkling boy cringed.

"So..." Snake began to report his findings, "Looks like the south route has a fork too, but of the two branching paths, one of them is through the water and it seems to lead to an island in the distance. Little Inky here apparently doesn't like that." The Inkling boy briefly glared at Snake over the nickname he gave him. "And no way in hell can any of us, barring the Inklings, swim that far, so we'd need a Spirit to help us cross. Any ideas?"

"Sheik has Lapras's Spirit, but she's over in the icy mountain area where, last we checked, she was going to save the Ice Climbers," Pit explained.

"I'll go get her," Link volunteered. "Meet me back here within an hour or so."

"Okay," Snake said. After Link ran off to find Sheik, Snake then asked, "Have we decided which teams will take which path at least?"

"I suppose Pit and I will explore the mountains up north," Simon offered.

"Sounds good to me!" Pit agreed jovially.

"In that-a case, I volunteer that me, Lucas, and the Inkling boy take-a the south route," Mario stated. Turning to the Inkling boy, he continued, "And don't-a worry, little one, we won't go anywhere near the water, okay?" The Inkling boy and Lucas nodded in agreement.

"Guess that leaves me, Captain Falcon, Marth, and the Inkling girl on the east route," Snake concluded.

"Sounds fine," The Captain agreed.
"Woomy!" The Inkling girl stated her approval.

"Of course," Marth said.

"Okay then," Mario announced. "Let's-a go!"

The three groups then went their separate ways, promising to meet back within an hour as per Link's request. Simon and Pit stuck to the north path, which seemed to mostly consist of Spirits. As Mario's team headed south, Lucas requested to temporarily split from the team to enter a warp pipe nearby, saying he had a feeling his friend Ness was on the other end of the pipe. Mario and the Inkling boy obliged. As for the remaining team of Snake, Captain Falcon, Marth, and the Inkling girl, they made their way through the alien maze, rescuing Mr. Game and Watch and various Spirits in the process. Once they made it out of the maze, they saw Mario, the Inkling boy, and the newly-rescued Red and Leaf and their Pokemon on the other side of some impassable rocks blocking either end of the path.

"You guys head back to the bridge and wait for Link and Sheik there," Snake instructed Mario's crew. "Where's Lucas?"

"He said he felt Ness's presence on the other end of a nearby warp pipe," Mario explained. "You know how it is with these-a PSI-powered kids. He should-a be back soon."

"Alright," Snake said. "Wait for him and whomever he returns with there, and then wait at the rendezvous point." After Mario and his crew ran off, Snake then noticed yet another fork in the road: one path leading to a portal containing a pocket dimension much like the ones Peach, Bowser, and Snake himself were rescued from; and the other leading up a waterfall.

"Damn, Galeem sure has a fetish for forks in the road," Snake sassed. "There is a chance, though, that that pocket dimension might have the key to breaking Galeem's barrier."

"Hmm..." Looking around, Captain Falcon looked up the waterfall and, using his visor's built in camera, tried to zoom in to the top. "I...I think I see Shulk up there..."

"Really?" Snake questioned. "Guess your intuition wasn't far off. I'm guessing you wanna free him, then."

"I'll go with you, too," Marth offered. "Shulk only wanted to help when Galeem attacked, and he must be upset over not being able to do anything... I'll help you reason with him."

"Well then, I guess I'll go with the Inkling girl and Mr. Game and Watch into that pocket dimension, just in case something's there," Snake asserted. "Meet me here once you save Shulk."

"Got it," Marth agreed.

...  

Once Marth and Captain Falcon finished scaling the path up the waterfall, freeing more Spirits from Galeem's control along the way, they saw Shulk standing before them, breaking free from his chains, his eyes turning red and the familiar aquamarine aura surrounding him; a mark of Galeem's control.

"Get ready," Marth advised the Captain.

"Don't have to tell me twice," Falcon replied as the familiar particles of light transformed the scene before them to Gaur Plain.
"So," Galeem spoke through Shulk, "I see what you two are trying to do. You want to make use of this young man's visions to find your friends and gain an advantage over me, do you not...?"

"Make use of'? That's cold, Galeem," Captain Falcon dissed the deity. "I guess an all-consuming god like you has never known what it's like to have friends or loved ones."

"Friends? Love?" Galeem made Shulk say in their voice instead of his own. "Those things are transient. My vision is eternal."

"Enough games. Where is Lucina?!" Falcon's patience was running thin. "Answer me!"

"Captain, please..." Marth tried to dissuade the Captain.

"I am afraid I do not know," Galeem answered their former puppet. "The world I created is vast. She could be anywhere, and this boy alone may not be enough to help you find her."

"You liar...!" Falcon lunged at the Galeem-controlled Shulk before Marth grabbed his arm. Turning around, he saw Marth solemnly shake his head and then let go of the Captain's arm, at which point the Captain grunted and gritted his teeth.

"Besides, saving this boy will prove to be harder than anyone thus far," Galeem stated as they made Shulk hold his right hand to his chin matter-of-factly, his facial expression remaining stoic all the while. "You remember what it was like to witness me controlling your bodies, and your consciousnesses struggled to break through? You both had a drive, a reason to want to be free."

"What are you implying, Galeem...?" Marth asked apprehensively.

"I can feel it..." Galeem proclaimed, making Shulk raise his arms to the sky. "The regret... the raw sorrow plaguing this boy when he saw his visions were useless and he could not change the future. I know the stories of everyone I've captured... and I know this boy has only known such intense despair one other time before... that time he thought he lost his sweetheart and his visions couldn't save her either... what was her name? Ah, right... I believe it was Fiora. I bet he doesn't know I have her too, somewhere."

"Guh-!" Captain Falcon gasped. He remembered Shulk's story about Fiora, how happy he was to see her alive again, and how the two became virtually inseparable. "You're keeping her from him too?! Galeem, you monster..."

"I'm flattered," Galeem mocked the Captain, making Shulk cross his arms and grin in a smug manner. "But my point is: this boy right here... he simply does not want to come out. He feels he is too much of a burden to you all."

"That's not true...!" Marth argued. Making eye contact with Shulk, he called out to him, "Can you hear me, Shulk?! Everyone's alive! We need you!"

"Marth, don't..." Falcon began, before seeing the impossible happen. Shulk's voice suddenly shifted back to his own instead of Galeem's, his facial expression hollow and devoid of all hope.

"Ugh... Captain? Marth?" Shulk weakly asked.

"Come with us, Shulk," Marth tried to convince the Hom. "Everyone's okay. We just need you to help us find everyone else and go home..."

Shulk remained silent for a moment, then monotonously asked, "Why...?"
"What...?" Marth could not believe what he heard.

"When I had my visions... I tried to warn you all, but... I knew... deep down, that there was no way to win..." Shulk let his gaze sink to the ground, his bangs hiding his eyes. "The words... they just wouldn't come out. I'm the reason we're all in this mess."

"Shulk..." Captain Falcon murmured solemnly.

"Please, guys... I'm useless. These visions were never a blessing, only a curse." Turning to the side as he still looked down, he continued, "Just leave me be... There is no way we can win."

"Shulk, please!" Marth tried to reason with Shulk. "That's not true! We need you!"

Unfortunately, Galeem once again seized control as Shulk's voice changed to Galeem's and they made him lift his gaze to meet his friends'. "You heard the boy. Leave him alone. Has he not disappointed you enough?"

"That's where you're wrong, Galeem," Falcon challenged the deity. "He never disappointed us. He's our friend, and we're not leaving him!"

"You really think you can still reach out to him?" Galeem boasted as they made Shulk draw his Monado. "Go ahead and try...!" Galeem then made Shulk dash at Captain Falcon and Marth. The two dodged Shulk's attack narrowly, before Marth called out to the real Shulk, "Listen to me, Shulk! There was a survivor of Galeem's initial attack! It was Kirby!"

Shulk lunged at Marth again, a tense expression on his face, as Marth parried the blow with his Falchion and continued, "It's thanks to Kirby we're all still alive, and if we can get everyone together again, we can get rid of Galeem and go home!"

Deciding to humor them, Galeem temporarily allowed Shulk's conscience to surface. "But... can we even beat Galeem...?" Shulk asked in his real voice, sounding hopeless still. "Kirby was only lucky he survived..."

"And he saved so many of us so far," Captain Falcon tried to reason with Shulk. "And with you, we can save even more. We need you, Shulk... and so does Fiora."

"F...Fiora...?" Shulk stammered. "She's...here...?"

"Somewhere in this vast new world, yes," Falcon confirmed. "We need you to bring everyone home...even her."

"You aren't useless," Marth tried to encourage Shulk. "The outcome wasn't your fault... and there's still a chance if we band together."

"Marth... Captain... I..." Shulk began to tremble. Hope began to well up in Marth and the Captain, thinking they finally broke through. Galeem, however, sensed they were losing control of their puppet and immediately resumed control.

"Stop it!" Galeem raged, making Shulk's teeth grit in anger. "Why must you keep trying to find ways to win a battle you clearly have no hope of doing so?!"

"Because..." Marth began, "The future can always be changed! Right, Shulk...?"

"He's right, Shulk," Captain Falcon tried to encourage Shulk. "And you... can help us change that future."
"Nnn..." Shulk's consciousness broke through, this time of his own will. His eyes began to well up with tears as the aura of light surrounding him vanished and his eyes returned to their usual blue color. As the scenery reverted to the top of the waterfall Marth and the Captain found him on, Shulk looked down and wept, tears raining from his eyes.

"I'm sorry...guys..." He sobbed. Walking over to him, Marth tenderly placed his right hand on Shulk's shoulder to comfort him. "It's okay," Marth reassured him. "You're free now... and soon, everyone will be too."

"Thanks, guys..." Shulk wiped away his tears and then asked, "Where to now?"

"Follow me," Captain Falcon told him. "You okay to walk?"

"I believe so..."

The three headed down the waterfall path to just outside the portal Snake, Mr. Game & Watch and the Inkling girl entered earlier. Within seconds, they emerged, having just rescued Diddy Kong.

"Excellent, we've saved another one of our own," Marth said.

"Yeah," Snake told Marth. "Unfortunately, we didn't find any guardian to fight in there. Guess we gotta keep looking." Noticing Shulk standing with Captain Falcon and Marth, he remarked, "I see you've saved Shulk, too."

"Hey there, Snake," Shulk greeted Snake. "I know... I didn't really do much to prevent this situation we're in... in fact I didn't do anything at all..."

"It's okay, kid," Snake reassured the Hom. "What matters is what you can do now to help us."

"O-of course," Shulk nodded humbly.

"Would you... happen to know where Samus is?" Snake asked him. "We've still got fifteen minutes to spare before we meet up with Link and Sheik back at the bridge."

"Let me see..." Taking a deep breath and focusing, Shulk's eyes then started to glow blue. After a few seconds, he pointed in the direction of the path leading to the waterfall and said, "When you reach the waterfall, there should be some train tracks on the opposite path. Based on my vision, Simon and Pit have hit some switches that will take the train where you need to go. Once you're in the mountain area, head northeast through the volcano area and you should find her."

"Thanks, Shulk," Snake thanked Shulk before running off.

"Hey, Snake!" Captain Falcon called out to his friend. "Be careful, yeah?"

Snake wordlessly gave the Captain a thumbs up and a confident grin before continuing on his way. Once Snake left, the Captain then asked Shulk, "What about... Lucina? Can you find her? What about Fiora...?"

"I'll try..." Shulk focused once again, but no visions came to him. "I'm not seeing anything..."

"I...see..." The Captain looked down solemnly.

"It's okay," Shulk said, trying to console Falcon. "I'm sure they're somewhere deeper in this vast world, like Galeem said..."

"Yeah...probably." Turning to the others, the Captain told them, "Let's head back and wait for
Simon's team, Link and Sheik."

...  

When Captain Falcon and the others arrived at the bridge, they were reunited with Mario, the Inkling Boy, Red, Leaf, and their Pokemon; Lucas, and two Smashers Lucas managed to rescue: Ness and King Dedede. Within a few seconds, Simon, Pit and Snake returned, with a newly rescued Samus in tow. King Dedede also came with the Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee, a fighter from Kirby's world who was interviewed by Robin and Zelda.

"So we just saved Ness, King Dedede, and Samus too," Falcon commented. "We're making good progress." He then looked to the side in a melancholy manner.

Lucina... He thought. Please, give me a sign... where are you...?

"Captain..." Shulk tried to reach out to Falcon. "I promise, we'll save Lucina soon..."

"Thanks, Shulk." Within a minute, Link returned with Sheik, the Ice Climbers, and Fox's comrade, Falco Lombardi.

"And Falco too, it seems," Snake remarked.

"Alright, I'm here if you guys need a ride to the island south of here," Sheik said. "But first... I imagine you all are pretty tired. Perhaps we should rest?"

"Sounds-a good," Mario agreed. "I'm a bit-a hungry too."

"Same here," Link said. "Let's set up camp for now."

...  

Heading down close to the beach, the combined team of Smashers set up camp for a few minutes to eat and rest. After taking a sip from a bottle of milk, Samus commented as she sat on the sand, "The sound of the ocean waves here is really soothing."

"Yeah," Snake agreed, wrapping an arm around his girlfriend as he sat next to her. "But...this beauty is deceptive. It's not real..."

"I know..." Samus looked down.

"But don't worry. We'll make it out of here..."

Taking a bite of the tempura shrimp Mario found when searching for supplies, Captain Falcon looked on at Snake and Samus, happy that they were reunited, but feeling a bittersweet ache in his heart, wishing Lucina were with him at that moment. He began to feel desperate without any sign of her anywhere.

It's not fair... Mario has Peach again, Snake is back with Samus, but... you're not here... I miss you so much... He took in a deep breath to calm himself. Take it easy, Captain Falcon. Don't get desperate... that's what Galeem wants...

"Something wrong, Captain?" Shulk asked him as he sat next to the Captain on the same towel laid out on the ground, taking a bite of his rice ball.

"Just... wondering how this world and everything in it is able to exist the way it does." Looking up, he continued, "And... how this all started in the first place... Can I ask you something?"
"Shoot," Shulk replied.

"As we were leaving New Los Angeles, Cloud was telling us that Bayonetta's suspicion of something being amiss with the Hands was correct," Falcon began. "Cloud then explained that he, you, Robin and Palutena were accessing the information archives... mind filling me in on all that happened?"

"Ah," Shulk said. "So basically, Lucina told Robin that she saw the creature we later came to identify as Galeem in her dreams, and paired with Bayonetta's testimony of the Hands' bizarre behavior as of late, we decided to enter the information archives section of the Smash City Library, which required top secret access. Luckily, Lady Palutena had such access. We first tried searching in the main database computer for anything involving prismatic wings, but there was nothing. We then tried searching for Master Hand and Crazy Hand, but... their information pages had been replaced with...gibberish."

"Creepy..." The Captain shuddered. "What then?"

"Even though she wasn't a Smasher at that time, Palutena knew of what happened during the Subspace Incident in the third tournament," Shulk continued. "So... she suggested we look for Tabuu, the instigator of that incident. We got an 'ACCESS DENIED' message, and we were soon locked out of the database. That's when... things got crazy. A bunch of shadow clones of the Smashers materialized and started attacking us, and we had to flee."

"Go on..."

"When we escaped the Library, the clones were everywhere, attacking everyone. The Smashers took on the clones while everyone else fled to safety. As for us, we tried to find the Hands, and sure enough, they were at the town square where they revealed the Inklings a few months ago. That's when... the weirdest thing happened. The Hands just... exploded and became a shadowy mass that could change shape at will. After we defeated the mass, it left behind a strange orb, which we assumed was its core. We wasted no time in destroying it, but when we did, it showed one last image of the cliffs... and the rest is history."

"You still don't know why this is all happening, then?" The Captain deduced.

"Unfortunately," Shulk said. "I suppose we'll learn more as we go on, though. All we know so far, is that Galeem wants to reshape the universe to their will, but we don't know why. Maybe they'll let something slip when we free more of our friends."

"I guess so..."

Once everyone had ate and rested enough, Sheik announced, "Okay, so are we ready to proceed?"

"Yeah," Snake said. "What's the plan?"

"Since I have Lapras, up to two of you can come with me to the island." Turning to Shulk, Sheik asked him, "Do you know if the enemy we need to defeat to gain access to Galeem is there?"

Focusing, Shulk managed to get another vision. Once it was done, he answered her, "As a matter of fact, it is. It's a dragon called Rathalos, and Toon Link and the Mii Gunner are there on that island too."

"I see," Sheik replied.

"Can I come with you, though?" Shulk volunteered. "I also saw the Spirit of Shantae in my vision.
She's someone I interviewed a while ago."

"Very well," Sheik obliged. "Anyone else?"

The two Inklings, who were naturally hydrophobic, promptly shook their heads and made distressed noises. Just then, Falco said, "I guess you can count me in, too. Even though I, personally, prefer the air."

"Then it's settled," Sheik declared. "Everyone else, try to get the others to meet up at the ribbon area close to where we found Peach and Bowser."

"I know-a the way," Mario told the others. "Follow me."

Within thirty minutes, Captain Falcon and the others met up with the other Smashers that were rescued thus far: Lucario, Dr. Mario, Pikachu, Pichu, the Mii Swordfighter, Jigglypuff, Isabelle, Duck Hunt, Little Mac, Donkey Kong, Mega Man, Bowser, Peach, Yoshi, the Wii Fit Trainers, the Villagers, Pac-Man, Fox, Olimar, Alph, and Ryu. And, of course, the one who made saving everyone possible in the first place: Kirby. Several Spirits accompanied them, including the Spirits of four Assisting Fighters, Spring Man, Ashley, Riki, and Yuri Kozukata; and two potential fighters who were also interviewed, Rayman and the Chorus Kids; among many others.

"Kirby!" Ness called out to Kirby.

"Poyo!" Kirby happily turned around and ran to Ness, knocking him to the ground in a hug.

"Hahaha, good to see you too," Ness chuckled, patting his small pink friend. "Oh, we managed to find one of your friends as a Spirit, too." The Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee peered out from behind Ness and waved to Kirby happily.

"Hiii!" Kirby waved back with an innocent smile.

"Heh... how cute," Samus remarked with an adoring smile. "I've heard of Bandana Waddle Dee, or as he sometimes likes to be called, Bandee. He has potential as a fighter, and I'd like to see him join Smash City someday."

"Same here," Snake agreed with his lover. "And everyone else who ended up here as a Spirit... soon, we can fight Galeem, and these Spirits can return to their bodies... they can't stay like this forever. They deserve a chance to be free just as much as we do."

"True..."

Everyone else looked around calmly, except for Captain Falcon, who looked up to the cloudy patch of peach-colored sky above everyone, where Galeem floated in the air, still ensconced in the safety of their barrier.

Galeem... He thought with a scowl, clenching his right fist. You smug bastard... once Sheik and the others defeat Rathalos, that barrier is going down. Then, you'd best believe your ass I'm coming for you. I won't stop until you return Lucina to me...

"Captain...?" Shulk timidly asked the Captain as he approached.

"Shulk..." The Captain began, trying to keep his anger at Galeem in check. "You're back already?"
"Yeah," Shulk confirmed. "Once I freed Shantae's Spirit, there was a warp pipe leading back to the main continent. I decided to take it while Sheik, the Mii Gunner, and Falco went into the pocket dimension there. They're probably saving Toon Link right now."

"Heeeey!" A translucent young half-genie girl with long purple hair bound back in a ponytail greeted. "Name's Shantae. It's great to meet everybody!"

"Same here," The Captain told the Spirit of Shantae with a reassuring smile. "I hope to see you join us someday, Miss Shantae." Turning to Shulk, he then pointed at the sky with a serious expression and said, "Look up there."

Shulk did as the Captain commanded, and saw two staircases of light in the sky on either side of Galeem. "I... know the way to one of those staircases. It's along the path where Lucas saved Ness and King Dedede, in the warp pipe close to the beach past the bridge."

"Good," Falcon said. "I was thinking we get a head start and head on over. Once Rathalos dies, I wanna make a beeline for that dickwad Galeem..."

"Are you sure...?" Shulk asked reluctantly.

"Very," the Captain confirmed, his voice brimming with conviction. "Please... don't try to stop me."

"...I won't," Shulk reassured him. "But...what about everyone else?"

"Tell them to stay here for now," The F-Zero racer instructed the wielder of the Monado. "And to wait for you to return to give further instructions. I'll go on ahead."

"I'll meet you there."

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was originally longer, but it was pushing 15K and... for the sake of pacing I'll leave it here. Only time I'll go THAT long is in the finale, probably.
So Far Away

Chapter Summary

(she's waiting for me...)

Chapter Notes

Content warning for this chapter: blood, strong language, WoL Spoilers (still), and EVEN MORE FEELS.

Also, forgot to mention last time, I know Fiora (Hom form) has a Spirit in the Light Realm, and Mecha-Fiora (the form I've been using this whole fic)'s Spirit is in the Dark Realm. I'll just stick to Mecha-Fiora being the only form of Fiora in this fic, so they save her in the Dark Realm, hopefully next chapter.

As for Rex, he's there too. I added a little detail in chapter 12 to sort of? introduce him for this fic, at least in passing. I know he's just a Mii Costume atm and probably won't become more than that, but I didn't wanna leave him out.

chapter namesake - So Far Away by Martin Garrix & David Guetta feat. Jamie Scott and Romy Dya

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 18 - So Far Away

Within a few minutes, a rumbling sounded throughout the land as Rathalos, Galeem's last guardian, fell. The barrier surrounding Galeem shattered into glassy particles of light, rendering them completely vulnerable. Standing close to the warp pipe he mentioned earlier, Captain Falcon noticed the barrier breaking.

"It's time," he murmured, his voice brimming with contempt at the deity that separated him from the woman he loved. "The hour of reckoning has come, Galeem..." He saw Shulk running to him in the distance. "You ready, Shulk?"

"Ready."

The two leapt into the warp pipe, depositing them in an area of pink clouds where Lucas found Ness. Knowing the way to the staircase from a vision, Shulk led the Captain through the meandering path until they reached the staircase of light to the right of Galeem. They faced no resistance, as Lucas, Ness, and King Dedede had freed all the Spirits in that area. Just as Shulk and the Captain approached Galeem, however, a fake Master Hand blocked their path.

"Of fucking course," Captain Falcon spat. "Galeem controls these fakes too..."
"Don't worry, Captain," Shulk volunteered. "I'll handle him. You go for Galeem."

"...Thanks, Shulk." The fake Master Hand hovered toward Shulk, ready to attack, while Captain Falcon ran to Galeem.

"Galeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeem...!" He cried belligerently, dashing toward them before leaping and shouting, "FALCON KICK!", striking them in their glowing core. The core flashed, following by the Captain hearing Galeem's voice in his head.

So... you've come to defy me, Captain Falcon. Come to destroy my perfect world of preservation...

"The hell I have...!" Falcon shouted. "Before I beat you into submission, I must ask again: where is Lucina?"

I already told you. I do not know. I only ask that you stop, before you do something you'll regret...

"Like I'd ever regret kicking your ass!"

So be it.

Galeem proceeded to attack Captain Falcon, using beams of light that were as thin as piano wires, which Falcon managed to expertly dodge. They then turned their prismatic wings into homing drills, which again, the Captain managed to avoid. Once Galeem was vulnerable, Falcon let loose on them with a flurry of punches. Galeem then warped to another area of the platform they were on, spinning their wings around in perfect circles.

"Oh, what now?" The Captain griped, before seeing something that shocked him.

Emerging from the rings was... Shulk. Or rather, a clone of him created by Galeem. His entire body was made of a bluish-white crystalline substance, with Galeem's familiar blue aura emanating from it. The clone's eyes glowed red, just as Shulk's did when he was under Galeem's control.

"Shulk...?" He stammered, stunned, as the Shulk clone rapidly approached him.

"Captain!" The real Shulk called out from afar, having already vanquished the fake Master Hand from earlier. "That's not me!" He ran to the fake Shulk and, leaping, pulled out his Monado in front of him and shouted, "BACK SLASH!" The strike knocked the fake Shulk onto the ground.

"Shulk..."

"I'll handle the clone," Shulk reassured the Captain. "Just take out Galeem, and we can put an end to all this!"

"Got it!"

You two are fools, thinking defeating me will solve anything...

"Like we give a shit!" Falcon leapt up to Galeem and struck them with his knee before continuing, "It's not like things will get any worse with you outta the picture!"

You don't know what you're dealing with...

"Stuff it, you megalomaniacal god!" He began to gather energy in his fist. "FALCON..."
"...PUUUUUUUUUUNCH!" With the Falcon Punch, Galeem collapsed into the sky below them as the fake Shulk, who was pinning the real Shulk to the ground, vanished. Getting up, Shulk headed over to the Captain and watched Galeem sink into the sky. "Looks like it's over..."

"Yeah..." Falcon looked down solemnly, fearing that he had truly let Lucina slip through his fingers and that he would never see her again, before he suddenly heard the sound of glass cracking. "Wait, what...?"

"Huh?" Both Shulk and Captain Falcon turned their gazes in the direction of the sound, and could not believe what they saw.

It looked like cracks were appearing in the sky, as if it were a mirror. Eventually, the cracked portion of the sky shattered, revealing a swarm of fake Crazy Hands that flew out of the dark hole and attacked the fake Master Hands, and another deity like Galeem, but instead of looking angelic, they looked demonic. They appeared to be a singular demonic eyeball surrounded by violet fleshy branch-like tentacles with sharp tips. There was a clear aura of darkness emanating from them. As the new deity emerged, Galeem mustered what remained of their strength to flee, with the new deity in hot pursuit after them. Shulk and Captain Falcon looked on in fear.

"Is this... Galeem's other half...?" Falcon murmured timidly. "Who are they...?"

"I don't know..." Shulk answered him, his voice tinged with apprehension. "All I can gather is... they're a deity of darkness, and they probably have the same type of capturing and world-creating power as Galeem..." Just then, his eyes suddenly glowed blue as a staircase of light formed from the south direction of the hole to the ground below where the other Smashers they saved stood.

"Another vision..." Once it was done, Falcon asked Shulk, "What did you see...?"

Letting out a sigh of relief, Shulk said, "Captain Falcon... you'll be happy to hear this. Lucina... is alive."

"She...?!") The Captain's heart began to race as happiness and hope filled his heart, his eyes overflowing with tears.

"She's there... captured by that dark deity in that realm... with a lot of the other fighters. I can sense a lot of the Spirits of our friends in there too... Dr. Stewart, Amy Rose, Rex, the Octolings, Dunban... Fiora..."

"Thank God..." Captain Falcon began to weep as his chest heaved with each breath. "I'm so...glad..."

"Captain..." Knowing the real Captain Falcon was shining through, Shulk extended his arms for a comforting embrace. "Don't be shy. It's okay to cry."

"Shulk..." The Captain embraced Shulk and wept, tears raining from his visor-obscured eyes. Shulk tenderly embraced him back.

"It's okay... I'm happy, too. We can save everyone in earnest now..."

"Heeeeey!" Snake called out from below. "What happened? Is Galeem gone? Why's that hole there in the sky...?"

Gently breaking the embrace, which prompted Captain Falcon to wipe away his tears, Shulk called
back to Snake, "Just stay there until I return! We're going to investigate this new dark realm for a bit! We'll be back soon!"

"Okay!"

Turning to the Captain, Shulk asked him, "Well? Shall we go?"

"...Yes. Let's." Shulk and Captain Falcon then leapt into the great unknown.

... "Ugh..." Captain Falcon slowly stood and looked around. Calling it a "dark realm" was certainly apt - the skies were a dark crimson, flashing every few seconds with purple lightning. From the platform he and Shulk stood on, he saw three bridges - one leading north, one to the east, and one to the west. To the south was the same hole they entered into from the Light Realm, which led him to assume they could backtrack that way if they needed to. Walking over to Shulk, he helped the blonde Hom up. "You alright?"

"I... think so..." Shulk grunted, brushing the dirt off his clothing when he stood. "So this is the world that deity of darkness created..."

"Looks like it," Falcon stated. Hesitating for a second, he then said, "Hey... Shulk."

"Yeah?"

"I just... want to apologize."

"What for...?" Shulk was a bit confused at the Captain's sudden apology.

"I... acted rash. I let my emotions cloud my judgment. Even if it means saving Lucina and the others, we don't know what this new deity is capable of. They could be worse than Galeem..."

"Don't worry about it," Shulk comforted the Captain. "I know you wanted to save Lucina really badly, and I haven't gotten any visions after the last one that would have indicated her life was in any danger. She's still safe for the time being."

"That's good..." Falcon looked down, tenderly holding his right hand to his chest. Just then, Shulk decided to cut to the chase.

"...You're in love with her, aren't you?"

"Ah?!!" The Captain gasped, surprised that Shulk figured it out. "Yes... I am. How could you tell?"

"It's written all over your face," Shulk chuckled. "No, but really, the way you seemed so concerned for her safety... how angry you got at Galeem when we couldn't find her at first... then how you burst into tears when you found out she's alive in here... that kind of protectiveness and concern for one's safety... it's a sign of true love."

"Right..." Looking ahead, Falcon said, "It's true. Lucina and I fell in love with each other shortly before all this happened... I'm sure she's waiting for me too. She must be so lonely without me..."

"And I'm sure she would appreciate her Prince Charming coming to save her," Shulk suggested. "It's actually pretty amazing how it feels like just yesterday, you were saying you wanted to make up with her for what happened that day... and now you two are an item."

"Yeah... if this deity doesn't give me a hard time saving her." Looking away and blushing, he then
said, "D-don't tell anyone else about the fact Lucina and I are a couple, just yet."

"You have my word," Shulk promised. "I know where she is. Want me to take you to her?"

"Lead the way."

Shulk and Captain Falcon took the east bridge to an ominous-looking landscape. Following the meandering path, they suddenly ran into a fake Crazy Hand.

"Oh, come ON!" Captain Falcon objected. "I'm so sick of this bullshit!"

"Don't worry, Captain," Shulk reassured him. "I'll handle this one, too. Just keep going!"

"How will I know where to go?!" The Captain pleaded.

"Through that cloudy area, keep going until you see a path leading to an area with clock gears," Shulk explained. "Then, keep going through the clockwork labyrinth until you find her!"

"Easier said than done..." The Captain muttered.

"Don't worry!" Shulk encouraged him. "I know you can do it! Just go! Once I'm done here, I'll bring everyone from the Light Realm over here and lead them to you!"

"...Thank you, Shulk." Captain Falcon ran off, determined, as Shulk faced off against the false Crazy Hand that the deity of darkness controlled.

...

It had only been a short distance from where he left Shulk to fight the fake Crazy Hand, but Captain Falcon felt as if he had run a marathon through the winding, complex clockwork-like labyrinth. Having faced several Spirits along the way, he was starting to feel exhaustion catch up to him. In the distance, he saw a humanoid figure surrounded by purple and red branch-like tendrils. He couldn't make out who they were, but he knew deep down it had to be Lucina. Shulk's visions never lied.

"Hold on, sweetheart," he murmured. "I'll be there soon..." Just then, a dark mist enveloped him and he found himself on Norfair, a metal Ridley standing before him.

"Another Spirit?!!" He cried out of frustration, trying to ignore the blistering heat of his surroundings. "God dammit, just get out of my way! She's waiting for me and I won't let anything separate me from her any longer...!" Leaping to the Spirit-possessed Metal Ridley, he shouted, "FALCON PUUUNCH!" and punched his opponent with all his might. The puppet Ridley let out a cry as he died before the dark mist returned Captain Falcon to where he was before. The Omega Ridley Spirit joined him, but he paid it no mind, and still trudged forward until he finally saw her, breaking out of her chains.

Captain Falcon could not believe his eyes. There, standing before him, was his lover, Lucina. A crimson aura surrounded her, brimming with the energy of darkness, and her eyes glowed purple amidst a grayish-purple sclera, indicating that this new deity of darkness had control of her body.

But there was no mistaking it. She was indeed, nevertheless, alive.

"Lucina..." He murmured, before a dark mist covered them both and when it cleared, they appeared to be fighting on Arena Ferox, just like when they first met. Within seconds, Lucina, or rather, the being that was controlling her, drew her Falchion out from its sheath.
"Lucina...is that really you?" Captain Falcon asked the Lucina standing before him, his voice sounding forlorn but desperately hopeful.

"This body is merely a vessel," were the words that came out of Lucina's lips; but the voice was not her own. Her face remained stoic as the being that controlled her spoke. "You may address me as Dharkon, the Embodiment of Chaos and Darkness. If you want this woman returned to you, you'll have to take her by force."

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that," Captain Falcon answered the deity controlling Lucina's body. "When Snake saved me from Galeem's control, he did so without any such force. I know the real Lucina is in there somewhere...I know I can reach out to her."

"You truly are a fool," Dharkon spoke through Lucina as her sword was pointed at the Captain. "Why are you willing to risk your own life for this woman...?"

"Because..." Falcon looked Lucina square in the eyes, hoping his voice would reach the real Lucina. His voice was full of unwavering resolve. "Because I love her...and she loves me too. I can only imagine how lonely she must have been without me... Lucina, sweetheart, if you can hear me...I'm finally here. You don't have to worry anymore..."

"She can hear you, but unfortunately for you, she cannot answer," the deity of darkness's voice said through Lucina's lips as Lucina got into an attacking stance. "You should have chosen your last words more wisely." After saying those words, Lucina's body dashed to Captain Falcon, Falchion drawn and ready to attack. Captain Falcon only held his arms in front of him, blocking Lucina's attacks with his metal wristcuffs.

Just like he did that day, he then kicked Lucina's Falchion away, making sure not to hurt her as she stumbled back, before Dharkon made her regain her balance with almost unnatural ease.

*Are you remembering, Lucina?* The Captain thought, hoping that that would help jog the real Lucina's memory and get her consciousness to surface. *I won't stop... until I save you...*

"I do not understand," Dharkon remarked as they got Lucina to stand upright. "Why will you not fight back...?"

"You underestimate me, Dharkon," Captain Falcon answered Dharkon, who was controlling the woman he loved. "Didn't I say I would reach out to the real Lucina without hurting her?"

"Even though you risk harm to yourself?" Making Lucina look to the side with a derisive look on her face, Dharkon then said, "And you say you and this woman are in love... heh. Love is perhaps one of the most useless emotions to exist..."

"Shut up! How dare you spew that cruel shit with her face!" Falcon cursed at the deity of darkness. "You're just like that asshole Galeem!"

"Ah, of course, you did mention Galeem once controlled you," Dharkon replied in a haughty manner as they made Lucina make eye contact with him. "But you will see I am nothing like the Lord of Light. They were always so prideful but weak-willed... I am so much more than them!"

"So it's a feud between you two douchebags?" The Captain provoked Dharkon. "Like I give a crap! Leave us all out of it! Leave *her* out of it!"

"You cannot begin to comprehend why I am doing this...!" Dharkon then made Lucina lunge at her lover again, as the Captain backflipped out of the way.
"And why are you doing this?" The Captain interrogated Dharkon. "Don't tell me it's to create a 'perfect world' like Galeem or something like that..."

"Stop comparing me to them!" Enraged, Dharkon made Lucina dash at Captain Falcon once again, only for him to grab their puppet by the collar.

"And why should I...?" The Captain challenged the being controlling his lover.

"You wish to see her again, do you not?" Dharkon asked as Lucina appeared to look down for a moment.

"What are you planning..." But before Falcon could reply, he heard Lucina weakly utter, in her own voice, "C-Cap...tain...?"

"Lucina?!" He promptly let her go, causing her to lose her balance before he then wrapped his arms around her. "Is that really you? Can you hear me?"

"I... It's you..." Slowly reaching her right hand to try to caress her lover's face, Lucina murmured, her face bearing a grateful but sorrowful expression, "I'm so happy... I could cry..."

"It's gonna be okay, sweetheart," The Captain affectionately reassured her. "I'm here. I'll save you."

"You...shouldn't... have come..." Lucina managed to utter as she could feel Dharkon seizing control of her again, a worried expression creeping up on her face. "I'll just... hurt you..."

"It'll be fine, I promise..." He reached out a hand to touch his beloved's face as well. "Remember what I told you? That I would free you if a situation like this arose? You wouldn't hurt me..."

In that moment, Dharkon once again assumed control over Lucina as they made her grab his hand in a vise-like grip before taunting in their own voice, her facial expression turning stoic, "She wouldn't... but I would."

"Kh-!" Captain Falcon grunted before Dharkon commanded Lucina's body to use all of her strength to throw him over her shoulder. Feeling the pain of the impact reverberate through his entire being, Falcon could barely move, only watching as he lay on his back and Lucina, controlled by Dharkon, walked over to him.

"So this is the effect love has on humans? Reducing them to sentimental, vulnerable, weeping husks of the people they have the potential to be? Pathetic." Looking at the F-Zero racer with an expression of scorn on her face, Dharkon then commanded Lucina to step on the Captain's chest with her right foot, knocking some air out of his lungs.

"Ughhhh...!" Falcon groaned in agony.

"Love... friendship... bonds... in the world I plan to create, which is a world that will consume every other and every being will bend to my will, there will be no need for such things," Dharkon explained as they made Lucina continue to torment the Captain. "At the very least, I will say I find it amusing to torture not only you in this manner, but the woman as well. She is watching everything... it breaks her heart so to see me use her body to hurt the man she loves." A sadistic smirk crept up on Lucina's face as Dharkon then boasted, "And I will relish every moment, feeding off her despair as I wring the life from your body and she can do nothing but helplessly watch."

"Dharkon, you sadistic prick!" At that moment, the anger welling up within Captain Falcon gave
him the strength he needed to push Lucina off him and stand back up. "Galeem is a narcissistic, uncaring little dickwad, but calling you a 'monster' would be too kind...!"

"So you intend to defy me to the bitter end, then?" Dharkon asked the Captain as they made Lucina push against the ground with her hands before hitting the ground, then backflipping and standing upright.

"Do I even need to answer that?" Captain Falcon retorted. "I will not stop... until I save her..."

Chuckling sinisterly, Dharkon then announced through Lucina, "Very well. You have sealed your fate." The self-proclaimed Embodiment of Darkness then made Lucina attack the Captain without restraint. The few seconds that elapsed seemed like an eternity to him as he only knew one thing: pain.

"Auuuuugh!" He was struck, thrown, kicked, and knocked down, screaming in agony with each blow. Whenever he tried to get back up again, Dharkon, controlling Lucina, would not permit that.

"Lucina, please...!" He managed to shout as he was being continuously beaten. "Remember... our training! You can... filter Dharkon's... influence out! Focus on... my voice...!"

Lucina... he managed to think in the midst of the unbearable hell he was going through. Please... I know you can fight Dharkon's control... I know... you're in there...

Eventually, the Captain lay still on the ground. Sensing this was the time to go in for the kill, Dharkon manipulated Lucina's body to back off momentarily.

"Lu...cina..." he grunted feebly as he lay on his back, trying to stand, but unable to due to the pain paralyzing him. In that moment, Lucina leapt onto him and pointed her Falchion at his throat as Dharkon spoke through her, "Any last words...?"

His vision blurring and his breathing shallow, the Captain would normally feel the fear of death paralyzing him in a moment like this. But he felt no such emotion. Instead, he only smiled softly and reached out a hand to touch his lover's face.

"What are you...?!

"Lucina..." He began with an exhausted sigh as blood trickled from his lips. "You're... doing it already, aren't you? You're starting... to resist Dharkon's control all by yourself. I'm so... proud of you..."

"Captain...?" For a brief moment, Lucina's consciousness surfaced again, her face bearing an expression that was a mixture of fearful, sorrowful, and hopeful at the same time. "I..."

Unfortunately, Dharkon seized control once again as they cried, "Stop it...!"

"You're holding Dharkon back, Lucina. Don't stop..." He caressed her face lovingly as he continued, "Even now, you're willing your body to not attack me, despite Dharkon wanting it to be so... Just keep... holding on..."

"Silence!" Dharkon cried, making Lucina raise her Falchion with the intent to stab Captain Falcon with it, before Lucina seemed to take control again and held the sword still as she strained, "N-no...!"

"Lucina...!" Falcon mumbled, feeling hope welling up in him as he saw his protégé-turned-lover continue to resist Dharkon's influence.
"You dare defy me?!" Lucina's body stood and backed away slowly from the Captain as he slowly sat up.

"You... won't," Lucina said in her own voice. "You won't... make me... do this anymore...!"

"Stop it! Just stooooooop - !" Lucina's eyes squeezed shut as Dharkon tried to maintain control over her, and failed.

"I won't let you use me anymore...!" At that moment, Lucina's eyes flew open again, but it seemed to be her in control, for real this time. "Ngh...C-Captain...?"

"Is... that?" Slowly standing and wiping the trickling blood from his mouth as his senses stabilized, he noticed Lucina standing still a distance from him, holding her Falchion's handle to her chest in fear, a heartbroken expression on her face.

"I... you're hurt...because of me..." She trembled as she stood, her body held still by her will alone. She could feel Dharkon still having a lingering semblance of control over her, and knew they could resume control at any time, but she was doing everything in her power to resist.

"It's...okay, love. This is...nothing. I'm just so happy to know you're alive..."

"But...I'm not happy...knowing I hurt you..." Tears started to gather in her eyes as she lowered the arm holding the Falchion and let it rest at her side. "I don't know how much longer I can fight Dharkon's influence. Please, babe, I'm begging you...just leave me. Save yourself. I'll be fine..." She looked away with a wistful smile as she said, "...Nobody needs me, anyway."

"Lucina...why are you saying that...?" The Captain's face bore a look of immense concern.

"Because..." Lucina closed her eyes, her mouth forming a slight frown as she spoke. "I was there when the beams of light hit, right after I sent Morgan back to my home world. I saw everyone being vaporized and... I couldn't do anything to stop it. I just watched as my parents tried to shield me." She opened her eyes once again, looking directly at the man she fell in love with. "I was so far away from you... I kept reaching out for you after Shulk, Link and Zelda were vaporized, only to see you and the Blue Falcon disappear. In that moment, I could only think about how I failed to save you... How I once again lost someone I loved so dearly before my very eyes. And then... nothing." Looking down solemnly, a single tear slid down her face as she concluded, "Like I said... nobody needs me."

Lucina... The Captain thought. I know that, in this moment, this isn't Dharkon trying to influence your words or thoughts...these are your true feelings. I already know you so well, sweetheart. And that's why...you need to hear what I'm about to say.

"I need you, Lucina. I won't give up on you."

"Babe...?" She could feel his hand softly caressing her face, bringing back wonderful memories of their first night together, their confessions of pure, undying love for each other. She remembered how lovingly his hand would caress her face, wiping away her tears.

"Kirby saved Snake, who saved me when I was under Galeem's control. Now it's my turn to save you, my love. I'm not leaving without you. We can save the others, like your parents and your friends...don't you want to show them all that you became stronger like you promised you would...?"

"Ah..." Lucina willed her right hand to drop the Falchion, trembling, her voice starting to crack. "You're...right..."
"I... knew you were in there. I'm so glad I could see you again..." The Captain smiled, lowering his hand and drawing closer to her before wrapping his arms around her tightly in a passionate embrace.

"I...!" Lucina's eyes were overflowing with tears, but instead of sorrow, these were tears of unadulterated joy. She could feel Dharkon's control on her weaken drastically.

This feeling...it's indescribable. The joy I feel is so intense, I... I can't stop crying...

She blinked, the tears gushing from her eyes which returned to their normal blue hue among a white sclera. Such a warm emotion...I'm reminded why I'm here, and why I fell in love with him. He remembered our promise...and so did I.

She instinctively embraced him back, burying her face into his chest as she slowly closed her eyes and the dark aura dissipated around her, the setting returning to what it was before the dark mist enveloped them. At that moment, she had finally, completely broke free.

It's like... I'm coming home. With him... I am home.

She softly wept as she held him tighter, enjoying the familiar warmth of his embrace, leaning her ear to his chest and listening to his heartbeat – the one thing that reminded her this was all real - as she felt his left hand softly run its fingers through her hair while his right hand rested on the small of her back. She was finally free, and finally safe again in the arms of the man she loved so much.

He's alive. I'm alive. This is really happening. I've been reunited with him... Naga... thank you.

"Babe..." She pleaded tearfully as she opened her eyes, her voice soft and loving. "Please... don't let me go. I've yearned for this moment for so long... all alone in that dark bubble... my consciousness kept crying out for you. And now... you're finally here... I'm so happy. I wish this moment... here, just the two of us... could last forever."

"I'm so happy, too. I promise, I won't let you go." Captain Falcon gently lifted Lucina's face so her gaze met his. His voice was comforting, but brimming with a joy so great he might have started to weep, too. "All this time... I thought you were dead after those beams of light hit. I thought I was dead... When I came to, I was in this empty, oppressive bubble of light. It was so lonely... all I could worry about was if you were safe."

"Babe... that's right, you said Galeem held you prisoner."

"Yes..." He tenderly wiped away her tears. "A deity of light and a deity of dark... both wanting to destroy everything. They separated us once. I won't let us get separated again."

"You... promise?"

"Yes," Falcon answered her. "It's thanks to Kirby making it out of Galeem's first attack alive that we've been... given a second chance. If he hadn't, we'd all be dead for sure. And in many ways... I'm thankful for Kirby. We were able to live again and... find our way back home to each other." It was at this moment he couldn't hold in his true feelings any more, that he bared his sensitive side to her. A single tear streamed down his face as he uttered, his voice starting to crack, "I really was afraid I lost you... I can't imagine a life without you, sweetheart..."

"Babe!" Lucina reached out her right hand to caress his face, the face she just couldn't forget, and wiped away his tears as joyful tears rained from her own eyes and she smiled gratefully. "I can't imagine a life without you, either... But please, love, don't cry... Everything's okay now. We did... we really did find our way back to each other...!"
He instinctively held her closer to him, feeling her heartbeat against his chest. "I never doubted that we would. We've been through so much on our own, as well as together... we've suffered so much." Wiping away her tears, he said, "It's up to us now... To oppose them both, and get our happy ending...the one we deserve."

"Of course..." Lucina nodded. Leaning her face closer, slowly closing her eyes, and parting her lips for a kiss, she softly, affectionately whispered, "I love you, Captain Falcon."

"I love you too...Lucina."

Their lips met in a delicate kiss that quickly became passionate but also full of longing. They could feel their blissful sighs mingling as they kissed. Every fear, every feeling of loneliness and sorrow, simply evaporated into the dark clouds above them. All that mattered was this moment. They were alive. They had never felt so alive. They were finally together again, after so many trials and tribulations.

And neither of them wanted to let go.

After several heavenly moments, they broke the kiss and looked at each other affectionately, their minds a bit foggy from the kiss, just silently feeling indescribably happy seeing each other's faces again. Not just that, but hearing each other's voices and feeling the other's touch again. It truly was like they had just come home.

Suddenly, the Captain clutched his side in pain.

"U-ugh...!"

"Babe...?!!" Lucina immediately caught Captain Falcon before he could collapse to the ground.

"My love..." The Captain strained before covering his mouth with his left hand to cough. After an intense, hacking cough, he felt something wet on his hand and a copper-like taste in his mouth. Moving the hand away from his mouth, both he and Lucina caught a glimpse of what it was. It was blood.

"Oh gods, you're hurt...!" She gently set him down as she crouched. "You're bleeding internally, and I... I did this to you...when I was under Dharkon's control..."

"Don't...worry about it anymore..." Falcon said weakly as he grimaced. "It's over now...I'm here...I'll be fine..."

"No, you won't," Lucina answered him sternly. "You saved me. Now please, love, let me save you and stop trying to take every burden on to yourself. If I can't overwhelm myself with such burdens, then neither can you. Please..." Her eyes turned pleading at her second "Please".  

Looking at her concerned face through his slightly blurring vision, the Captain only smiled softly, feeling a sense of peace wash over him.

You're being strong, for my sake... And you're always so selfless and compassionate. It may be to a fault sometimes, but it's one of the many reasons I fell in love with you, Lucina.

Seeing the others finally catch up to them, Lucina saw Shulk and called out to him, "Shulk!"

"Lucina! You're alright..." Shulk ran to them when, just then, he noticed Captain Falcon crouching and clutching his side in pain, a small trickle of blood dripping from his lips.
"Captain! Oh no! What..." Shulk gasped, his voice sounding slightly fearful.

"Does anyone have anything that can help...?" Lucina called out, desperately.

"...I've got just the thing."

Snake walked out from the midst of the other Smashers. "Here's a Healing Field." He walked over to the newly reunited couple and set the item on the ground, generating a column of healing energy that enveloped them both in a green glow and healed their external and internal injuries.

"S-Snake..." The Captain murmured, weakly. "Thanks..."

"Please, babe, save your breath until you get better," Lucina urged her lover, softly stroking his face. "Just rest..." She sat down and gently lay him down as well, letting his head rest on her lap. Turning her gaze to Snake, she said, "Thank you, Snake."

"You could use some of it, too," Snake urged her.

"Maybe..." She looked to the side briefly. "But...he needs it more." She turned her gaze downward to see the man she loved peacefully asleep. "He went through all that suffering...just to save me. There's no greater love than that..." She smiled as she softly caressed his peaceful face.

"Heh...you two are just like Samus and I. Only, you're way more passionate over each other and devoted to each other...I must say, I'm a bit jealous."

"Heehee..."

"Oh," Snake murmured, noticing Lucina's Falchion lying close by. "Let me get that for you."

"Thank you," Lucina thanked Snake as he picked it up and handed it to her. Laying her lover's head on the ground softly, she then stood and sheathed it into the holster on her uniform. Turning to Shulk, she asked him, "So, what now?"

"Hmmmm..." Focusing, Shulk had another vision come to him. Once his eyes stopped glowing blue, he announced, "There's a pocket dimension not far from here. I can sense some more fighters to save there, including Robin, your mother Robyn, and Simon's descendant, Richter."

"Richter... mom..." Lucina murmured.

"You coming?"

"...No," Lucina declined Shulk, kneeling down next to her lover. "I need to rest for now... There's a lot I need to try to wrap my head around at the moment. And the Captain is hurt... I have to make sure he recovers, too."

"I'm stayin' too," Snake announced. "I've got some... catching up to do with them. Especially Cap when he wakes up."

"Very well," Shulk nodded.

"Before you go," Lucina told Shulk, "Apparently the ruler of this domain is named Dharkon. They were controlling me until the Captain saved me just now... apparently there was another deity, Galeem, that controlled the Captain and you guys? The... same one I had those dreams about?"

"Yeah," Shulk confirmed.
"See if Dharkon lets slip anything about their motives, or anything like that," Lucina suggested, wanting to help her friends any way she could.

"I have some things I want to know for myself too," Shulk commented. "Once we save every fighter and Spirit in that dimension from Dharkon's control, we'll report back here and discuss what we've learned."

"Sounds good," Snake commented. "Stay safe out there, guys."

"Of course." Shulk began to walk off before quickly turning back to Lucina and asking, "And... Lucina?"

"Hmm?"

A heartfelt smile graced Shulk's face as he told Lucina, and Captain Falcon as well, "...I'm happy for you guys."

Lucina smiled gratefully as she watched Shulk run off to the pocket dimension with everyone else as the Healing Field ran out of energy. "...Thank you, Shulk."

"I'm happy for you two, too," Snake commented, taking the spent Healing Field. "I had a feeling something was different about you guys after we met up again in New Los Angeles, but I wasn't sure what it was at the time."

"Well, I guess you know now," Lucina giggled. "How long... have you and Samus been together...?"

"Longer than you two, that's for sure," Snake commented. "Ever since the third tournament. When we met, we were like two kindred souls, having lived through similar experiences and we... seemed to just click right away. Unfortunately, I wasn't called back for the fourth, and I had to leave Smash City during that time... she missed me a lot, but for me... every day without her was empty, instilling in me an unimaginable solitude. The world as I knew it stopped spinning..."

"When you two were reunited, you must have been really happy..." Looking down at her slumbering beloved with an affectionate smile, Lucina continued, "To be back together after circumstances separating you for so long... the happiness must be unlike any you've ever known..."

"Like you guys," Snake remarked. "Galeem and Dharkon had separated you two from each other, and when you guys were reunited... you just can't put that happiness into words."

"True," Lucina agreed. "It's like... as Dharkon sealed my conscience away, I couldn't stand what they were making me do to him. My consciousness kept struggling, resisting their control until I broke through. And it's all thanks to him... he was my light in the dark." All of a sudden, Lucina winced, clutching her head. "U-ugh..." She could feel her heart begin to palpitate weakly in her chest.

"Something the matter...?" Snake asked her.

"I... I don't know..." Lucina murmured, panting as she began to feel dizzy. "I didn't sustain any...injuries. B-but... my body... somehow feels...exhausted?" She began to waver and was about to collapse onto the ground when her lover awoke and sat up as quickly as he could, catching her.

"Babe...?" She asked weakly, struggling to keep her eyes open. "You're...rested already...?"

"Not really..." Captain Falcon groggily answered the woman he loved. "But...I couldn't help but
overhear. It's because... you were fighting Dharkon's control all by yourself, wasn't it...?"

"Ah..." Lucina sighed, her face bearing a slightly regretful expression.

"That makes sense..." Snake concluded. "I can imagine it must have been very taxing on her mental and emotional state. Even without any injuries or physical strain, that can wear someone out fast."

"I... see..." Lucina panted.

"You could... use some rest too, sweetheart..." Falcon offered his lover, reaching out a hand to softly stroke her face as he slowly lay back down. "If you... have any nightmares or anything, you can... at least feel safe knowing it's not real... that I'm here by your side..."

"O-okay... I need to rest my eyes, anyway..." Lucina slowly crawled to the Captain's side and lay next to him, resting her body above the waist on his chest, allowing herself to listen to his heartbeat and wrapping one of her arms around him as the other rested on his chest. She almost immediately felt one of his arms wrap itself around her, and sighed blissfully as she relaxed into his embrace.

"So... warm..." she murmured, a faint but content smile creeping onto her face. "I've... missed this... so much..."

"I've missed it too..." Falcon replied, his voice sounding drowsy.

"Hey... babe..." Lucina began, her eyelids beginning to feel even heavier. "When... this is all over... we should... thank Kirby. It's... thanks to him that... we're even alive in the first place. You said it yourself..."

"Yeah..." her lover agreed with a yawn. "He saved us both, indirectly... and brought us back together. Just... don't worry for now. We will make it out... together. All of us..."

"I look forward to it..." Lucina sighed deeply, closing her eyes as she sank into another darkness – the peaceful, beautiful darkness of deep slumber.

"All of us... huh..." Captain Falcon murmured, his other arm reaching out to gently pat Lucina on the head as he spoke. "I never thought I'd see the day... that everyone is here, that... we're all back together..."

"It's great," Snake agreed. "And we're up against world-ending forces again, huh... just like old times."

"Like... Tabuu, you mean...?" Falcon's arm that was patting Lucina's head earlier wrapped around her and held her closer to him. The sound of her deep, serene breathing soothed him and made the urge to fall asleep pull at him more.

"Yeah," Snake replied. "I remember it like it was yesterday..."

"Heh..." Looking up at the dark sky above him, the Captain said with a smile before joining his lover in the darkness of sleep, "It's... truly great... to have you back, Snake..."

"It's great to be back." Noticing the lights on Falcon's visor turning off, Snake realized his longtime friend was already asleep. Looking on at the happy, reunited couple asleep in each other's arms, Snake smiled and said to himself, "Don't worry, guys. I'll let you know when Shulk and the others return. In the meantime... you guys deserve a break. Rest well, you two."

Pulling out his signature cardboard box, Snake decided to get some rest himself as well, but only
managed to sleep for half an hour before the air became colder. Lifting the box, he noticed Lucina shivering even in the warmth of her lover's embrace. Quietly crawling over, he noticed her sleeping face looking distressed, as if she were having a nightmare.

"Poor girl..." Snake whispered, his eyebrows furrowing in concern. "After fighting Dharkon's control by herself, this is probably the aftermath... she's stronger than she looks." Remembering he brought over some blankets from the Light Realm in his supply bag, he quietly took one out and lay it over the sleeping couple, letting the blanket stop just below Lucina's shoulders. He slowly backed away before noticing Lucina weakly open her eyes.

"Ah..." Crouching, he whispered, "I didn't wake ya, did I...?"

Looking at Snake tiredly, Lucina only faintly smiled and whispered, "Thank you..." before drifting back to sleep.

Smiling compassionately, Snake thought, *Don't mention it. That's what friends are for.* He then took another blanket for himself and lay on the ground, covering himself with it as he, too, fell asleep.

**Chapter End Notes**

So, that other story idea I mentioned in chapter 16? I was thinking of doing my own take of the characters being rescued from Galeem/Dharkon's control according to my headcanons and this fic/any connected fics. There will be a Snakus one for sure, sooo

And if you want a sample of what that would be like, check out a fic I wrote months before this chapter, *Blue Bird Lamentation.* It's basically Lucina's POV when Falcon saves her from Dharkon's control, with a cliffhanger at the end cause well, that's my thing lul

Hope you guys enjoyed, and stay tuned for more...

Also, Luminary (Dragon Quest Hero) was indeed confirmed, and his trailer seems to tie in to WoL or at least have WoL-like elements (and also Galeem/Dharkon possessed alts for the characters sans Kirby and the DLC?). Neku will be mentioned nevertheless and appear in the epilogue but... stay tuned for what I might do with Luminary…
Out of the Dark

Chapter Notes

we're getting close to the end, folks... everything's coming full circle, most of the loose ends will be tied up, we'll even see more of how our main duo developed along the way.

also as far as I'm aware Morgan (male or female) doesn't have a Spirit in the game, but screw it I'm making him one

oh, and since he's mentioned at one point: Yuri Lowell, Tales of Vesperia © Bandai Namco

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 19 - Out of the Dark

"Ngh..." Snake groaned as he slowly awoke. "What...time is it...?" Getting up, he put the blanket he was covering himself with back into his supply bag. The air around him, Lucina and Captain Falcon had only become slightly warmer, but with a slight chill still.

Looking up at the dark sky, he thought aloud, "I guess a realm of pure darkness, or pure light, would have no concept of night or day. Kinda bothersome as you would lose track of time pretty fast..." Noticing Shulk and the others hadn't come back yet, he then concluded, "Guess they're still not back yet, but they should be soon. I should wake the sleeping lovebirds over there just in case..."

Slowly walking over to the slumbering couple, he elected to nudge his longtime friend awake first. "Cap? Rise and shine, buddy..."

"Mmm..." The Captain moaned as he awoke, the lights on his visor turning on as he opened his eyes. "Snake...? How long have we been asleep?"

"No idea," Snake answered him. "The others should be back any time soon, though, so it's best to get up now."

"You have a point..." Falcon admitted as he quietly stretched his arms before tenderly nudging his lover awake. "Lucina? Sweetheart...?"

"Ngh..." Lucina slowly opened her eyes and lifted her gaze to the Captain's. "Good morning, babe..." When she realized the Dark Realm had no concept of time due to the skies being perpetually dark, her face bore a puzzled expression as she followed up her statement with, "Good...evening? I don't know what time it is..."

Chuckling, Captain Falcon reassured Lucina as he softly ran his fingers through her hair, "Don't worry, none of us do either."

"Did you guys sleep well, at least?" Snake asked the two. "I didn't sleep that long. Feel like I've got
enough energy for one more pocket dimension at least."

"In his arms, who wouldn't?" Lucina asserted lovingly as she cuddled closer to the man she loved.

"Heheheh..." The Captain giggled. "But yeah, I slept well too. It helps that we rested a bit before all this happened."

"I see..." Just then, something clicked in Snake's mind as he realized what his friend meant. "Wait a minute... you didn't..."

"Didn't what...?" The Captain asked apprehensively as he got up. Lucina stood as well, taking the blanket and walking over to Snake's supply bag a short distance away.

"You... and her? You actually...?" Laughing heartily, Snake playfully slapped Falcon's back as he announced, "You actually got some action?! Damn, you are on a roll!"

"S-Snake... can you not?" Captain Falcon turned away and blushed. It was at that moment Lucina heard Snake's comment after she put away the second blanket, that she immediately turned around and briskly walked over to Snake. "Excuse me... Snake?"

"Y-yes...?" Snake slowly turned over to Lucina and saw her serious, somewhat ominous facial expression as she glared at him.

"...Not a word of this to anyone else, Snake... got it?"

"Whoa, Lucina," Captain Falcon chuckled nervously upon seeing Lucina demand Snake's silence on the more intimate details of their relationship with such fervor. "No need to be so... intense."

"But babe," Lucina began, her expression becoming slightly more relaxed but still concerned, "I-it's embarrassing if everyone knew all the details..."

"I mean, I get that, sweetie, but..."

"No, it's fine," Snake dissuaded his friend. "Your secret's safe with me. I am your roommate after all, Cap."

"Heh, true..." Falcon made a gesture as if he were bashfully scratching the back of his head as he commented, "I almost forgot you'll be moving back in with me when this is all over..."

"Yeah... it's been that long, huh?" Noticing Lucina walk to her lover's side, Snake then remarked, "You're a lucky guy overall, Cap. You've finally found someone who makes you happy... and she's a keeper. She's definitely the affectionate, loyal type. Someone like that, you gotta protect at all costs...and never let go of her."

"I know," The Captain said with a nod. "I promised her I would protect her... and, after I freed her from Dharkon's control, that I would never let her go."

"I'll protect him too, Snake," Lucina interrupted the two, wrapping her arms around her lover. "He trained me after that incident... I'm stronger now, thanks to him. In many ways... he is the source of my strength. And I found my happiness with him, too. I won't let go of that either."

"Heh, already you two are on the same wavelength," Snake commended them. "I don't say this lightly, but you two are so compatible with each other, that you might as well be made for each other. I truly am happy for you guys."
"Even though... he and I are so different?" Lucina looked down shyly.

"Especially because of that," Snake assured her. "You have more in common than you realize. Both of you, hold on tightly to that happiness, alright?" The couple only nodded in affirmation.

"Good." Looking into the horizon, Snake noticed Shulk and the other fighters returning. "Looks like they're on their way."

Within seconds, Shulk and the others from the Light Realm returned with the fighters and Spirits they freed in the pocket dimension a ways off. The fighters they saved were Daisy, Robin, Robyn, Ridley, Wario, Richter, Ryu's friend Ken, and Dark Pit.

"Lucina...!" Robyn cried as she ran to her daughter and hugged her.

"Mother..." Lucina hugged her mother back.

"Your brother's here too, as a Spirit," Robyn added. Just then, a translucent Morgan materialized before the two.

"Sis!" The Spirit of Morgan hugged Lucina as well. Since he was a Spirit, Lucina could barely feel him embracing her, but she knew he was doing so.

"I've missed you too, my dear brother... I'm sorry to make you worry."

"Don't worry, sis," Morgan reassured his older sister. "I'm just glad to know you're alright..."

"Hey, Lucina," Richter greeted Lucina. "We meet again."

"I guess so," Lucina chuckled softly.

"Can we save the reunion for later?" Robin interjected. "We have some things we should discuss right away."

"Oh... right." Lucina looked down as her mother and younger brother stopped hugging her, preparing to listen to what everyone else had to say.

"Don't worry, sis," Morgan reassured his big sister. "We'll catch up more later, okay?"

"Sure."

"Alright, so from what we can gather so far," Shulk began, "This realm here is ruled by a being named Dharkon. They are the antithesis to Galeem, the ruler of the Light Realm me and most of the others came from, but their goals are similar. They both want to reshape the universe to their will, with Galeem aiming for a universe of infinite light, and Dharkon's goal being a universe of eternal darkness."

"What we don't know is why either of them are doing this," Robin added. "Or even where they came from, or how they got so powerful that their reach seems to extend beyond the bounds of time and space itself."

"Space... time...?" Falcon pondered. "Hey, Robin?"
"Yes, Captain?"

"When I was warping from Mute City to Green Greens, which is where I last heard Lucina was before she ended up on Mira, there were yellow sparks coming from the console. An aura of yellow light engulfed me and dropped me in Shibuya, Japan, in the year 2007 A.D., where I met that youth, Neku Sakuraba."

"Um..." Lucina decided to speak up as well. "It... happened to me too. Twice, in fact. I was warping from Green Greens, my intended destination being Mute City, when a purple light swallowed me and dropped me in Simon and Richter's world. Then, it happened again, both a yellow and purple light sent me to Mira... Do you think... the yellow light was a fragment of Galeem's power, and the purple light Dharkon's power?"

"And both tampered with the fabric of space-time..." Snake contemplated. "You might have a point. It's kinda hard to believe this is all actually happening, and not something out of a sci-fi novel. Or as Otakon would say, one of his 'Japanese animes'."

"You don't think..." Lucina held her right hand to her chest as she looked down solemnly. "That our constant teleporting... somehow alerted them to our, and Smash City's, existence...?"

"Lucina..." Captain Falcon compassionately wrapped an arm around his girlfriend and gently pulled her closer to him. "You're not to blame for this...none of us are."

"Bab - Captain..." Trying to keep the fact she and him were a couple on the down low, Lucina merely leaned closer to her lover before subtly backing away.

"Moreover," Samus added, "If Galeem gets their way, they will erase everyone in the known universe and replace them with new beings created in their image. Dharkon, however, will enslave all of their subjects to ensure their influence reaches every corner of every dimension."

"So, not a good outcome either way," Shulk concluded. "There is something that bugs me, however."

"Which is...?" Robin asked.

"It would appear they've captured the real Master Hand and Crazy Hand, which is why Galeem has an army of fake Master Hands, and Dharkon an army of fake Crazy Hands. In addition... they must be somehow connected to both that mysterious being pretending to be the Hands, and the instigator of the Subspace incident, Tabuu."

"You mean, from that day?" Robin asked Shulk. "When Cloud, Palutena, and the two of us entered the classified archives and tried to look up the Hands and Tabuu? The Hands' pages were vandalized with weird symbols, and searching Tabuu got us locked out and well...started this whole mess."

"You know, I don't think that alone started it all," Shulk said. "The fact that Tabuu was what got us locked out... makes me think Galeem and Dharkon are connected to Tabuu somehow."

"But Tabuu's dead," Snake objected. "We defeated him back then... there's no way he survived."

"I don't doubt that," Shulk told him. "But perhaps... these two are trying to finish the job Tabuu started? I wasn't a Smasher back then, but from what Palutena told us, it's not out of the realm of possibility."

"So... what do you suggest we do now?" Lucina asked Shulk.
"I was thinking, we should try to find either Cloud or Palutena so they can give us more information," Shulk answered her. "My last vision before I arrived in the Dark Realm was vague. It only showed me your location, and that some of the others were here too, but I wasn't sure who else was here exactly. I do know it showed me that the Spirits of some of our friends are here, like Fiora, Dr. Stewart, Sonic's friend Amy..."

"Hmm..." Falcon murmured. "Think you could try to see if you could get another vision or two?"

"I'll try..." Within seconds, Shulk's eyes once again glowed blue, only this time, instead of mere seconds, the vision seemed to last for more than a minute.

"What did you learn?" Marth inquired once Shulk's vision was done.

"It's...quite a lot," Shulk admitted.

"Just give us a basic rundown," Fox told him.

"O-okay." Taking a deep breath, Shulk began, "We'd need to backtrack to the platform where the Captain and I first arrived here. The bridge to the north of that platform leads to Rosalina, the Spirits of Amy and Dr. Stewart, and a pocket dimension with the following fighters: Luigi, Ike, ROB, Kamui, Corrin, Meta Knight, King K. Rool, Wolf, Mewtwo, and Greninja. There's also... the Spirit of Tabuu? How's that possible?"

"Huh... that's what I'd like to know too..." Snake mused.

"Maybe we'll find out," Shulk answered Snake. "As for the other route... the bridge to the left of the platform leads to Incineroar, the Spirits of the Octolings, and another pocket dimension with Young Link, Chrom, Zelda, the Mii Brawler, Sonic, Cloud, Bowser Jr. and the Koopalings, and Ganondorf. Fiora and Rex's Spirits are also there, and you guys might find some more of your friends there too..."

"Father..." Lucina murmured pensively. Walking up to her daughter, Robyn gently placed her right hand on Lucina's shoulder and reassured her, "We'll save him together, okay, baby?"

"...Of course, mother," Lucina replied with a confident, but soft, smile. "I want to show everyone the fruits of my training...that I've gotten stronger."

"You can tell me more about it later, okay?"

"Okay."

"There is one thing I forgot to mention," Shulk announced. "Like with Dracula's Castle, the dimension we were just in, these two dimensions have their own boss guardian as well, like it was in the Light Realm. I imagine if we defeat them, Dharkon will return. When that happens, we can defeat them and finally go home... hopefully."

"Wait, aren't we missing some people?" Samus interjected. "Namely, Roy, Palutena, Bayonetta and... Dark Samus...? You didn't mention them in your vision..." Samus's face bore a look of visible dread upon mentioning her Phazon clone. "We have to save them too... even if I'd rather not save Dark Samus... but I believe no Smasher should be left behind."

"You're right on both counts, Samus," Shulk said. "Maybe they'll be freed when we defeat Dharkon. Let's hope."

"So then," Captain Falcon spoke up. "I guess we should split up in this case too?"
"Without a doubt," Shulk confirmed. "But... this realm is nothing like the Light Realm. Dharkon has made it harder for us to survive unless we band together as much as possible. We haven't been able to find any supplies, and we used quite a lot already."

"Dharkon is a bit of a sadistic psychopath compared to Galeem," Falcon commented. "I noticed that when I freed Lucina from their control. They seemed to enjoy making her torment me, and I can only imagine the emotional turmoil it put her through..."

"Captain..." Lucina subtly reached out one of her hands to hold onto one of his. "It's... okay now."

"Lucina..." He held her hand, their fingers interlacing.

"Thanks to you, I'm stronger in every way... not just in my combat prowess. It's all...because I have you by my side."

"And I have you with me, too," he reassured her with a tender smile. "So... I'll be strong for your sake too..."

"Speaking of supplies," Snake said. "We are running a bit low, and we'll need some for the fighters we save. I've been thinking I should do a quick supply run in the Light Realm and see what I can find."

"I'll come too," Fox volunteered. "We'll meet you back at that platform. There's some kind of teleportation portal close to the pocket dimension we came out of, that I only imagine will send us back to the platform over there."

"Got it," Shulk confirmed. "We'll wait for you there."

"You coming too, Samus?" Snake asked his girlfriend.

"...Not this time," Samus declined him. "I have some catching up to do with everyone. Whichever group you decide to go with, though, I'll go with you."

"Okay." Snake and Fox ran off in the direction of the shortcut they discussed earlier.

"Well then," Shulk began, "It goes without saying that we should think about this carefully, decide which group we want to go with. We should each form groups of close to equal sizes at least. I suppose a walk back would give us time to think about it. So I guess... think on it, and choose wisely. We don't have a lot of room for error here."

As Shulk led everyone else single-file along the longer route, Lucina, walking next to Captain Falcon, asked her boyfriend, "Babe?"

"Yeah, sweetheart?"

"You wouldn't mind if I caught up with my mom and some of my friends?" She looked to the side somewhat bashfully.

"Go ahead," he told her. "They're important to you, too. That's part of a healthy relationship, isn't it? Catching up with people other than your significant other?"

"True..." Smiling, Lucina only said, "Thank you. I'll see you soon, babe," before falling back in line to her mother, Robin, and Richter.
"See you soon," Falcon murmured with a compassionate smile before hearing a familiar voice.

"Captain?"

Recognizing the voice, he turned around and saw Samus standing before him. "Oh... long time no see, Samus."

"Long time, indeed," Samus chuckled. "You know it's been practically over a year since I last saw you?"

"Yeah..." The Captain looked down solemnly as he and Samus continued walking. "I'm sorry... I wasn't expecting to be gone so long. Heck, even after Snake left, I've been a bit distant... well, moreso than usual. Can't believe the last time I properly talked to you was the day of that incident..."

"Don't worry about it," Samus reassured her longtime friend. "We've been friends ever since the very first Smash Bros. tournament, and we've stuck together through thick and thin. What matters, I think, is that you're here now, and that girl is safe too."

"Lucina...?" Glancing back momentarily, he commented, "You know... it's thanks to that little journey I had with her, that I think I'm starting to open up more... be less distant."

"I can tell," Samus remarked. "Talking with you like this... you feel more... natural in your conversations now. I hope that, when we return to Smash City, that you can be this open with almost everyone else. That... you can be the real you."

"Hopefully," The Captain said. "Maybe even, whenever I return to Mute City for any races... I hope to be able to show everyone the new me. The real me."

"And I think I know what caused this surge in confidence," Samus asserted. "It's because... Lucina... she's the source of your happiness now. Am I wrong?"

"Ah..." Looking to the side for a moment, the Captain admitted, "Yes, Samus. You are very much correct. I've... found love again. I've missed this feeling... I've found someone I want to protect, and she will protect me too. We truly complete each other..."

"I'm happy for you," another familiar voice said.

"Is that...?"

Within seconds, a familiar, translucent figure materialized next to Samus.

"Jody...?!"

"Sheik found her Spirit in the Light Realm shortly after she and the Ice Climbers saved Falco," Samus explained. "I know she's your ex, but you two are still friends regardless, so..."

"You know," Jody's Spirit told the Captain. "I remember a few days after we broke up, when we decided to be just friends again, you told me you were worried that you would never find your own happiness. I know I wasn't the best lover to you... I couldn't protect myself."

"Please, Jody..." Falcon tried to dissuade his ex. "Don't blame yourself. It's because I couldn't do more to keep you safe..."

"Either way, I never would have expected the young woman you gave a shoutout to on F-ZERO
TV that day, would be the one you truly resonated with," Jody commented. "The Arrow couple
told me about her, how she vowed to protect you too. I think that's truly admirable."

"It's honestly amazing how my relationship with her developed," Falcon remarked. "We... weren't
on such good terms when we first met. But when I took her on that training journey, we became so
close... I can tell it's changed her, too. She's more confident in herself."

"That's the best thing you could do for someone," Jody said. "You've finally found your happiness,
and so has she. It's up to both of you now to hold on to it."

"I promise you, and Samus, that we will," Falcon reassured the two ladies. "Neither of us will take
any moment together for granted anymore." Samus only smiled and nodded in approval.

Meanwhile, Lucina was walking with her mother, Richter, Robin, and the Spirit of her brother
Morgan.

"Mother, Morgan," Lucina began, "I've missed you two so much. I know I've been away from
Smash City for... a lot longer than I was expecting. I've been training hard for a day like this... not
just for the tournament, but for myself and everyone as well."

"I know, baby," Robyn told her daughter. "And I'm so proud of you. We'll save your father
together, okay?"

"Of course," Lucina serenely nodded. "And, Morgan... like I said, I'm sorry I made you worry. Do
you...still have the daisy I gave you, at least?"

"Hmm?" The Spirit of Morgan checked his person. "...No, it seems I lost it in the commotion when
you were sending me back home."

"I see..." Her eyes bearing a melancholy look, Lucina continued, "Here I was hoping that if I sent
you home, you'd be safe... and... I must admit, I... lost my daisy too a while back..."

"Hey, look at it this way, sis," Morgan tried to cheer his sister up. "At least we're together, safe and
sound."

"True..." Looking just behind her, where Richter and Robin were walking next to each other, she
then murmured, "I'm sorry for not being more open about what's been going on with me. There's...
some things I have to tell you, but... at the right time."

"Like the fact your trainer, Captain Falcon, is now also your boyfriend?" Morgan giggled
mischievously.

"M-M-MORGAN!" Lucina cried, embarrassed. "Not in front of mother!"

"Come ooooon, sis," Morgan teased. "She could totally see you cuddling up to him... subtlety isn't
really your strongest point, you know."

"I..." Lucina stammered, her face turning beet red, before realizing she couldn't hide it anymore.
Sighing, she asked Robyn, "Did you really see us... mother?"

"No need to be ashamed, my dear daughter," Robyn reassured her with a soft smile. "I couldn't be
happier for you that you finally found someone you could call your beloved."

"E-even though... it's him?"
"I spoke with the Captain once, when you were training the day before the special tournament that marked Ryu's Smash City debut," Robyn explained. "Even back then, he expressed remorse for what happened that day, and he even wanted to help you when you were injured during training."

"I noticed..." Lucina murmured. "And... as we were training, as we got closer... he seemed to want to atone for what happened that day. My father never held any grudges, and I wasn't about to, either."

"I'm sure your father would be proud," Robyn told her daughter. "He's moved on since then, you know."

"I know." Looking at the dark clouds above as she continued walking, Lucina murmured, "I wonder if... he'll accept me and the Captain being together..."

"He has to," Richter interjected. "I'm sure your father must know how well the Captain trained you, and that you two are happy together."

"Richter?!" Lucina gasped. "I wasn't expecting you to hear..."

"I heard too," Robin spoke up. "It's like your little brother said: subtlety isn't your strong point."

"I suppose..." Lucina admitted before she, her mother, her brother, Robin and Richter shared a hearty laugh.

"So," Richter began, "The one your heart belongs to...it's Falcon after all, isn't it?"

"Yes..." Lucina nodded. "Ever since that day, I could tell he cared for me too... He even saved me...the day of the incident." Remembering what Robin told her that day, she then asked him, "Robin... did you...?"

"I knew..." Robin confessed. "I didn't want to tell you then, but I was hoping you would figure it out. I guess you must have..."

"I did," Lucina confirmed. "And... I must admit. Deep down, I felt... worthless for letting that happen to me. I couldn't protect my father back then, I couldn't even protect myself... The Captain showed me that I wasn't worthless. He was there for me when I was at my lowest point... and he helped me become stronger. I think... he even loved me back then too..." She smiled softly, her cheeks turning a rosy pink.

"All the more reason I believe your father would approve of you and Captain Falcon being together," Richter encouraged her. "You two have come a long way, and the love you two have for each other is genuine. I'm happy for you, Lucina."

"I am, too," Robin said. "He's done more for you than I ever could."

"Robin..." Lucina murmured. "Like I was saying earlier, I haven't been completely open with you, or my family, or most of my friends about everything. I'm not talking about me and the Captain... it's... something else."

"Guess you'll have to tell us later," Richter told her. "Looks like we're here at the rendezvous point."

Sure enough, everyone had arrived back on the platform that Shulk and Captain Falcon landed on when they first entered the Dark Realm. The portal to the Light Realm was just to the south of the platform, and they were expecting Snake and Fox to return at any moment.
"If you guys come with me, I'll tell you everything after I save Zelda," Lucina said. "She's one of my closest friends, and... I've kept secrets from her long enough, too." The others nodded in agreement.

Within seconds, Snake and Fox leapt back in from the Light Realm.

"Alright, Fox and I have acquired some things we'll need," Snake announced. "Since we're going to split into two groups, everyone should take at least one thing they think they'll need."

"One at a time, please," Fox reminded everyone.

After each fighter took at least one supply they were sure they'd need, Shulk then announced, "Alright, have we decided who will be in which group? There's Team A, the team headed north, and Team B for the west."

"I'm going north, for sure," Mario announced. "I have to save Luigi."

"Poyo!" Kirby announced, running up to Mario.

"So I take it Kirby wants to go north, too?" Shulk asked. "To save Meta Knight, I imagine?"

"Po-poyo!" Kirby affirmed.

"Okay then," Shulk said with a chuckle.

"I'm going west," Lucina announced. "Zelda's there, and my father, too."

"I swore to protect Lucina," Captain Falcon said, holding Lucina's hand tightly but gently. "So I'm going with her."

"As her mother, I'm coming, too," Robyn asserted.

"Wherever Mario goes, I go," Peach declared. "What about you, Daisy?"

"Mmmm, I'll pass," Daisy declined Peach's offer. "I wanna catch up with Lucina, as a fellow participant in the Echo Program!"

"Echo...Program?" Lucina questioned.

"I'll explain later," Daisy told her.

"I... don't have a lot of energy for a full pocket dimension trip, so I guess I'll go west," Snake said. "But...not before saving the Spirit of Cap's friend, Dr. Stewart. Any friend of the Captain's is a friend of mine."

"I'm with Snake," Samus announced. "Rex's Spirit is in the dimension to the west. I've interviewed him before... he's a good kid, and I want to save him."

"North for me!" Pit announced. "You said Tabuu's Spirit was there, Shulk? I wanna see if we'll get any answers there."

...
Jigglypuff, Fox, Falco, Simon, Ridley, Wario, Olimar, and Alph. Team B consists of: Daisy, Lucina, Captain Falcon, Snake, Samus, Pikachu, Robin, Robyn, Little Mac, the Wii Fit Trainers, Ken, Duck Hunt, Richter, the Inklings, Ryu, Bowser, the Mii Gunner, the Mii Swordfighter, Pichu, the Villagers, Dr. Mario, Link, Sheik, Toon Link, and myself. Snake and Samus will head north momentarily to retrieve Dr. Stewart's and Amy's Spirits before joining the rest of Team B."

"You're heading west too?" Falcon asked the wielder of the Monado.

"Fiora's there," Shulk answered him. "I have to... she must be worried sick without me."

"I understand..." The Captain sympathized, as he had to save his lover earlier.

"Everyone got their supplies?" Shulk asked to make sure. Everyone nodded in response.

"Hey... Robin?" Ness asked Robin.

"What is it, Ness?" The tactician asked the PSI-powered youth.

"Bandee wants to come with you," Ness told Robin as the Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee peeked out from behind him.

"He wants to see Zelda, huh?" Robin asked with a soft grin. "Come along, little guy."

"Alright then," Shulk declared. "Teams, move out!"

... 

As Shulk led Team B along the western path after freeing the Spirits of the Octolings, Captain Falcon asked his lover, "So... are you ready to finally put your training to use?"

"Yes," Lucina answered him. "I promised myself I'd make everyone proud of me... like how I made you proud of me."

"Heh..." The Captain smiled affectionately at the swordswoman. "I believe in you."

Smiling back, Lucina told him, "Thank you, babe."

"I imagine you've improved your skills since then," Ryu interjected from behind them.

"Ryu..." Falcon murmured. "It's... been a while."

"Indeed it has."

"Excuse me, Ryu..." Lucina began. "I... I'm sorry I couldn't make it to the rebooted fourth tournament. I'm sure you would have liked to face off against me if I was the last one standing, were it not for that accident..."

"Don't worry about it," Ryu reassured her. "What matters now is that you believe you've gotten stronger. And I'm sure you have. Never stop improving, okay?"

"Thank you..."

"Heeeey! Izzat you, Lucina?!" Ken called out, walking up to her and wrapping an arm around her as he grinned. "Long time, no see!"

"Ken!" Lucina greeted him. "It has... the last time I saw you was off world, during the Golden
"Chains incident..."

"Heh, you remember," Ken chuckled, retracting his arm from around her. "Yeah, and now your old man's joined Smash too! All we need is Fiora, and that hot android chick to join, and it'd be just like old times! Maybe even that Yuri Lowell guy too..."

"First off, her name's KOS-MOS," Ryu corrected his friend. "Second, need I remind you you're a married man, Ken?"

"Hey!" Ken protested. "Just 'cause I'm married doesn't mean I can't think she's attractive!"

"You find a robot attractive?" Ryu raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"I'll have you know the proper term is android, Ryu!"

"Heehee..." Lucina giggled. "You guys must be really good friends to exchange banter like this."

"You know, Lucina," Falcon told her. "With how I've been opening up to you... maybe... I should try to forge more friendships as well. You've given me that confidence, too."

"I have...?" Drawing closer to her beloved, Lucina told him, "I'm glad. Snake was right... it's like we really are made for each other."

"Yeah..."

Just then, they heard Shulk's alarmed cry ahead of them. "Shulk?!" Lucina gasped.

"Let's go!" Falcon told his girlfriend, the two running off to Shulk's aid. Once they arrived, they saw another fake Crazy Hand blocking their path.

"How many of these fake Crazy Hands does Dharkon even have?!" Shulk cried in frustration.

"Allow me, Shulk," Lucina volunteered. "All this time I spent training with Captain Falcon... I want to put it to use. I want to show you all how much stronger I've become..."

"Sweetheart... are you sure?" Falcon asked his girlfriend.

"I am," she confirmed, briefly drawing closer for an embrace. "And... after Dharkon separated me from you and tried to use me against you... I want them to know that it's personal."

"Just... be careful."

"I will, my love." Letting him go, she turned around and drew her Falchion as she declared, "It's time to change fate!" Dashing to the fake Crazy Hand, she leapt at it, dodging all its attacks expertly and striking whenever she had an opening, acting in exactly the way the Captain instructed her to, until the fake was defeated. Everyone watched in amazement that she was able to take down the fake so flawlessly.

"Breathtaking..." Shulk murmured. "Even I had a bit of trouble taking down that other Crazy Hand a while ago..."

"Indeed, she has become stronger," Ryu commented. "You've trained her exceptionally well, Captain."

"Thanks..." The Captain humbly murmured.
"My dear daughter... I'm so proud," Robyn uttered, happy tears gathering in her eyes.

"I did it..." Lucina panted, slowly sheathing her sword as she turned around to face everyone. "This... is the result of my training. I'm glad... that I could finally... make you all proud of me."

"You certainly have, Lucina," Robin said. "Congratulations."

"Thank...you..." Lucina began to feel dizzy before losing her balance. Thankfully, Captain Falcon dashed to her and caught her before she could hit the ground.

"You okay, sweetheart?" He asked her. "I hope you didn't push yourself too hard..."

"I...I'm not sure..." Lucina weakly uttered. "I don't need to...sleep or anything, though. I think... I'm a bit hungry..."

"Right... you probably haven't had anything to eat in quite a while... who knows how many hours you'd been out before I found you." Turning to the others, he asked, "Anyone have anything to eat? She may need it to get her energy back up."

"I might have something," Ryu volunteered, reaching into his supply bag. He later pulled out a platter of sushi Snake and Fox found in the Light Realm, still fresh. "It's still amazing how Galeem allowed these things to exist in their world..."

"Sushi...?" Falcon mumbled as he took the platter. "Thank you."

"We'll go on ahead," Shulk announced. "We'll make sure Zelda and Chrom wait for you guys, though."

"I'll see you soon, dear," Robyn told her daughter.

"Thanks, everyone..." Lucina mumbled as she slowly inched over to a rock to sit against.

"Woomy!" The Inkling girl chirped, pointing in the direction Shulk saw Incineroar in his vision.

"You want to save Incineroar?" Shulk asked her. "Okay, just meet back with us soon." The Inkling girl nodded before running off.

As the others headed to the pocket dimension, Captain Falcon crouched next to his beloved, handing her the sushi platter. "Here. Have some of this."

"This is... sushi?" Lucina asked. "It's just rice topped with seaweed and raw fish, right? Is it safe?"

"It's fresh, so it has to be," he reassured her. "You know, back in Mute City, there's a little sushi bar I like to visit sometimes... when I was there last, I had hoped you would have been there with me... I'm sure you'd like it."

"Maybe when this is all over, I can come with you someday..." Taking a sushi roll, Lucina dipped it into the small cup of soy sauce on the side and took a bite. "It's...good."

"Glad you like it," Falcon answered her. "Eat up as much as you can... you'll need the energy."

"Okay..." As she continued to eat, tears began to well up in her eyes, the reality of the situation they were in dawning on her.

"Hey... Lucina?"
She did not answer him, only continuing to eat as the tears began to rain from her eyes, faintly splashing onto the platter. Once she finished her last bite, she couldn't hold in her emotions any more as she shut her eyes and burst into sobs. Wordlessly, her lover gently drew closer and held her in his arms, just like he did in the hospital that day. She reached out an arm to embrace him back as she wept. His embrace was warm, tender, comforting, as it was that day, but it still wasn't enough to soothe the intense pain in her heart.

"It's... not fair..." She sobbed. "Why... just why do Galeem and Dharkon want to take away everything we care about? Why do they want to take away our happiness...?"

"I wish I knew, my love..."

"I don't... I don't want to lose my family, my friends, or you... I don't want to die... I'm... scared..."

"I... I am too." He held her tighter. "I don't want to take any moment I have with you for granted anymore..."

"M-me neither... I want to... enjoy every moment I have with you, and everyone, with whatever time's left..." Lucina wept. Slowly opening her eyes which still overflowed with tears, she said, "Captain... this world... it reminds me of the future... that I came from... maybe that's why Dharkon trapped me here... to remind me of the loneliness I would have to one day return to..."

"Sweetheart..." He tenderly wiped away some of her tears. "I... I'm sure there'll be enough time to enjoy with all of us once this is over. Who knows, maybe you won't have to leave next tournament...I hope so."

"I... I actually... dreamt about Galeem and Dharkon before this all happened... like a prophetic vision, or something. I heard Dharkon's voice in my first dream... a dream where I, an emissary of darkness, had to kill you, an emissary of light... I also heard their voice when I was hallucinating back at Sylvalum. They said I'd either die alone, or destroy everything I loved with my own hands... and in my vision, that included you..." She briefly blinked, causing more tears to gush from her eyes. "They said... I had a dark heart, and that I pushed those I loved away..."

"That's not true, Lucina," Falcon comforted her. "You're one of the kindest, most caring and devoted people I've ever known... you put others before yourself, and it's part of why I fell in love with you..."

"No... it's still partially my fault. When I left you... I was distant from everyone else... my brother, my friends... I would just shut them out... I'd only tell them half-truths..." Closing her eyes again, she tearfully continued, "And Zelda... part of the reason I want to save her is because... she's always offered to lend an ear for support, but I lied to her, told her everything was okay when it wasn't... because I didn't want her to worry about me. And my father... I was too afraid to congratulate him when he got accepted..."

Snake was right... The Captain thought. Lucina and I... we do have more in common than meets the eye. I can relate to that feeling all too well.

"It's not too late, though," Captain Falcon reassured her. "I'm sure they'll all understand, and most importantly, they'll appreciate how you've changed as a person."

"Thank you for believing in me..." Lucina sobbed. "Inside that tough, confident exterior is the compassionate, encouraging soul I fell in love with... I'm so happy I met you."

"I am, too." Leaning closer to her, he softly whispered, "I love you."
"I love you too..." The two shared a soft, tender yet passionate kiss as he gently wiped away her tears. Once the kiss had finished, she had calmed down significantly.

*Captain... if I am the dark, you truly are the light. You're so bright...and warm... you always illuminate my darkest, most soul crushing days. I truly thank Naga for you... and I pray we'll never be apart again...*

"Feel a bit better?" Falcon asked her.

"Y-yes..." Lucina stammered.

"Those... dreams you spoke about, were they... what you wanted to talk to the others about?"

"You heard?" Drying her eyes of any remaining tears, Lucina admitted, "Yes... I told Robin about one of those dreams, and that's what led him, Shulk, Palutena and Cloud to investigate... and it's part of why this all started."

"Don't blame yourself," Falcon told her. "If you hadn't said anything, things may well have turned out to be much worse... we might not even be here today. When you think about it, Lucina: you really did save us all."

"Thank you..." She leaned closer to him in an affectionate manner.

"I had similar dreams, too," The Captain mentioned. "Shortly after you left, I had a dream where... you said you didn't want to die without any regrets, as beams of light vaporized everyone, even us... I wish I knew what this all meant."

"When we save Zelda, Young Link and Cloud, we'll get everyone together and discuss it all," Lucina proposed.

"Sounds like a plan," Snake interrupted them. "Once Team A is done, we should get a messenger over there and have us all meet up to discuss what else we learned before moving on."

"You're back already?" Falcon asked his friend.

"Yeah," Snake confirmed, as Samus ran up to him. "I was thinking we send over Sonic once he's rescued. Much as I don't like him, he is fast, and can deliver a message pretty quickly."

"Sounds good," Lucina concurred.

"I'll go on ahead, Snake," Samus told her boyfriend. "I want to see if I can find Rex. I'll meet you inside."

"Alright." After Samus ran off, a familiar voice called out to the Captain, "Douglas?"

"D-Dr. Stewart?" Falcon gasped.

"Douglas...?" Lucina asked. "Is...that your real name, babe?"

"...Yes," Falcon admitted bashfully. "My real name is Douglas Jay Falcon. I know, it's a rather lame name... if that Beat kid learned it back in Shibuya, I know for a fact he would not stop laughing at me... wasn't *his* actual name a mouthful and just as embarrassing to him, anyway? Daisuke-something? Talk about the pot calling the kettle black."

"I think it's nice, babe," Lucina complimented him.
"You do...?"

"Yes," Lucina nodded. Giggling, she followed up with, "But I'm still calling you babe."

"Heh..."

"Babe?" The Spirit of Dr. Stewart inquired. "Did she... call you an affectionate nickname?"

"Yeah..."

Smiling, Dr. Stewart said, "So, you've finally figured it out... figured out what she meant to you."

"Yeah, and I couldn't be happier," Falcon told his fellow racer. "We're... surprisingly compatible. I protect her, and she protects me too."

"I can tell you two would be very happy together," Dr. Stewart reassured his friend. "I'm happy for you, Douglas."

"Thank you." Standing up, he reached out his hand to Lucina to help her up. "You ready to save those you love, sweetheart?"

"Yes," Lucina answered him as she took his hand and stood. "Let's go..." She, her lover, and Snake walked to the pocket dimension.

Chapter End Notes

once again, for pacing's sake, I'll end it here. There will for sure be even more interactions that bring everything full circle, next chapter, and boy will it be detailed. And worth it.

Oh...one more thing, as of the date of this posting (6/25/2019) I wanted to inform you all the next chapter may take... a bit longer than expected. I'm sure everyone in the Smash community at large knows right now, but famous Smash reaction YouTuber Desmond "Etika" Amofah passed away from an apparent suicide. He was dealing with some mental health issues that got so severe because he had nobody to turn to, and knowing that some people passed it off as like, him being a clown or something... it's really bringing back bad flashbacks of "friends" ditching me or making light of my problems whenever I felt desperate. If I hadn't found a therapist and more supportive friends... I might have ended up like him. So... I'm probably gonna be quiet for a while to mourn and also try to find peace in my mind and heart as much as possible.

Remember - you are not alone. You are loved. If you're struggling, don't ever be afraid to reach out to anyone, be it friend, family or professional, for support.
Chapter Notes

So, Protective Dad Bowser may or may not have been inspired by Barret from Final Fantasy VII, haha (why doesn't FF7 even have so much as Spirits? Not even an Assist Trophy while Street Fighter and Bayonetta do. that's a real crime.) Also, bonus points to whomever spots the Castlevania: Symphony of the Night reference.

Chapter namesake - Into the Light from the Splatoon 2 Octo Expansion OST. (Team Chaos won, whoooo!)

As for the Rex part - Shulk and Fiora's journey with Rex on Alrest (them being DLC Blades) takes place after Shulk gets the Monado but before the Colony 9 invasion, as Fiora's in her Hom form there and not her late game cyborg form. As for Elma, it's explained in Xenoblade 2 that the Nopon trader gave her that VR thingy that transports her mind to Alrest or something and that time passes faster on Alrest than on Mira (and possibly on the Bionis/Mechonis as well), so her trips to Alrest can (and here, have) take(n) place during X's story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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*Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within*

Chapter 20 - Into the Light

As Lucina and Captain Falcon entered the portal into the pocket dimension, they were greeted by Snake, Samus, Shulk, and everyone else as they stood on a stone bridge dividing two sections of land - the land to the north an expansive desert covered in a thick purple mist, and the land to the south a foggy forest.

"You guys... all of you have been waiting for us?" Falcon asked Shulk.

"Of course," Shulk reassured him. "I know the general location of each fighter thanks to my visions. Unfortunately, we can't go north just yet, because that thick purple mist severely limits visibility. According to my visions, the Master Sword due south can clear it, but it's blocked by a boulder and I have no idea how to clear it." Turning to Bowser, he tried to console the King of the Koopas, "Sorry, Bowser... I promise, you'll be able to save your children soon."

"Okay..." Bowser mumbled sadly before suddenly shouting, "DON'T WORRY, MY KIDS! PAPA'S COMIN'!"

"Heh..." Looking down, Shulk anxiously murmured, "Please wait for me too, Fiora..."

"So... what now, Shulk?" Lucina asked the wielder of the Monado.

"I guess all we can do for now is explore the region due south," Shulk answered her. "I think we should check out the forest first. According to my visions, Young Link and Chrom are there..."

"Father..." Lucina murmured. Placing her right hand on her daughter's shoulder in a comforting
gesture, Robyn reassured her, "Let's save him together, sweetie."

"Yes..."

"Guess I'll try to find Young Link then," the Captain said.

"I'll come with you, Captain," Link volunteered. "He's another one of my incarnations, and I feel somewhat responsible for his and Toon Link's safety."

"Say whaaaat?!" Toon Link announced in surprise, alerting the other two to his presence. "There's ANOTHER me?! How many versions of me are there, anyway?"

Chuckling nervously, Link told his younger, more cartoon-like incarnation, "If you're referring to Smash... it's just me, you, and Young Link."

"How come I didn't know? I wanna meet him!" Toon Link jumped up and down with childlike excitement.

"I'll take you to him," Link said. "He's been absent since the second tournament, but Master Hand brought him back after so long." Holding his hand to his chin quizzically, he mused, "Which... I wonder why he decided to go the extra mile to bring all of us back in the first place..."

"Link...?" Falcon began.

"Yes?"

"Snake told me a while ago that he heard the Hands wanted to make this their biggest tournament ever, but... now that you mention it, given what I've learned from Bayonetta and Cloud, and what happened in Smash City while I was away... it makes me wonder if there was some sort of ulterior motive on the behalf of the beings who impersonated the Hands. Was this really what the real Master and Crazy Hand wanted? How long had the real Hands even been missing?"

"I remember Shulk and Robin talking about something like that," Link answered him. "I guess we'll find out when we save Cloud, and everyone from Team A heads back here. They're sure to learn something about all this over there."

"Yeah..."

As the rest of Team B headed down the path leading to the foggy forest, Captain Falcon looked to the sky and murmured, "I can't quite place my finger on it, but... something about all this just... isn't adding up..."

... Team B was exploring the foggy forest, trying to find Young Link and Chrom who were located here as per Shulk's visions, but were at a loss as to where to go.

"This was a lot easier in the Light Realm," Little Mac complained. "We'd just flip a few switches to open up the path to save our friends..." Noticing the Duck Hunt duo looking dismayed, he added, "Even a dog can't trace their scent... something's up."

"It seems Dharkon's the type to play mind games with us," Ryu commented.

"It's like I said, Ryu," Falcon began, "They get their sick kicks in watching us squirm. I saw it firsthand when I saved Lucina. Who knows what they're doing to everyone else, even when they're
not actively in control..."

"Ah - nnnn..." Lucina grunted a short distance away. Immediately turning to his lover, the Captain noticed Lucina huddling over and holding on to a nearby tree branch with her left arm, panting as sweat covered her pale face. Within seconds, she collapsed, the branch she was holding onto snapping off the tree. Falcon immediately ran to her aid and caught her before she could hit the ground.

"Lucina...!"

"Ahh..." Weakly opening her eyes, she strained, "B-Babe...?"

"Are you okay?" His voice sounded concerned, but was also strangely comforting to Lucina. Simply recalling the memory of the same gentleness he showed her at the hospital that day filled Lucina with a sense of safety unlike any other. That gentleness was one of the many reasons she had fallen in love with him.

Smiling faintly as her face was covered in sweat, she weakly told him, "I-I'm fine..."

"I know you're not fine, sweetheart," The Captain told her. "It's okay... you can tell me. What's wrong...?"

Lucina's smile sank as she glanced away solemnly. "I'm sorry... hiding things from the people I love... is a bad habit of mine... you're the last person I should hide anything from." Taking a few deep breaths to regain her grip on reality, the color slowly returned to her face as she focused and told him, "Remember what I was telling you... about the dreams? How I first learned about Galeem, and Dharkon's voice in my head before this all started?"

"Go on..."

"After you saved me, and we rested for a bit... I had a brief nightmare. I guess... somehow, Dharkon and I must have become linked, before and after I fell under their control... I'm not sure how we're linked exactly, but... in the nightmare, I saw myself in the exact same spot you found me, but... you and Snake weren't there. The darkness extended for miles, and I could hear... screams..." She shuddered briefly before continuing, "The screams of... all the other fighters and Spirits here... my friends and family... mother, father, Zelda, Richter, Robin, Fiora... I couldn't bear to hear it much longer."

"Lucina..." The Captain held his beloved close to his chest, gently stroking the small of her back to calm her down further.

"The air around us had gotten colder, so I guess Snake noticed and covered us in that blanket... it's a good thing he did, as he woke me up, ending that horrible dream... just... if Dharkon and I truly are linked... why? And why would they show me something so horrible like that?"

"I'm...sure it's nothing, love," Captain Falcon tried to comfort Lucina. "It's probably just... stress from all that's happened. I heard you say you were fighting Dharkon's control by yourself, so the struggle probably remained in your subconscious and led to that nightmare. I'm sure everyone, even your father, is fine..."

She has a point, though, the Captain thought. Dharkon did establish themselves as quite the sadist back there... it wouldn't surprise me... And if what she says is true, and... that dream I had in Mute City... maybe Galeem and I have a similar connection, but how...?

"I'm sure you're right, babe," Lucina answered him. "I'm sure... it's nothing. It has to be..."
"I'm still... not so sure, she thought. Those dreams... and that hallucination on Mira... Dharkon has to have some kind of link to me. But how, and why?"

"You ready? We'll do a more in depth search of this forest to see if we can find Young Link and your father."

"Ah..." Snapping back to reality, Lucina answered her lover, "Sure..." Taking his hand as he helped her up, she suggested, "When I save my father... is it alright that I... tell him about us?"

"Will he... be okay with it?"

"I'm sure he will," Lucina reassured him. "It's like I told you back at Sylvalum - my father never held a grudge in his life, and he's not about to start now. That's why I admire him and strive to be like him..." Just then, she winced again. "Ugh..."

"Lucina...?"

"I...can hear them...again," she told him, slightly straining, her face bearing a visible look of discomfort. "I hear their screams, louder than before... Young Link... Father... Zelda... the Spirit of Fiora... Cloud... they have to be close by..."

"Is that why... you didn't seem so well earlier?" The Captain asked her. When she silently nodded, he reassured her, "Just... don't worry about it for now. We will save them... and then once Dharkon's out of the picture, maybe we'll all get to go home."

"Of course..." Lucina answered the man she loved. "The sooner we can end this nightmare, the better..."

I guess this confirms my suspicions... Dharkon and I have to be connected somehow... Looking down for a moment as her facial expression turned melancholy, she thought, I don't want to keep any secrets from anyone anymore... they deserve to know more than I tell them...

"You coming, sweetheart?" The Captain called out to her. "I think I found something..."

"I'll be there!"

Following her lover, Lucina caught up with him and the two Links at an owl statue. "A... statue?" She questioned, holding a finger to her chin quizzically.

"Not just any statue," Toon Link said excitedly. "Its eyes glowed and I heard its voice!"

"Hmm... it must be one of those statues," Link wondered, having encountered similar statues on his adventures. "What did it say?"

"I think it said, 'Courage lies with the hopeful girl who waits for her friend'," Toon Link answered his older incarnation. "What does it mean?"

"Saria..." Link mumbled.

"Who?" Toon Link asked.

"She's... one of Young Link's best friends, and the Forest Sage. I remember this from my incarnation at the second Smash Tournament... maybe she can help clear that large tree stump blocking the path to the southeast." Looking around, Link mused, "But we've searched the whole forest and haven't seen her Spirit anywhere..."
"Link..." Lucina spoke up. "I think I saw another owl statue on the way here..."

"Thanks, Lucina. Toon Link and I will check it out," Link said before he and Toon Link went back the way Lucina came.

"You coming, Cap'n?" Toon Link called out to Captain Falcon.

"Not just yet, kid. I'll let you know," Falcon told the younger incarnation of Link.

"Ah - ! Nnnngh..." Lucina suddenly collapsed to her knees once the two Links went on their way, covering her ears and wincing. "F-Father..."

"Lucina..." Walking over to his beloved, Captain Falcon crouched down and placed his hand on Lucina's shoulder to try to comfort her. "You're...hearing their screams again?"

"Specifically... my father's... and it's really loud..." Grunting, Lucina continued, "I... tried to keep it on the down low back there because... I didn't want the Links to worry, but... the fact I can hear father's screams so loudly... he has to be close by, but all I see is a wall of shrubbery..."

The Captain embraced Lucina tenderly. "We'll save him... I promise."

"Dharkon has to be doing something to him... to Zelda and the others too. I was lucky to be unconscious for a long time after Galeem's initial attack happened, so I don't think Dharkon did anything terrible to me until you came to save me... but it's like they said when they were controlling me. They feed off despair, and no doubt, watching them use my body to hurt you... maybe in the dark dimension father and the others are in... I guess only I can hear their screams, because Dharkon didn't want my suffering to end so easily... they're tormenting my friends and family now..."

"Don't overthink it, sweetie..." Falcon hugged Lucina slightly closer. She hugged him back as tightly as she could, calming down in his warm embrace as the screams slowly faded from her mind.

*What if she's right, though...?* The Captain thought, feeling a sense of dread linger over him.

"Hey...babe?" She asked him, somewhat timidly.

"Yes...?"

"I... don't want to keep any more secrets from you... or anyone... I guess the only 'secret' should be Snake knowing about...our night together at New Los Angeles, but that's it. At least that way he'll be more open to me visiting you at Smash City and... us spending a little more time together..." She giggled softly at that thought before her facial expression turned somber once more, and she continued, "But... in the long run, keeping secrets will only make others worry more. I've kept so many secrets from Zelda, Robin and my own family too... I shouldn't do that anymore."

"I'm glad," The Captain praised her. "Recognizing a problem is the first step to fixing it." Gently releasing her from his embrace, he then said, "I... want to apologize for keeping secrets from you too. About Blood Falcon and the Horrific Grand Finale... I thought if you didn't know, you'd be safe... but I guess what you don't know can hurt you, after all."

"Babe..."

"When Jody and I were together, we didn't keep any secrets from each other... I think we should both be open with each other, too. I promise, I won't keep any more secrets from you..."
"Thank you, Captain..." Lucina leaned closer to give her lover a small affectionate peck on the lips, smiling afterwards.

"Of course." Glancing to the side, he then asked, "But... what about the fact we're together? When I first came into the Dark Realm to save you, Shulk was the first person to figure out that I was in love with you, and I asked him to not tell anyone else we were a couple just yet, but Snake, and practically everyone else so far figured it out..." Chuckling briefly, he commented, "Is it really that obvious?"

"Robin, Richter, and my own mother and brother figured it out too... they said subtlety wasn't my strong suit," Lucina giggled. "It may sound silly, but... I actually think it's best everyone does know. I think we may... play a bigger role in all this than we realize."

"You think so?" Captain Falcon asked Lucina, who only nodded in response. "Well... I'll trust your judgment, sweetheart." He stood, extending a hand to help her stand as well.

"Lucina?" Robyn suddenly said. "Are you okay, dear?"

"Mother..." Glancing to the side, Lucina asked her mother, "How long... have you been standing there?"

"I heard you shouting, but I didn't want to interrupt you and your boyfriend there," Robyn answered her daughter with a compassionate smile before walking to her and hugging her.

"So... you heard?" Lucina asked her mother.

"Only some of it," Robyn answered Lucina, releasing her from her embrace. "You want to save your father with me?"

"Yes," Lucina confirmed. "I have a feeling he's close by... I'll explain more on the way."

"I guess I'll catch up with the Links in finding Young Link, then," Captain Falcon announced. "We'll catch up later, alright, my love?"

"Yes..." Lucina nodded, an affectionate smile gracing her face.

"Captain?" Robyn asked Falcon.

"Yeah?"

"I wanted to thank you for keeping my daughter safe all this time..."

"D-Don't mention it." Falcon glanced away bashfully, covering his mouth with his right hand as he blushed.

"I'm serious!" Robyn emphasized. "Not just during your training journey, but for saving my daughter from Dharkon's control as well... she trusts you because she loves you." Smiling, Robyn added, "And... I trust you too. Anyone my daughter cares so deeply about, I will also trust unconditionally."

Gasping faintly, the Captain then nodded with a reassuring smile. "Thank you, Robyn." He then ran off to find the other two Links.

..."Oh, Captain!" Shulk called out to Captain Falcon from afar.
"Shulk?" Walking over to the wielder of the Monado, the Captain asked, "Where are the Links?"

"They followed the hints from some other statues, and according to the last hint, Saria's Spirit should be in a small inlet accessible by swimming through a secret passage in the nearby lake."

Hearing a loud splash a short distance away, Falcon commented, "I guess one of 'em is off to do just that."

"Yeah... according to my visions, once Link awakens Saria's Spirit, the tree stump blocking the southeast passage should disappear. Toon Link's waiting there."

"I see..." Looking around, Falcon then asked Shulk, "And where are Snake and Samus?"

"I sensed Sonic nearby, just before the boulder blocking access to the Master Sword. Snake's on his way to save Sonic and have him serve as our messenger to Team A when they're done. Pikachu wanted to come with him... I don't know why, but he took it along. As for Samus, she's looking for the Spirit of Rex. He was someone she interviewed..."

"Ah." Noticing Robyn and Lucina searching the forest, he told Shulk, "Shulk... can I ask you a favor?"

"Shoot."

"Could you possibly assist Lucina and her mother in finding Chrom? Lucina... has a feeling he's close but doesn't know how to get to him."

"I will," Shulk obliged. "But... how does she know exactly where he is?"

"It's... some kind of intuition. I'm sure she'll tell you..." He glanced to the side pensively.

*I know she said no more secrets between us... as well as not keeping any important secrets from anyone else, but... something like that, I don't think I should tell them so soon. It's just a theory for now anyway... a theory that makes a lot of sense... I just don't know..."

"Something wrong?" Shulk asked Captain Falcon.

"N-no," the Captain stammered. "I'll wait over there with Toon Link. I guess we'll save Young Link together, especially since Toon Link wanted to meet him."

"Good luck to you both."

...

Within a minute, Link had freed Saria's Spirit from Dharkon's control, causing the tree stump blocking the rest of the southeast path to vanish. Captain Falcon managed to get a glimpse of Link emerging from the lake on the way over to Toon Link, and decided to check on him.

"You alright, Link?" He asked the legendary hero.

"Yes... just need some time to rest a bit." He shivered, the air around him feeling colder since he was dripping wet.

"Oh, Link," Ken said, walking up to Link and reaching into his supply bag. "I have a towel..."

"I've got some firewood," Samus offered.
"Thanks, you two," Link thanked them. "Toon Link's waiting for you, Falcon. You two save Young Link together, okay?"

"Of course," Falcon told Link. "I just... wanted to check in on you and make sure you were okay, that's all. In case... you needed something."

"That's... awfully nice of you, Captain," Link said with a smile, drying himself off with Ken's towel as Samus lit a small campfire with her firewood.

"Looks like you're being more open with everyone now," Samus commented with a reassuring smile. "Keep it up."

The Captain nodded and grinned before running off as Link, Ken and Samus sat around the campfire, with the Spirits of Saria and Rex introducing themselves and conversing with the Smashers.

..."What took you so long?" Toon Link asked the Captain. "Where's Link?"

"He said it's okay for just the two of us to save Young Link," Captain Falcon told Toon Link. "You ready, little one?"

"Yup!"

As the two approached Young Link, whose eyes were already glowing purple and his body surrounded by the familiar crimson aura, a dark mist transported the three of them to Hyrule Temple.

"Stay on your guard, kid," The Captain instructed Toon Link, getting into a defensive stance.

After raising his shield, Toon Link noticed Young Link wasn't attacking him or the Captain. "Wait, Cap... something's up..."

Lowering his guard, the Captain noticed Toon Link was telling the truth. Young Link just stood there, looking down with a sorrowful look on his face. Cautiously, he called out to the youth, "Hey... Young Link...?"

"...Why?" Were the words that came out of Young Link's lips, but this time, something was different. It was neither Dharkon's voice that spoke, nor his own.

It was somehow... both. As if Dharkon and Young Link were on the exact same wavelength. Despite this, Young Link's voice was more audible.

What is this...? Captain Falcon thought, a feeling of dread creeping down his spine. It's like... Dharkon and Young Link spoke at the same time... is Dharkon influencing Young Link's thoughts...?

"What's wrong...?" Falcon tried to act diplomatically upon being faced with this unexpected situation. What followed surprised him more.

"I... I thought I'd never see everyone again," Young Link said, his voice mingling with Dharkon's as he spoke. "You can't imagine how happy I was to see everyone back... Popo... Nana... Ness... the older me... Zelda... I even got to meet some people I hadn't met before, like Lucas... but it was only for a few minutes. Afterwards, it was... chaos. Everything was falling apart, and then... that
glowing orb came and I saw everyone vanish... I thought they had died... and now I'm here. Why? Why?"

"It's going to be okay, little one..." Captain Falcon cautiously walked closer to Young Link. "We'll save you..."

"No!" Young Link protested, shaking his head. "It's not going to be okay! After so long of feeling so alone... of missing all my friends... I get to see them again, only to have them taken away?! I had hope for the first time in the longest time... and happiness when I got to see my friends... and it was taken away, just like that..." Young Link closed his eyes and held his free hand in a fist to his chest.

"I..." The Captain bit his lip as he looked down. I should have noticed... when we ran into him again at Clock Town, he said he missed everyone and hoped to see them again, and what happened that led to this... must have been a shock to him...

"Hey..." Toon Link suddenly spoke up, timidly walking over to Young Link with a sheepish, nervous grin. "Everything's okay. Everyone's safe and alive, and we've saved so many of them. And we're sure to save more, so -"

"...Who are you?" Young Link bluntly asked, a trace of anger in his voice. "Were you... my replacement when I was away?"

"I - what?!!" Toon Link blurted. "That's stupid! Why would I -"

"Don't lie!" It was becoming more apparent that Dharkon was twisting Young Link's inner thoughts and amplifying his insecurities. "I was forgotten about for two tournaments... and replaced on top of it?!" He lunged at Toon Link in a leaping slash, but Toon Link blocked the blow with his shield.

"C'mon, get a grip," Toon Link called out to Young Link, deflecting the latter's sword with his shield and backflipping a short distance before continuing, "If you were really replaced... why would the Hands call you back to Smash?"

"I..." Young Link hesitated for a moment, during which Captain Falcon and Toon Link thought for sure Dharkon's influence was starting to fade. Young Link then retorted, "If that's true then... why did this happen?! Why were we attacked and separated from each other?"

"That's... what we're trying to find out," Falcon tried to console the youth. "I know... how you must have felt when you were thrust into all this after what was supposed to be the happiest moment of your life. But I promise, we'll get to the bottom of this... we'll get to go home..."

"I..." Young Link collapsed to his knees, dropped his sword and covered his head in his hands. "I'm just... so alone... and confused... I don't know how to feel..." As he spoke, Dharkon's voice began to fade until only Young Link's voice could be heard.

"Hey," Toon Link said, walking over to Young Link and placing a hand on his shoulder as a comforting gesture. "You know, when I first joined Smash, it took a while for Link, Zelda, and Sheik to warm up to me. They said they really missed you... Even when the fourth tournament rolled around, even though I became friends with them, they still felt someone was missing..."

"They...missed me?" Feeling tears come to his eyes, Young Link wiped them away as he murmured, "I'm... glad... I've missed them all so much. I've missed everyone..."

"Wanna be friends?" Toon Link asked Young Link with an amicable grin. "You have all your friends here... why not make another while you're at it?"
"R-really?" Young Link's eyes returned to his normal blue hue amidst a white sclera, indicating that Dharkon was quickly losing their control over him.

"Sure!" Hugging Young Link, Toon Link said, "I've always wanted to meet the different incarnations of myself... and you know, you can never have too many friends!"

"Ah..." The dark aura surrounding Young Link disappeared as he hugged Toon Link back and the dark mist changed the setting back to the forest. "Thank you..." He wept softly. Toon Link gently pat Young Link on the back as a comforting gesture.

"You're never alone, Young Link," The Captain told him with a compassionate smile. "Even if we have to go our separate ways some day, you'll always have us in your memories..." Looking to the side, he solemnly thought, That's right... If what Snake said is true... we might not get another reunion like this... any one of us might have to leave... Lucina's face immediately flashed in his mind. Lucina... I don't want us to have to go our separate ways... After all we've been through together...

It was then that he remembered Lucina theorizing that Dharkon had to be doing something to the other fighters, hence the screams only she could hear. She was right... Dharkon is doing something to their victims... twisting their thoughts, bringing their deepest fears and regrets to the forefront of their mind... who knows what else. I have to inform her...

"Hey, you two," Captain Falcon called out to the two small Links. "Follow me... I have to catch up with the others, particularly Lucina..."

"Lucina's here?" Young Link asked, a hopeful smile gracing his face. "I wanna see her again! I've missed her!"

"I'm sure she's missed you too," Falcon replied. "Let's go."

Once Captain Falcon and the smaller Links returned to the campfire Link, Samus and Ken were sitting around, they found Shulk resting there as well.

"...Anyway, Shulk, remember when you and Fiora went to Alrest with me? Elma too? Oh, it was so much fun showing Alrest to you guys!" Rex's Spirit told Shulk.

"Indeed," Shulk agreed. "I hope you can join us someday, Rex. I'd like to fight by your side again...maybe spar against you, too." Noticing the Captain and the two Links approaching, he called out to them, "Oh, hey guys. I see Young Link is back with us."

"Yeah." The Captain confirmed as Toon Link ran up to the older Link, while Young Link stayed by the Captain's side. "Where's Lucina?"

"Just wait right there by the open treasure chest," Shulk advised, pointing to an opened treasure chest a short distance away. Noticing Falcon and Young Link's perplexed expressions, Shulk told them with a slight chuckle, "Just trust me on this one."

"If you say so..."

Young Link and Captain Falcon walked over to the treasure chest and waited, as per Shulk's instructions. A few seconds of silence passed, and Young Link commented. "I don't get it..."

"Well..." The Captain began to explain, "It seems this forest has secret passages, like how Link
freed Saria's Spirit so I could get to you? She was tucked away somewhere only accessible by a secret path in a lake, so it wouldn't surprise me if - " Just then, both he and Young Link saw a hand reaching out from the bottom of the treasure chest.

"WHOA!" Both of them cried out, stumbling over in surprise.

"...Babe? Is that you?" A familiar voice asked the Captain.

"...Lucina?"

Hoisting herself up, she climbed out of the treasure chest, got on her knees and hugged her lover. "I've done it... I saved my father..."

Hugging her back, the Captain commended her, "I'm so proud of you, sweetheart... I knew you could do it."

"Heehee..." Noticing Young Link close by, she greeted him with a smile, "It's been a while, Young Link." Young Link wordlessly drew closer to the couple and joined them in a group hug.

"Heh... this group hug almost makes it feel like we're a family," Captain Falcon commented. "Like we're a married couple with a son..."

"I suppose..." Lucina embraced them slightly tighter. "That would be nice..."

Smiling and blushing softly at the thought, Falcon then asked her as he released her and Young Link from the group hug, "Say... where's your family?" Young Link then ran back to the campfire with Link and the others.

"They should be here soon..." Within seconds, Robyn climbed out of the treasure chest, followed by Chrom.

Turning around and noticing where he crawled out of, Chrom announced, "You mean to tell me... I was inside a treasure chest?!"

"Well, dear," Robyn began, hugging him and smiling affectionately, "You are my treasure!"

"UGH, MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!" Lucina and the Spirit of Morgan wasted no time in groaning at their mother's cheesy pun, while Chrom, Robyn, and Captain Falcon burst into laughter.

"It's just like mother to crack a lame pun like this, huh, sis?" Morgan asked his sister.

"And at a time like this... how embarrassing..." Lucina crawled away and hid her face in her hands.

Noticing the sound of Captain Falcon's laughter, Chrom murmured, "Is that...?"

"Oh..." The Captain stopped laughing when he noticed Chrom walking toward him and stood up, brushing the dirt off his clothing. Lucina stood as well, murmuring "F-Father..." before looking down shyly.

"Chrom..." Falcon began, somewhat timidly. "I'm... happy you finally got your chance. Listen... I wanted to apologize for that day..."

"All is forgiven, Captain," Chrom answered him. "I can't possibly continue to bear ill will toward the man who's kept my daughter safe all this time, now can I?"
"R-Really?" The Captain questioned, slightly surprised that Chrom forgave him that easily, but at the same time greatly relieved. "Even though... I crushed your dream back then?"

"I always believed I would get my chance another day, and that day came," Chrom explained. "I can fight alongside my wife and daughter, and everyone else in Smash City. Even you, Captain. This is an honor I've dreamed of for so long, and the fact it finally came to fruition fills my heart with a joy I can't describe."

"But what about... before you were accepted?"

"I never gave up hope," Chrom answered the Captain. "And I knew you weren't to blame... I knew you could only take Robin, my wife, and my daughter onboard at that time, it was entirely Master Hand's decision and you were simply fulfilling it. I didn't give it my all back then either... during our fight..."

"No, please, Chrom," Captain Falcon dissuaded Lucina's father. "You were a very worthy opponent." Glancing up at the cloudy sky above, he commented, "You know... once we all get rid of Dharkon and go home, why don't we someday... spar for old times' sake?"

"Sure, why not," Chrom accepted the Captain's offer. "I won't hold back, you know!"

"Don't expect me to, either," The Captain boasted with a confident grin. Just then, Lucina walked over to him and made a gesture to come closer, as if she were going to whisper something to him.

"Lucina? What's up?" Leaning over to hear what she had to whisper to him, he mumbled, "Are you sure? ... Okay."

"Lucina?" Chrom asked his daughter.

"Father..." Lucina began. "You know how Captain Falcon trained me when I was away from Smash City, keeping me safe all the while? And how he freed me from Dharkon's control? Well..." She reached for the Captain's hand, holding it as their fingers interlaced. Blushing and looking to the side, she continued, "We've...gotten closer than expected. We've gotten to know each other so well and...basically became a couple..."

I...hope you can accept us being together, father...in spite of what happened in the past...

"You two... you're in love?"

"We are..." Gently letting go of Lucina's hand, Captain Falcon held the hand that once held hers to his chest. "I... hope you don't have any objections..."

He's going to say no... isn't he...? Falcon bit his lip anxiously.

"...Why would I ever object to my daughter being with the man she truly loves?"

"H-Huh?!"

"There's no denying you two became close during your training. Any issues you two had with each other in the past, you've worked it out during your time together. My daughter found her happiness with you, and I would never dream of taking that away."

"Chrom... thank you." Reaching for her hand again, the Captain gently held it as he announced, "I've found my happiness with her too, and I vow to continue to protect her as I have been all this time. It... really means the world to me that you've given us your blessing."
"Father... I will protect Falcon, too," Lucina told Chrom. "He's trained me well, and I, too, vowed to keep him safe. We'll be... having each other's backs, right? Is that how the saying goes?"

"You certainly have gotten stronger since I saw you last, Lucina," Chrom acknowledged. "And that sounds wonderful. Just like me and Robyn, we keep each other safe... You've found your perfect match, my dear daughter, and I couldn't be happier for you."

"Father..." Lucina ran up to her father and hugged him. "Oh... and congratulations. I'm glad you've finally got your chance... I look forward to fighting alongside you in Smash."

"Thank you."

"I'm just... sorry I couldn't be there the day you got accepted..." Lucina released her father from her embrace, looking down solemnly. Placing his right hand on his daughter's shoulder, Chrom reassured her, "It's all right... at least you get to congratulate me now, when we're together as a family." He brought his daughter and wife in for a group hug, and the Spirit of his son joined in too.

"Or should I say... Chrom... congratulate him?" Robyn teased with a wink.

"Motherrrrrr!" Lucina and Morgan complained before the whole family burst into hearty laughter.

"I want to formally congratulate you too, Chrom," Captain Falcon told Chrom. "I didn't get to right away either... and I had my own insecurities and fears about it at first."

"Again, don't worry about it, Captain," Chrom told Falcon with a confident smile as he gently broke the group hug and made eye contact with him. "It's all water under the bridge. Know that I never bore any sort of grudge toward you..."

"...Thank you." The Captain subtly bowed respectfully, and Chrom smiled and nodded before he and his family began to walk off to the campfire.

"Oh... Lucina?" Falcon called out to his lover.

"...Yes, babe?" She walked over to him.

"Did... you notice anything peculiar when you and your mother saved your dad? Did he say or do anything that struck you as... odd?"

"A little..." Lucina admitted. "He refused to attack either of us, but he lamented that I wasn't there on the happiest day of his life - the day he got accepted for Smash. He surprisingly didn't mention anything about you... which I suppose reassures me that he really didn't hold anything against you... and I heard a bit of Dharkon's voice with my father's when he spoke."

"Listen... I think your theory may be right. About Dharkon doing something to their victims... when I saved Young Link earlier, I could hear both his and Dharkon's voices overlapping as he spoke... and he seemed distraught, unwilling to cooperate, and thought Toon Link replaced him at one point. It would appear Dharkon is twisting their victims' thoughts, bringing fears, worries, regrets, even grudges out of their subconscious and amplifying them. I don't know if Team A is experiencing this as well, but... be on your guard. Especially when you go to save Zelda... I know she's your best friend, and if this pattern continues, saving her from Dharkon's grasp might be difficult... Just don't give up."

"Thank you, babe..." Lucina hugged her lover tightly. "I'll keep it in mind."
"Hey, Cap," Snake interrupted them.

"Snake? What's up?"

"I... noticed something similar when I went to save Sonic. He was... terrified. Blaming himself not only for the fact that he couldn't outrun Galeem's initial attack, but also that when he tried to save Pikachu, he saw it vaporized in front of him... it's a good thing Pikachu came with me, as it being there put Sonic at ease and we were able to save him, too."

"Did... Sonic's and Dharkon's voices overlap, too?" Lucina asked Snake.

"Yeah... It's like Dharkon was whispering in Sonic's ear...like you said, Cap, I too wonder if Team A is experiencing something like this... I guess we'll know when they're done and Sonic leads 'em back here."

"Yeah..." The Captain murmured.

"Sorry to interrupt, guys," Shulk suddenly began as he walked up to them, "But I got another vision. We'll be moving to the next area where the Mii Brawler and Zelda are. Once we save Zelda, the boulder blocking the way to the Master Sword will clear, and we can save Cloud, and once that mist is cleared with the Master Sword, we'll be able to save more Spirits, as well as Bowser Jr., the Koopalings, and Ganondorf." Beckoning the three, he announced, "Come on, let's go."

... Team B reunited with the Inkling Girl and the newly-rescued Incineroar at the entrance before taking the path that led to a sunlit grassland. They saw two series of twelve lanterns each laid out in a circular fashion, one inside the other, resembling some kind of clock.

"What now, Shulk?" Captain Falcon asked the wielder of the Monado.

"In order to gain access to Zelda, Impa's spirit must be freed from Dharkon's control. Once she is, the boulder blocking the way to the Master Sword will disappear, and we can save Cloud, and once that mist is cleared with the Master Sword, we'll be able to save more Spirits, as well as Bowser Jr., the Koopalings, and Ganondorf." Beckoning the three, he announced, "Come on, let's go."

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"What now, Shulk?" Captain Falcon asked the wielder of the Monado.

"In order to gain access to Zelda, Impa's spirit must be freed from Dharkon's control. Once she is, the boulder blocking the way to the Master Sword will disappear, but to get to Impa, the lanterns must be lit to show a time of 12:10. For the Mii Brawler, the 'clock' has to be at 4:40. But it goes without saying you can only do one at a time, so I'd suggest freeing Impa's Spirit first."

"I'll go, Shulk," Sheik offered. "Which lanterns represent the hour and which ones are for the minute?"

"The red lanterns are for the hour, and the blue lanterns are for the minute. It operates like the hands on a clock."

"...Got it." Sheik ran off and followed Shulk's instructions.

"Once she's done, I'll go for the Mii Brawler, and then Dunban's Spirit which is up that hill," Shulk said, pointing in the direction of a hill in the distance.

"Excuse me, Shulk," Robin stated, "But once Zelda is freed and the boulder near the Master Sword disappears, I'd like to try to save Cloud. Since we were both involved in the... investigation that day, and once Team A arrives, he can help bring everyone up to speed."

"Sounds fair," Shulk obliged.

"Okay." Turning to Lucina, Robin asked her, "You're going to save Zelda, right?"
"Yes... As her roommate and friend, I feel it's my obligation... Especially considering, despite all she's done for me, I haven't been completely honest with her, as you know... I want to make up for that..."

"I see..." Noticing the Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee running up to Lucina, Robin commented, "Looks like Bandee wants to come with you... Zelda interviewed him, so I'm sure he'd want to help you however he can."

"Of course..." Crouching down, Lucina cooed, "Come along, little guy."

"I suppose I'll see you all once I save Cloud," Robin announced with a wave before running off.

"Later, Robin," Captain Falcon told him. "I guess all we have to do now is wait..."

"I suppose..." Lucina and her lover took a seat on some rocks nearby when Daisy, Richter, and Ken walked up to them.

"Sup, Lucina?" Ken greeted her, followed by Daisy enthusiastically shouting, "HELLO!" with an energetic smile, and Richter calmly but silently waving hello.

"You guys..." Lucina stood and smiled at them softly.

"Lucina, who might these be?" Falcon asked his girlfriend. "I recognize Princess Daisy, and Ken Masters is Ryu's best friend, but who's the other man with them?"

"Babe, this is Richter Belmont," Lucina introduced Richter to her lover. "I met Richter when I ended up in his and Simon's world. As for Ken, I met him at the same off world quest I met Fiora at."

"Lucina told me about you, Captain," Richter said, extending his hand for a handshake. "It's nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too, Mr. Belmont," Falcon replied, shaking his hand.

"Oh, please, you can just call me Richter," Richter chuckled bashfully. "I know it's a bit strange to finally meet you when we're in the middle of saving our friends from mind-controlling deities. Can't say it's the first time I've been controlled..."

"It... has been for me, though. Probably the Captain too," Lucina commented. "Say, Richter... when they were freeing you, Daisy, Dark Pit, Ken, and the others in Dracula's Castle from Dharkon's control... did anything seem... off?"

"Not that I recall," Richter shrugged. "I guess it was no different from when the Captain saved you, that Dharkon would be in control of us one minute, detailing some of their plans, then we'd struggle to break free. Except for Ridley and Wario, they basically realized they were being controlled and... let's just say, didn't take too kindly to the thought. Simon saved me, I guess what gave me the strength to break free was him and Alucard reminding me of my duties as a Belmont. I'm actually a bit surprised it was that easy."

"Would you believe it was Little Mac that saved me?" Ken commented. "Freakin' Little Mac! I guess it's fitting cuz I wiped the floor with him before I got accepted... then Incineroar showed up, heheh. But this time, Mac beat me fair and square... not gonna lie, the thrill of fighting, the rematch that felt like it was fate, seeing that kid step up his game... that's what got me to break free."

"Peach saved me, being my best friend and all," Daisy explained. "I swear, if she calls me a
crybaby again though..."

"Don't tell me that's what got you to break free?" Ken jested as Richter snickered.

"Unless you want my parasol rammed up your ass, Masters, you won't say another word on that matter...!" Daisy glared at Ken ominously. Ken, feeling a sense of fear creep up his spine upon being addressed on a last-name basis, hid behind an intimidated Richter and mumbled, "Richter... she's scaring me..." Lucina and Captain Falcon giggled at the exchange.

"If you think that's juicy though, you should have seen how Pit saved our fellow Echo Program participant, Dark Pit," Daisy began, snickering. "It was even funnier to see Dark Pit deny that he was crying and hugging Pit... it was actually kind of cute, but he just has to act all tough... it's actually kind of endearing!"

"Say, Daisy?" Lucina asked the princess of Sarasaland. "What's this 'Echo Program' you once mentioned before?"

"Oh, that," Daisy began. "You know how you fight like Marth, and Dark Pit fights like Pit? Master Hand decided that, upon my arrival, fighters like us, who have a lot of similarities to someone else but have such subtle differences either in skills or personality, call ourselves Echoes. Your father joined as an Echo of Roy. Ken's an Echo of Ryu, obviously, and there's Dark Samus, who's Samus's Echo when she's in her Power Suit."

"I see..."

"It's opened up the gates for a lot of potential fighters, so I hope to see more faces join us, with or without the Echo Program," Richter commented.

"That would be wonderful. Just the thought of meeting them all sounds exciting," Lucina said.

"I agree," The Captain concurred. Hearing a sudden rumbling, he then saw Sheik teleporting over to them.

"Alright, Impa's Spirit has been saved," she announced. "Lucina, if you want to save Zelda, now's your chance."

"Thank you, Sheik." Turning to Captain Falcon, Lucina told him, "I'll be back soon, my love."

"I'll be waiting," he replied. "I guess I'll chat with your fellow Echoes for a bit. They seem like an interesting bunch, especially Ken."

"Have fun, babe." She leaned in to give him a kiss on the cheek before running off.

...\n
Lucina finally arrived where Zelda was. Seeing Zelda standing before her with the crimson aura surrounding her body and her eyes glowing purple, a dark mist enveloped the both of them and changed their surroundings to Hyrule Temple. Like with Chrom and Young Link before her, Zelda also stood there and did not attack.

"Zelda...?" Lucina cautiously called out, slowly inching to her friend afterward before Zelda launched a Din's Fire at Lucina, stopping just a few centimeters before her as a warning shot.

"Stay back!" Zelda shouted. Like with her father, Lucina noticed Dharkon's voice blending with Zelda's. Without a doubt, they were manipulating her emotions as well.
"Please, Zelda, snap out of it," Lucina urged her friend. "Dharkon's just trying to manipulate your thoughts..."

"No." Zelda coldly looked away as she began, "I see no point in coming with you. I remember... from my past incarnation, that whenever I noticed you distressed, or something was weighing you down... You'd just brush it off, even when I figured out what the problem was. You wouldn't let me in... why? I only wanted to help you..."

"Zelda..." Sighing, Lucina explained, "I didn't want you to worry. I didn't want to be seen as weak, or that I couldn't solve my own problems. I felt that whatever I was facing... only I could solve it."

"But don't you see, Lucy?" The look in Zelda's eyes turned pleading, sad, as she continued, "That only made me worry more... I felt useless. We're friends, aren't we? Aren't we supposed to confide in each other? You listened to me whenever I needed advice, but..."

"I know... and I'm sorry." Lifting her gaze to meet her friend's, Lucina continued, "I've learned. I promise to not keep any secrets from you anymore..."

"I'm afraid it's too late for that." Looking at Lucina with a hurt look in her eyes, Zelda stated, "If it were my other incarnation, she'd probably just shrug it off. But not me..."

She's right... Lucina thought. This Zelda is a bit younger than the Zelda I knew before my training journey, and her personality is different too. She's understandably more sensitive... Just then, she could hear the real Zelda's voice screaming into her mind as she covered her ears and winced.

"Uuuugh..."

"Please, Lucina, I need you! Don't leave me...!"

"Zelda..." Regaining her composure, Lucina began, "I know you don't want to believe this, Zelda, but just now, I heard the real you screaming for me... that you need me. I know this isn't how you really feel..." Noticing the Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee peering out from behind her with a sad look in his eyes, she continued, "Remember Bandee? He's worried about you too... he considers you a friend, and just like when I met him, he doesn't like to see friends sad... Please. I know I was wrong to shut you out. I promise I won't do that anymore..."

"Lucina... Bandee..." For a moment, Zelda spoke purely in her own voice as she trembled and looked like she was going to cry. For a moment, it looked like freeing her from Dharkon's grasp would be easier than expected, until...

"I'm sor- uuuuuugh!" She suddenly clutched her head.

"...Zelda?!"

"Lu...cina..." Zelda strained in her own voice, before her arms dropped to her sides limply and her head bobbed. When she lifted her gaze to meet Lucina's again, it was only Dharkon's voice that came out of her lips.

"You sure are persistent for my former puppet," Dharkon spoke through Zelda. "Why do you want to save someone you wouldn't let help you? Those feelings she's expressed... I am not the one planting those thoughts into her mind. Those feelings of loneliness, of rejection... they are real. You pushed her away, and only now you're letting her in?"

"I don't doubt that I indirectly hurt her with the dismissiveness of my actions when she was only worried about me," Lucina told the being who once controlled her. "But I want her to see that I've
"You heard her... she does not want to hear it!" Zelda began gathering magical energy in her hand as a Phantom knight was assembled piece by piece, the artificial fighter lunging at Lucina when Zelda pointed at her. Backflipping out of the automated suit of armor's path, Lucina declared, "I know that's not what the real Zelda wants... I heard her screaming for me. This is probably a side effect of what you did to me, Dharkon, but this way... I at least know I can save her."

"You will die trying!" Zelda began twirling in place as wind magic energy surrounded her and she prepared to use Farore's Wind to warp over to Lucina, who was standing close to the edge of the platform. Lucina leapt out of the projected warp point, but wasn't expecting Zelda to overshoot her projected warp coordinates, causing her to warp over open air past the edge of the platform.

"No...!" Zelda gasped in her own voice as she struggled to regain control of her body and reached for the ledge, successfully grabbing it.

"Zelda!" Lucina shouted, running to her friend as she knew that in her current state, she probably wouldn't be able to hold on much longer. Without a moment's hesitation, she reached for Zelda's hand and tried to help her up.

"Lu...cina...?" Zelda murmured, a slightly confused yet sad look in her eyes. "Why are you still helping me... after all I said...?"

"Because... I knew that wasn't you," Lucina answered her roommate with a tender smile. "When Dharkon was twisting your thoughts, I heard the real you crying out for me... that you didn't want me to leave you." Her eyes began to well up with tears as she continued, "I... don't want anyone to leave me either, and... when I was trying to find the Captain again... I got lost, I almost died... and that hallucination... you and everyone else I cared about were fading away, because I pushed you all away... it was a wake up call for me."

"Lucina..." Zelda held on tightly to Lucina's hand as the Ylissean helped the Princess of Hyrule up. Once she was lifted to safety, she willed her body to stay perfectly still and tried to focus, knowing Dharkon could control her or twist her emotions again.

"The nightmare I had that night... it was so long ago for you, but it feels like yesterday for me. In that dream... nobody came to help me when I needed it. Everyone just walked away... I've always hated being alone, but that was my greatest fear." Lucina blinked, causing tears to stream down her face as she continued, "You were right about Captain Falcon. He was only looking out for me, realizing that I couldn't shoulder all my burdens alone... that I shouldn't be ashamed to open up to others. During our journey... he opened up to me too. We did become closer... to the point that we fell in love with each other."

"Ah..." Zelda blinked, her eyes returning to their usual color. Hearing Lucina open up to her filled her heart with joy and began to weaken Dharkon's power over her.

Wiping away her tears, Lucina said, "I've changed... thanks to him. Knowing such joy... the joy of being in love... has helped me put things in perspective. I promise, Zelda... by my honor as an Ylissean, I won't be so distant from you or anyone I care about anymore... and I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I'm ready now... ready to go home." She hugged her best friend, and the Spirit of Bandana Waddle Dee joined in.

"I..." Zelda's eyes began to flood with happy tears, the gratitude in her heart forcing Dharkon's influence out of her, as she embraced them back, closed her eyes as the dark aura vanished from her person and the setting returned to what it was before, and said, "...That's all I wanted to hear,
"I'm glad..." Lucina hugged her friend tighter. "You've been so good to me... everyone in Smash City has. I was stupid to take it all for granted... but with the Captain, you, Robin, Shulk... everyone by my side, I won't do that anymore..."

"Good," Zelda told her friend. "Let's take Dharkon down, then we can finally put an end to this nightmare." Just then, a loud thunderclap echoed through the land as the Master Sword was freed, clearing the gloom obscuring the northern part of the realm.

Releasing Zelda from her embrace, Lucina stood and saw her suspicions were indeed correct. "Looks like shortly after I saved you, Robin saved Cloud, and we were able to clear the gloom up ahead..."

"Veemo!" An unknown voice interrupted them. Lucina, Zelda and the Spirit of Bandee turned and saw a transparent young half-cephalopod half-humanoid female lifeform that looked similar to an Inkling, but with octopus-like traits instead of squid-like traits, standing next to Shulk, accompanied by a male of the same species.

"Heh, looks like the Octolings are ready for adventure," Shulk commented. "With the gloom up north gone, all we have left to save are Bowser Jr., the Koopalings, and Ganondorf. Bowser, the Links, and Sheik are waiting for us just ahead."

"Something tells me freeing Ganondorf from Dharkon's grasp might be harder than expected," Zelda commented apprehensively. "Knowing him, he might cooperate with them, or just not be able to be awakened by appealing to emotions or memories. We might have to beat some sense into him..."

"Either way, I wish you luck," Shulk told Zelda. "Come on, let's not keep them waiting. Bowser's been dying to save his kids... and I have someone I want to save too..."

"Fiora..." Lucina murmured. Turning to Zelda, she asked her, "Let's go, Zelda. You've been in the dark for too long... let's all step into the light of hope... of a new beginning."

"...Yes." The two best friends and the Spirit of the spear-wielding Waddle Dee joined their friends a short distance away.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, this got longer than expected. I'll leave it here for pacing's sake.

Next chapter though, hooo boy... it'll be a wild ride, and it's not even the finale but the penultimate chapter. We're getting close guys... :D

I hope my depictions, current and future, of the motives of Galeem/Dharkon/Tabuu, as well as the abilities of the former two, are on point or at least unique and fleshed out. I thought emotional manipulation might be an interesting idea for those cosmic forces.
Chapter Notes

This WAS going to be the penultimate chapter, but lately I've been worrying that I cram too much into my chapters and I should give my readers some breathing room and also to help pace better. next chapter might be longer, final chapter most likely WILL be hella long, so I guess this is a breather chapter with enough happening? Also I've scrapped the epilogue; there will be a separate follow-up fic to this instead after it's finished.

Content warnings: Final Fantasy VII spoiler (THAT one) is referenced not-so-subtly, as well as a Kid Icarus Uprising spoiler you've probably already been exposed to from Palutena's Smash 4 trailer. also, there's some suggestive dialogue. Hints of IsaWolf perhaps?

also oh frickkkkk I FORGOT to mention the Koopalings with Bowser Jr. despite me going out of my way to mention Alph with Olimar. Previous chapters have been updated to reflect that.

title namesake - Uncontrollable from the Xenoblade X OST

In my Skin, Broken from Within

Chapter 21 - Uncontrollable

It had been several minutes since the gloom was purged from the northern lands of the Sacred Realm. Bowser, Shulk, the Links, Sheik, Lucina, and Zelda had freed several Spirits from Dharkon's clutches along the way, including Shulk's girlfriend, Fiora, and someone both she and Lucina met on that off world quest they first met at: a martial artist named Akira Yuki, who was an Assisting Fighter in Smash City. In between, the group would converse among themselves and the Spirits they brought with them. Rex would tell tales of his journey across Alrest to Shulk and the adventurous Bandana Waddle Dee; Toon Link, Young Link and the Octolings would tell each other jokes, even though the two small Links didn't really understand their cephalopod friends' wisecracks; and Zelda would voice her suspicions of Sheik getting a bit too close to Link despite Sheik being a different incarnation of Zelda in disguise, which led to Lucina giggling at their exchanges.

"...Alright, guys," Bowser told his traveling companions. "My kids are up ahead. After I save them, I'm headin' back."

"Understandable," Shulk reassured the King of the Koopas. "Links, Zelda, Sheik... according to my visions, if you head to the right, you'll reach someplace that looks like an abandoned town. Ganondorf will be there... but...something's a bit strange. Once you get him on your side, Dharkon's guardian for this realm will appear... and it's... the Demon King Ganon? So... Ganondorf from another timeline?" He subtly muttered under his breath, "Looks like Snake was right about those two tampering with the space-time continuum..."

"Looks like this will be a job for all of us," Link commented. "Thanks, Shulk."
As the group of Hylians headed east, Lucina called out to Zelda, "Oh, and Zelda?"

"Yes, Lucina?"

"I'll tell you, and everyone else, everything once you're done and Team A gets here! Promise!"

Nodding, Zelda concurred with a smile, "It's a promise," before catching up with the others.

"So? What now?" Shulk asked Lucina.

Noticing the Spirit of Fiora standing next to Shulk, Lucina suggested, "The others will take things from here. Why don't we head back? I'd like to do some catching up with Fiora while I'm at it..."

"Of course."

..."Say, Mr. Yuki?" Fiora asked Akira as they, Shulk, Lucina, and the spirits of Bandana Waddle Dee, the Octolings and Dunban walked back to the clock puzzle area. "Why do you look...blockier than how I saw you last?"

"The Hands gave me this form," Akira answered her matter-of-factly.

"Ah... right..." Fiora chuckled nervously, a bit unnerved that Akira wasn't even bothered by his current form. "Oh! Lucina!" She caught up with her friend a short distance away.

"Fiora... it's been a while." Lucina smiled softly at her best friend. "I've been meaning to ask... what's it like being a Spirit?"

"That it has," Fiora said. "As for what it's like being a Spirit... it's like... we can see and hear everything you guys do and say, but when it comes to close physical contact, it feels... incomplete." Holding her right hand to her chest, she continued, "When Shulk saved me... he hugged me, but I could barely feel him there..." Her facial expression turned solemn.

"Think of it this way," Lucina said, trying to lift her friend's spirits. "Once this is all over, you'll have your body back. You'll be able to enjoy hugging Shulk again." Looking to the side, she smiled and blushed as she continued, "When Captain Falcon freed me from Dharkon's control... the moment we shared in each other's arms... it was magical. His warmth, his tenderness... things I've missed before he saved me... it was like in that moment, the only things that existed were myself and him... So wonderful."

"Ah, so you told him how you felt?"

Turning to Fiora, Lucina replied, "...Yes. It just so happened he was in love with me too... and then..." "A dreamy smile graced her face as she sighed, "It was truly... the happiest day of my life."

"Aww!" Fiora gushed. Her face bore a curious but cheeky expression as she inquired, "So... how far did you guys go? Give me all the juicy deets!"

"F-F-F-FIORA!" Lucina's face turned beet red. "We're friends and all, but I will not give you the 'deets'! It's too embarrassing!"

"Oh really? Then why were you all blushy-crushy when you were giving him first aid that day...?"

"T-that's-" Stammering and flustered, Lucina decided to change the subject with, "What's it like when a Spirit is being controlled?"
"Aren't you a spoilsport," Fiora muttered grumpily before bursting into laughter, and Lucina followed suit. "Anyway, it's like... we're in a dream. We're seeing and fighting things that aren't really there... sometimes the right voice can free us, like Shulk's did for me. Other times, you'd just beat the stuffing out of the puppet fighter we've been crammed into, and that's that."

"Was it like that for you too, Bandee?" Lucina asked Bandee's Spirit, who nodded in affirmation. "I see..."

"All in all, I'm just happy to be with you guys," Fiora said. "I've missed my big brother Dunban, and Riki too. Shulk tells me Reyn, Melia and Sharla are waiting for me too..."

"I'm sure they'd be glad to see you again." Smiling, Lucina told Fiora, "I'm glad I have my parents and little brother with me as well... I really am thankful for everyone I've met in my life, in my homeworld or in Smash City..."

But... Above all, I'm glad I have him by my side. That's why... I don't want to lose him... ever again...

"Lucina?" Fiora asked her friend, who seemed to be in a trance.

"Oh..." Lucina softly murmured as she came to her senses. "I'm fine. I... just hope you can join us someday, Fiora."

Hopefully before the next tournament begins... if what the Captain and Snake say is true, this might be the last time we're all back together...

"Hopefully. I mean, if your dad can pull it off, I'm sure I can too," Fiora said, referring to Chrom being a fighter and still summoned in Robin's Final Smashes. "Say, I didn't mention it back then, but the day we were in Mute City, I was being interviewed by Master Hand..."

"Tell me more," Lucina told her friend. "I didn't know, so... I'm sorry I couldn't put in some wishes of good luck or something..."

"No worries," Fiora replied, trying to put her friend at ease. "I didn't tell you cause I wanted it to be a surprise if I made it after all. Anyway..."

... Eventually, the two friends arrived at the grasslands area with the lantern "clock", where the rest of Team B was waiting.

"...I see," Lucina told Fiora after the latter finished her explanation. "I'm sorry to have made you worry if I did, though. You know how it was that day... I had to think fast to make sure everyone would be safe. Including you..."

"It's okay," Fiora reassured her friend, her face bearing a compassionate expression. "In the end, everything worked out... and we'll all find a way out of this here mess too."

"True..." Lucina nodded. Looking ahead, she saw Riki's Spirit, as well as two women and one young man she didn't recognize. "Looks like your friends are waiting for you and your older brother."

"Heeeeeeey!" Fiora called out to her friends with a wave. "Riki! Reyn! Melia! Sharla!" Turning to the Spirit of her brother, she told him, "Let's go, Dunban!"
As the Spirits of Fiora and Dunban walked off, Lucina spotted her lover talking with Cloud, who was rescued not long ago. Walking up to them, she managed to hear some of their conversation.

"In any case, it's nice to be able to properly meet you, Captain," Cloud told Captain Falcon, resting his right elbow on the crossguard of his Buster Sword as it was stuck into the ground blade-first. "It was kinda an emergency in NLA, so..."

"No worries," The Captain reassured the ex-SOLDIER. "It's nice to meet you, too. I've heard about you, how you resisted the mega-corporation Shinra and stopped a meteor from destroying your planet..."

"I've heard about you too... your career as a bounty hunter is quite impressive," Cloud complimented him. "Racing's not for me, though, especially given how fast F-Zero machines can go. I'd get motion sickness fast..."

"Heh, it's not for everyone, that's for sure," Falcon remarked. Noticing Lucina standing there, he smiled and said, "Welcome back, sweetheart."

"Good to be back, babe," Lucina replied, drawing closer and hugging the man she loved.

"So... you two are together?" Cloud asked them. "I had no idea..."

"It's a long story, but yeah," The Captain replied, tenderly releasing Lucina from his embrace. "When Team A gets here, we... have some things we'd like to share once you finish your explanation. It's based on our experiences before this all happened, as well as some discoveries here too..."

"Really?" Cloud asked.

"Yo!" Sonic called out to Cloud from afar, standing at the top of the nearby stairway with Team A and the Smashers and Spirits they saved in tow. "We late to the party?"

Picking up his sword and putting it in the holding attachment on his back, Cloud beckoned to Team A and Sonic, "You're just in time. Come on over."

While Cloud brought all the Smashers up to speed on the investigation that happened before Galeem's initial attack, some of the Spirits managed to reunite with their fellow Spirit friends. The Spirit of Amy Rose met up with her friends Cream, Blaze and Silver, who were found in the Light Realm; and Rex was reunited with his partner Pyra, who was also found in the Light Realm, among other such reunions.

In spite of all these reunions, however, everyone there, Smasher and Spirit alike, knew that they couldn't stay here forever, that they had to fight for their freedom; so that they could go home, and that the universe would be restored to its former state.

"...and that's just what happened before Galeem's attack," Cloud concluded his explanation. "I was unconscious from when Galeem first attacked to when I was freed from Dharkon's control... well... mostly. According to Captain Falcon, Dharkon has been manipulating the emotions of most, if not all, of the Smashers rescued in this particular dimension... including myself."

"You, too?" Lucina asked Cloud.

"Yeah," Cloud confirmed. His facial expression became increasingly glum as he continued, "It's
like... when Robin was saving me... I even felt it, I could feel Dharkon bringing my most painful
memories to the forefront of my mind... mainly... the memory of when I saw her murdered right
before me, and I couldn't do anything to stop it..." By "her", Cloud was referring to the flower girl
he met along his journey, who was killed by the man in black he was trying to stop from
summoning Meteor.

"I know..." Robin placed his hand on Cloud's shoulder, as if to tell him to take a rest and that Robin
would take it from there. "I remember you even mentioned that you felt powerless to prevent the
catastrophe Galeem caused... which I suppose is why Dharkon decided to take advantage of those
emotions, reinforce them with painful memories, and manipulate you and the others like that."

Just then, the group of Hylians returned, with Ganondorf in tow. "We're back," Zelda announced,
before a rumbling sounded in the distance.

"That... must be Dharkon deciding to show their ugly mug here," Cloud commented. "But we'll
check it out later."

"Indeed," Robin concurred. "Zelda, did Dharkon manipulate Ganondorf's emotions as well?"

"Surprisingly, no," Zelda answered him. "He was like... a machine. Just blindly fighting, wanting
to dispose of us. I don't know if he was willingly cooperating with Dharkon, or just fully controlled
by them, but we simply had to defeat him to free him from their control."

Noticing Ganondorf glaring at the other Hylians spitefully, Toon Link commented, "I don't think
he's gonna spill it anytime soon, either..."

"Apparently Wolf was like that too," Fox commented. "Dharkon didn't even spill anything about
their plans when they were controlling him, either. He just attacked me and Falco blindly."

"To think I had sense beaten into me by that friggin' puppy secretary..." Wolf grumbled in a
somewhat embarrassed manner, burying his face into his hands.

"I have a name, you know!" Isabelle objected. "It's Isabelle! And I'm not leaving any of our friends
behind! Once all the Smashers are free, we can beat these guys and go home!"

"Beating gods with the power of friendship? You make it sound so easy," Wolf commented,
protectively drawing closer to Isabelle. "Wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you if you fail to
free any of the remaining Smashers or defeat those things..."

"What's this?" Falco teased Wolf. "The feared leader of Star Wolf has a soft spot for someone,
after all!"

"S-shut up, Lombardi!" Wolf protested, getting into a stance as if he were about to lunge at Falco.

"Excuse me, guys?" Lucina spoke up, raising her hand. "I... noticed something too. But it's only on
my end, it seems."

"Yes?"

"Shortly after I was freed from Dharkon's power and came here, I could hear... the screams of most
of the Smashers trapped here." Shuddering briefly at the harrowing memories, she regained her
composure and continued, "Maybe it's a side effect of what Dharkon did to me, but I don't know
why I was the only one affected. But... I heard the real Zelda calling out to me when Dharkon was
manipulating her thoughts, and... I was able to find my father easier... when I heard his screams
become louder... it was a sign that... he was..." Squeezing her eyes shut, Lucina panted as her face
was coated in sweat, "...c-close...by..." The memories proved to be too stressful for her, and she collapsed to the ground. Thankfully, her lover caught her in the blink of an eye.

"Lucina..." Captain Falcon softly embraced her. "It's okay, love... he's safe now. Zelda is, too..."

"Babe..." Lucina whispered softly, hugging him back.

"So that's how she was able to sense her father was close by..." Shulk murmured with a worried look on his face.

"Mama mia," Mario commented with a faint gasp. "You two... you're a couple?"

"...Yeah," Falcon admitted. "While we were training outside of Smash City, which apparently took a couple years on your end, we got... close." Helping his lover stand, he continued, "And we have reason to believe that... we might be connected to all this somehow."

"If I-a may," Mario interjected, "We did-a experience something like what you guys were-a describing on Team A's end, but only with a few of the Smashers, like-a Luigi, who was grappling with his insecurities of being in my shadow, which I had to assure-a him weren't true. And-a then there was Mewtwo, ROB, Kamui and Corrin struggling with their own painful memories; which for the latter two, we had to bring Azura's Spirit in to help soothe them. We've made discoveries of our own too, but we'll-a wait till you two explain your theories."

"Okay," Lucina replied. "So... I believe the fact only I can hear these screams... makes me think Dharkon and I are somehow linked. I have a feeling it was that way even before Galeem attacked..." She proceed to explain her dreams at Ylisstol and in the Dark Realm shortly after her lover saved her, and the hallucination she had in Sylvalum, as well as the fact that Dharkon's presence, be it their voice or their power alone, was a constant in all three of them. She then mentioned the anomalies both she and the Captain experienced when using the teleporters, with the yellow and purple lights.

Once she was done, Captain Falcon spoke up with, "I... have reason to believe I might have some kind of connection to Galeem as well, though it's not as strong as the hypothetical connection Dharkon and Lucina might have. When I was in Mute City during my time away from Smash City, I had a dream... Galeem wasn't there per se, but it was... just like what happened when they attacked... beams of light and everything." Thinking for a moment, he then asked Shulk, "The fact that they also diverted our destinations on the teleporter those times... and what you said about them manipulating space and time... you think...?"

"I don't think them finding us was explicitly tied to the teleporters, no," Shulk answered him. "But apparently, Dharkon's guardian for this realm was the Demon King Ganon, who is Ganondorf from another timeline... the Hands can manipulate space and time too, but they stay within the bounds of reasonable manipulation, unlike Galeem and Dharkon. Which... I wonder why Tabuu's Spirit was in the realm Team A was searching..."

"About that," Mario began, "Captain, Lucina, you two done? I'd-a like to explain what we discovered..."

"Go ahead," The Captain replied.

"Okay, so," Mario began, "The realm we explored, which we've dubbed the 'Mysterious Realm' for lack of-a better term, was-a nothing short of chaotic. It-a looked like a bunch of dimensions were converging and-a becoming unstable."
"Like how Ganondorf and Demon King Ganon were allowed to exist in this same realm at the same time," Snake commented. "No doubt, if Galeem and Dharkon keep going like this, reality as we know it might fall apart."

"Yeah... I'd-a hate to imagine that," Mario replied. "By the time Sonic met up with us, he helped us take-a down Tabuu's Spirit, and we've learned some... really big-a bombshells."

"Fitting that I helped take him down again, huh?" Sonic boasted. He continued from Mario's discussion with, "Anyway, Tabuu was... not like the other Spirits we faced. He was fully conscious as he fought us in that puppet Bayonetta body, and it would seem the Spirit Tabuu was from a period of time before the Subspace incident began. We've learned that he, in fact, created Galeem and Dharkon to assist him in conquering the universe. However, their power eventually grew unchecked, and they had their own ideals and visions for the universe which differed from Tabuu's and put each other at odds, so Tabuu had no choice but to seal them away."

"Ideals...?" Cloud asked Sonic.

"Apparently, Dharkon wanted to spread their corruption like a disease across the universe, while Galeem wanted to create a 'perfect' universe and preserve it according to their vision free of any perceived imperfections."

"'Perfect' universe?" Captain Falcon spoke up. "That lines up with what Galeem told me when I defeated them the first time... apparently they must view us as imperfect."

"And they would have erased us all entirely were it not-a for Kirby making it to safety," Mario emphasized. "We also learned from another Spirit, precisely the Spirit of the mysterious being that-a impersonated the Hands, that-a when Tabuu died, not only was the seal on-a Galeem and Dharkon lifted, but Tabuu himself stealthily deployed that being, which he called the 'Master Core', while-a Galeem and Dharkon would abduct Master and-a Crazy Hand respectively and, according to Tabuu's hopes, carry on his original goal, as he needed them back then, too. That's also why-a the fake Hands brought everyone from past tournaments back, so that-a Galeem could proceed with their-a original plan."

"Only, Tabuu's original goal isn't what's going to happen at all," Meta Knight said. "Galeem and Dharkon are still very much at odds with each other even after this many years, and are clashing with each other even now, according to Marx, who was the Mysterious Realm's guardian. If either deity gets their way, they'll proceed with their original plan... killing us all in the process."

"A war between light and darkness..." Lucina murmured timidly. "No matter which side wins, we all lose..."

"How horrible..." The Captain murmured, his voice starting to crack, his face bearing a pained expression.

"Babe...?"

"I..." Pulling Lucina close to him and embracing her tightly, Falcon began to weep softly, "It seems the future... is hell bent on taking away our happiness... on separating us... I hate it..."

"Darling..." Lucina hugged her lover back, softly patting him on the back to comfort him.

I don't want us to be separated again either... or worse. In this moment, this is the real you emerging, the you who doesn't hide his true feelings... the you I've fallen in love with. And I promise, I will be strong for you... for all of us.
"Don't worry, love. I'll make sure we can go home again... and face the future together with hope in our hearts."

"Thank you, dear..." After Lucina wiped his tears away for him, Captain Falcon softly released her.

"What about the Spirits, like us?" Fiora spoke up all of a sudden.

"Dunno," Sonic replied. "Since you guys weren't fully fledged Smashers, your bodies were obliterated, but since Galeem's original plan failed, they used you guys merely as resistance for us. When Galeem was defeated the first time, Dharkon simply snatched those of us, and you guys, that Galeem didn't get to utilize, so to speak."

"I imagine once Galeem and Dharkon are done for, you'll all get to return to your bodies and back to your home worlds," Shulk hypothesized.

"I see..." Fiora murmured.

"One last question, Mario," The Captain said. "Gathering everyone in Smash City once again... do you know if that was, in fact, the real Hands' original plan as well?"

"I cannot-a say for certain," Mario stated. "When we save the Hands, we'll ask-a them ourselves."

"Well... we shouldn't stick around much longer," Lucina interjected, a determined look in her eyes. "We should act... Dharkon is here. The sooner we defeat them, and hopefully free the other four Smashers and remaining Spirits, the better. Maybe... I'll even learn why they've given me that... ability, so to speak."

"Are you sure about this?" Shulk asked her.

"I am," she confirmed. "I want to know how and why exactly I'm connected to them... This is something I must handle. I don't want any of you getting hurt."

"You're not going alone, my love," Captain Falcon told her, softly placing his hand on her shoulder. "I swore to protect you, so I'm coming with you..."

"Babe..." She affectionately drew closer to him.

"We're coming too," Chrom announced, with Robyn close by. "We're not losing you either, my dear daughter."

"Father... mother..."

"Lucina..." Zelda murmured, the uncertainty apparent in her voice.

"Zelda..." Walking to her friend, Lucina sorrowfully told her, "Please stay here. I've told you, and everyone here, what's been plaguing me all this time... and I don't want to have to lose you with all this in mind. Consider this my way of repaying you... by protecting you. I'm sorry..." She briefly hugged Zelda, who hugged her back. Once they were done, Lucina turned to her parents and lover. "All right... let's go."

...

As the four exited the dimension they were in, they spotted a warp pad to their left, like the one Snake and Fox found as a quick shortcut for their supply run after finishing up with Dracula's Castle. As expected, it took them to the central platform with the entrance into the Light Realm.
close by.

But something was different...very different.

Dharkon's eye was levitating above the ground, as if they were waiting for the Smashers. The four just stood there, looking on as a feeling of dread overwhelmed them.

"Y...you ready for this?" The Captain asked Lucina.

Taking a deep breath, she declared, "It's now or never. We've got nothing to lose." Lucina, Robyn, Chrom and Captain Falcon approached Dharkon's eyeball when their tentacles flew up from the other side of the platform and surrounded the eyeball, which then emerged as the tentacles pointed their thorn-like sharp tips at the fighters who were present.

**So you've returned...**

"Ugh..." The Ylissean family covered their ears and slowly got to their knees, Dharkon's voice emanating a power that they couldn't comprehend. However, while the Captain could hear what Dharkon was saying, he wasn't affected by their power, only running to his lover's side.

"Lucina...!"

**Did you like my little parting gift, my pet...?**

"So the fact that I could hear the screams of my friends and family was your doing after all, Dharkon," Lucina spat.

"What the hell did you just call her?!" Captain Falcon raged at the being of darkness.

*I see you are indeed close to Galeem's little back-up pawn too... pathetic. It's so funny, that your emotions over leaving him that day were what drew me to you...*

"I'm Galeem's WHAT?!" Falcon began to lunge at Dharkon, only for Lucina to hold her arm in front of him, as if to tell him to stand down.

"Please, darling..." she strained, a pleading look in her eyes. Turning to Dharkon, slowly building a tolerance to their otherworldly power, she then said, "It's no surprise that negative emotions are like a magnet to you... you knew of my heartbreak, and I've only just now figured out that you tampering with the teleporter was largely your doing, as well as those nightmares and that hallucination... to strengthen my despair. I was just food to you, wasn't I?"

**You are certainly perceptive. That witch may be my primary emissary, having the power of darkness at her very fingertips, but you are my treasure... the maiden with a dark heart, who denies it... you think putting things into perspective and making amends will help you?**

"That 'witch'... Bayonetta?" The Captain wondered. "So you have her somewhere, too?"

"Enough, Dharkon," Lucina stated. "I do not have a dark heart... I will prove you wrong. I will defeat you and secure the path to our freedom!" She stood, drawing her Falchion. Chrom and Robyn stood as well, drawing their weapons.

**Very well... by the time I'm done with you, you'll be so broken that you'll be begging to return to my side...**

"We'll be the judge of that!" Chrom shouted, attacking Dharkon in their eyeball in a leaping slash.
"Father..."

Walking up to her daughter, Robyn declared, "Your father and I are building a resistance to Dharkon's power too... and it seems the Captain is completely unaffected." Looking ahead, she then said, "Let's take them down... together!"

Warping a short distance away from the platform, Dharkon gathered their tentacles close by so that the thorns were facing the fighters. They then shot a volley of laser beams in bursts, which the fighters deftly dodged.

When Dharkon warped back within the range of the fighters, Captain Falcon wasted no time in trying to get a hit in. "Falcon... PUUUUNCH!" He struck them in their exposed eyeball with a fiery punch.

"Did you get them?" Chrom asked the Captain as the smoke cleared.

Seeing a dark portal open above them all and Dharkon levitating into it, Falcon warned his allies, "Apparently not... be on your guard, guys!"

Within seconds, Dharkon vanished into the portal. "Where did they go?!" Robyn asked, frantically looking around and preparing a Thunder spell. As she was charging lightning energy into the spell tome, a portal similar to the one Dharkon vanished into, but smaller, began forming at her feet.

"Robyn!" Chrom cried, dashing to his wife and shoving her out of harm's way as a swarm of tendrils emerged from the portal on the ground and into another portal a short distance above, attacking Chrom in the process.

"Dearest!" Robyn shouted for her husband, reaching out her hand as Chrom was sent flying in the air briefly before falling to the ground unceremoniously with a thud.

"Ugh... Ro...byn..." he grunted.

Shocked and worried for her beloved, Robyn then noticed another portal opening above her, but diagonally to the left. "You won't hurt my family anymore!" She declared, ready to blast Dharkon when they emerged. The split second they did, Robyn immediately yelled, "Thoron!" and sent a large blast of electricity at the cosmic being, but to no avail as the swarm of tendrils struck her at high velocity, knocking her to the ground.

"Augh!"

"Mother!" Lucina cried.

"Just stay close," The Captain told his lover, drawing close to her and standing against her back, the two raising their guard. Within seconds, Dharkon emerged again, swiping one of their tentacles in a manner that seemingly cut through dimensions, surrounding the couple in a bright red void.

"What...is...this...?" Lucina grunted, realizing that whatever this attack was slowed them down immensely.

"I...can... barely...move..." The Captain strained. Noticing Dharkon gathering an immense amount of energy, he cried, "Look...out...!" and turned to Lucina in slow motion, trying to shield her, but the blast of fire engulfed them both.

"Ugh..." After a while, Lucina opened her eyes, finding herself lying on the ground, the time-distorting void having disappeared. Pain reverberated through her entire body as she slowly sat up.
She was quite injured, though not as badly as her lover, who merely lay face down, unconscious.

"Babe..." She murmured, tears gathering in her eyes. Just then, she noticed Dharkon spinning their tentacles around in perfect circles, one enclosing the other from smallest to largest.

"What...?"

Within seconds... Zelda emerged. Or rather, a clone of her created by Dharkon. Her body was composed of a red and black crystalline substance that resembled some manner of cursed ruby, with the familiar crimson aura and purple eyes.

"Zel...da...?" Her eyes widened in shock and confusion. "But... I left you back there..."

The fake Zelda only extended her hand, as if to help Lucina up, but Lucina heard Dharkon's voice in her mind at the same time.

**So now you see... you're nothing without me. You've broken, you've reached the end of your rope... Come join me once more...**

"Lucina! Don't listen to them!" Zelda, the real one, called out from afar.

Turning her head in the direction of the voice, Lucina saw that Zelda had indeed arrived. "You... came all this way...?"

Launching a Din's Fire at the fake Zelda, the real Zelda ran to Lucina and helped her up once the fake fell off the platform into the abyss below. "After you opened up to me... after hearing what you've went through all this time... I couldn't possibly let you face this alone."

"Zelda..." Lucina could feel a sense of gratitude welling up in her heart, although the feeling was somewhat bittersweet as she didn't want another one of her friends putting themselves in danger.

After sticking Healing Sprouts onto Chrom, Robyn and Captain Falcon, Zelda briefly stuck one onto Lucina as well as she continued, "I had a feeling deep down that even with your parents and the man you loved backing you up, you'd run into trouble. I don't want you dying on me either now, Lucy!"

"I..." At that moment, Lucina remembered her lover's words to her when they got lost in the Termina mountains.

"What would your friends or your family think if you didn't come back? I admire your selflessness, but you can't overdo it."

"You're right..." Once the Healing Sprout healed her completely, she brushed the shriveled sprout off her as her parents and lover, also fully healed, came to her side. "It's time to put the training I've received to the test, and with the people I love by my side, I will not lose...!"

"We will defy you, Dharkon!" Zelda declared. "You and Galeem are the only obstacles to our freedom!"

**Another one of my slaves defies me?!... So be it. Your victory will mean nothing in the grand scheme of things...**

"You forget, Dharkon," Chrom began. "Anything can change!" The five rushed in and attacked Dharkon, defeating them. As the cosmic being sunk into the dark void below, all five present fighters heard Dharkon's voice in their heads.
"We will," Lucina declared. "We'll... find a way." Once Dharkon disappeared, Lucina immediately collapsed to her knees, buried her face in her hands, and began to weep.

"Lucina..." Captain Falcon approached his lover, crouching and embracing her.

"So...it's true," Lucina sobbed. "Dharkon found me through my emotions, my darkest despair... I was the one who brought them here, and Galeem probably followed, which is probably why you had that teleporter issue with Galeem's power interfering..."

"It's okay, sweetheart..." The Captain comforted the woman he loved. "They were just trying to make you feel guilty... You heard Mario's explanation, they were coming anyway, since the seal on them and Galeem had been lifted when Tabuu died..."

"I know...but... the fact Dharkon gained so much power from my emotions alone... I really must have a dark heart..." She hugged him back tightly.

"Dark heart or not, you're still the one I've fallen in love with." Falcon held Lucina closer to him as he continued, "And I know for a fact that there is a light within you... just as there is darkness within me..."

"That's it..." Lucina murmured as she came to a realization.

"What is?"

Wiping away her tears, Lucina explained, "You said it... there's light in me just as much as there is darkness within you. It's all about balance... the universe needs both light and darkness to exist. Just as we cannot have joy without sadness... Or peace without hardship... Or strength without weakness..."

"That is true," Chrom said. "Don't worry, Lucina. We will stop both of these beings... with everyone by our side."

"Father...thank you." Both Lucina and the Captain stood before Chrom welcomed them, Robyn, and Zelda into a group hug.

"I don't know what the future holds," Lucina told them. "Not even Shulk's visions can predict the long-term future... but once Galeem and Dharkon are out of the way... we'll have more time to make more memories together... with my family, my friends, and the one I love."

"We all look forward to it," Zelda told her friend.

Within a few seconds, a luminous staircase materialized out of nowhere, leading up to a swirling portal above them.

"That must be where both Galeem and Dharkon are waiting for us," Captain Falcon commented. "I still wonder what Dharkon meant when they said I was Galeem's 'back-up pawn'... and if Dharkon has Bayonetta as their 'primary emissary', I can only imagine Galeem has the goddess Palutena as theirs..."

"Did you say Lady Palutena?!" Pit interrupted him. Turning around, the five Smashers saw the other Smashers had caught up to them.
"Pit..." Zelda murmured.

"Please, Zelda. Palutena sacrificed herself during Galeem's attack so that Pittoo and I could try to make it to safety," Pit elaborated. "If Galeem is doing what the Chaos Kin did to her... I won't forgive them...!"

"You really care that much about your goddess?" Dark Pit asked his original counterpart. "You make it sound like you can't live without her..."

"Well...of course I do," Pit said. "I can do anything when I'm with her, and I devote my life to protecting her. Don't you feel the same way about Viridi?"

"Meh," Dark Pit shrugged. "I can take it or leave it. Viridi's not the most agreeable of people anyway..."

"I HEARD that, Dark Pit!" The Spirit of Viridi, who was rescued in the Light Realm, grumbled. "Do you have ANY idea how worried I was about you when we couldn't find you in the Light Realm?!"

"Okay, okay, geeze!" Dark Pit griped. "I care about you too, Viridi! I mean it!"

Giggling at the exchange, Zelda then told everyone, "Alright, everyone. This is it... the final battle. Is everyone ready?"

Everyone silently nodded.

"Then let's go..."
Once everyone headed up the stairs and into the portal, they emerged on what looked like the original cliffs they first faced Galeem at, only there was a sea of light and dark clouds where the ocean once was, with a luminous path meandering above the cloud ocean. In the skies above, Dharkon, situated on the left, was firing beams of dark energy at Galeem on the right, who countered with their own beams of light energy. Swarms of fake Crazy and Master Hands assisted their respective cosmic beings, fighting the Hands on the opposing side. The Smashers only watched.

"This war between light and darkness has gone on long enough," Marth said. "We have to defeat them both, or we'll all cease to exist..."

"Any ideas on what to do next, Shulk?" Simon asked him.

"Hmmm..." Focusing, Shulk's eyes began to glow blue as a vision came to him. Once it was finished, he took a deep breath and began, "We... can't go for Galeem or Dharkon individually in
the hopes of attacking them both. In order to get access to Galeem, the balance of light and
darkness must be disrupted so that the darkness overpowers the light; and vice versa for being able
to attack Dharkon."

"Okay, but how do we do that whole disrupting thing?" Snake questioned.

"Apparently, freeing Spirits captured by Galeem will increase Dharkon's power, and the converse
applies to increasing Galeem's power," Shulk explained. "And as I've implied, you don't want that
outcome."

"Why not?" Dark Pit asked with a shrug, his tone somewhat dry. "We just kill one, shift the
balance again and go for the other, right?"

"...Wrong." The blunt graveness of Shulk's reply made the normally cool headed Dark Pit stiffen in
fear and gulp nervously. Shulk continued with, "If, for instance, Dharkon is defeated first, Galeem
will absorb Dharkon's Spirits as well as their own and carry out their original plan of... erasing us
'imperfect' beings and restarting the multiverse." Glancing at Mario, he somberly told the plumber,
"I've seen the other outcome too... if Galeem dies first, Dharkon will spread their corruption like a
deadly disease... and unfortunately, Mario, you're their first victim. It... isn't a merciful end."

"M-mama mia..." Mario shuddered in terror as his own twin brother tried to comfort him, trying to
put on a brave face. Equally horrified and heartbroken at the thought, Lucina and Captain Falcon,
the two lovers who were reunited after being forced to fight on opposite sides of the cosmic
conflict, huddled together and embraced each other tightly, not wanting to let go, bearing
melancholy looks on their faces.

"Is... is there anything we can do at all...?" Falcon asked timidly, holding Lucina even tighter.

"What about... the Hands?" Lucina inquired. "Surely they'd be able to do something?"

"I imagine so, but..." Shulk held his hand to his chin in a thoughtful manner as he continued, "I'm
not sensing them anywhere... Captain, you said Bayonetta and Palutena were most likely here,
right? I don't sense them, either..."

"Strange..." The Captain murmured. Suddenly, he briefly staggered before crouching and clutching
his head in his hands, as if he were having a horrible headache. "U-ugh...

"Babe?!" Lucina immediately crouched down and got closer to her boyfriend, trying to figure out
what was wrong. "What is it...?"

"It... hurts..." He panted, groaning. "W-wait... this...is..."

"This is...?"

"What's going on?! Where am I?! Someone, anyone, please help!"

"Roy..." The Captain murmured, slowly standing up. "He's here...he sounds terrified, poor boy..."

"Babe, does this mean...?" Lucina trailed off, apprehensively.

"It...would appear so," Captain Falcon answered his girlfriend. "Just like you could hear the
screams of your family and friends when they were under Dharkon's control, I can hear Roy's.
Which... can only mean he's under Galeem's control, like I once was."

Maybe... this is what Dharkon meant when they said I was Galeem's "back up" emissary. But...
why am I hearing the screams of their captives just now...? Why not in the Light Realm? He faintly gasped as he came to a realization. "Unless..."

"Unless... what?" Shulk asked him.

Regaining his bearings, Falcon answered Shulk as he stood, "What if... Galeem is stooping to the same tactics Dharkon did in the Dark Realm? Influencing the thoughts or emotions of their victims?"

"It wouldn't surprise me," Shulk commented. "The two had been at war for a while. They want whatever edge over the other they can get, and you know what they say about imitation and flattery... well, maybe 'flattery' wouldn't be the right word choice here, but you understand what I mean."

"Yeah..."

"Nnnngh..." All of a sudden, Lucina groaned as the voice of another one of Dharkon's captives echoed in her mind.

"Sweetheart!" Falcon managed to catch his lover before she collapsed to the ground. "Is it...?"

"Another one of us that Dharkon has captured...yes..." Lucina strained. Within a few seconds, she shuddered as she murmured, "But... this one's... ugh... different..."

"H-how so?"

"This voice sounds... eerily calm, not in any sort of distress. Just breathing. Like this person's... waiting for someone..."

"Samus..."

"Ah...!" Looking around slowly, Lucina asked, "...Samus?"

"Yes?" Samus walked over to the Ylissean.

"Do you know... anyone who may bear ill will against you? Aside from Ridley, of course. The voice I heard... was full of evil and malice, like the person it belonged to had a vendetta against someone..."

"...There's no mistaking it." Samus turned and looked in the direction of the dark side of the cloud sea. "She's been waiting for me."

"Who's 'she'?" Lucina inquired.

"...Someone who should never have existed. Someone who was born from me that day when I was investigating the Phazon... my clone." Pausing, she looked down and took a deep breath before clarifying.

"...Dark Samus." Lucina's eyes widened in shock at Samus's announcement.

Looking ahead once more, Samus announced with determination in her voice, "I have to settle the score... if I have to free her from Dharkon in the process, it can't be helped. I've been waiting for this moment." Pressing a button on the device on her left wrist, she then held her arms out to her sides and her legs close together as she began to levitate, electric sparks gathering around her. One by one, the pieces of her Power Suit flew to her body and became equipped to her, starting from her
boots, followed by her thigh greaves, arm attachments, and breastplate, concluding with her familiar helmet. Everyone watched in awe and wonder as Samus, now donning her Power Suit, slowly descended to the ground.

"Alright," she declared, her voice slightly muffled in the helmet. "I'm going in."

"Not without me, you're not," Snake spoke up. "Being separated from you once was hell, not to mention twice. If the third time was for real... I'd never forgive myself." He looked down wistfully.

"Snake..."

"Huh...?" A vision suddenly came to Shulk, after which he told the couple, "You... might want to bring Ridley along, too."

"Him?! Are you mad, Shulk?!” Samus protested.

"I know it sounds crazy, but hear me out," Shulk explained. "The minute Dark Samus is freed and realizes Dharkon was controlling her, she'll be absolutely livid, trying to free Dharkon's Spirits so that the light can weaken Dharkon and she would try to take them out. According to my vision, Ridley's the only one who can dissuade her, as he managed to break free from Dharkon's control on his own once he realized it, without being defeated, reached out to by someone close to him, or reasoned with."

"Ugh, fine," Snake griped, rolling his eyes. Glancing at Ridley momentarily, he then got close to the feared space pirate and, without a moment's hesitation, strapped a C4 to the beast's torso. Everyone gasped in terror, afraid Ridley would somehow retaliate, when Snake reassured them, "It's fine. The C4 won't go off unless I hit the switch." Turning to Ridley once more with a stern glare, he threatened the space pirate with, "Unless you wanna be blown sky high, you'll only help us free Spirits along the way, and dissuade Dark Samus from going after Dharkon once she's saved. Under NO CIRCUMSTANCES are you to turn on us, or God forbid, try to go after Dharkon yourself, or Galeem for that matter. Nod if you understand."

Ridley wordlessly nodded with an obliging expression on his face.

"I'll be holding you to it, now," Snake emphasized. Everyone else looked on in wonder as Snake was able to tame the feared mass murderer using only a remotely-denotated C4 and threatening commands.

"Wasn't there someone else who resisted Dharkon's control without outside help?" Samus asked.

"That would be Wario," Robin answered the bounty huntress. "Probably because he's just too selfish to obey anyone's orders, only thinking of himself. He's the type to play by his own rules."

"I see," she replied. "Speaking of... where is he?"

"Wha-" Robin looked around and saw Wario riding off into the distance on his motorcycle. "...Of course he'd do this. We haven't even finished detailing our plans for now... Mewtwo, if you would?"

"On it." Mewtwo teleported away, and within seconds arrived back with Wario and his bike in tow.

"HEY! Nobody bosses Wario around!" Wario objected. Mewtwo only dropped him and his bike a short distance from the ground. "Ouch!"

"Wario, please, this is serious," Shulk reprimanded the haughty con man. "We need to plan our
next moves carefully. It's imperative you hear us out to the end."

"Pffft, fine, I guess I'll do that," Wario conceded with a scoff. "You'd-a better make it snappy, though!"

"Anyway, since the team in charge of saving Dark Samus has been decided, what about saving Roy?" The Captain suggested. "I imagine once both are free, Shulk might get another vision of what to do next."

"I'll go," Chrom volunteered. Glancing in the direction of the clouds of light, he continued, "I'm his Echo. And if what you say is true, Captain, he needs someone to reassure him that everything's okay."

"Chrom..." The Captain murmured, somewhat timidly.

"I finally got my chance, and you welcomed me in spite of our past. I won't let this opportunity go to waste."

"I'll go too," Marth said. "Roy and I joined Smash at the same time, during the second tournament. He's a dear friend of mine, and he was beyond happy to see me again when he returned for the fourth."

"Chrom!" A familiar voice called out to Chrom. Turning around, Chrom saw the Spirit of his younger sister, Lissa, standing before him.

"Lissa?"

"It's so good to see you again, big brother!" Lissa smiled and hugged her brother. Even though he could barely feel her hug, he was content being reunited with his family.

"Just glad to know you're safe," Chrom told her.

"Aunt Lissa?" Lucina asked Lissa's Spirit. "Where did they find you?"

"It's all a blur," Lissa said. "I remember light beams invading Ylisse, and then everything went dark. Marth found me in that place you guys call the Mysterious Realm."

"They found one of yours, Tharja, in the Light Realm too, sweetheart," Captain Falcon told his lover.

"I see..." Lucina murmured. "This interdimensional war... Galeem and Dharkon even took people who weren't involved in the tournament at all..." Making eye contact with Lissa, Lucina declared, "Don't worry, Aunt Lissa. I promise, we'll defeat them both and get you and everyone else home safely."

"I'm so proud of you, Lucina," Lissa commended her niece from the future. "And I'm proud of my brother, too, for finally being accepted into Smash!"

"I'm happy that you're happy, my dear sister," Chrom said. "So, are you coming along?"

"Of course!" Lissa chimed. "I'll do my best to help Roy, and we can catch up along the way!"

"Good luck, father, Aunt Lissa," Lucina told them. "I pray Naga will keep you all safe."

"Alright, that's settled," Shulk announced. "I guess everyone else will help free Spirits, but I must urge you all to please, watch the balance of light and darkness. If the balance starts to skew too
heavily to one side, I urge you to wait until those on the opposite side try to normalize it. If at ANY POINT Galeem or Dharkon are weakened enough to be able to fight them, do not engage. I repeat: DO NOT ENGAGE. We need to find a way to fight them both at once, so until then, please hold off."

"Shulk?" Lucina asked Shulk.

"Yes?"

"I... think I'll abstain from freeing Spirits," she said timidly. "Hearing Dark Samus's voice... this 'ability' Dharkon gave me... it takes a lot out of me. If I'm freeing Spirits, I'll probably hear her voice more... Plus, I can't shake it but I have a bad feeling about what would happen if the balance were upset, since Dharkon and I are connected. I think I should... see what happens first."

"Think I'll sit this one out too, for similar reasons," Falcon announced. "I... think I'm connected to Galeem somehow. I, too, want to gauge the effects that the shifting of the balance has on me first..."

"Understood," Shulk reassured them. "I suppose I'll take a break too... I've been spearheading the rescue efforts so far and I can only take so much." Turning to the others, he told them, "Alright, everyone, move out. Remember what I told you guys. Once Roy and Dark Samus are saved, meet me back here so I can discuss the next steps."

Once everyone else left, Shulk took a seat on the luminous path, with Fiora's Spirit close by. Captain Falcon and Lucina followed suit.

"I guess all we have to do now is wait," Lucina said.

"Looks like it," Shulk replied. "If what you guys say is true... I want to make sure you'll be alright."

"Thank you, Shulk," The Captain thanked him.

"I... also want to touch base with you guys," Shulk admitted, chuckling bashfully.

"I guess that would be nice," Falcon said with a smile. "Some idle chatter could put us at ease."

"So..." Shulk began, "Fiora's been filling me on some of it, but you two got close during your time away from Smash City?"

"Yeah," the Captain confirmed. "Kinda hard to believe it all started with me saving her from certain doom at the hands of the Territorial Rotbart."

"Which, not to brag, you guys would be toast against him had I not shown up," Fiora boasted, rubbing the bottom of her nose with her left index finger as a somewhat prideful gesture.

"What would I ever do without you, Fiora?" Lucina playfully inquired. "After that, the Captain volunteered to train me, and... the rest is history." Noticing the balance of the clouds below them already shifting in the darkness's favor, she stammered, trying to keep everyone there calm, "Of course, I learned a lot of valuable skills from his training too. I intend to put them all to use."

"I've noticed," Shulk remarked. "The way you tried to fend off Black Shadow that day... No ordinary person would be able to take someone like him on for as long as you did unprepared. I know the Captain trained his own combat abilities for situations like that, too. You've really come
"Don't you know it's rude to gossip?" Boomed a voice neither Lucina nor Captain Falcon thought they would ever hear again. Preparing for a fight, they, Shulk and Fiora stood and turned to see the Spirit of Black Shadow standing there.

"Black Shadow...!" Falcon grunted.

"Why are you here...?" Lucina interrogated him.

"Put down your weapons," Black Shadow demanded. "I have not come for a fight. I cannot harm any of you, even other Spirits like miss Fiora here, even if I wanted to. And trust me: the urge is very strong."

"State your business now," Fiora threatened him.

"My, aren't you feisty," Black Shadow taunted her. "Anyway, I was just suddenly freed from the grasp of the being you all call Galeem, without so much as being shoved into one of those disgusting Puppet Fighters. And... I am swallowing my pride to ask you all a favor."

"Depends on what it..." Shulk began skeptically before seeing Wario approach on his motorbike. "...is...?"

"There you are!" Wario called out to Black Shadow's Spirit. "You're not-a getting away that easy!"

"...Please, I beg of you all, get me away from this obnoxious money grubber who has no concept of personal hygiene!" Black Shadow pleaded. "I swear, he's worse than Don Genie!"

Several moments of silence passed before Shulk, Fiora, Lucina and Captain Falcon burst into hearty laughter.

"You fools dare mock my plight?! Have you no idea who I am? I am Black Shadow, revered criminal mastermind!"

"Not now, you're not," Lucina laughed, slapping her left thigh in hysteria.

"I can't believe Wario of all people is bossing you around now," Shulk chortled, his eyes starting to water from laughing so much.

"How the mighty have fallen!" Fiora howled, clutching her side.

"What can I say, dude?" Captain Falcon teased his nemesis, covering his mouth and giggling. "Karma's a bitch!"

"Were it not for me lacking a corporeal form, I would make you all pay for your insolence!" Black Shadow bellowed.

"Yeah, yeah, revenge-a later, helping me comes now," Wario dismissively told Black Shadow, grabbing him by the arm and dragging him away.

"Whyyyyy..." Black Shadow whined as Wario pulled him along.

After the two couples spent several more seconds laughing at the ironic poetic justice that ensued, the Captain wheezed, "Man...that was rich. Only in situations like this, eh?"

"It's just one of many memories we've made together," Lucina said. "I... like making good
memories. When I first traveled back in time to save my father, we caught up on the time I missed with him after he died in the future I came from."

"Awww," Fiora cooed before noticing the dark clouds surging forth some more, prompting her to gulp in fear.

"A-and... of course, the memories I made with you are very precious, Fiora," Lucina tried to quell her friend's fears. "And with everyone from Smash City... Shulk, Robin, Zelda, and most of all... the Captain." She looked at her lover and smiled affectionately, blushing.

"Heh, you're so cute, Lucina." Noticing the dark clouds increasing still and darkening the sky more and more, he said, "Remember when we visited Mute City? And our little date in New Los Angeles? That was wonderful... Being with you like that let me forget my cares and just... be myself."

"And being with you like I was then... helped me see the joys of a normal life, free from conflict... something I didn't really know in the world I came from. Once we get out of here, I hope we can go back to that... and make more lasting memories together..."

"Yeah," Falcon agreed. "If we all do have to part ways someday... we should make as many memories as we can beforehand. People come and go, but memories are forever." Looking to the side, he murmured, "Speaking of NLA, I wonder where Elma is—" Before being interrupted by a harrowing sight.

"Oh no..."

The other three finally noticed the issue - the balance had been completely thrown off and darkness reigned supreme, making Galeem vulnerable in the process. The skies were so dark, it instilled a terror like no other in the hearts of the four who stayed behind.

"Horrifying..." Lucina murmured, shuddering in dread. "This is the world Dharkon wants... pure darkness... without the light of hope anywhere to be found..." Looking at her right hand momentarily, she muttered tremulously, "Just like Grima..."

"I just hope everyone else remembers what I told them," Shulk thought aloud. "My heart's pounding... these next few seconds will feel like an anxious eternity unless the light surges back in..."

"U-ugh!" The Captain suddenly cried in pain. "N-no...!"

"Babe!"

Clutching his head, Falcon grunted as Galeem's signature aqua aura began to gather around him, just like when Galeem controlled him.

"S-Screw off, Galeem," Captain Falcon strained, feeling himself starting to lose control of his body. "Why... are you trying to... regain control of me now?"

Galeem's voice echoed in the minds of the Captain, Lucina, and Shulk:

Unless you want everyone to die here and now, you will follow my commands, Captain. You are my last line of defense... kill anyone who tries to go after me.

"Bullshit," the Captain spat. "Me, your last line of defense? Get off your damn high horse! You won't get me to hurt the people I love!"
"You're clearly bluffing, Galeem," Shulk retorted. "I would get a vision if someone was going in for the kill, and so far, nobody has. Besides, you do have the goddess Palutena at your disposal, right? Why do you insist on hiding her?"

**Palutena... yes, the goddess who wields the power of light... her time will come, I assure you. But for now... this man, along with the goddess, is the closest thing I've found to perfection in an otherwise flawed universe... if he would only obey my commands, I might spare him and perhaps even let him bear witness to the new universe I will create...**

"You must be insane... to think I'd ever willingly accept your offer," Falcon protested. "Why would I want a world without all the people I've gotten close to? Why would I want a world without... her?" He glanced at Lucina briefly, who softly gasped and blushed in response, her concern for her lover nevertheless still apparent on her face.

"Besides..." Captain Falcon continued, "I'm really... not as 'perfect' as you say I am. I have my own moments of weakness, lapses in judgment, my own pain and trauma... I've done my best to heal from the wounds, but the scars still remain. Hell, there's a lot I don't remember about my own life before I became a bounty hunter, and I feel like... regaining those memories is probably why I started being one in the first place..."

**That can all be fixed.**

In that instant, the Captain felt Galeem seize full control over his body as he watched himself grab Lucina by the collar.

"Babe... please, fight it..." Lucina murmured, tears coming to her eyes as she looked on in fear and sorrow.

"Please, Galeem...stop it..." Falcon begged Galeem, his voice starting to crack. "Do whatever you want to me, just please, don't hurt her..."

**You seem... really attached to this woman. Is she not Dharkon's back up emissary?**

"That doesn't matter!" The Captain countered. "I love her... I've loved her even before I told her how I felt. When she was captured by Black Shadow, I couldn't bear to see her hurt. I would have done anything to save her, even sacrifice myself. And as we trained, just as she felt closer to me, I felt closer to her too. Even back when she was injured, I sympathized with her. I just didn't know what my feelings meant until that day... and I don't care if I never regain my missing memories, or even if I let my own personal problems get the best of me again. As long as I have her... I'm happy. Cause I know she'll be by my side through thick and thin."

"Captain..." Lucina weakly whispered, blinking her eyes as tears streamed down her face.

**You... loved me for that long too...? Captain... I truly am blessed to be with someone like you...**

"You know, it's really fucked up that you and Dharkon would pit two people who love each other with all that they are, against each other, Galeem," The Captain commented spitefully before his voice turned pleading, "So just stop it... leave us alone..." He used whatever ounce of strength he could muster to glance to the side and saw Cloud standing a distance away, witnessing the whole thing. The Captain quietly mouthed to him, "Help," and Cloud nodded, heading off to find one of Dharkon's Spirits to bring the light back and hopefully make Galeem let go of Captain Falcon once they were no longer in danger.

**Such vulgar language... but that is what I admire in you, Captain. You're such a complex**
"Shut up! Enough with this 'creature' bullcrap! I'm human! My flaws... and my best qualities are what makes me, me! I wouldn't change it for the world!"

If that's the case... don't you want a world where you can be the real you?

"Wha..." The Captain gasped softly. "Nnngh..."

"Don't listen to them, my love," Lucina tried to reach out to him, slowly extending one of her arms to softly touch his face. "You showed me the real you by opening up to me bit by bit as we trained together... and I can tell that you're gaining the confidence to be more open to others and show them the real you, too..."

"I... Lucina, you're right..." The affectionate reminder gave the Captain a surge in willpower to resist Galeem's influence, and he commanded the arm grabbing Lucina's collar to let go. She wobbled a bit, but quickly regained her balance. Just then, the clouds of light began to re-emerge and push through the darkness, severing Galeem's connection to Captain Falcon as they were no longer in danger.

"U-ugh..." The Captain staggered before lurching forward, Lucina catching him in the nick of time.

"Are you okay, love?" Lucina asked him as she slowly set him down, lovingly caressing his face.

"Yeah..." Taking a deep breath, he continued, "I don't need a new world to be able to show the real me to others. I am more than the 'Captain Falcon' persona I'm famous for, and I won't be ashamed to show others who I really am anymore. It's all thanks to you, Lucina..."

"Babe..." Leaning her face closer, she softly kissed him on the lips. He kissed her back, slightly more passionately, a blissful feeling calming his nerves. Once they were done, they broke the kiss and softly smiled at each other.

"Captain?" Shulk began. "I've seen the real you shining through just before we entered the Dark Realm to save Lucina, too. When you care about people so deeply like that, it shows. And it's nothing to be ashamed of. We're all glad to have your company in Smash City."

"Shulk... thank you," The Captain said as he stood.

"I'm sorry, I don't really understand what just happened," Fiora interrupted them.

"Oh..." Shulk murmured. Turning to Fiora, he explained, "Lucina, the Captain and I just heard Galeem's voice in our heads, and they tried to control the Captain again just now, trying to press his buttons so to speak."

"I didn't hear anything," Fiora said. "Though, that's probably because I'm a Spirit... before we're awakened, we're for the most part unconscious, so..."

"Would explain why you couldn't hear Galeem or Dharkon," Shulk answered his sweetheart. "They have a greater connection to us Smashers than the Spirits, it would seem."

"You guys alright?" Cloud asked, walking over to them.

"Thank you, Cloud," Captain Falcon thanked the former AVALANCHE member. "If you hadn't reset the balance just now..."
"Yeah," Cloud concurred. "Hey, Captain? You look a bit...shaken up. I heard something about... showing the real you?"

"Well..." The Captain began. "I'm sure you know me as this confident, can-do man with bravery and heroism like no other... but that's just the surface. I experience sadness, fear, anger, joy, pain, just like anyone else. I'm not gonna lie, I'm just as scared as everyone else is in this moment..."

"None of us blame you," Cloud reassured him. "It's only natural to feel like that."

"That's not all, though," Falcon continued. "To me, showing this side of me when everyone is only familiar with the metaphorical mask I wear in public... what will they think? It's made me very insecure, and for the longest time, I would distance myself... before then, I did show one person who I was behind the mask, and she almost got hurt." Glancing at Lucina, he elaborated, "And... Lucina, when I offered to train you back at Gaur Plain... how all this began... I was afraid."

"Why?"

"I was afraid that... despite my best efforts to mend things with you, it wouldn't be enough. That 'what if' scenario terrified me..."

"Babe..." She hugged him, noticing the clouds of light surging in even more. "You showing up at the hospital that day... you saving me the day before... that was all I needed to know that your intentions were pure. You wanted to set things right even then, and I just couldn't say no."

"Sweetheart..." He hugged her back tenderly.

"In fact... your insecurities over showing weakness when people perceive you as a bastion of strength... that's how I felt, too. It's why I broke down at the hospital that day... it's another reason why I even left you after I was captured by Black Shadow, too, and pushed almost everyone else away. I hurt them because I didn't want them to see me at what I felt was my lowest point... but it made me feel worse. I felt... lonelier, like I had literally nobody. Like there was a gaping emptiness in my soul... When I came to in the dark dimension Dharkon sealed my consciousness away in, just before you saved me, I felt that same loneliness. I never want to feel that again..."

"Lucina..." Shulk and Fiora walked over to Lucina and joined in for a group hug.

"Thanks everyone..." Lucina murmured. "It's thanks to the Captain, and all of you, that I no longer have to feel insecure. It's one day at a time... right? When it comes to improvement?"

"Strength comes from experience," a familiar voice echoed. "That's true, even now."

The four turned around and saw Elma's Spirit descending to the ground.

"Elma!" Shulk commented. "It's been a while."

"Hadn't seen you since Alrest, Elma," Fiora said.

"You seem... a little different from how I saw you last, Fiora," Elma told Fiora.

"Only a little? Come on, Elma," Fiora teased, the two ladies giggling afterwards.

"Elma..." Falcon muttered. "Are you okay?"

"Shortly after you guys left New Los Angeles, these beams of light were vaporizing everyone... Lao, Lin, Tatsu, the citizens... then one got me. I don't remember much after that, only that I was
freed from the clutches of... I believe their name was Dharkon? Just now."

"Wait, does that mean..." Shulk noticed the clouds of light were overpowering the clouds of darkness. The clouds of light were beautiful, shining in many colors like a prism, but everyone knew that beauty was deceptive, like Galeem themselves. "I hope everyone's careful..."

"Anyway, Lucina?" Elma asked the Exalt.

"Ah..." Making eye contact with the BLADE Colonel, she asked her, "Yes... Elma?"

"You're one of the most strong-willed, determined people I've known, and I've only just met you. Don't be so hard on yourself... Every experience, good or bad, is a chance to learn and become stronger. Never let go of hope."

"Of course, Elma," Lucina said with a nod. "I especially won't give up now, not when our freedom is on the line..." She turned to look at the two cosmic beings in the distance.

"So those are Galeem and Dharkon," Fiora commented. Feeling a surge in confidence, she proclaimed, "Let me at them! I'm gonna go all out!"

"Those are pretty big targets. We should buff up first," Elma suggested. "Then, we move in and keep the rhythm going!"

"You forgot the part where we put a dent in them!" Shulk jested, followed by Elma, Fiora and himself bursting into laughter. Once they had laughed it all out, Shulk told Elma, "In any case, weren't you interviewed by one of the Smashers? I'd love to spar alongside, and against, you someday, Elma."

"Ooh, me too!" Fiora chimed.

"The feeling is mutual," Elma said. "Hopefully one day, I'll join Smash City's ranks... it would be a great honor."

"It really would-" Lucina began before being interrupted by an intense pain. "Urgh...!"

"Lucina!" Falcon called out to the woman he loved. He saw Dharkon's signature crimson aura gathering around her again and murmured, "How the hell...?"

"What...?" Lucina strained, realizing what was happening to her. "How? Why...? Why are you trying to control me again, Dharkon? You're not even vulnerable yet!"

**How easily you forget, my pet. Our connection is stronger than the one Galeem and that man have... As long as I am around, I can control you or that witch at any time...**

"What...?" Captain Falcon asked apprehensively, hearing Dharkon's voice in his head as well. "Are they really that powerful...?"

"No..." Lucina uttered, her voice tinged with panic as she felt Dharkon's power holding her in place, putting her at their mercy. "I thought... I had become strong enough to shut you out..."

**You put on this mask of self-confidence and inner strength, but I know no amount of training or resolve can give you the mental fortitude to keep me out. You're weak, and you hate to be seen that way...**

"How dare you...!" The Captain muttered angrily. "Leave her alone! She's a lot stronger now,
"That's right!" Shulk backed the Captain up. "Lucina, we're all proud of you, how far you've come. Don't let Dharkon tell you otherwise..."

"I... am strong..." Lucina insisted, slowly holding her hands to her head. "I won't...worry about people seeing me as weak anymore. They all know I'm doing my best... giving it my all. And I will prove it... by vanquishing both you and Galeem."

_How do they know...everything about me? They know all my insecurities and hidden fears... No, I can't give in...I can't let them win..._

**You know, I can hear everything... I know you treasure these people... the same ones you pushed away? And that the thought of being all alone is unbearable?**

"I know I'm not alone anymore," Lucina answered the being of darkness. "I should never have pushed them away... I promised myself I'll never push anyone away again. I won't let you use my emotions as a source of your power anymore..."

**Once Galeem and I are gone, however, do you not fear for your future?**

"I'll make my future a happy one..." Lucina grunted. "You'll never take my hope away from me. I will never rejoin you!"

**I know just how to press your buttons, Lucina. I know all paths lead to you returning to that lonely future, be it within weeks, months, years, even decades...**

"Enough," Lucina stated. "I know you're bluffing... just reveal Bayonetta so we can save her and get this over with..."

_Very well. I must warn you, however... Saving her will be different from anyone you've saved thus far... can you really pull it off? I cannot wait for you to fail and give in to despair once more..._

After that, Dharkon released their control of Lucina on a whim, not because the balance of light and darkness was returning to normalcy. Collapsing onto her knees, Lucina clutched at her chest and gasped for air.

"You okay, darling?" The Captain's words of concern sounded ever so comforting and reassuring to his lover, helping her regain her grasp on reality.

"Huff... huff..." Lucina panted. Slowly turning her head to face her lover, she stammered, "I... think so... I am a bit... confused, though."

"Why?"

"Why didn't Dharkon make me attack you or Shulk? Galeem wasted no time in trying to get you to attack me..."

"I remember when I freed you from Dharkon when I first entered the Dark Realm, that they introduced themselves as the Embodiment of Chaos and Darkness," the Captain explained. "They're probably just trying to mess with your head, in the hopes you'll let your guard down. For what, I'm not exactly sure, but if they didn't try to get you to kill me then and there, that is a bit odd... although, they had plenty of chances to do that back in the Dark Realm..."
"I wish I knew what exactly they were planning with me..." Lucina mused, her voice bearing an uncertain, somewhat apprehensive tone. "I guess we'll find out when they finally reveal Bayonetta..."

"And Galeem revealing Palutena in turn," Falcon added. "Which, it looks like it might hopefully be soon. I see everyone else on their way, and it looks like Roy and Dark Samus were just rescued."

Once the other Smashers, plus the newly saved Dark Samus and Roy, arrived, Snake said, "Hey, guys. Mission accomplished."

"Glad to see the rescues were successful," Shulk commented.

"Successful, yes. Easy, not so much. At least, not on my end." Glaring at Ridley for a moment, Snake continued, "Your vision accurately predicted what would happen when Dark Samus was freed from Dharkon's control, and as you foresaw, Ridley did manage to dissuade her, which is amazing in and of itself. It's what happened before that was a nightmare - as Samus fought Dark Samus, Scamus here was firing her Phazon shots like crazy, like Dharkon was sending her into a murderous rage the likes of which I've only ever seen once before."

"Call me 'Scamus' one more time," Dark Samus began threateningly, "And I will drag you into the Phazon Mines and dip you into the pools myself. If you think that's akin to a pleasant bath, you are sorely mistaken."

"Whoa... understood," Snake conceded with a nervous chuckle, holding his hands in front of him as a defensive gesture. "Anyway, those Phazon shots nearly got me a couple times, one was even this close to knocking the C4 detonation switch out of my hands." Snake held the index finger and thumb of his free hand close together without actually touching when he said "this close". "I bet you Ridley had a bit of hope to break free, but I was like, nope! Not today, you filthy genocidal maniac." Laughing heartily, he concluded, "I'm actually surprised he didn't try to make a move on me all this time."

"True, I could have killed you when your back was turned. I just didn't think it was worth it. Contrary to what Samus might tell you, I'm quite skilled at exercising restraint."

Everyone turned their heads in the direction of the voice and saw that it was none other than Ridley who said that. After a while of staring at the space pirate, eyes widened and jaw dropped in a dumbfounded expression, Snake blurted, "...you can TALK?!"

"Funny that you mention 'restraint'," Samus retorted, pointing her arm cannon at the C4 still strapped on Ridley's chest. "If only you could have exercised that same restraint when it came to my parents!"

"There was a purpose for that, Samus dear," Ridley taunted the galactic bounty huntress, who snarled in response as she lowered her arm cannon. "And yes, I can talk. It's just that for such a methodical creature like myself, words are often unnecessary. And I assure you, I will not try to attack any of you while we're still here, or even as long as the Hands are still alive. I oppose Galeem and Dharkon just as much as you do. It is inconceivable that Dharkon had the audacity to believe they could control ME. If anything, in an ideal world, they would be the one at my mercy."

Looking down at the C4 on his chest, Ridley then requested of Snake, "Now, if you could please remove this cumbersome thing?"

"At least you said 'please'," Snake muttered snarkily as he removed the C4 from Ridley's body. "But this changes nothing. I've still got my eyes on you."
"So be it."

"If I may," Samus began, "It would appear that Dark Samus was alone in this area this whole time... even before Dharkon captured the others found in the Dark Realm after Galeem was first defeated. I think Bayonetta may have been in the same situation. Here, all alone in the dark, Dark Samus's vengeance toward me grew... probably fueled by Dharkon, no doubt."

"That thing had nothing to do with it," Dark Samus retorted. "You know I've sought to destroy you since my birth. But... that doesn't matter. Just for today, I suppose I'll... call a temporary truce. I want that thing gone for daring to control me... but I also know you must find a way to fight both them and the other creature, so I have nothing to do now but bide my time."

"She insists Dharkon had nothing to do with her rage toward me... but what I faced wasn't normal, even for her," Samus stated.

"Roy was... similar," Chrom spoke up. "But he was more... afraid. Terrified at waking up in a realm of almost blinding light, with nobody else to be seen for miles... From what I observed, Galeem played on his fear and he attacked us in his paranoia... He kept shouting, asking where we were this whole time, why didn't we come sooner... it took a lot to tranquilize him, and it seems he's still a bit shaken up... if Palutena was here all along too, I fear for what might happen."

Listening to Chrom recount what happened and recalling the harrowing memories, Roy whimpered and began to tremble. Marth wrapped an arm around his shoulder to comfort him and said, "It's all right now, Roy... you're safe. We're here for you, and we'll get to go home soon." Roy silently nodded, somewhat timidly.

"Hmmm... I think I've cracked Galeem and Dharkon's modus operandi," Shulk remarked. "Before, they would seize control of our bodies while our minds watched, and usually, we could be reached out to with the right words or connections if defeating us wasn't the only option. But... I think Galeem and Dharkon both realized they cannot corrupt positive emotions..."

"Like my love for the Captain..." Lucina murmured.

"Exactly. So they're now amplifying negative emotions - loneliness, pain, fear, anger... hatred... and manipulating their victims. And their hold on such negative emotions seems to intensify as we proceed... it would appear that Galeem or Dharkon practically becomes one with their victims now, twisting their emotions and reinforcing them with subconscious thoughts. We need to be careful..."

"Ugwaaaaah-!"

"Noooooo...!"

Captain Falcon and Lucina's pained cries suddenly broke the silence. Shulk immediately realized what was going on.

"It hurts... Galeem... what are you doing to me...?!"

"Palutena..." Falcon strained.

"No! Stop! I don't want to hurt Pit... or anyone! I..."

"S...she went silent." The Captain murmured, his voice tinged with tangible fear.

"Is this how you get your sick kicks, Dharkon? Guh... I'd sooner go to hell than let my comrades die...!"
"Bayonetta!" Lucina shouted. "Just hold on! We're coming to-"

"Such power... no... I can't... any longer...!"

"Bayo-" In that instant, Lucina couldn't hear Bayonetta's voice in her mind any longer. "What... happened to her...?"

"Not good..." Shulk murmured tremulously. "Galeem and Dharkon mean business now..." Just then, a vision came to him. Once it finished, he urgently announced, "We must hurry."

"Why?" Rosalina asked.

"...Galeem and Dharkon are going to try to go all out with their respective emissaries, Palutena and Bayonetta. Within fifteen minutes, if we don't do anything, they will emerge and fight each other to the death. At that point, there'll be no use trying to save them... they'll be too far gone. If either one of them survives, they will follow the orders of whomever's controlling her and kill that being's nemesis...dooming us all. We have to try to find and stop them before then."

"But where are they?!" Pit exclaimed.

"They're... guarding the Hands on either side of the rift," Shulk said. Everyone looked around and saw paths leading to Master Hand in the distance on the light side, and Crazy Hand on the dark side. "Like I said though, Galeem and Dharkon are pulling out all the stops. We'll need to approach in parties of three, to try to snap them out of it."

"I guess it goes without saying I'll try to save Palutena," Captain Falcon announced. "I... don't dare tread into the dark clouds, considering Galeem tried to control me again when the darkness overpowered the light... I don't wanna risk anything."

"I'll go for Bayonetta, for similar reasons," Lucina said.

"Do you even need to ask? I'm going for Palutena!" Pit declared. "A good angel never leaves his goddess's side!"

"Bayonetta's been my partner since New Los Angeles," Cloud asserted. "I think I'd stand a chance of reaching out to her..."

"Cloud, I think I'll come with you and Lucina," Shulk suggested. "I think I can help in that regard too. I... blamed myself for letting this all happen in the first place. Were it not for Kirby... and Marth and the Captain... I'd have given up long ago."

"Poyooooo..." Kirby muttered sadly.

"Thank you so much, Kirby," Shulk hugged the pink puffball who saved all of his friends thus far. "Don't worry. This is our story... we made our beginning, and we'll write the ending together. We won't leave anyone behind!"

"Poyo!"

"I suppose I'll accompany Pit and the Captain, then," Rosalina said. "Palutena's a fellow goddess. I hope I can be of help... are you ready, Luma?"

The small star-like creature accompanying Rosalina chittered happily in response.

"Lucina?" Elma's Spirit asked Lucina. "I would like to come with you... I can sense Lao's Spirit
right before Bayonetta. While he was under suspicion before the light beams attacked NLA, I can't just leave him... Questioning can wait until we both get back to NLA."

"Of course."

"And I'm coming with you, Shulk," Fiora's Spirit asserted. "I want to try to help, too!"

"Glad to have you with me, Fiora."

"Excuse me... Captain, Pit and Rosalina?" The Spirit of Pyra asked the team headed to save Palutena. "Would you guys mind bringing me and Rex along? I can sense the Spirit of my other half, Mythra, right before Palutena... it's a long story."

"Sure thing, you two," Rosalina told the Spirits of the Aegis and her Driver.

"Looks like I'll once again embrace the dark," Lucina pondered aloud, looking in the direction of the dark clouds.

"And I'll be returning to the light." Captain Falcon turned his gaze in the direction of the clouds of light.

"...Captain?" Lucina asked her lover before they parted ways.

"Yes?" Falcon asked her.

"I'm... a bit worried. Dharkon said that saving Bayonetta would be harder than anyone so far... and I fear they might be right. They also said they look forward to me giving in to despair again..."

"Just remember our training," The Captain consoled her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "And know that I believe in you, my love. You've made me... made everyone so very proud of you. All that's left is to believe in yourself. I know you, Cloud, and Shulk can reach out to Bayonetta."

"Same to you," Lucina told him, drawing closer and hugging him tightly. "I hope you, Pit and Rosalina can save Palutena too... I don't know what tricks Galeem might have up their sleeve, but... don't give up."

"I won't." He hugged her back. "I'll see you soon, sweetheart."

"Same to you, babe..." She released him from her embrace, and he did the same.

"Alright, teams," Shulk called out, "Time is of the essence. Let's move out!"

---

Eight and a half minutes had passed. Pit, Rosalina and Captain Falcon had freed several light Spirits on the way to Palutena and Master Hand, and had just freed the Spirit of Mythra.

"Great to have you back, Mythra!" Rex's Spirit told Mythra.

"Same here," Mythra replied coolly before noticing Pyra next to him. "Oh, Pyra's here too? And we're...not sharing the same body?"

"According to the Smashers' descriptions a while back," Pyra began, "These beings, Galeem, the being that captured both of us, and Dharkon, the one that got Rex, are capturing people from different universes and different timelines... I guess it explains how we're able to exist at the same time like this."
"Weird..." Mythra muttered, her voice dripping with skepticism.

"Not to pressure you three," Rosalina began, "But we need to hurry. We have less than seven minutes to save Palutena before the worst happens..."

"Oh... right," Pyra said. "Come on, guys."

...

The team caught up to where Palutena was waiting for them. Like clockwork, she stood there, a blank expression on her face, as her eyes glowed red and the familiar aquamarine aura surrounded her body.

"Be on your guard," Captain Falcon advised his teammates.

"Oh man, I'm already getting Chaos Kin flashbacks from this..." Pit muttered anxiously.

"Just remain calm, Pit," Rosalina encouraged the angel. "Whatever Galeem makes her do or say... know it's not her actually saying it. It's Galeem trying to make her their servant..."

"I sure hope so..."

Within seconds, the scenery changed to a platform overlooking Palutena's Temple.

"So... you three think you can save me?" Palutena began, her voice, which mingled almost flawlessly with Galeem's, sounding somewhat condescending. "A queen of the cosmos, Galeem's little 'second in command'... and you, Pit...?"

"How did she know...?!" The Captain muttered under his breath, incredulously.

"Oh no... it is the Chaos Kin all over again...!"

Meanwhile, on the other side of the cloud sea, Shulk, Cloud and Lucina had freed several dark Spirits on the way to Bayonetta and Crazy Hand. Interestingly enough, the balance didn't shift either way, though they assumed that was because the team sent to rescue Palutena had been freeing light Spirits at roughly the same time, so any shifts would be canceled out.

After freeing Lao's Spirit, Elma asked him, "Are you alright, Lao?"

"I think so..." Lao's Spirit answered her. "It's funny, all this time, right before I awakened just now... I had the strangest dream."

"Do tell?"

"Yeah... it was so bittersweet. Charmaine and Chengshi were there..." Lao's face bore a slightly pained expression.

Remembering his words to her at New Los Angeles, Lucina decided to ask Lao, "Is... something the matter?"

"Hey, you're that Lucina girl..." Lao muttered before he answered her with, "No... it's nothing."

"You sure?" Elma asked her fellow BLADE. "Is there anything you want to talk about...?"

"I'm fine," Lao tried to reassure the colonel of the Reclaimers. "Just... tired, I guess."
Looking on at Lao, Lucina couldn't help but realize Lao was feeling more than he let on. He insists he's fine... but I can see he's clearly in pain. Who are Charmaine and Chengshi? ... I guess it's not my place to ask. Her eyebrows furrowed in concern as she pondered, Sometimes... the darkness, or light, in a person isn't so literal. It can be metaphorical... like how Lao struggles with his own inner darkness. Just like me...

"No time for daydreaming, Lucina," Cloud told her. "We need to get to Bayonetta on the double. Time's a wasting."

"Right."

...  

They eventually arrived at Bayonetta's location. Sure enough, standing before them was the Umbran Witch herself, her eyes glowing purple and the familiar crimson aura emanating from her body.

"Bayonetta..." Lucina began. "It's okay now. We've come to save you."

"And what makes you think I want to be saved...?" Bayonetta taunted her. Her voice seemed to blend with Dharkon's almost completely, and her face bore an unnaturally smug expression. "What makes you think you can save me, when you were practically Dharkon's battery this whole time?"

"Wha...?!" Lucina stammered. "She knows...?"

"Don't let her mess with you," Cloud told the Exalt. "This is just Dharkon trying to assume total control. We can't let them."

"That's right!" Shulk spoke up. "Bayonetta, I know this isn't what you truly want! I know you're in there!"

"So Monado Boy and Mister 'Not Interested' came along for the ride too?" Bayonetta questioned as the scenery changed to the falling platform at the Umbra Clock Tower. Striking a pose, she provoked them with, "Let's dance!"

As they crouched in pain, Pit, Rosalina and Captain Falcon took a moment to regain their breath. Under Galeem's control, Palutena was not an opponent to be underestimated. Galeem made her dodge and block almost every attack flawlessly, and her counterattacks were precise and powerful.

"No..." Pit murmured, his voice starting to crack. "Unlike when the Chaos Kin controlled her, I can't just snipe Galeem from close by... they're remotely controlling her and I... I don't wanna hurt her..."

"We can still try to reach out to her," Rosalina reassured him. "Don't give up..."

"Right!" Pit nodded.

"You are all wasting your time," Palutena told them all flatly, her facial expression still remaining stoic. As usual, she and Galeem seemed to be practically on the same wavelength, and it looked like Galeem was slowly taking over until, soon enough, there would be nothing of Palutena left, merely an empty husk for Galeem to use. "This is all in accordance to the will of the Lord of Order and Light, my master."

"You can't possibly mean that?!" Captain Falcon protested, slowly standing up. "Have you already
forgotten... that during Galeem's first attack, you sacrificed yourself so that Pit and Dark Pit could try to escape? And now you're..." He paused, biting his lip. "...no. This isn't you. Please, wake up! I know this isn't what you truly want!"

"But it is, Captain," Palutena answered him, the emphasis she placed on the "Captain" making him feel uneasy. "I failed to even stop Galeem in the first place... I, a goddess of light, was utterly powerless." A soulless, creepy smile graced her face as she continued, "But don't you see? Galeem gave me a second chance... they had compassion on me, and granted me the privilege of being their emissary... you were a fool to reject that honor, Captain Falcon."

"Honor?!" The Captain could not believe what was coming out of the normally rational goddess's lips. "Listen to yourself! Galeem is manipulating you!" Glancing back for a moment, he then said, "And what about Bayonetta? You cannot be okay with the idea of blood on your hands!"

"The Witches were supposed to have been wiped out centuries ago," Palutena replied. "It is unfortunate that Cereza... Bayonetta is of half-Lumen Sage descent, but her allegiance with the Umbran Witches makes it my duty to kill her."

Pit couldn't stand hearing his goddess talk like this any longer. Standing up, he called out to her, his voice pleading, "Lady Palutena...!"

"Pit...?" For a moment, it looked like the real Palutena was emerging, albeit barely, as she slowly turned her head to meet his gaze.

"Can you hear me, Lady Palutena? Please... this can't be you. When Bayonetta joined Smash City that day, you two may have gotten off on the wrong foot, sure, but you otherwise wouldn't be at each others' throats like this!" Remembering what Shulk said if only one of the two beings fell, Pit followed up with, "And if you do kill Bayonetta... you do realize that if Dharkon alone dies, Galeem will erase us all?! Please! I know you don't want this!"

"It is a small price to pay for a new, glorious universe, free of any imperfections..." Palutena raised her arms to the sky. "Galeem will erase everyone else, yes... except me. I have been chosen to oversee the new universe they will create. Finally, a world befitting of a goddess." Turning to Captain Falcon, she offered him with a crazed smirk on her face, "If you join me once again, Galeem will spare you too..."

"Hell no!" The Captain vehemently refused her offer. "That would mean all our friends and the people we care about would die! You wouldn't want to live in a world without Pit... would you?"

"He's right, Lady Palutena," Pit tried to reach out to her. "I don't want to imagine a world without you, either..."

"Pit..." Palutena's facial expression seemed saddened before turning into a spiteful scowl as she pointed her staff at Pit and threatened him, "Enough games. Out of my way, Pit... or I will destroy you right here and now..."

"Lady... Palu..." Pit's eyes flooded with tears as he collapsed to his knees, heartbroken.

"This has to stop..." Rosalina murmured.

"H-huh?" Pit felt Rosalina touch him on his shoulder.

"Pit... I... have an idea. But... I ask that you forgive me for what I'm about to do..."

"I don't care..." Pit wept. "As long as you can save her... please..."
"I will." Standing and walking over to Captain Falcon, Rosalina told him, "Could you... cover Luma's eyes for me...?"

"Huh...?" The Captain noticed the star-like creature that accompanied the queen of the galaxy floating over to him. "O-okay..." He covered the star creature's eyes as Rosalina walked over to Palutena, a determined expression on her face.

"So another goddess defies me?" Palutena mockingly questioned Rosalina. "You underestimate my, and Galeem's power... speaking of, were you not one of Dharkon's-"

And then, it happened. An unexpected sound broke Palutena's monologuing and echoed all around them. Pit and the Captain winced momentarily at the sound, then opened their eyes and saw what happened.

Rosalina had slapped Palutena across the face.

"Have a taste of this...!" Bayonetta fired a volley of bullets at Lucina, who deflected each one with her sword. She was cutting it dangerously close each time, as exhaustion was starting to catch up to her without the assistance of Shulk and Cloud, who were weakened by Bayonetta's earlier attacks. Under Dharkon's control, the Umbran Witch's power was to be feared.

"Not bad," Bayonetta taunted Lucina, "Considering everything Dharkon did to you... you still have that much energy?" Smirking, she followed up with, "But you're running out fast... aren't you?"

"I've... gotten stronger..." Lucina panted, wincing slightly and letting the arm holding her sword hang at her side. "In every area... in my skills, my mind, and most importantly, I've gotten stronger as a person... Neither you nor Dharkon can take that away."

"Well, aren't you a fucking goody two-shoes," Bayonetta spat before preparing a Wicked Weave attack to smack Lucina to the side.

"Lucina, look out!"

Shulk mustered whatever strength he could to run to Lucina and tackle her out of the way of the giant demon's fist.

"You too, Monado Boy?" Bayonetta scoffed. "Great, now one of Galeem's former puppets is going to lecture me too..."

"Bayonetta!" Shulk called out to her as he and Lucina stood. "This isn't you! This is Dharkon manipulating you! I know... how horrible you must have felt when you failed to defeat Galeem... how you must have felt being trapped here, all alone, all this time..."

"Oh, shut up! You can't begin to sympathize with me, so don't even try!" Bayonetta pointed one of her Love Is Blue pistols at Shulk.

"I can... actually..." Looking down solemnly, Shulk began, "When I had my vision, I tried to warn all of you, but I just...tensed up. I knew it would be of no use... they had power we couldn't begin to comprehend. The only other time I had a vision of the future that I couldn't change... was when I almost lost Fiora..."

"Shulk..." Fiora's Spirit murmured wistfully.

"I thought for sure I was dead after Galeem's attack... I thought everyone was. When I awoke to
find myself technically alive, but alone... a despair unlike any I've known took over. I blamed myself for not being able to save you all... I genuinely thought I was useless. It's thanks to Kirby, Marth and Captain Falcon that I was able to snap out of it... All we have to save now are the goddess Palutena... and you."

"Don't you see, Bayonetta?" Lucina asked the witch. "Once we save you, and the Hands, we can all go home!"

"Home..." For a moment, it seemed like the real Bayonetta was shining through, before Dharkon influenced her thoughts again. "I'm a witch. I don't have a 'home', I go wherever my duties take me. And my duty right now... is eliminating that goddess!"

"You would kill an innocent person?!" Shulk exclaimed. "Just because she commands angels doesn't mean she's affiliated with your enemies!"

"Can't risk that ever happening, can I, Monado Boy?" Bayonetta smirked in a smug manner as she asked him, "Tell me, do your visions show a future where she, too, goes mad with power?"

"Only this one, but that's only because Galeem is manipulating her, just as Dharkon is doing to you!" Shulk urged her. "Besides, if you kill Galeem after Palutena dies, Dharkon will kill everyone, even you!"

"I'm going to hell anyway," Bayonetta shrugged. "It's par for the course for witches. I just figure, why not do so in style...?"

"Please, Bayonetta, I know there's still good in you..." Shulk pleaded.

"Well, this one-woman choir has had enough of your preaching, Monado Boy...!" Holding her pistol steady, Bayonetta fired a shot aimed at Shulk's heart.

"Look out...!"

Before Shulk could process what was happening, Cloud shoved Shulk out of the bullet's way, only for the bullet to go right through Cloud's left bicep.

"Ugh...!" Time seemed to slow down as he crumpled to his knees, his face contorted in pain.

"No...!" Bayonetta, the real one who started to break through, gasped as her partner since Mira took the bullet that was meant for Shulk.

"Cloud...!" Lucina cried.

"Ah..." Shocked, Palutena held one of her hands to the cheek Rosalina slapped. In that moment, Galeem's hold on Palutena had weakened.

As the Spirits of Rex and Pyra looked on, Rex's eyes widened and jaw wide open, and Pyra covering her gasping mouth with her hands, Mythra observed the scene unfazed and nonchalantly commented, "Wow. And I thought I was savage."

"Palutena." Rosalina began, looking down, her voice sounding agitated with a hint of sorrow. "Don't ever say anything like that again... that you would be okay with a universe without the people you love..."

"Rosa...lina..." Palutena murmured, feeling Galeem's control over her weaken even more.
"You were born a goddess... but I was made one. And I didn't choose to become one, either..."
Looking to the side, she continued, "It all started when I offered to help Luma find his mother... years passed, we traveled all across the universe... but we never did find her. It was then I remembered my own family... my mother, father, and brother..." Looking up at Palutena with tears streaking down her cheeks, she wept, "By the time I saw my planet again... they were all long gone...!"

"Ah..." Tears began to gather in Palutena's eyes. From afar, Pyra began to be moved to tears at Rosalina's story as well, prompting Rex and Mythra to embrace her in a comforting group hug.

"I may be the new mother to Luma, and others like him too, but not a day goes by that I don't regret leaving my own family behind, never to see them again... don't make the same mistake I did... you have people here that care about you...!"

"Yes..." The tears flowed down Palutena's face as she collapsed to her knees and murmured, "I'm sorry... I'm so sorry..."

Hearing Palutena breaking free, Pit's heart was filled with gratitude. "Lady Palutenaaaaaa...!" He ran to her, sobbing, and embraced her tightly.

"Pit...!" At that moment, Galeem had lost their control over Palutena as her eyes returned to their normal green hue and the aqua aura vanished from her body. As the scenery reverted to what it once was, she embraced him back as she managed a smile despite the tears. "Pit... can you ever forgive me...?"

"Of course I do...!" He sobbed. "I forgive Rosalina too... I know she did what she had to do, to bring you back...!"

"I've missed you, Pit...!"

"Me too...!"

Looking on at the scene before him with a soft smile, Captain Falcon remarked, "All's well that ends well... I'm glad for them."

Not if I have anything to say about it.

Galeem was seizing control of Captain Falcon once again as the aquamarine aura once again emanated from his body.

"SERIOUSLY?!!" The Captain protested. "You lost, Galeem! Palutena is free, and soon, Bayonetta will be free from Dharkon's control too! Checkmate!"

Even though you've ruined my plans time and again... I have this strange feeling of compassion toward you... I only want the best for you, and I know what you want.

"Ngh..." The Captain could feel all his senses shutting down, not even noticing everyone else's cries for him. "What's...this light...?"

Within seconds, he slouched over, breathing but not moving or responding to outside stimuli, as his visor lights glowed red once more.

"Captain...!"
Seeing Cloud wounded awoke something in Bayonetta, giving her the willpower to resist Dharkon's power and run to her injured partner, catching him before he hit the ground.

"Seriously, Cloud..." Bayonetta began, her voice starting to sound more like her own as Dharkon's voice began to fade. "What... the hell are you thinking...?"

"Are you alright, Cloud?!" Lucina called out to him.

"He is," Shulk confirmed. "I'd have received a vision if he were going to die. The bullet seems to have missed his vitals."

Getting in closer to have a look at Cloud's wound, Elma's Spirit confirmed, "Shulk's right. The bullet went right through and missed his brachial artery. With a Healing Sprout, he should be good as new."

"Yeah. Hurts like a bitch, though," Cloud hissed, grasping the wound.

"Cloud, why...?" Bayonetta asked him, her eyebrows furrowed in concern.

"Heh... I've been thinking, maybe Master Hand making me your partner wasn't a mistake after all," Cloud began with a chuckle. "We're more alike than you think... You have this standoffish air at first glance, but when people get to know you, you open up to them... I see myself in you when that happens. And... before we set out for Mira, we had some sparring matches, and once we were done and taking a break before we headed to our apartments, you just... suddenly opened up about your past. I did the same. It was surprising, but... nice." Cloud suddenly hissed in pain again from the bullet wound.

"Please, Cloud... don't exert yourself..." Dharkon was losing control of Bayonetta fast.

Smiling weakly, Cloud muttered, "I'm glad we're partners, Bayonetta. And we'll always be."

"Cloud..." Bayonetta broke completely free of Dharkon's control as the crimson aura around her vanished and her eyes stopped glowing purple. As the scenery reverted to the dark clouds, she hugged him tightly. "Don't you dare... ever give me a scare like that again, you bloody idiot."

"Are you...starting to cry?" Cloud chuckled faintly as he hugged her back.

"Oh, shut up," Bayonetta grumbled, trying to hide her embarrassment at showing her soft side. Glancing at Shulk, she asked him, "Do you have a Healing Sprout?"

"I do, actually," Shulk said, pulling one out.

"Thank you, Shulk." Bayonetta took the Sprout and stuck it on Cloud, watching the bullet wound slowly close like magic, as if it never happened. "Sorry for... the things I said."

"No worries," Shulk reassured her. "You... weren't yourself. Let's go save Crazy Hand, and with her and Master Hand back, we can go home. Right, Lucina?"

Something was wrong with Lucina. She was clutching at her chest, breathing heavily and sweating.

"...Lucina?" It was then he noticed Dharkon's signature crimson aura was emanating from Lucina's body once more.

"Why... Dharkon...?" Lucina strained, feeling herself slowly losing control of her body. "It's over... Bayonetta is free. Captain Falcon and his allies saved Palutena too, and soon the Hands will be free
too... I didn't even give in to despair like you said I would. Just accept your defeat..."

*But where's the fun in that? My pet... I know of your deepest darkest desires... You want to be with those you love forever, don't you? You don't ever want to lose them? I can give you that... if you return to me...*

"I..." Lucina felt herself giving in, her body slowly going numb, her mind giving in to the temptation.

*Dharkon really knows how to press my buttons... I... can't resist... why? Is this... what they planned for me all along?*

*I will spare you and your loved ones. You can live the rest of your lives together in harmony...*

"Everything's..." Lucina weakly murmured as her eyes glowed purple once more and she hunched over, "Going...dark..."

"Ugh..."

Captain Falcon slowly came to, the light fading and revealing a hospital room. The dusky orange light of sunset shone through the windows, just like that day.

"Are you feeling okay, Captain?"

"Yeah..." Getting a grip on reality, he said, "Thank you for your help, Dr. Stewart."

"Any time," the man named 'Dr. Stewart' replied. But... this was not the same Dr. Stewart that the Captain knew.

*Why did I just call him Dr. Stewart...? The Captain thought. Dr. Stewart doesn't look like that... or sound like that... he's never been this much of a stiff around me either...*

"Is something wrong?" The doctor asked.

"No... it's okay. I'd just like to go home."

...

Once he arrived at his private quarters, the Captain disrobed and stepped into the showers, enjoying the feeling of the soapy lather melting off his skin under the stream of warm water. Once he was done bathing, he put on his clothes and briefly looked at himself in the mirror, seeing his own, unconcealed face.

"This...is me." He smiled. "The real me." Glancing for a moment at the helmet nearby, he stared at it for a few moments, hesitating.

"No..." He shook his head, his gaze drifting back to the mirror. "I don't need that anymore."

For a moment, he saw his own reflection, donning the helmet this time, with the aquamarine aura surrounding his body. The reflection was banging at the mirror with his fist as if he were trapped inside it, shouting something mostly unintelligible, but the Captain could barely make out the words "stop" and "not real".

"Gwaaaah!" Shocked by the sight, he fell backwards and landed on his rear. Taking a deep breath
to try to regain his bearings, he cautiously stood and looked at his reflection again.

It was normal.

**What was that all about...?**

All of a sudden, a memory flashed into his mind.

"It's not every day I get to look at myself in the mirror like this... I sometimes wonder if the person staring back at me really is me..."

A... memory? He thought. Perhaps... there's something amiss about all this after all... Looking at the clock, he murmured, "Now's not the time to worry about it, though. I've got a championship to race in."

... 

As expected, Captain Falcon had placed first in the new racing tournament. As he stood at the podium, he smiled and waved, feeling that this was a true victory for him... that he could be himself in front of everyone, no longer needing the helmet. All of a sudden, he saw the other racers below "glitch" and change form into familiar faces. Jody Summer. John Tanaka. Dr. Clash. Lily Flyer. Even Black Shadow and Blood Falcon.

**What...?**

He blinked, causing the images to revert to their old, unfamiliar forms.

**I was right. Something's wrong...**

The time came for him to be interviewed by Mr. Zero. At least, Mr. Zero in name only. The Captain couldn't place his finger on it but he was sure the person he spoke to wasn't really Mr. Zero.

"So, Captain Falcon... or should I say, Douglas," Mr. Zero began, "That was a breathtaking victory, and your decision to bare the real you lately and race without the iconic helmet has moved us all!"

"It... has?" He questioned. Stammering, he tried to regain his composure with, "Thank you..."

"See, there's the real you again! I'm so glad to see such authenticity... it almost feels like you're a different person."

**Different... person?** He glanced at the reflective marble floor for a moment and saw... a different Mr. Zero in the reflection.

The real Mr. Zero.

"You okay there, Douglas?" "Mr. Zero" asked. "If so, I'd like to ask you something..."

**What the hell...** His eyes darted around fearfully, seeing more reflections of the people around him that didn't match what he saw before seeing the reflection.

I... remember... I remember that... these aren't the people I know!

"Douglas...?"
"I..." His heart racing and vision getting blurry, Falcon stammered, "Please excuse me... I'm not feeling so well..."

He stumbled toward the exit, slamming the door behind him as he stepped out into the alley.

I'm... the real me... but everyone else... isn't...?

Wavering where he stood, he saw a familiar face before everything went dark.

Lucina...?

He felt his body become weightless, not even hearing himself hit the ground with a thud when he collapsed.

...

"Babe?"

Slowly opening his eyes, the Captain saw none other than his lover, Lucina, sitting close to him. He appeared to be lying on a couch in his home, the coffee table nearby with a fresh cup of tea situated on it.

Lucina's here... this person looks like her, sounds like her... it has to be her... right?

"Babe, say something."

"Ah..." Looking around, he murmured, "Lucina? You're here? And... you brought me home?"

"Of course, silly," she giggled. "This is our home. We're engaged and living together now, remember?"

Did that really happen...?

"Y-yeah, I remember..." He decided to play along.

Lucina wouldn't lie to me... right?

"But how are you feeling?" She asked him.

"Okay, I guess... Is that... some tea?"

"I made your favorite," she told him with a smile. Noticing him starting to sit up, she moved aside and let him take a sip.

"You like it?" She asked him curiously.

"Y-yeah..." He stammered. Smiling at her, he said, "Thank you, sweetheart. I'm looking... forward to our life together."

"Same here," she giggled. "And... you know what else I'm looking forward to...?"

"I think I know already..." he chuckled, drawing closer to her and wrapping his arms around her as she pulled him closer to her and their lips met in a passionate, yearning kiss. Within moments, the love behind the kiss turned to lust as she lay him back down and removed his scarf, her hands moving to the buttons on his jacket.
"Oh yes..." Falcon sighed blissfully as she planted her lips on the nape of his neck. He began to muss up her hair as his chest was exposed, feeling her hands stroke his back. "Mmmmm..." he tilted his head back and moaned as he felt her lips travel to his chest.

**Maybe there's nothing wrong after all... this feels amazing...**

His mind was becoming foggy with pure pleasure as his breath hitched and his body began to heat up, before suddenly noticing Lucina begin to straddle him, positioning her still clothed crotch right above...

**Wait a minute.**

"L-Lucina?" He interrupted her. "It's kinda hot that you're trying to dominate me right now, but... I do remember you said you weren't very used to the customs of romance, let alone... this. Aside from our first time, you're not that... shall we say, experienced yet?"

"Really? I guess I remember..." Lucina tilted her head to her side quizzically. Climbing off his body, she suggested, "Want another drink?"

"Yeah, that'll help..." As he sat up, he pretended to drink, only subtly moving the cup so that the tea's surface would show Lucina's reflection as she reached for the remote and turned on the TV.

What he saw shocked him.

"Captain...!" The real Lucina inside the reflection called to him. The same aquamarine aura from earlier was surrounding her too, and her face bore a desperate expression. "Wake up, darling! Please! That isn't me!"

"Wha?!

"Babe...?" The Lucina sitting next to him asked him.

Gently setting the cup of tea down, he told her bluntly, "...You're not Lucina."

"What?" The "Lucina" before him chuckled nervously. "Of course I'm Lucina. Who else would I be...?"

"Explain this." He shoved the cup into "Lucina"s face, letting her look at her reflection, which was the same thing Falcon saw.

"Kh..." The fake Lucina grunted as she appeared to "glitch" just as the crowd did earlier. Just then, she smirked as her voice changed to Galeem's.

"So, you've figured it out..."

"Ugh!" The Captain gasped, his consciousness snapping back to reality. Pit, Palutena and Rosalina stood before him, looking on with a concerned look.

"Is he awake?!" Pit exclaimed.

"Looks that way..." Palutena answered him.

*I don't understand. I created a world where you can be the real you, and I've included your lover too...*
"What good is being the real me, if everyone else is just... carbon copies?!” Falcon protested. "Dr. Stewart and Mr. Zero were in name only, and while the 'Lucina' you included was the spitting image of her in every way, her personality was different... that's no better than you erasing everyone else and leaving me alone in your new universe! So fuck off! Lucina and I will come for you and Dharkon, and then it'll be the end of the road for both of you!"

If that's what you decide, so be it. Know that when I see you again, I will not show mercy. Farewell, Captain Falcon. Farewell to you... and these disgusting flawed beings you care about so much...

At that moment, Galeem released their hold over the Captain, the aqua aura vanishing and the lights on his visor turning white again. Feeling exhaustion catch up to him, he fell to his knees, then collapsed face first onto the ground, unconscious.

"Mmm..."

As Lucina's mind emerged from the darkness of unconsciousness, she closed her eyes once again to a different darkness - one of desire and ecstasy.

She and her lover were entwined together in a cacophony of pure carnal pleasure, their naked bodies fusing together in a series of tantalizing movements. Their hands roving everywhere... their lips locked together, pausing only to catch their breath... their moans echoing throughout the bedroom... the sheer bliss flooding their bodies.

"So... good..." Lucina faintly gasped, moaning as the Captain's movements found the perfect rhythm. She embraced him tighter, sighing and moaning as the wonderful feelings built up in her. Briefly opening her eyes, she saw her lover's face.

He was wearing his helmet for some reason, but that just made him all the sexier, especially seeing the rest of his face contort into an expression of intense bliss.

Gods... that is such a turn on. She thought, as she closed her eyes once more and gave in to the pleasurable culmination that rocked her to her core powerfully, but gently at the same time.

"Cap...tain..." she sighed, unable to think about anything but him and the warmth flooding her being.

"Lucina..." He embraced her tightly as he shuddered, experiencing a breathtaking release, his voice sending pleasant vibrations down Lucina's spine.

After they lay in each other's arms as they came down from their rapturous high, Lucina pondered, Wait... our first time together...

She opened her eyes and saw their bodies were both emanating the crimson aura. The lights on Falcon's visor glowed purple, as well. Not only that, the walls seemed to be covered in some dark purple slimy material that vaguely resembled veins.

What...?

"Something wrong, sweetheart?"

"Ah..." Stammering as she felt unease begin to creep up on her, she asked him, "Did... we ever get to... make love to each other with you still wearing the helmet before?"
“Yeah,” Falcon said. “Don’t you remember?”

“I... guess so,” Lucina conceded, deciding to play along.

“Maybe some time, we should do it with you wearing your old butterfly mask,” he jested. “Spending time with you like this... makes me forget all my worries.”

“Of course it does...” She giggled, snuggling closer to her lover, savoring the feeling of safety being in his strong arms gave her.

“It makes me forget the fact that I miss Snake and Samus...” He sighed sorrowfully. “They died from Dharkon’s corruption. You, me, Shulk, Zelda, Robin and your parents and brother are the only people alive today... in this world of eternal darkness.”

“Oh...” she sighed timidly, subtly backing away to give her lover space.

“Shulk lost Fiora too... Zelda lost Link and her counterpart, Sheik... Robin lost all his friends too... Our bodies were like a vector for this disease-like corruption. We were just the carriers and were unharmed, but they... I heard it wasn’t pretty.”

We...caused this?

“I... you’re joking... you have to be...” Lucina chuckled nervously.

“Take a look.” Reaching for his smartphone close by, the Captain showed Lucina a video feed of what happened to the loved ones of the people who were spared, barring herself.

“No...” Lucina shook her head fearfully, covering her mouth with one of her hands. What Falcon said was true... she first saw Fiora dying a horrible, disfiguring death, the method of which Lucina couldn’t even begin to describe... the same happened to Link, Sheik, Cloud, Snake, Samus...

“This... isn’t what I wanted...” Lucina sobbed. “I didn’t want to be alone, but... not at this cost...”

“Was it worth it?” Captain Falcon asked her, his voice changing to Dharkon’s.

“Aaaaagh!” Lucina cried as her consciousness returned to reality. Standing before her were Shulk, Bayonetta, and a fully-healed Cloud.

“She’s back...” Shulk murmured.

“I know you’re no quitter!” Bayonetta encouraged the Exalt. ”Shove them out of your subconscious!”

“You can do it!” Fiora’s Spirit joined in. “I know you can!”

“That’s right!” Elma’s Spirit said. “Remember your own strength!”

“Dharkon...” Lucina began. “You feed off my emotions, torment me, my loved ones, and threaten me time and again... and try to tempt me with a corrupt wish. Yes, being alone is a pain I can’t bear. But to be surrounded by loved ones, only for them to be unhappy... that’s even worse.”

You...!

“My resolve is stronger than it's ever been before, Dharkon. In a way, I guess I should thank you. Your attempts at getting me to cave in to my insecurities actually tempered me to become even stronger still. I will use my newfound strength... to cleave the path to a hopeful future for myself,
So be it! When I see you again, I will make you regret ever leaving me...

"Ah..." At that moment, Dharkon released their control of Lucina, her eyes returning to their normal blue color and the crimson aura vanishing from her body. Staggering, she felt her consciousness as light as a feather before falling backward onto the ground, losing consciousness within seconds.

"Ngh..." Captain Falcon slowly opened his eyes and found himself back on the luminous path, the cloud sea back to a state of perfect equilibrium. Noticing Lucina laying on the ground a short distance off, he crawled over to her and gently nudged her awake.

"Sweetheart...?"

"Mmmh...?" She moaned as she came to. "What happened? Why are we... back here?"

"Hey guys," Mario greeted them with a wave.

"Mario..." The Captain murmured as he slowly got up. Lucina did the same. "How did we get here?"

"After Master Hand was-a freed from Galeem's control, and Crazy Hand from Dharkon's, Palutena and Rosalina helped bring you back here, Captain. As-a for Lucina, Bayonetta carried her back here before the goddess and the witch followed the Hands to the rest of the Smashers. They've-a found a way for us to go home."

"They have...?" Lucina's eyes lit up with hope.

"Hold on, Mario," The Captain said. "Did you get to find out if... gathering everyone back together was the real Hands' intention all along?"

"As a matter of fact, that is-a true," Mario answered him. "The Hands... they're getting tired. They've been running tournaments for so long, they're thinking of hanging up their metaphorical hats and-a letting someone new take the reins. But first, they're-a planning to go out with a bang. This will be their biggest tournament yet, letting more new faces join over time, but after that... I don't know if something like-a this will ever happen again." Looking down solemnly, he continued, "It's-a safe to say me, Link, Luigi, Donkey Kong, Pikachu, Kirby, Yoshi, Marth, and-a Samus will stay, but I don't know if anyone else is guaranteed to return... not even you, Captain..."

"I... see..." The Captain looked to the side solemnly.

So... Snake was right, he thought. There is a chance I, or Lucina, or both will go our separate ways next tournament... or even any of our friends or loved ones...

"Babe..." Lucina affectionately stroked his face in an attempt to comfort him. "No matter what happens... let's try to make our immediate future as happy as possible. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it... right?"

"Right." He tenderly embraced the woman he loved.

I promise, Lucina... I won't let you go ever again. I won't let any more moments between us, or anyone else in Smash City, slip by again...

"Anyway, you two," Mario interrupted them. "Let's-a go. The Hands are waiting for us."
"Right."

... The three arrived at a wide clearing just in between Galeem and Dharkon. There appeared to be a crack in the cloud sea, orange light shining through.

"Alright, everyone is here," Master Hand announced. "It would seem that this rift here is the key to our freedom. Crazy Hand and I will see what we can do." Master Hand and Crazy Hand then started rubbing together to create what looked like static electricity, and slapped the crack, which grew wider.

"Poyoooo..." Kirby was amazed by the display and inched closer before Master Hand blocked the way. "Sorry, Kirby. We're all thankful for your help saving us all, but we can't risk harm coming to any of you. We can sense throngs of Phantom Fighters created by Galeem and Dharkon in there. It would be too dangerous for any of you, but we should be able to handle it without any problems. Once that's done, the path to freedom awaits."

"Come on, Master!" Crazy Hand encouraged her partner. "Let's stick it to Galeem and Dharkon! We've had enough of their chains!"

"Indeed!" Master and Crazy Hand then dove into the rift.

A few seconds passed, and Sonic spoke up. "What do you think is going on in there...?"

Immediately after Sonic's inquiry, some of the Phantom Fighters Master Hand described were sent flying out of the rift and into the horizon. They included Galeem-created clones of Mario, Link and Snake with their signature red eyes and crystalline light blue bodies; and Dharkon-created clones of Sonic, Cloud, and King K. Rool, with crimson crystalline bodies and purple eyes.

"...That answer your question?" Snake rhetorically asked the hedgehog.

Once they were done, the Hands flew out of the rift, whose cracks spread until the cloud sea seemed to shatter, revealing the light of sunset below them.

"It's done... we have conquered both light and darkness," Master Hand said. "We can finally... go home."

"Hooooome...!" Luigi cried, running to the path that lay ahead of the Smashers, only for Galeem and Dharkon to inch closer to block the path.

"Luigi!" Isabelle called out, pulling out her fishing rod and tossing the lure at Luigi, snagging him and pulling him out in the nick of time. Mario ran to his brother, catching him before he hit the ground.

"Well, whoop de frickin' doo," Daisy sassed. "Of course these two would try to deny us our freedom!"

"Step aside, princess," The Spirit of Pearl, an Inkling and one half of popular Inkopolis pop duo Off the Hook, began. "Let a queen show you how it's done." Striking a pose, she shouted, "AYO, LIGHT 'N DARK THINGIES!"

"Um... Pearl?" The Spirit of Marina, an Octoling and the other half of Off the Hook, tried to warn her friend. "You... do realize we're just Spirits right? You can't summon the Princess Cannon like this!"
Slumping her shoulders, Pearl griped with a disappointed frown, "Ah, carp."

"Wait..." Palutena realized. "This means... Galeem and Dharkon have a common enemy now, which is us... all of us. Now that we're all free, they don't want us to try to escape. They'd sooner put aside their differences to try to stop us."

"What say you we team up, goddess?" Bayonetta suggested. "You were Galeem's former emissary as I was Dharkon's... maybe we could even switch opponents? You go for Dharkon, I'll handle Galeem?"

"That look on your face," Palutena skeptically commented, noticing Bayonetta's vaguely flirty smirk. "You're... expecting something in return, aren't you?"

"What? What ever makes you think that, goddess?" Bayonetta deflected with a chuckle before muttering under her breath, "Damn. Almost had it under control..."

"You... probably shouldn't, ladies," Captain Falcon dissuaded the goddess and witch. "You two were just freed from their control... you're probably more vulnerable than any of us right now."

"Now that you mention it, Captain," Palutena began, "I do feel a bit... tired..."

"Yeah, and I feel my magic isn't at full strength," Bayonetta remarked. "But... who will go, then?"

"I will," Lucina spoke up. "In a way, I am still somewhat responsible for bringing Dharkon here and making them so powerful... and Galeem followed. It's time I put an end to it all... with the training I received, I will not lose."

"Lucina, don't you dare think about going alone," Falcon told his lover. "I'm going too. I was somewhat responsible for all this too, a bit more indirectly... And I was Galeem's back up emissary, like Lucina was Dharkon's. Once Palutena was free, Galeem tried to win me back to their side with some kind of catatonic dream..."

"You too, babe?" Lucina asked him. "In my 'dream' Dharkon tried to offer me a world where me, you, Shulk, Robin, Zelda and my family were spared... but you talked about how you missed your own friends, like Snake... and the others missed the people they cared about too. I wouldn't be alone, but everyone else was. It was a world of selfish desires."

"In my vision, I was free to be the real me, but everyone else, even you, were replaced with carbon copies. Some were in name only, others had every detail down pat... except their personalities. Like the fake you Galeem created in my dream. That's what tipped me off... I'm free to be the real me, but everyone else is fake? I do not want a world like that..."

"I know..."

"Captain... you sure about this?" Snake asked the Captain.

"I don't want to lose one of my best friends again..." Samus added, her voice sounding solemn. "When you were away from Smash City, I was beginning to worry that you'd never come back... and if either you, Snake, or both have to leave next tournament..."

"Guys..." He embraced them both, trying to hide the uncertainty in his voice. "I... don't know what will happen. But I'll do my best to make it back to safety, and with Lucina by my side... I know she'll keep us both safe."

"My dear daughter..." Chrom embraced his daughter as tears began to gather in his eyes. Robyn
and Morgan joined in the hug. "You've grown to be a wonderful, beautiful, kind young woman... you saved me not once, but twice now. I'm so proud of you and... I can't bear the thought of losing you..."

"Please don't die, sis..." Morgan wept.

"Lucina..." Robyn sobbed.

"Mother, Father, Morgan... I... am not going to lie. I'm a bit scared, too, even with my training, and the Captain by my side. I'll do my best, but... if I don't return... know that I'm sorry, and that I love you all. And..." Tears began to stream down her face as she told Chrom, "Father... if that happens... look after the other me and the other Morgan, okay...? They'll grow up into a prosperous future, the future my Morgan and I couldn't have... and I know you'll raise them right..." She wept, hugging her family closer.

Letting go of his friends, Falcon walked over to his girlfriend and tenderly placed a hand on her shoulder. Releasing her family, she turned around and embraced him, kissing him tearfully. Once they were done, he broke the kiss and reassured her, "Let's do our best... together."

"Yes." Lucina nodded, wiping her tears away after her lover released her. As the couple turned around to see the two oppressive beings blocking their way, they looked straight ahead with determined expressions, holding hands.

"Let's take a leap of faith..." Captain Falcon began.

"...Into the great unknown, and secure our freedom!" Lucina declared. The two, still holding hands, dashed toward Galeem and Dharkon. Even as the two cosmic threats retreated into an interdimensional portal, the couple did not stop running, and leapt when they reached the end of the platform, vanishing into the void.

"Lucina...!" Zelda shouted as she and Shulk ran to the portal. Her best friend and the Captain had already vanished.

"Wha..." A vision suddenly came to Shulk, after which he said, "...they won't be able to manage on their own."

"No..." Zelda collapsed to her knees, starting to cry. "I was too late to..."

"It's not too late," Master Hand reassured Zelda. "I can feel it... a Spirit whose will is so strong, it wants to help... I will grant it physical form and it will join Smash City's ranks as a fighter effective immediately."

"It...?" Zelda questioned before seeing Master Hand count down from three to one with his fingers, then came a snap.

"Come forth and join the battle, Piranha Plant...!"

"I'm sorry, did he just say..." Daisy began before a beam of light descended before the Smashers. Emerging from it was indeed, a Piranha Plant in a pot.

"WHAAAAAA-?!" Mario cried in surprise, falling over. The Piranha Plant dashed to the portal and leapt in as well, just as more Phantom Fighters emerged and flanked the other Smashers.

"Looks like we'll have our own battle to fight here," Shulk commented. "Let's give it our all, guys!"
"Poyo!" Kirby nodded.

"Wait... what's this?" Master Hand questioned. "I sense... more...?"

"This deity of order and light... they build their promises on falsehood. I will unmask their true form!"

"A being of darkness threatens the land? I, the Luminary, will vanquish this chaos...!"

"Guh-huh!"

"Hey, c'mon!"

"Target locked on. Commencing combat mode."

"Master... are you thinking..." Crazy Hand began.

"Five more brave souls..." Master Hand muttered. "Piranha Plant might not be enough. Those two could use all the help they can get... it's time for more to join the battle!" Extending his palm outward, Master Hand shouted, "Joker, Hero, Banjo & Kazooie, Terry Bogard, and KOS-MOS! It's time to SMASH!"

Chapter End Notes

AW YEAH EPIC FINALE NEXT. I can't believe I'm actually finishing this...

also I def headcanon Bayonetta as a polyamorous pansexual don't DM at me

Reviews are appreciated. I thank you all for sticking by so far, no matter what. And if there's some spelling/grammar/punctuation/connecting word I'm still missing somewhere let me know.

Also, if you wanna hit up fellow Smash Bros. authors on Discord, check out the Super Smash Prose server! The ID is gDK48ua.

OH AND I'mma be bold and include my FP5 prediction I'm SUPER confident on: KOS-MOS! I've been teasing her all fic and tbh given patterns and some rumors, I am VERY sure she'll be FP5. (I was wrong, but I feel like she will appear anyway)

ONE LAST THING. I unintentionally called Dark Samus a racial slur. I didn't know that before someone pointed that out, and to anyone I offended, I'm sorry. I have changed the mocking nickname given to her to Scamus instead.
OH MY GOD YOU GUYS

THIS IS IT... THE FINAL CHAPTER! I'VE COME SUCH A LONG WAY AND NOW, THROUGHOUT ALL MY YEARS OF FANFIC WRITING, I FINALLY, FINALLY COMPLETE A MULTICHAPTER FIC! EXPECT SOME MINDBLOWING TWISTS AND APPEARANCES, AND A FLUFFY, SATISFYING ENDING!

Content warnings: violence, blood, mind-screw hallucination scenes, a suggestive joke at one point, Xenoblade X spoiler near the end (a certain character's appearance), vaguely referenced Persona 5 spoilers, partial nudity, and vague hints of Heroker (with DQ11 Hero as that's his default appearance) if you squint. Potentially super long, too. Also brief dialogue coding to differentiate Galeem's dialogue from Dharkon's: in addition to being bolded, italicized and underlined for both, Galeem's dialogue has [square brackets] and Dharkon's dialogue has {curly braces}. Oh and... check the end of the previous chapter. I added a pretty BIG update, lmao. (and yeah, KOS-MOS just got shot down for FP5 according to leakers... season 2 maybe?)

But oh my God... thank you all so much for sticking by until the end! There will be a follow up fic later, taking place several months to a year afterward, but for now, let's see this long, heartfelt journey through to the end!

...actually, screw it. after chatting with reviewer Fosco21 on FFN, original plan to include an epilogue as opposed to it being a separate fic has, in fact, been reinstated! I'll still mark it as complete after this chapter though, just expect a random update out of nowhere despite the Complete mark I guess?

Before I get started, I'd like to thank the following people: princessviolet (my beta reader from chapter 15 onward), Krosshair (for helping me get un-stuck after chapter 19), snow x fairy (can't use the periods cause I think it'll nuke some text on FFN; left some reviews), Smash King24 (reviewed, faved and gave some tips), everyone who's reviewed/faved/followed on FFN, everyone who's Kudos-ed on AO3, and my readers on FFN, AO3 and Wattpad! This wouldn't have been possible without your support, and I urge you guys to check out the people I've namedropped, they're awesome!

Also, I'd like to thank several of the amazing authors in this section, but two in particular come to mind for me to name: Shana Hager ("One Loose Thread" serving as a big inspiration for Falcon's characterization and the conflict with Lucina in chapter 9, and "We're In The Endgame Now" providing some inspiration for the characters' POV when they're captured by Galeem or Dharkon, as seen here and in my companion fic Blue Bird Lamentation) and Crystal Rose of Pollux (you KNOW who they are if you've been following their amazing WoL saga and "The Devil's In The Details"). Just... EVERYTHING about their saga inspired a lot of the plot elements and interactions in the latter half of this fic. They are PHENOMENAL and deserve a shout out here as well!

And one last reminder - Super Smash Prose, a Smash Bros. fanfic Discord server, is open! The ID is gDK48ua. If that invite ID no longer works, PM me (if on FFN) or if you're
reading from elsewhere like AO3 or Wattpad, search "Super Smash Prose" on the r/fanfiction subreddit.

Anyway, it's time. Let's do this.

Chapter namesake - Eternal Blue from the Azure Striker Gunvolt OST

_Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within_

_Finale - Eternal Blue_

"Ugh..."

Lucina slowly opened her eyes. The first thing she noticed was that she was lying on some sort of stone platform suspended in midair, with a series of platforms above it interconnecting like a spiral staircase. It was then she took note of her surroundings.

The platform was situated high in a bright, dusty orange-colored sky, thin clouds of light blowing in the wind in the distance. She concluded this had to be the dimension Galeem and Dharkon took their battle to, with her in the midst of it.

Her and... him.

Looking to her right, she saw her lover, Captain Falcon, also lying on the ground, face down and unconscious. Getting up, she walked over to him and crouched, nudging him awake.

"Babe...?"

"Ngh..." The Captain groaned as he came to. "Did... we make it?" Getting up, he looked around and couldn't believe what he saw. "Where... are we?"

Reaching for her beloved's hand and grasping it, Lucina told him, "This looks like it's a dimension of Galeem and Dharkon's creation. I guess this is where we can finally fight and defeat both of them at once, and finally be able to go home."

"If I had to guess... I'd imagine _that_ is why we can face them both at once now."

Looking up, Falcon pointed at somewhere in the sky. Looking in the direction he was pointing, Lucina saw Galeem and Dharkon firing beams of energy at each other.

"They're still at war with each other..." Lucina pondered. "But at the same time, I heard what Palutena said. They also have common enemies now... us."

"Exactly," Falcon nodded. "Which is why we need to be careful. We should expect a lot of resistance along the way..."

"Not to mention, after Dharkon gave me that 'dream', they said they'd make me regret ever leaving them..." Lucina shuddered in fear for a moment. "They mean business."

"I imagine Galeem feels the same way about me," Captain Falcon agreed. "They bade me farewell and said that the next time we met, they wouldn't show mercy." Turning to his lover, he encouraged her, "So let's give it our all and take both of them down for good!"

"Of course." Lucina's face bore a determined look as she continued, "With the training I've received... with everyone counting on us... and you by my side... let's challenge fate!"
"Speaking of..." The Captain mumbled, holding his left hand to his chin in thought, "I wonder how everyone is holding up..."

"Hey, guys!" A familiar yet disembodied voice echoed. "Can you two hear me?"

"...Elma?" Falcon asked.

"We Spirits are staying here, to assist the other Smashers," Elma explained. "Galeem and Dharkon just summoned a bunch of Phantom Fighters, and the other Smashers are trying to hold their ground."

"Oh!" Fiora's voice exclaimed. "But you've got a helper on the way!"

"A helper...?" Lucina murmured before noticing a figure leap in toward her and the Captain seemingly out of nowhere.

"Hold up... a PIRANHA PLANT?!" Falcon shouted in surprise.

"Bandee says you should have seen the look on Mario's face when Piranha Plant was made into a fighter," Elma chuckled. "Oh, and if you'll pardon the pun, the Hands' hands are full, but they have a few more new faces on the way to aid you."

"But what if something happens to the Plant?" Lucina questioned.

"Crazy Hand said she will pull the Plant out of there after a certain point," The voice of Shantae's Spirit echoed. "Master Hand will beam some of the other new faces in there as necessary, and Crazy will pull them out to give the other Smashers a hand. You guys just gotta make sure to stay safe." Sighing, she continued, "If only I could be helping you guys out..."

"Don't worry about that, Miss Shantae," The Captain called out to reassure her. "We'll do our best, and come back safely."

"That's the spirit!" Fiora called out. "Press on, and on, and ON!"

"Yo!" Pearl's Spirit yelled. "Our connection's startin' to fade, but I just wanna say: let 'em have it!" She then grumbled, "I would, if only I could summon the Princess Cannon..."

"We would sing for you," The Spirit of Marie, one half of the Squid Sisters, began. Her cousin and the other half of the ironically-named duo, Callie, finished with, "But I guess all we can do for now is hype you up, so go go GO!"

"D-D-DROP THE SEA BASS ON THOSE SCRUBS!" The Spirit of DJ Octavio bellowed.

"I have faith in you, Douglas," Dr. Stewart encouraged his long time friend. "You, and your loved one. Give it your all!"

"Come back safe, sis!" Morgan called out to his sister.

"I will, my dear little brother..." Lucina replied with a smile.

"I cannot believe I'm saying this, but you had better not die in there, Captain," Black Shadow's Spirit announced. "You only have my permission to die when it's at my hands!"

"That's... a strange way of motivating someone, Black Shadow," The Captain snarked, "But I'll take it!"
"Weyo!" The Octoling boy's voice cheered.

"Heehee..." Marina giggled. "He's saying to kick their... hey! You shouldn't use that word!"

"Hey guys, it's Anju," Anju's Spirit called out to them. "It's been a while, and I know you two worked very hard to become stronger up to this point. Put what you've learned to good use!"

"You can do it!" Lin's Spirit cheered them on.

"Give 'em hell!" Lily Flyer's Spirit said. "Or... whatever plane of eternal punishment cosmic beings face!"

"...I don't think such things exist in that context, Lily," Viridi's Spirit mused. "And I should know; I'm a goddess! One who would totally smite those aberrations to nature if I could, mind you, so you guys will have to do it for me!"

"For our freedom!" Spring Man's Spirit declared.

"We're all counting on you!" Elma called out.

A cacophony of cheers and encouraging words from the other Spirits echoed throughout the dimension, gradually fading.

"They all... believe in us..." Lucina held her hand to her chest. "Even those we've never met before..."

"Our very existence is on the line..." Falcon murmured. "We can't let them down... and we won't. Let's go, Lucina!"

"Right!"

Drawing her Falchion from its sheath, she led the Captain and Piranha Plant onward. Within seconds, they ran into the first form of resistance: a Galeem-created clone of Samus in her Zero Suit.

"I've got this!" Lucina cried, slashing at the clone and sending it flying. Immediately afterward, a Dharkon-created Phantom Fighter of Chrom showed up.

"...Father?!" Lucina gasped, hesitating.

"That's not your father!" Falcon called out to Lucina. "That's just a Phantom Fighter created by Dharkon! They're just trying to intimidate you!"

"Well... it's working..." Lucina let her sword rest at her side. "I just... can't bring myself to do it, fake or not..."

"I... sorry, babe..." Lucina sighed. "I just... tensed up. My training should have made me more aware..."

"But I know it can't be helped, sweetheart. You love your dad, and can't imagine hurting even a fake likeness of him." Chuckling dryly, he added, "That situation was somewhat ironic too... considering, you know... that's how our feud started back then."
"Don't worry... It's in the past now," Lucina reassured him with a soft smile. "Let's keep going."

The couple and the Piranha Plant continued to ascend, noticing Galeem's wings hovering close by, followed by Dharkon inching their way close to them, forcing the group to take the longer path to the right.

"Dharkon?!" Lucina gasped. "What are they doing here?"

"They're not talking to you, are they?" The Captain asked his lover.

"I... now that you mention it, no..."

"They must be so focused on fighting Galeem that they don't notice us... they just happen to be obstructing part of our path."

"Hopefully neither they nor Galeem will notice us..." Lucina murmured. "We mustn't stop now. No way to go but up."

The three continued their climb, noticing Dharkon eventually retreating and gaining access to the platforms they were originally blocking. Eventually the three reached a wider platform where more Phantom Fighters flanked them - light clones of Mario and Peach, and dark clones of Luigi and Daisy. Despite seeing the Captain, the Plant, and Lucina as a common enemy, the light clones also tried to fight the dark clones.

"Here we go again..." Captain Falcon muttered before noticing Piranha Plant quite literally pipe up, hopping up and down excitedly.

"I think it's saying to sit back and watch. That it will handle this..." Lucina suggested.

"Really?" Stepping aside, he beckoned to the Plant, "They're all yours, buddy."

Grinning wide with its sharp teeth, the Piranha Plant proceeded to go to town on the clones, first spitting a metal spiked ball at the clones of the Mario Bros. like it was nothing, then growing spikes on its head and swinging it, smacking the clones of the princesses away. When the Dharkon-created clone of Daisy hovered back toward the platform, Piranha Plant began spinning the leaves on its stem like a propeller and shot upward, striking the clone and sending it flying into the horizon.

"Daaaaaaamn!" The Captain exclaimed.

"Imagine if Mario saw this..." Lucina giggled. Noticing Piranha Plant pointing one of its leaves upward like a human hand doing a similar gesture, she commented, "Oh, I think it's saying it's okay to continue climbing."

"Didn't know you could talk to plants," Falcon sassed, grinning mischievously.

"Babe, please..." Lucina puffed her cheeks in an irritated manner. "I'm just good at reading cues is all."

"Hahaha, you're so easy to tease, it's adorable," Falcon laughed. "Anyway, let's press on. Remember your training..."

"Of course."

Heeding the training her lover gave her, Lucina fought more Phantom Fighters as she climbed,
making sure to maintain awareness of her surroundings and not fall. The Captain and Piranha Plant followed her. As they all ascended, they noticed the skies turning a slightly darker shade of blue as both Dharkon's tentacles and Galeem's wings hovered in the distance. Before long, they noticed they appeared to be climbing into outer space, as they could see the planet Smash City was situated on in the horizon, and stars shining dimly in the sky.

"Is this... outer space?!" The Captain murmured in disbelief. "How is there still gravity? How are we still breathing?!

"I... don't know..." Lucina answered him. "I guess this is the peak of Galeem and Dharkon's reality-warping powers..." Noticing Galeem inching closer to Falcon, she cried, "Watch out!" and grabbed him by the arm, pulling him toward her as Galeem obstructed the path to the right, just as Dharkon obstructed the left path earlier. Piranha Plant swiftly dashed over to the couple before Galeem claimed their turf. Once her lover was safe, she noticed his body was in close proximity to hers, and she without a second thought wrapped her arms around him protectively.

"That was close..." Lucina panted, holding on to him tightly.

"Nice save," The Captain praised her with a grateful smile, hugging her back. "Let's hope Galeem didn't notice us this time."

"Indeed..." She felt that familiar warmth within her upon hearing his praising words, as well as the gentle heat of his embrace. Breaking the hug, she glanced up and said, "Come on."

The three climbed even more and found themselves at another wide platform with more Phantom Fighters, this time with light clones of Palutena and Ryu, and dark clones of Bayonetta and Ken. Unlike the last ambush, however, the light and dark clones seemed to be on two teams together despite them being of opposite alignments. In particular, the clones of Palutena and Bayonetta did not attack each other, neither did the Ryu and Ken clones.

"Light and darkness... working together?" Lucina questioned.

"I think... Galeem and Dharkon may have noticed us..." Falcon remarked, sounding somewhat tense. "They're putting aside their differences to try to take us out now... we need to be extra careful."

"Right!"

Captain Falcon managed to take out the fake Palutena and Ken, while Lucina defeated the false Ryu. Piranha Plant was trying to hold its own against the fake Bayonetta, until the clone of the witch used a Wicked Weave - just like the real Bayonetta - and sent it flying off the platform.

"Oh no!" Lucina gasped as she watched Piranha Plant fall into the abyss, before it suddenly started glowing white and seemed to teleport upward, seemingly out of the dimension she and the Captain were in.

"...What just...?" The Captain tilted his head to the side.

"Don't worry, you two!" Crazy Hand's voice called out to them. "I sent the Plant back to help everyone else back here. Master Hand will be sending another helper on the way soon, but for now, you two are on your own, so try to survive until then! We cannot pull either of you two out before you defeat Galeem and Dharkon!"

"Got it!" Unbeknownst to Captain Falcon, the Dharkon-created clone of Bayonetta was sneaking up on him while his back was turned, ready for the kill.
"Babe, look out!" Lucina shouted, dashing to the fake Bayonetta and delivering a series of slashes, shattering the clone like glass.

"Wha-" Turning around, he saw Lucina standing before him, the clone of Bayonetta nowhere in sight. "Heh. This is the second time you've saved me thus far, three if you count that time you saved me from Black Shadow... I really have trained you well."

"I was trained by the best." Lucina smiled affectionately at her trainer-turned-boyfriend before continuing, "You heard Crazy Hand. We should try to survive until the next helper arrives."

"Right."

Without Piranha Plant to assist them for the remaining leg of the ascent, Lucina and Captain Falcon continued their careful climb. As the planet Smash City was situated on slowly sank below their view, they noticed the sky turning an even darker shade of purple as Dharkon's tentacles floated in the horizon.

"Ah..." No matter how many times Lucina saw the sheer darkness of the future Dharkon wanted to create, the sight still unnerved her every time. She stood still for a moment, shivering in fear.

"Lucina?" Her lover asked her. "Remember, Dharkon's only trying to intimidate you. This future of infinite darkness can be prevented if we defeat them. Same goes for Galeem. So... let's not stop now, sweetheart. We've come so far. You've come so far..."

"Of course..." Lucina nodded. "Sorry."

"It's okay. Just don't be afraid anymore. Everyone's counting on us..."

"Yes... I will fear Galeem and Dharkon no longer!"

The two resumed their ascent, and once the planet completely vanished, the stars in the sky began to shine brighter, in shades of dark blue, purple, rusty orange and yellow from left to right.

"We're almost there...they have to be close..." Falcon panted as he and Lucina reached the top. Once they did, though, they witnessed a disappointing reality.

Galeem and Dharkon were far off into the distance, with Dharkon situated around the area of the blue and purple stars, and Galeem on the side of the sky with the orange and yellow stars. They seemed to still be firing beams of light and dark energy at each other.

"Dammit..." The Captain sighed in a disappointed manner. "So close, but so far..."

Looking around, Lucina noticed more Phantom Fighters emerging - Galeem-created clones of Sheik and Simon, and Dharkon-created clones of Rosalina and Richter. "Don't forget that they can create these things to fend us off..." She muttered. "Don't let your guard down!"

"What would I ever do without you, sweetheart?" The Captain grinned before he and Lucina proceeded to attack the clones and defeat them.

"Is that it...?" Lucina asked apprehensively, noticing Galeem and Dharkon still fighting each other. Just then, more Phantom Fighters appeared - this time, there were light clones of Isabelle and the female Inkling, and dark clones of Young Link and Robin.

"Apparently not." The Captain answered her. "Let's hope we get the big guys' attention when we're done with these small fries."
"Yes!"

Exhaustion, however, was beginning to catch up to the couple. The two were in pretty rough shape by the time the dark Young Link clone was the last phantom remaining, especially with how they were looking out for each other, making sure their partner was safe. Once the fake Young Link was finally defeated, Lucina and Captain Falcon could feel Galeem and Dharkon staring daggers into them.

"Well... that did it..." The Captain said between gasps for air as he hunched over and placed his hands on his knees. "We finally... got those bastards' attention..."

[I see. So you two actually did it... put your lives on the line and traversed your way to us, knowing neither I nor Dharkon would show you the faintest bit of mercy...]

[Did you really think we wouldn't notice?]

"You know damn well why we're here!" The Captain declared, standing upright and pointing in an accusatory manner at them. "We want our universe to be restored, and for everyone to be able to go home! Not only that, but separating us is going too far!"

"You two have vastly different visions for your ideal universe," Lucina added, "And not only do they clash with each other, but they cause a lot of problems... the universe needs balance, and you two want to disrupt that balance. We can't let you do that!"

[A noble goal. But know that you will die trying.]

[Why wait for you two to come all that way to die at our hands, though? Let's have some fun now...!]

"Wha-" Before either of the two could react, they saw purple and yellow lights emanating from Galeem and Dharkon, which proceeded to engulf everything.

...

"Huh...?" This time, Captain Falcon was the first to come to his senses. Slowly standing up, he saw he was standing on the platform at the start, but there were no platforms above. Instead, the sole platform was situated seemingly between dimensions of light and darkness.

Noticing Lucina lying on the ground next to him, he crouched down next to her and gently nudged her awake. "Hey... Sweetheart?"

"Ah..." Lucina moaned, slowly getting up and noticing where she and the Captain were. "What... is this place?" Looking around, she saw an unfamiliar figure standing next to them. "Hey babe, who's that?"

"Who's what - oh..." It was then the Captain noticed who Lucina was talking about.

Standing there was an anthropomorphic, somewhat cartoonish bear stretching his arms. He wore yellow shorts with a black leather belt, a string necklace with a tiger's tooth, and a blue backpack on his back.

"No way... Banjo and Kazooie? They're here, after all these years?"

"Banjo and... who-ie?" Lucina held a finger to her chin, puzzled. "What peculiar names..."
"Oh trust me, sweetheart, these two are a big deal," Captain Falcon told Lucina. "They were supposed to join in the second tournament, actually, but... let's just say a rival organization bound them with a contract. It would seem, though, that the organization found a loophole that finally allowed them to join. Oh man, the Kongs and King K. Rool are gonna be so excited when they find out...!"

"Wait a minute, they...?" Lucina asked before the Captain held out his hand, as if to say to be quiet and let him handle things. The Captain then called out to the bear, "Hey, Banjo! Nice to finally meet ya!"

"HEY!" A female's voice piped up before Banjo could return the greeting. Emerging from Banjo's backpack was a large orange bird with yellow-tipped feathers. "You say hi to Banjo, but not to me? Rude much?"

"Haha, sorry about that, Kazooie," Falcon chuckled, making a gesture as if he were scratching the back of his head bashfully. Turning to Lucina, he explained, "There you have it. The laid-back bear is Banjo, and his snarky gal pal is the bird, Kazooie. I've heard stories of their unparalleled teamwork to stop the witch Gruntilda from unleashing her nefarious plans."

"I see..." Approaching the duo, Lucina asked Kazooie, "Say, Kazooie? Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure, why not," Kazooie replied.

"What exactly... is your relationship to Banjo? Are you two partners, friends, or maybe... something more than that...?"

"No comment." Kazooie looked to the side with a blank expression.

"You'll have to excuse Kazooie," Banjo spoke up. "She's a bit shy."

"Am not!" Kazooie protested. "Don't make me peck at you, Banjo!"

"Hahaha, she's such a kidder," Banjo laughed, prompting a grumble from his avian companion. "Anyway, nice to meet you guys. What are your names?"

"You can just call me Captain Falcon," Falcon said. "This here is Lucina."

"Guh-huh!" Banjo bowed in courtesy. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Falcon and Mrs. Lucina!"

"M...Mrs.?!" Lucina gasped, blushing slightly. "I'm not... married to the Captain, or anything..."

"Married...?" The Captain whispered to himself, holding his right index finger to his lips. "He calls every woman a Mrs., regardless of whether or not they're married," Kazooie clarified. "Except for Gruntilda, her sisters, his own little sister Tooty... and me, of course..."

"Anyway, guys," Banjo began, "Master Hand sent me to help you guys after Piranha Plant was sent back to help the others. And judging by where we are..." Noticing the dark void on the left side of the rift, and the brightly lit sea of clouds on the right, he continued, "This seems to be some kind of pocket dimension? And... whoa!"

"What is it?" The Captain asked the bear.

"Did you guys see that?" Banjo pointed upward, and the Captain and Lucina looked in that direction. They could see orbs of yellow light with the images of a giant robot, orange-scaled
dragon, and Giga Bowser clashing with orbs of purple light with the images of Demon King Ganon, Dracula, and a suspicious looking small purple creature with a jester hat. All of these were once Galeem and Dharkon's respective guardians.

"Hold on, I recognize one of those," The Captain remaked. "That robot is Galleom. Ike fought it during the Subspace incident."

"Subspace...?" Lucina questioned.

"I'll tell you all about it when we get home, dear," Falcon told his lover. "I will say it was one hell of an adventure... that's where we fought Tabuu... who we now know created Galeem and Dharkon."

"So, what's the plan, guys?" Banjo asked before noticing the "guardian orbs" shooting yellow and purple flames at the group. Kazooie interjected, "Guessin' we gotta make a decision on who to fight first. Better make it snappy...!"

"Eeny, meeny, miney..." The Captain murmured as he glanced at the orbs before deciding, "...Galleom!" He leapt and kicked the orb with Galleom's likeness in it, and everything went white.

When the group came to, they appeared to be standing in a wide hangar area of some high tech base.

"'Eeny, meeny, miney, Galleom'? Really?" Lucina teased the Captain. "I'm pretty sure the rhyme doesn't go like that..."

"Hey, it was the best I could come up with!" Falcon retorted. "Let's see you try to do better next time!"

"Is that a challenge, babe?" Lucina boasted.

"Hey, not to interrupt your little lovers' competition," Kazooie began, "But here it comes! You ready, Banjo?"

"Let's do this, Kazooie!" Banjo grabbed Kazooie from out of his backpack and held her in front of him like a weapon. Within seconds, Galleom converted from tank mode to its combat stance, letting out a loud somewhat mechanical roar.

"Wow, that thing's massive..." Lucina murmured in wonder.

"Hey... Kazooie...?" The Captain asked Kazooie. "You... ok with Banjo using you like a weapon like that?"

"We do it all the time, it's no biggie," Kazooie shrugged. "I can do tons of awesome stuff. Watch this!" As Banjo held her in front of him like a rocket launcher, Kazooie rapidly shot magic eggs from her mouth, exploding upon contact with Galleom.

"I don't think that'll work forever..." The Captain muttered.

"Hey, don't worry!" Banjo tried to reassure him. "We got -" All of a sudden, Galleom grabbed the duo in its hands and started shaking them violently up and down.

"Banjo! Kazooie!" Lucina called out to them.

"Guh-uh-uh-uh..." Banjo cried as he was shaken. "Gettin...dizzy..."
"Come on, Lucina!" The Captain called out to her. The two started dashing toward the mechanical beast and began relentlessly attacking its legs, prompting it to release the bird and bear after a while. Once Banjo and Kazooie were released, however, Galleom started stomping side to side as if throwing a temper tantrum.

"Looks like it's getting angry..." Lucina observed.

After it finished its "temper tantrum", Galleom got into a "winding up" pose.

"Everyone, get back!" Captain Falcon commanded his allies. They all retreated to a safe distance in the nick of time as Galleom spun around wildly with its fists out.

"Gosh, I'd sure hate to be hit by that..." Banjo remarked timidly.

"That thing doesn't scare me!" Kazooie boasted, still remaining confident in the face of this threat.

After it was done spinning, Galleom reverted back into tank mode and started shooting missiles at its opponents.

"Missiles! Look out!" Lucina shouted. Banjo and Kazooie managed to cut it close when dodging, but otherwise escaped unharmed. Lucina, however, found herself losing her balance after dodging a few.

"Lucina!" Falcon shouted as he dashed to her and tried to push her out of the way of the last missile, but the shockwaves on the outer edge of the blast radius knocked them to the ground.

"Ugh... You okay, sweetheart?" The Captain asked his lover, struggling to stand from the pain.

"It... hurts..." Lucina strained. Noticing Galleom's back thrusters lighting up, she muttered fearfully, "Oh no..."

"What's wro-" Turning his head, Falcon saw why his lover was so afraid. "Crap..."

"Time to show our secret weapon," Kazooie proclaimed, perching on Banjo's shoulders and covering him with her wings.

"Kazooie! Are you nuts?!" The Captain yelled.

"Don't worry, Captain!" Banjo reassured him. "We know what we're doing! Just lemme know when it starts driving, Kazooie!"

"OK!" Kazooie affirmed. Once Galleom started boosting toward them, Kazooie shouted, "NOW!" and Banjo started dashing toward the mechanical beast-tank as he and Kazooie started to emanate golden sparkles from their bodies.

"This is suicide...!" Lucina gasped. She was soon proven wrong when the duo successfully slammed into Galleom and actually sent it screeching backward, converting into its combat form all the while, its feet leaving skid marks on the metal floor.

"How...?!!" The Captain was stunned at the sight.

"That's the magic of Wonderwing," Kazooie explained. "We become invincible and super fast, but... we can only use it four more times after this until the next day. Don't ask me why, it just... works that way I guess."

"Hey, don't get distracted now, Kazooie," Banjo told his partner. "Let's finish this thing off!"
Carrying Banjo on her back like an ostrich, Kazooie ran over to Galleom, who was a bit stunned after the Wonderwing blowback. Wasting no time, Banjo then grabbed Kazooie by her ankles and swung her down upon Galleom, effectively delivering the final blow. Kazooie hit the ground with a smack once the attack was done. As Galleom died, the scenery slowly faded to white until the Captain, Lucina, Banjo and Kazooie found themselves on the same platform between dimensions as before.

The Captain and Lucina were still injured, so Banjo, finding a nearby Heart Container, took it and handed it to the couple sitting on the ground. After their wounds were healed from touching the relic, they stood.

"Banjo..." Lucina began. "You used Kazooie... like a sword?"

"Yup!" Banjo confirmed. "You're a swordfighter, I see. Believe it or not, I, too, was originally-"

"BANJO!" Kazooie interrupted her partner. "You remember what the contract says. We're not supposed to discuss these, ahem, trade secrets!" She made air-quotation marks at the "trade secrets".

"Right, I forgot, sorry," Banjo scratched the back of his head and chuckled heartily.

"You alright, though, Kazooie?" Falcon asked Kazooie. "You finished Galleom off like that, sure, but that looked like it hurt..."

" Eh, I don't mind it," Kazooie shrugged. Her eyes bore a slight look of pleasure as she uttered, "I actually... kinda like it."

Realizing the implications of Kazooie's statement, Lucina and Captain Falcon started to blush. "W-well, if that's your thing, I'm not judging or anything..." The Captain muttered, looking away in a slightly embarrassed manner.

"Who's next?" Banjo asked. "I'm still raring to go!"

"We'll let you decide this time," Lucina said.

"Okay... gee..." Looking at the orbs swinging by, Banjo spotted the one with Demon King Ganon's likeness. "Oh hey, is that Ganondorf? Link's sworn enemy? Time to beat him to the punch!"

"Well, yeah, but..." The Captain began, "Galeem and Dharkon - the big bad guys we're trying to stop, right? - they've apparently been screwing with timelines, so this Ganon is from a different time period as our Ganondorf, and I guess that also explains Giga Bowser-"

"Let's go!" Banjo shouted, crouching on all fours as Kazooie popped out of the backpack and pecked at the orb with her beak, prompting everything to go white once more.

The scenery changed to that of town ruins on fire, the skies above covered in dark purple clouds.

"...So wait," Banjo began, "Ganondorf is also a Smasher? And he's also..."

"J-just-" The Captain stammered, sounding a bit frustrated. "It doesn't matter! Look, I know you're eager to meet everyone, you've missed out on a lot, you're confused about some things. That will all be explained in due time, I promise! Namely, after the universe is restored! Which we'll do after we defeat Galeem and Dharkon, so for now, just give us a hand!"

"Babe, did you really have to be so..." Lucina trailed off.
"Trust me, I'd love to give him a proper catch-up, but we just don't exactly have the time for that right now," The Captain elaborated, his tone sounding somewhat urgent.

"No, it's fine," Banjo dissuaded him as he noticed Demon King Ganon approaching. "I came here to help you guys, and later on, the other Smashers, so I'm good for now. Let's do this!"

The team managed to take down Ganon with their combined efforts. When they all returned to the central platform, however, Banjo was well out of shape.

"Whew..." He sighed. "I only used two more Wonderwings that fight, and I'm already winded..."

"So then...I guess you've reached your limit?" The Captain asked the duo.

"Looks like it..." Kazooie panted. "I can only take being Breegull Bashed so many times..."

"I thought you said you liked that...?" The Captain asked her teasingly, grinning in a somewhat smug manner.

"Shut uuuuuuuuup...!" Kazooie grumbled, looking down as Falcon burst into hearty laughter. "It gets tiring after a while, too, you know!"

"Just teasing," the Captain said. "Anyway, hope you guys will be able to hold your own."

"Here." Lucina offered them a wedge of cheese found close by and split it in two with her hands, handing one half to Banjo and the other to Kazooie. "Wouldn't want to lose you guys after we just met. Just survive down there until the Captain and I defeat Galeem and Dharkon."

"Aww, thanks!" Banjo thanked her after eating his portion and his minor injuries were healed. "We'll do our best!"

"You do your best too," Kazooie encouraged Lucina. "Hope you and your boyfriend stay safe."

"You knew...?"

"It's really freakin' obvious how you two tease each other, but also protect each other. Those are my relationship goals if I'm being honest!" As she and Banjo began to glow white before being teleported back to the other Smashers, she added, "And no, I'm still not telling what my relationship to Banjo is!" Within seconds, the bird and bear duo gave the couple a thumbs up and shot upward to the sky in a beam of light, joining the other Smashers on the other side of the dimension.

"Guess it's up to us to decide the next guardian to fight..." The Captain trailed off pensively. "Just hope our next helper is on the way."

"I guess I'll choose this time..." Lucina volunteered. Closing her eyes and grabbing the hilt of her Falchion, she muttered, "Eeny meeny miney mo..." and as she swung her sword up she cried, "Catch a Risen by the toe...!"

The scenery faded to white. When it cleared, the two found themselves at a plain surrounded by mountains, the sun shining brightly in the cloudless sky.

"Catch a Risen by the toe?" Falcon teased his girlfriend. "You know what they say about people who live in glass houses and throwing stones..."

"Baaaabe..." Lucina griped before noticing an unfamiliar shape approaching out of the corner of her eye. Turning around, she announced, "Here it comes!"
Within seconds, Rathalos, a giant dinosaur-like dragon with reddish-orange scales, strange black patterns on its wings, and black horns on its head, descended.

"This must be Rathalos..." Captain Falcon got into a battle stance. "The last of Galeem's guardians to fall originally before we fought them the first time and gained access to the Dark Realm we found you in. Let's do this, Lucina!"

However, he noticed Lucina just standing there, not drawing her sword. "...Lucina...?"

"No..." Lucina shook her head, trembling. "A...dragon...? Just like..." She held her arms to her chest and shivered, a terrified look in her eyes.

"Just calm down, sweetheart!" The Captain called out to his lover. "That's not Grima! It's Rathalos! Just focus and we can take it down!"

Lucina, however, just stood there, shuddering and murmuring fearfully.

"I guess it's not everyday she gets to fight such a large dragon... I can see how Rathalos would remind her of Grima..." Noticing Rathalos taking a deep breath, he shouted, "Watch out!" and tackled her out of the way of Rathalos's sonic boom bellow.

"Ah...?" Lucina murmured, sounding a bit out of it.

"Just stay there, sweetheart," He comforted her, placing a hand on her shoulder as she sat up. "I know this must be... making you relive your trauma with Grima. It's okay... just sit tight. I'll handle this." He dashed off and opened up on Rathalos with an aerial Falcon Kick, descending upon the dragon from an angle.

"Babe..." Lucina tried to stand, but she felt fear holding her back.

_I promised myself I wouldn't be afraid anymore... of Galeem, of Dharkon, of anyone or anything. Then why...?_

Watching her lover take a few hits but keep on going, her eyes began to flood with tears as she looked down, her tears splashing on the dirt below. _He's putting his life on the line for me... this isn't what I wanted... why? Why won't my body move?_

"Auuuugh...!"

Looking in the direction of her lover's pained cry, she saw him fall to the ground unceremoniously.

"Babe...?!” Her palms were sweating and her heart began to beat rapidly. The Captain lay on the ground in agony, barely moving. It was then she noticed a pitfall seed nearby, as well as Rathalos leaping back a short distance.

_It's probably going to try to charge attack Falcon..._ Lucina strategized, taking deep breaths to calm down. _I should use this...!_ Grabbing the pitfall seed, she ran to her lover's side and tossed the seed just ahead of the two of them. When Rathalos ran to them, the trap triggered and its talons were swallowed by the ground, making the rest of its exposed body vulnerable.

_Now's my chance...!_

"You will not hurt him...!" She shouted as she leapt at the dragon, furiously hacking and slashing at it.
"Uhhhh..." The Captain groaned as he slowly came to. Sitting up, he saw Lucina going berserk on Rathalos. "...Sweetheart?!"

She did not hear him, only screaming and attacking furiously as images of her loved ones in her future dying at Grima's hands flashed in her mind.

*No more... I won't lose anyone like that ever again...* She did not even notice Rathalos breaking free from the trap.

Slowly standing, Captain Falcon called out to his girlfriend, "Lucina...!"

"Huh...?" Before she knew it, Rathalos was standing on its own two feet. She immediately raised her Falchion to try to parry its next attack, which, unfortunately for her, was a spinning tail whip. The sword absorbed some of the blow, but the shock sent her flying backward.

"I've got you...!" The Captain yelled, extending his arms to catch her as best as he could. She ended up slamming into him, knocking them both onto the ground.

"Guh..." The Ylissean grunted.

"You alright?" The Captain inquired. "You... seemed to be going a bit berserk back there..."

"I... don't know what came over me..." Lucina held one of her hands to her head, as if she had a headache. "Are you alright, babe?"

"I... think so... still hurts, but I think I can..." Suddenly, he saw Rathalos charging toward them again, and this time, neither of them had a pitfall seed. He wordlessly huddled close to Lucina in the vain hope of shielding her, when...

"R-CANNON!"

Out of nowhere, a blast of ether energy shot at Rathalos and exploded, stunning it in its tracks briefly. The two looked in the direction of the shot and saw their next helper.

She was a female android, about 5'6" tall, with crimson eyes, long light blue hair, a metallic white leotard for body armor, cream-colored thigh high boots with her left boot stopping shortly above her left knee, metallic "sleeves" on her arms, starting in an open shape below the shoulders and ending with black gloves on her hands, and a metal visor on her hair just above her eyes with the following word engraved on it: "KOS-MOS", with "KOS" on the first line and "MOS" on the second line.

"Kosmos Obey Strategical Multiple Operation Systems. All systems functional." Her voice was monotone, understandably robotic, and her facial expression remained stoic as she spoke, presumably since her AI didn't support emotional display. "I can ascertain that you two require my assistance."

"KOS-MOS...?" Lucina murmured.

"You know her...?" Captain Falcon asked Lucina.

"Greetings, Lucina," KOS-MOS greeted the swordswoman. "It is nice to see you again, after the Golden Chains incident. Would you happen to know where Miss Fiora is?"

"So that's where you know her..." The Captain deduced.
"I'll explain later, KOS-MOS," Lucina told the combat android. "For now, we need you to take out this...dragon!"

"Affirmative. Do not worry yourselves. My scanners indicate that this battle is very psychologically taxing for you, Lucina, and your partner's injuries will reduce his effectiveness in combat by about 40%.

"Rude... is sass part of her AI?" Falcon remarked as he slowly got up. "I can handle myse-" He crumpled to the ground again in pain. "Ouuuuch!"

"The algorithms I have been programmed with do not support the comprehension of this 'sass',' KOS-MOS replied. Getting into a fighting stance, she declared, "Eliminating enemy threat." Her right arm began to glow before transforming into what was seemingly a long drill.

"How is she doing that?!" The Captain marveled.

"Fiora told me that KOS-MOS is composed of all mechanical parts, possibly built with... nanomachines? Was that the word?"

"Nanomachines, huh... wonder what Snake would think of her..."

"Hyaaaah!" KOS-MOS cried as she thrust her spinning drill-arm at Rathalos, tearing through the lower area of its right wing. As the now crippled dragon struggled to fly, KOS-MOS somersaulted backward through the air gracefully and, landing on her feet, announced, "Charging." Hunching over slightly, light energy began to gather around her abdominal area until something that looked like a long, thin crystal emerged from her back. She then stood upright and a large volley of lasers shot from her abdomen as she shouted, "X-BUSTER!" Rathalos couldn't take the laser assault for long and perished, the scenery fading to white once again before Captain Falcon, Lucina, and KOS-MOS were back at the starting platform.

"Enemy has been exterminated," KOS-MOS said in her usual robotic manner. "Your orders, Lucina and Captain Falcon?"

"I... how did you know my name?" The Captain stammered.

"The being called Master Hand informed me to protect you two on the way to eliminating the threats named Galeem and Dharkon," KOS-MOS explained. "It goes without saying that he told me your names." Turning to Lucina, she continued, "And I will reiterate that it is good to see you again, Lucina."

"Same here," Lucina nodded. "About Fiora... she's currently a Spirit, and she fights alongside Shulk in Smash City right now. She hopes to become a fully fledged fighter someday. I'd like to see that happen, too."

"She did mention a 'Shulk' during the Golden Chains incident," KOS-MOS clarified. "Is anyone else from that journey participating in this Smash tournament as well?"

"There's Ryu and Ken, for starters," Lucina began. "My father, who was also there during that time, finally got his chance, too. I don't know of anyone else, though..."

"I see," KOS-MOS replied. "I imagine I might see more of them when I am called back to assist the others after this next fight." Noticing her partners' condition, she remarked, "You require healing. Activating Hilbert Effect." Gathering energy around her body, she emitted a light lavender aura that healed Lucina and the Captain's injuries.
"Such amazing technology..." Falcon remarked. "KOS-MOS, who's in charge of your development?"

"That would be Ms. Shion Uzuki of Vector Industries," KOS-MOS answered him. "This Hilbert Effect, while initially purposed for drawing the Gnosis into our plane of reality, can also be repurposed for healing use. I also have access to a wide array of weapons."

"Gnosis...?" The Captain muttered before saying, "That's a can of worms I don't think we should open right now." Noticing the guardian orb with the likeness of the strange purple creature shooting balls of dark energy at him and his companions, he shouted, "Whoa!" and shoved them out of the way.

"Babe...?" Lucina asked, before noticing KOS-MOS taking out an energy pistol. "Target acquired. Engaging." She aimed the pistol at the orb and shot it.

The three found themselves on the surface of an unfamiliar planet, the sun setting over the dark sky as the stars and nebulae dimly lit the sky.

"Where is it...?" Captain Falcon pondered. "I don't see anything..."

"My sensors indicate that our opponent is behind us," KOS-MOS responded. The three turned around and saw a strange small purple creature with large, cartoonish bug eyes, brown shoes, and a jester hat with one half being blue with white circles, and the other half red with white triangles.

"Aw, this lil' thing's kinda cute," The Captain giggled. It was then that the unexpected happened - dark energy began gathering around the creature as he levitated into the air. His eyes glowed purple as the miasma enveloped him, followed by his re-emergence in a more powerful, imposing form. Those once adorable bug eyes now had a look of madness in them, his once babyish, innocent smile was now wide with two fangs, his small brown shoes were now larger, and he had two bone-like wings with holographic hexagons below the "bones".

"What the CRAP?!" The Captain yelled in shock, flinching.

"Marx..." Lucina began. "Meta Knight told me about him once. Marx is a master of deception, seeking nothing but absolute power. He even got the sun and the moon to fight each other once..."

"Graviton readings rapidly increasing," KOS-MOS observed. Materializing two Gatling Guns from seemingly thin air, she declared, "Disabling auto-safety. Target must be destroyed at all costs!"

"KOS-MOS, wait-" Captain Falcon tried to warn KOS-MOS, but to no avail as KOS-MOS began rapidly firing at Marx, seemingly riddling him with bullets.

"Is he dead...?" Lucina asked. Once the smoke cleared, Marx was still alive.

"Negative," KOS-MOS said. Just then, Marx's eyes turned completely black, before launching several of those black "eyes" at the fighters like balls.

"Oh come ON!" Captain Falcon complained as he kicked the "balls" away and as Lucina and KOS-MOS dodged them. "Could this freak be any creepier?!"

"Changing weapons." KOS-MOS then materialized a scythe and swung at Marx three times, but only hit him twice before he warped out of the way.

"Where'd he go?!" The Captain shouted.
"Scanning..." KOS-MOS looked around, but Marx was warping all over the place. "Cannot lock on to target." Just then, Marx appeared above them and seemed to split himself in half, causing a black hole to materialize and suck the three fighters in before they could react. They were then thrown at a high velocity from the sky, the pain of the impact reverberating through their bodies. Of course, the humans in the group wondered if the android with them could even feel pain.

"Are you two alright?" KOS-MOS asked them.

"Y-yeah," The Captain grunted, trying to mask the pain he felt. "We'll be okay... what about you, though? Don't you... feel pain?"

"Pain..." KOS-MOS murmured, slowly standing, her tone of voice starting to sound less robotic. As the other two stood, KOS-MOS turned to them, her eyes now blue instead of red, and asked them in a much more human-sounding tone of voice, "Will feeling pain... make me complete?"

"Huh...?!!" The Captain was understandably confused.

"Blue eyes...?" Lucina murmured, before realizing the risk the android was facing and protesting, "What are you planning to do, KOS-MOS?! Don't be rash!"

"The safety of my masters takes precedence above all else." Turning to Marx, she told her partners with an almost human-looking compassionate expression, "And right now, you two are my masters." Leaning back slightly, she began focusing a small transparent ball of blue energy onto her chest as she said in an increasingly human-sounding tone of voice, "Maximum output reached." She then shot the ball of energy at Marx, which enlarged and enveloped him completely. KOS-MOS then shouted, "Relinquish your pain... unto me!" in a tone so human sounding, so emotional, it was somewhat eerie to hear from an android.

Or perhaps it really wasn't eerie at all.

The orb exploded, weakening Marx drastically to the point he collapsed to the ground, but he wasn't dead yet. KOS-MOS then blinked, her eyes reverting to their usual red color, before wavering where she stood and slurring in her usual robotic voice which sounded somewhat glitchy, "Enerrrrrrrgy output-put-put exceeded-ed-ed. Shutting...down..." She closed her eyes and collapsed to the ground.

"KOS-MOS...!" Lucina cried, running to the android. Captain Falcon, however, took advantage of the window of opportunity KOS-MOS created. "FALCON... PUUUUUNCH!!" He dealt the finishing blow to Marx, who let out an unearthly screech as he died.

"I really can't stand creepy shit..." he murmured.

The three were returned to the starting platform. The first thing Falcon noticed was Lucina cradling KOS-MOS in her arms, a sorrowful expression on her face.

"Lucina..." He crouched down next to her.

"Babe..." Her voice started to crack. "She's not... gone, is she? We just met her... well, I was reunited with her after so long, and... if we lost her..."

Suddenly, KOS-MOS's body began to glow white and her eyes opened as she said, "Recharging..."

"Don't worry!" Crazy Hand's voice called out to them. "I've got this!"

Getting up, Lucina told KOS-MOS in a greatly relieved, somewhat cracking voice, "I'm... so glad
"Your concern is appreciated," KOS-MOS stated. "I am ready when you are, Crazy Hand."

"Hey, KOS-MOS!" Falcon called out to the android. "Do your best down there, yeah?"


"I just hope she doesn't hurt herself like that again..." Lucina muttered anxiously.

All of a sudden, an unfamiliar male voice spoke up.

"Hey, c'mon, c'mon!"

Captain Falcon and Lucina turned in the direction of the voice. Standing there was a tall, muscular, American man in his mid-twenties with long blond hair in a ponytail and blue eyes. He wore red and white sneakers, slightly bleached blue jeans with a brown leather belt, black gloves that exposed part of the back of his hands, a white tank top covered by a red sleeveless vest with a white star insignia on the back, and most notably, a red and white trucker hat with the words "FATAL FURY" emblazoned on it.

"Oh. My. God." Falcon was speechless.

"Babe... do you know who that is...?" Lucina questioned.

"The real question is, who doesn't?!" The Captain started geeking out. "That's Terry friggin' Bogard! He's a LEGEND! Master Hand would talk about him all the time, and now he's finally here!"

"Oh my God! Captain Falcon?!" Terry exclaimed, grinning wide with excitement. "Duuuuude! I'm your biggest fan!"

"I'm your biggest fan!" The two men began enthusiastically giving each other high fives and fist bumps.

"Of course, here comes the male bonding..." Lucina chuckled to herself dryly.

"Anyway, guys," Terry began, "We just gotta defeat these last two... guardians? I see Banjo, Kazooie and KOS-MOS have taken care of most of 'em."

"Why don't you decide, Terry?" Lucina suggested.

"Whoa, she's cute," Terry commented with a whistle. "Who's she?"

"Her name's Lucina, and she's mine," The Captain stated. "So don't get any ideas."

"Number one rule of the bro code - don't flirt with your bro's girl. Got it." Grinning, Terry added, "You're a lucky guy, I'll say that much."

"Thanks, I guess..." The Captain scratched his cheek softly with his left index finger. "Anyway, you gonna decide?"

"I choose..." Watching the remaining guardian orbs clash with each other, which were Giga Bowser and Dracula respectively, Terry decided, "Let's go for that overgrown lizard first!" He punched the orb with Giga Bowser's likeness, transporting the three to what looked like Final
Destination. Standing right there was Giga Bowser himself, albeit one from an alternate continuity and thus not the same one fought back in the Light Realm.

"That's a big lizard, alright," Terry said, taking his hat off and spinning it around on his right index and middle fingers before putting it back on.

"Ya think?" Falcon sassed. "That's Giga Bowser. Just stay away from the spikes on his shell and you should be good. Oh, and he also breathes fire."

"Sounds like fun," Terry said optimistically. "Let's do this!"

"He sure loves a challenge," Lucina remarked. "I imagine he, Ryu and Ken would get along very well..."

The three defeated Giga Bowser with their combined efforts. Terry, however, was the real show-stealer with his special moves, including his flying axe kick which he called Crack Shoot, and his Power Wave, which sent waves of energy upon punching the ground.

Once they were back at the platform, Captain Falcon asked Terry, "So where'd you learn that fighting style?"

"My brother Andy and I are orphans. We lived on the streets for a while, so we learned to fend for ourselves," Terry began. "We were adopted by a man named Jeff Bogard and lived in Southtown 'till I was ten years old, when Geese Howard murdered our adoptive dad."

At least he can remember his childhood... Falcon thought. I can barely remember mine...

"So... you've known what it's like to lose a father too..." Lucina murmured sorrowfully.

"Hmm?"

"She... lost her father in the timeline she originally came from. He is in Smash, but he's the version from a timeline she saved," Falcon explained. "It's... a long story."

"Nah, I get the jist," Terry reassured them. "Anyway, while my bro Andy went to Japan to train, I sought out my dad's old mentor, Tung Fu Rue. Using the abilities he taught me, as well as those I learned on the streets, I guess you could say I invented my own fighting style."

"Interesting..." Lucina mused.

"Well, I'm looking forward to seeing more of the Legendary Wolf's abilities in action," Captain Falcon declared with a grin.

"Oh, you will," Terry told him. Noticing the Dracula orb was the only orb remaining, he commented, "Ready to bust up a vampire lord, guys?"

"Yes!" The three attacked the Dracula orb together, and were taken to what looked like Dracula's Castle.

Right there, sitting on the giant throne, was the Lord of the Vampires himself, Dracula. He was immensely tall, over 10 feet in height. He had wavy brownish-silver hair, pale skin, dark purple boots, and a black tunic with gold trim and a long black cape with red on the inside. Holding an empty wine glass in his hand, he bellowed, "Ha! Mankind." He tossed the wine glass at his opponents, who ducked in response as the glass shattered against a nearby pillar. "A cesspit of hatred and lies." Standing up, he said, "Fight for them, then," and tossed his cape behind his back.
"Oh great, he's the pompous type," Terry griped as he rolled his eyes. Within seconds, Dracula warped from the throne and rematerialized in front of them.

"Charrrage!" Terry shouted as he, the Captain, and Lucina dashed at Dracula and attacked him, but to no avail as every attack phased through his body. Dracula then transformed into a bunch of small bats and flew to the other side of the hall, rematerializing, but not before the bats attacked the three fighters on the way.

"Why aren't our attacks landing?!!" The Captain complained.

"Wait... when he rematerialized, his arm was raised in front of..." Lucina then ran to Dracula once more and leapt at his head, attacking it. Dracula cried in pain in response, stunned for a moment as Lucina then backflipped out of the way.

"So what you're saying is..." Terry began, "...We should have gone for the head?" Lucina only nodded in response.

"OH YEAH!" Terry shouted triumphantly. "Time to show these babies off!" Dashing toward Dracula, Terry yelled, "Power Dunk!" as he leapt into the air diagonally, then descended diagonally with his fist out, punching Dracula square in the face on his way down. He then shouted, "Rising Tackle!" and leapt upwards feet first, spinning and kicking Dracula in the face.

"Don't forget me!" The Captain ran to Dracula, leapt, and shouted, "FALCON KICK!" and kicked Dracula once again in the face on his way down. Dracula got down on one knee, panting.

"Is that it...?" Terry questioned. Just then, Dracula stood, shouted, "FOOLISH MORTALS!" and held his arms out to his sides as he transformed in a flash of light. Once the light faded, he morphed into a giant, part-lizard-part-bat-like monster with green skin, demon horns on his head, and a pointed tail.

"Man, you're ugly," Terry taunted Dracula. "Aight, time to let the wolf loose!" Charging forward with his left fist out, he shouted, "BURNING KNUCKLE!" and punched Dracula's true form, following by a series of kicks and punches before backflipping, crouching and raising his left fist, and shouting, "POWER GEYSER!" He then slammed his fist on the ground, leaving eruptions of energy in a trail, the third one exploding in front of Dracula and stunning him. Turning to his allies, Terry suggested, "So guys, I got a plan. Here's what we'll do..."

Once Dracula regained his bearings, he was first assaulted by Lucina's Dancing Blade as she hacked, slashed and jabbed relentlessly at him. Leaping backward, she shouted, "Now, you two!" Unbeknownst to Dracula, he was about to be caught in a pincer attack courtesy of Terry and Captain Falcon.

The Captain leapt at Dracula from the front, gathering energy in his fist and shouting, "FALCON..." Meanwhile, from behind, Terry was charging at Dracula with his fist out, asking, "Are you okay?..."

And then, once Terry's hit connected, it all came together.

"...PUUUUUUUUUUUUNCH!"

"...BUSTER WOLF!"

The punches collided on both sides in a fiery explosion, destroying Dracula from the inside by the
sheer impact of the punches alone. He let out a cry before exploding into red smoke, and within seconds, Lucina, Falcon and Terry were back at the platform.

"That. Was. AWESOME!" The Captain cheered.

"I know, right?!" Terry agreed, giving Falcon a high five before taking off his hat to brush it against his left thigh, putting it back on afterwards. "Welp, I guess that's it. Gotta go help the others now. All that's left are those big light and dark pricks, and everything should go back to normal when you beat the crap outta those guys. Who knows, maybe I'll treat you guys to some burgers or something to celebrate!" Adjusting his hat as he started to glow white, he pondered, "Say, where's that high school kid who moonlights as a phantom thief and that other guy? They should've been here by now..."

"Fighting alongside you was remarkable, Mr. Bogard," Lucina complimented Terry. "You do your best down there as well. I promise, we won't take long in defeating Galeem and Dharkon. Soon, everyone can go home."

"That unflinching determination is admirable, miss," Terry praised her. "I know you'll do fine. I will, too - I've got enough Buster Wolves to go around!" Turning to the Captain, he added, "And keep your girlfriend safe, okay? Women like that don't come every day... you've found one who's one of a kind! I hope you guys can find a way to stay together no matter what!" Before he teleported away, he shouted, "OKAY!" and pumped his left fist in the air.

As the two turned around and looked at the still-balanced rifts of light and darkness, Captain Falcon held Lucina's hand and asked her, "It's time. You ready, sweetheart?"

"Let's end this." The scenery faded to white once more.

...

The two found themselves on a different platform this time, one with three thinner platforms above, and another rift of revolving clouds of light and darkness, divided by an invisible boundary.

[So...it's time.]

Galeem emerged first, their wings flying in symmetrically from the light side of the clouds, followed by their glowing core.

[I almost can't decide who to kill first... Dharkon, or the two of you. Either way, once you three are out of the way, I'll erase everything else and start my new world order. Everything perfect and peaceful, in my image, as it should be.]

Just then, Dharkon emerged from the dark side of the clouds, their tentacles flying in rapidly.

{"New world order'? Don't make me laugh! Chaos and suffering is the way, and I will make sure you and these pathetic humans, and all life in this universe, suffer as much as possible! I want to hear your screams of agony...!}

Dharkon's tentacles and Galeem's wings clashed, holding them both still as they glared at each other spitefully before shifting their attention to the Captain, once the Lord of Order and Light's chosen, and Lucina, the former chosen one of the Embodiment of Chaos and Darkness.

{Ah, my once prized maiden has come to take me down... After all I've done for you, you still oppose me? Then you must suffer like the rest!}
"Done for me?" Lucina countered. "All you've done is make me doubt myself, hate myself, make me feel like I was inferior and like I deserved nothing. You got stronger from my misfortune... and I won't have any more of it!" Drawing her Falchion, she continued, "It's thanks to the Captain... and all my friends, and the people I've met along the way, that I know I deserve to be happy! All these experiences are precious, and I won't take them for granted anymore!"

[Captain... you and that woman were once enemies, even before she became Dharkon's pawn. Why did that change? Why do you resist the call for order?]

"As a wise man - the same wise man whose dreams I once crushed - said, 'Anything can change'. And anyone can change too." Getting into a fighting stance, he continued, "I was a more sheltered person before I got close to Lucina. I was distant, plagued by regrets, insecurity, and my own personal trauma. Getting close to Lucina has helped me open up more, forgive and heal from the past, and even slowly heal from my own painful memories. It's not perfect, but it makes me happy all the same. Your obsession with perfection is unrealistic and unhealthy, and I'll make sure your vision doesn't come to pass!"

[But wouldn't you rather know what the future holds?]

"You ever hear the story of Pandora's Box, Galeem?" The Captain interrogated the being of light. "That girl was given a box she was explicitly told never to open, but she did anyway. All sorts of horrible evils and plagues flew out and cursed the world, but she closed it before the last evil could emerge - foresight. If humans had foresight, they'd know every misfortune they'd face every day, even the exact day they'd die... and they would live in fear." Smiling, he continued with, "That's why it's great not knowing what the future has in store for us - it's more exciting! We can make our own decisions and live life to the fullest... and when it comes to the one I love, I know we'll find a way to stay together no matter what the future holds."

{Even though you two will most likely face a lot of unbearable hardship along the way?}

"We'll cross that bridge when we get there," Lucina answered Dharkon. "Together... I know we can overcome anything. Even the two of you, threatening to throw off the universe's harmony."

{How dare you?!}

[Such bold words... but pride comes before the fall.]

"You're one to talk!" Captain Falcon taunted Galeem. "The universe...everything in it... needs balance. Light and darkness... order and chaos... happiness and sorrow... they need the other to exist, otherwise there's no value in any of those things."

"We will not stop fighting..." Lucina began, "Until we're all free to live our lives in harmony! We helped each other lift our burdens, and we will overcome the two of you together!"

[Very well. I suppose I will try to make this as quick and painless as possible... you won't even know what hit you.]

{Not me, though! Scream for me! It's music to my ears!}

Galeem and Dharkon began a synchronized assault on the two humans who dared to defy them, with Galeem firing beams of light as thin and sharp as piano wires, while Dharkon began shooting small laser bursts of dark energy at the couple. The two dodged both of their attacks in perfect sync, dividing focus as necessary as per their training. Galeem them spun their wings around like drills, while Dharkon began conjuring pillars of dark flames on the ground. It was a bit more
challenging, but the duo managed to narrowly dodge both. Once that was one, Lucina went for Galeem while Captain Falcon began his assault on Dharkon.

[You think taking out Dharkon for me will earn you any favors, Falcon? It's too late for that...]

"To hell with your 'favors'!" Falcon retorted, not noticing the ball of light Galeem was launching at him.

"Babe, look out!" Lucina warned her lover. He got out of the way, and the ball of light hit Dharkon square in their eye instead, prompting them to shape their tentacles into a hammer and whack Galeem in their core.

"They're still very much at odds with each other," Lucina observed. "But we can't count on one to finish the other. We should deal the final blow!"

"Right!"

The two continued their assault on the cosmic beings until they let out a cry. The two deities disappeared for a moment before Galeem positioned their wings in a looping oval pattern and let out a stream of brilliant light, while Dharkon held their tentacles out in all directions and let out a piercing screech, emanating a dark red glowing aura.

"What...?" The Captain asked, raising his arm to shield his eyes from the light.

"Ugh..." Lucina winced, covering her ears.

Once the light cleared, Captain Falcon saw Galeem hovering before him menacingly.

[Time to do what I should have done so long ago...]

Charging their energy, Galeem began to aim at the Captain when Lucina shouted, "Babe, no!" and ran to him, shoving him out of the way. The minute she did, Galeem fired a beam that had a radius the size of a baseball. The beam burned a hole in her chest, right where her heart was. The minute the beam made its impact, her eyes became dull and lifeless and she groaned faintly before breathing her last. There was no blood dripping from her fatal wound, only burned tissue. Captain Falcon ran to her body, catching it before it hit the ground.

"Lucina, no..." He begged. "Please...sweetheart...answer me..."

But it was too late. She did not respond.

"She just... slipped through my fingers... I couldn't save her..." Tears began to rain from the Captain's visor-obscured eyes as he held her body close to him and wept. Unbeknownst to him, Galeem had claimed him as their servant once more, the aqua aura surrounding him again and the lights on his visor turning red again.

[Perhaps you may still be of use to me...]

The Captain paid no attention, only closing his eyes, hugging Lucina's corpse tighter and weeping, "I'm sorry, Lucina... Please... forgive me..."

Dharkon's screeching dulled Lucina's senses for what felt like an eternity. Once it stopped, she took her hands off her ears and saw Dharkon before her, glaring at her with unbridled malice.
They sent a single tentacle with its sharp tip flying at Lucina at breakneck speed. Lucina could only stand there in hesitation and fear and look at her impending doom, too paralyzed by terror to respond.

"Sweetheart! Look out!" Captain Falcon shouted, pushing her to the side...

...and taking the full impact of the sharp tip through his abdomen as he choked.

"Babe...!" Lucina cried in despair, watching the dark red blood from the wound stain his indigo jacket. Within seconds, the tentacle retreated, facing a bit of resistance in pulling it out, but when it did, blood sprayed from the wound on the Captain's abdomen in front of him. He fell backward, with Lucina managing to catch him before he hit the floor.

"Babe, no..." Lucina's eyes began to flood with tears as she desperately pleaded. "Please... hold on... I think I should still have a -"

She was interrupted by her boyfriend's hand wiping away some of her tears. "Lu...cina..." He grunted weakly, trying with all his might to hold on. "I'm glad... I got to spend time with you..."

"Captain...!" Lucina gripped the Captain's hand. "This isn't the end! Please!"

"I'm glad..." His arm began to lower. "...I met you..." His arm rested at his side as he breathed no more, his visor lights turning off and the blood from his wound pooling on the floor around him.

"No..." Kneeling, she wrapped her arms around him and buried her face into his chest and began to weep.

What a deliciously fortuitous turn of events. You couldn't live with your failure. Where does that bring you? Back to me..."

Lucina could feel Dharkon claiming her as their own again, her eyes, which overflowed with tears, glowing purple and the crimson aura emanating from her once again. She paid no attention to this fact, though, as the only emotion she felt in that moment was heartbreak. Raising her head to the darkening sky, she let out a grieving wail, shutting her eyes.

"What?!" Lucina gasped as she opened her eyes. She wasn't under Dharkon's control anymore. Or rather, what she saw didn't even really happen in the first place.

"A...vision?" She mumbled. It was then she noticed something vastly different about her surroundings. The skies were all radiant, daylight bathing the clouds in a deceptively beautiful glow. To her right, on the other side of the platform, was Captain Falcon, apparently under Galeem's control, as the aquamarine aura surrounded him and the lights on his visor glowed red.

"Babe...?!" She called out to him, fighting the urge to cry. "I thought... you were dead... I saw you die from Dharkon's attack..."

"I thought you were dead." Captain Falcon solemnly answered her. "And... Dharkon? Dharkon's gone... Galeem killed them, and then tried to kill me, but you... sacrificed yourself for me."

"I..." Something about the whole situation didn't feel right to Lucina, but at the same time, she saw nothing but a universe of light, and her lover standing before her.
"I cradled your lifeless body in my arms..." His voice started to crack as he spoke. "I was once again chosen as Galeem's emissary, as the universe was restarted. Everyone's gone. And soon, I will be too... at least, let us fade away together, knowing we did all we could... I felt so alone without you, all this time..."

"Babe..." Lucina took a few steps toward him, but then hesitated. "Wait... how... can I know it's you?"

"You told me that I would be the light guiding your way out of the dark if we ever got separated..." Looking down sorrowfully, he said, "Please, Lucina. There's nothing here for either of us anymore... it's time we left..." Unbeknownst to either of them, a figure in a black cloak dropped behind the Captain.

"Babe..." Lucina blinked, tears flowing from her eyes. "It's okay... I'm here now..." She slowly walked over to him, but before she could get too close, the figure in the dark cloak leapt onto the Captain's back from behind. He had short, somewhat curly black hair, fair skin, wore a black leather suit and shoes under his cloak, red gloves, and a black and white mask covering the skin around his gray eyes. He looked to be about seventeen years old, and was as tall as Lucina herself.

"What?!" She gasped in surprise, recoiling slightly.

"You are not this woman's lover," the young man told the "Captain". "You are part of an illusion created by Galeem, to lure her into a deadly trap. To break this illusion, I'll reveal your true form!"

"Wait-" Lucina cried, but the young man reached for "Captain Falcon"'s helmet and yanked it off in one fell swoop. However, instead of revealing his face, there was an aquamarine light that started to glow brighter. The young man leapt to Lucina's side as the light enveloped them all. Once it faded, they were back at the original platform with the divide between light and darkness in the background. Standing before them was a Galeem-created Phantom Fighter of Captain Falcon - the true form of the "Captain" Lucina saw earlier.

"Galeem!" The young man pointed his knife at the being of light. "I am Joker, leader of the Phantom Thieves of Hearts, and I have come to take yours, and Dharkon's, hearts, and restore the universe!"

"How did you know...?" Lucina asked the young man.

"Master Hand sent me to help the two of you," Joker answered her. "Looks like I arrived just in time. As a Phantom Thief, I unmask the true form of all the evils in the world, and I could tell you were witnessing a Cognition of your loved one, or something similar." Glancing behind Lucina, Joker saw Captain Falcon, the real one, seemingly staring at something. "Is that... your lover behind you too?"

"What...?" Lucina turned around and saw Captain Falcon on the left side of the platform, and standing before him was a Dharkon-created Phantom Fighter of Lucina, although given what she experienced earlier, he was probably hallucinating.

"Try to reach out to him," Joker advised her. "I'll handle this imitation of your lover." Turning to the light clone of the Captain, he shouted, "Arsene!" and tore the mask off his face as a pillar of blue flame appeared in front of him. Emerging from the flames was a tall humanoid figure clad in red with a long black top hat, black bird-like wings, and a somewhat demonic ghostly face.

"I am thou... Thou art I... Call upon my name, and release thy rage!"
As Joker and Arsene dashed at the fake Captain Falcon, Lucina called out to her lover, "Babe! Captain! Can you hear me?!"

Captain Falcon, however, did not hear his true lover calling out to him. He just stood there, dumbfounded, staring at the "Lucina" standing before him. She looked just like she did before he freed her from Dharkon's control back in the Dark Realm, except she bore a regretful look on her face.

What the hell... He thought. I saw her die... Galeem killed her... but how...?

"Sweetheart...?" He cautiously called out to her.

"Babe...?" "Lucina" raised her gaze to meet his. "You're... alive? I saw Dharkon impale you with their tentacle... I heard your last words..." Closing her eyes, she sobbed as tears flowed down her face, "I held your body close as I lost my last remaining shreds of free will... and now... Dharkon has won. Everyone else died a painful, slow death from their corruption. And..." Wincing in pain, she rolled back the glove concealing the hand with the Mark of Grima on it. The mark was indiscernable now as the whole hand was a dark purple, red thorns protruding from her bloody fingers. She also rolled back the sleeve on that arm, showing more purple skin, sickly dark crimson veins, and crystalline ruby thorns protruding from some areas on her arm, blood dripping from the wounds.

"Lucina..."

"The corruption is claiming me slowly too... At least Dharkon killed you first, so you didn't have to suffer..." The fake Lucina explained. "I don't... have a lot of time left... but I figure if... I were to die in your arms... I'd forget some of the pain..." Looking up at him again as tears streamed down her face, she told him, "My biggest regret... is that even though I trained so hard... I couldn't protect you. I couldn't protect anyone. This is what I deserve..."

"Sweetheart..." Putting aside all reason and letting his emotions take over, the Captain walked over to "Lucina". "It's okay... If this is how it has to be, then..." He hesitated. "Wait. Is it really you? What's... something only the real Lucina would know?"

"You told me... you saw Young Link like a son to you..." Looking down solemnly, the "Lucina" standing before him lamented, "I also wish... we'd have one day settled down and started our own family..."

*I don't know why, but... I have a really bad feeling about this...* The Captain thought, biting his lip anxiously.

All of a sudden, a young man's voice yelled, "Get down!"

The Captain obeyed without a second thought, and a large ball of fire flew past him and enveloped the fake Lucina. When the smoke cleared, the fake's true form was revealed - a dark clone of Lucina. Turning around, the Captain saw a young man, about sixteen years old, standing before him. He had bob-cut brown hair, blue eyes, beige pants, green boots, a gray long sleeve shirt covered by a lavender tunic, a blue shield with a bird-like golden crest with a ruby in its center, and a sword with the same crest at the hilt.

"Who are you...?" Falcon asked the young man.

"You may call me the Luminary," the young man replied. "I was sent here along with Joker to help you and your lover." Recalling a memory for a moment, he then said, "Before I was granted
physical form, I saw the Spirit of a young man who claims to have met you. His name, if I remember, was Neku Sakuraba."

"Neku..." The Captain murmured.

"He wanted me to ask you if you didn't let it get too late for you and her."

Looking behind the Luminary's shoulder, Captain Falcon saw the real Lucina, who met his gaze with a grateful, tearful smile.

"Yeah. I did." Looking back to the Luminary, Falcon continued, "If you see him again, tell him I've broadened my horizons... and I won't take any moment with her... with anyone... for granted anymore."

"Good." Getting in front of the Captain and drawing his sword, the Luminary continued, "He hopes to join you someday, but for now... be by her side, and defeat those power-drunk cosmic beings, for our freedom! I'll handle the impostor!"

As the Luminary fought the false Lucina, Captain Falcon ran to the real one and hugged her tightly. She did the same in response.

"Babe... I'm so glad you're okay..."

"I'm glad you're okay, sweetheart. I was so scared..."

"I was, too." Breaking the hug, she looked up at Galeem and Dharkon and said, "Let's put an end to this... once and for all."

The couple resumed their attack, this time with Lucina going for Dharkon and Captain Falcon going for Galeem.

"It's personal now!" The Captain declared. "Tricking us with painful illusions? Using fakes of the ones we love to try to kill us? That's going too far!"

"But we know... our real loved ones are always nearby," Lucina added. "And with this, we rise against those that once oppressed us!"

As Joker and the Luminary fought off the fake versions of the couple, the real ones unleashed a no-holds-barred assault on Galeem and Dharkon.

{Lucina, my maiden. You cannot escape the darkness within you, or your dark future.}

"You forget, Dharkon," Lucina said. "The darkness doesn't have to bind me! I can make my own future, and it will be a happy one...!" She stabbed Dharkon in their eye, effectively dealing the final blow as the skies darkened and they sunk into the abyss below with a pained, unearthly groan and the dark clone of Lucina vanished.

[See, Captain? Such filthiness is why light is necessary... to purge it...]

"There is ugliness in this world, I won't deny that," Captain Falcon stated. "But there is also beauty, the kind that already exists, and it must be protected!" Gathering energy in his fist, he continued, "And you forget something else light stands for... Hope!"

[Hope...?]
Galeem's question, of course, went unanswered.

"Falcon...PUUUUNCH!" The Captain punched Galeem in their core as the final blow. Glimmering light illuminated the skies as Galeem slowly fell and the light clone of Captain Falcon disappeared.

The light of hope.

"We did it..." The Captain murmured, out of breath, before collapsing to his knees. Lucina did the same.

"The show's over..." Joker softly uttered, looking on at the glimmering sky.

Soon, the couple, the Luminary, and Joker were enveloped by a white light and everything went white.

... The four found themselves back at the cliffs just before what was once the cloud sea. Everyone was waiting for them - all the Spirits, all the Smashers, and the other new recruits: Piranha Plant, Banjo & Kazooie, KOS-MOS, and Terry. In addition, there were three other young men that looked somewhat similar to the Luminary. One of them had wavy green hair in a golden sea dragon-like hair ornament and turquoise clothing; one had spiky black hair and a blue tunic; and the other had brown hair, a yellow tunic, and an orange bandana on his head. The Kongs and King K. Rool were palling around with Banjo and Kazooie; KOS-MOS was conversing with her fellow combat android Mega Man, who once interviewed her; Terry was talking with Ryu and Ken; and everyone else was conversing with their friends or the Spirits of potential future Smashers. Everyone except for Snake and Samus, who hugged their long time friend after seeing he made it back in one piece; and Chrom and his wife and son, who embraced Lucina, relieved to see she was alive. After the emotional reunion, the Captain's friends and Lucina's family went back to the others, prompting the other three young men to walk over to the couple, the Luminary and Joker.

"You three..." The Luminary began. "You're... people chosen to obliterate the darkness too?"

"Indeed," the green haired young man said. "I'm Solo, from Zenithia."

"Name's Arusu," The black-haired one introduced himself. "I'm the son of Ortega, and I defeated the Archfiend Baramos."

"...You can just call me Guv," The one with the bandana said. "It's what Yangus calls me. Solo, Arusu and I were sent to help the others while you helped your companions here take down the main threats."

"I see..." The Luminary pondered. "It's an honor to meet you all, as well as being able to defeat the greatest Archfiend, Dharkon, with the assistance of these brave souls."

"I wouldn't call them an 'archfiend' per se. Just a power hungry demon," Joker commented. "We also defeated Galeem, the false god of light. Which..." Looking up at the sky, he asked, "Isn't that them?"

Everyone directed their gazes to the cosmic beings who fell into the ocean. Dharkon's remains emitted a purple light, while Galeem's emitted a yellow light, before the lights exploded, sending aura shockwaves all around the planet... and across the universe.

"! I can sense it..." Mewtwo spoke up. "Galeem and Dharkon are dead. The universe... has been restored."
All of a sudden, a whirlwind of rainbow pyreflies emerged from the ocean, slowly spiraling upward as the sunset sky gradually transitioned to night. They were all Spirits captured by Galeem and Dharkon, now free and able to fly home to their bodies.

"It's time..." The Spirit of Neku Sakuraba said out of the blue, standing before the four saviors of the universe. "You've done it, guys. We can all go home now...and so can you."

"Excuse me... Neku?" The Luminary asked Neku.

"Yeah?"

The Luminary informed Neku that the Captain was able to uphold his promise.

"Excellent. I'm happy for you two. Lucina, was it? You're his girlfriend now?"

"I am," Lucina nodded. "I promise, I'll protect our happiness together."

"You don't have to promise anything to me," Neku chuckled, his smile heartfelt and genuine. "Just do it." Turning to the four, he said, "Take care of yourselves, and live life with all ya got. I look forward to fighting alongside you guys."

"Same here," The Captain said, waving as Neku waved back before glowing and transforming into a small glowing ball which flew toward the Spirit-spout, headed on his way home. Soon, the Spirits of the Assisting Fighters and non-Smashers like the Squid Sisters, Lyn, Tom Nook, Akira Yuki, Yuri Kozukata, Spring Man, Ashley, Riki, Viridi, Pauline, Dunban, Fiora and Morgan regained physical form as they still lived in Smash City. The ones who weren't Smash City residents were ready to go home to their own worlds.

"Hey, Pearl, Marina!" Callie told the Spirits of Pearl and Marina. She and her cousin Marie struck a pose and enthusiastically shouted, "STAY FREEEEEESH~!"

"Stop by Inkopolis again sometime!" Marina told them. "And..." She and her friend Pearl struck their own poses as they said, "Don't get cooked! Stay off the hook!" Before transforming into glowing orbs and flying home, with Pearl shouting "Boo-YAAAAAAAAAHHH!" as she flew to the Spirit-spout.

"Still say our catchphrase is better," Marie snarked.

"Sankyyuu!" The girl Inkling thanked the two Octolings as the boy Inkling waved at them. The Octolings waved back before transforming into their small octopus forms, aiming at the Spirit-spout before launching toward it and turning into Spirit orbs on their way home.

"Oooooooooooomiiiiiiiiiiii~!" The Octoling boy cried happily.

"Oooooo-weeppeeeppeeeppee~!" The Octoling girl shouted.

"It was nice to see you again, Shantae," Shulk told Shantae. "Maybe I'll see you at Smash City officially someday, too."

"That's the dream!" Shantae told him. "Until then!" She departed for the spout.

"Captain Falcon...!" Black Shadow bellowed.

"Ah!" Turning his attention to the Spirit of Black Shadow, he asked, "Are you...?"

"What? Going to kill you here? Don't be daft!" Black Shadow cackled. "Much as I hate to admit it,
you have my gratitude for restoring our worlds! Just don't expect me to be so friendly when I see you back at Mute City!" He turned into an orb and flew back to his home world.

Everyone else was bidding "see you later" to their friends and colleagues. Kirby waved bye to Bandana Dee before Zelda gave him some well wishes of making it into Smash someday; Mario, Luigi, Peach and Bowser wished their old friend Geno good luck, and so on.

"See you at NLA, Elma!" Lin told Elma before she, Lao and Tatsu flew home to Mira.

"Well..." The Spirit of Elma told the Captain and Lucina, turning to them. "Guess it's time for me to go home. I hope I will get my chance someday." When she tried to revert into a Spirit Orb, however, there was a flash of light and she could not leave.

"What?!" Elma gasped. "Why can't I... let me try again."

It happened again.

"What is this...?"

"Elma!" The voice of Master Hand boomed as everyone's attention was shifted to Master and Crazy Hand, who approached Elma. "We have something for you!"

"Something...?"

Like when Piranha Plant became a fighter, Master and Crazy Hand counted down from three to one with their fingers before snapping their fingers, after which Elma was enveloped in a large pillar of light.

"What?!"

Elma was... transforming. Her silver hair became long, glimmering periwinkle hair; her green eyes were now a bright purple; her outfit was replaced with a high tech black bodysuit with a transparent plastic around the front of her torso, exposing her navel and part of her breasts; and her dark skin was now a pale bluish-green, with periwinkle "crystals" on her forehead. Most importantly, she was no longer translucent like a Spirit. She was fully corporeal.

"I'm... in my body?!" Elma could not believe what just happened. "This is... my true form, though. I..."

"Elma..." Master Hand began. "Congratulations. You have officially joined the ranks of Smash City's elite. We hope you enjoy your stay."

"Of course, we'll have to do something about what she's..." Crazy Hand began before Master Hand nudged her.

"I..." Joyous tears rained from Elma's eyes as shimmering sleet rained softly from the sky, as if a miracle had just happened. And it had. "...Thank you. I never dreamed this day would actually happen. It's... an immense honor."

"Congratulations." The Captain and Lucina hugged Elma, who hugged them back.

"Words can't describe my happiness..." Elma said. Realizing something, she told Master Hand, "Wait... I still have business on my home planet. Plus, my teammates there don't know of my true form yet... Is it okay that I take a while to resolve things back there?"
"Of course!" Master Hand reassured Elma. "We'll be waiting for you!"

"Thank you." Turning to everyone, she told them, "I suppose I'll see you all again in a few months your time. I hope to be back soon!" Elma then began glowing white and teleported upward toward the sky, heading back home to Mira.

"See you soon, Elma..." Lucina whispered.

"Guess that's it, then," Mario commented. "Everyone, let's-a go home to Smash City!"

"Yeah!" Everyone cheered.

As Joker and the Luminary followed Mario to Smash City, the Luminary asked Joker, "So... you looking forward to your new life in Smash City?"

"Yeah," Joker agreed. "I've already taken care of things back in my home world, and fighting Galeem and Dharkon was somewhat... nostalgic. I could hear everyone cheering for us."

"You're so... cool? Is that the word?" Luminary tried to compliment the Phantom Thief. "I wish I had an ability like yours."

"You mean Arsene? He's my Persona, and Personas only manifest in those that exhibit a strong enough will," Joker explained. "But you're not bad yourself. You fight with a sword, but you can also use magic. Your character is admirable, too. You remind me of someone I knew back home, who had a strong sense of justice. Unlike him though, your justice isn't misguided. I just... admire you."

"Admire...?" The Luminary blushed. "Thanks... I really admire you too. You remind me of Erik back home... he's suave, confident, and... someone I really care about."

"Is that so?" Joker chuckled. "Guess we'll keep each other from getting homesick as long as we're here."

"That sounds nice... I hope our own friends can come visit us, too."

Meanwhile, while the rest of the crowd followed Mario, Terry caught up to the Captain and Lucina, who were still standing close to the view of the Spirit-spout. "Hey guys! My burger offer still stands, ya know. Just point me to any good establishments, yeah?"

"Sure," The Captain agreed with a grin. "Just... give us a bit of time here."

"Okay, I guess..." Terry conceded. "You guys already know the way to Smash City, so I'll wait for you two in front of Smash Tower!" He headed off to the rest of the crowd before noticing KOS-MOS observing the couple.

"Excuse me... Mr. Bogard?" KOS-MOS asked him. "What are the Captain and Lucina doing?"

"Hey, you don't get between a couple's romantic moment," Terry replied with a somewhat teasing grin. "Don't wanna look like a voyeur, now."

"Romance...?" KOS-MOS tilted her head to the side. "My algorithms do not comprehend this emotion."

"Well, you see," Terry began as he led KOS-MOS to the crowd with him, "When two people feel really strongly - in a positive way of course - about each other..."
Once they were alone, Captain Falcon and Lucina looked at the gorgeous sight before them, holding hands, as the gentle winds blew around them.

"Heh..." The Captain chuckled. "Not every day that a simple training journey leads to us literally saving the universe, eh? It's a bit hard to believe..."

"Yeah..." Lucina agreed. "So, babe... Have you... thought of a way for us to stay together, despite whatever may happen?"

"I have," The Captain nodded. "We'll just... cherish every moment we have together during this tournament. If either of us have to go, we'll go wherever the other goes. If you have to return to the future, I'll fight Grima with you until the end of our days."

"And I'll spend the rest of my life with you in Mute City if you have to go," Lucina replied with an affectionate smile. "But for now... let's make the most of our time together, and strive for a happy future."

"Of course, my love." Looking to the side for a moment, the Captain then asked, "Oh, and... Lucina?"

"Yes?"

"I couldn't have done all this without you... this time around, you were my strength."

"Thank you..." Lucina whispered, tears of joy coming to her eyes as she smiled affectionately. "I truly am happy I met you, babe."

"I am too..." The Captain embraced his lover, holding her close to him. Their faces drew closer until their lips met in a passionate kiss, her arms wrapping around him while her hair blew in the wind.

Colors wove into a spire of flame, distant sparks calling to a past still unnamed.

The two bore the torch against the cold of the night, having searched their souls during their journey together...

And reawakening the undying light.

The light of a hopeful future, finding their way and stepping into their... everyone's tomorrow.

*The End*
Epilogue - Your Voice

So. 2020. New year. Byleth is FP5. 6 more DLC on the way. One last hurrah with the promised epilogue. (also note that the finale ended with "The End" and not "Fin" like I usually do)

Let's do this.

I'm still assuming KOS-MOS and Elma are in, as I'm now kinda hoping they'll be in season 2. This will also assume the following are confirmed for DLC: Neku Sakuraba from TWEWY; Octoling (another Spirit promotion; the Octoling Girl & Octoling Boy which uses the Octo Expansion artwork. they are NOT an Echo here); AND Mecha-Fiora. Yes, she finally gets her chance just like Chrom! PLEASE LET THIS ACTUALLY HAPPEN OH MY GOD. And also T-elos who is just randomly announced as KOS-MOS's echo out of nowhere, lol. Season 2 supposedly will go until December 2021 (!) and judging by a recent Famitsu column, could well be the LAST season (!) so... even though there are six spots in the second pass, they only said no echoes for the first pass. I think they'll pick 4 fighters to have Echoes (cause there are currently 10 unfilled World of Light character slots in the datamine) and bundle them with their "base" so to speak. Fiora will be Elma's Echo here and T-elos will be KOS-MOS's. Didn't want the "Echo Program" plotbun to go to waste either.

There MAY be a sequel to this later down the line...? I kinda want to do one. Maybe they'll still be dealing with the aftermath of what Galeem and Dharkon did to them. Maybe Falcon will get to explore his past and learn where he came from, and why he became a bounty hunter and racer. MAYBE Black Shadow will play a role in it, regardless of if he's ever confirmed for Smash or not. I haven't settled the full details yet tho. I may also do that rooftop party side story too.

But rest assured, you will LOVE this ending. And it may also set the stage a bit for said potential sequel...?

Content warning: MILD SMUT AT ONE POINT (also assume they're using condoms and the pill everytime they do it from here on out incl. said sequel if i include such scenes, and that Lucina stopped by Dr. Mario's office real quick upon returning to Smash City for the morning after pill - safe sex is important my dudes). also tooth rotting fluff oh my GOD I don't wanna say any more to not spoil y'all

Also, male Byleth is called Byleth and female Byleth goes by Blythe. Get it?! Anagram? (I'm so original.) I was gonna call F!Byleth Beth originally but Blythe is just more creative. Also teases of Terry/Blythe.

Title origin - Your Voice from the Xenoblade Chronicles X OST (Unsurprising)

and of course, obligatory Super Smash Prose server plug. ID is gDK48ua.

Hiding in my Skin, Broken from Within

Epilogue - Your Voice
Once they arrived back in Smash City, Captain Falcon and Lucina met up with Terry Bogard as promised in front of Smash Tower as night fell.

"Heh, took ya guys long enough!" Terry chuckled, briefly taking off his hat and spinning it around on his fingers. "So, got any burger joints you recommend?"

"I might know one..." The Captain replied with a grin.

"Oh, is it that one Shulk, Zelda and I visited one time?" Lucina questioned curiously. "I really love the food there."

"Might be... seeing as how it's the only burger place in Smash City." The three shared a hearty laugh.

"Oh, hey guys!" Banjo called out, running over to them. "You guys gonna head up to the rooftop party?"

"Not just yet," Terry told Banjo. "I'm treating the saviors of the multiverse here to some burgers!"

"They have fries too, right? And dipping sauces?" Kazooie piped up.

"Yup, a lot of different kinds," Falcon told the bird and bear duo. "Wanna come with?"

"I guess," Banjo conceded. "I guess it'll be a pre-tour for us, we'll do the full tour tomorrow probably. But try not to take too long - you guys are wanted there for the main event before the party stops at midnight!"

"It hopefully won't take too long," Lucina told them. "Say, babe, you wouldn't mind telling me about that Subspace incident you mentioned?"

"Sure," The Captain agreed with a smile. "I'll even catch Banjo and Kazooie here up while we're at it."

"I see..." Lucina murmured after listening to Captain Falcon's explanation of the Subspace incident over some burgers. She sat next to Banjo and Kazooie at a booth situated close to a window while her boyfriend sat in front of her, with Terry sitting next to him. Taking a sip of her cherry limeade, she remarked, "So... this Tabuu was turning everyone into trophies? And he wanted to send all the dimensions to his own to become more powerful?"

"Yeah," Falcon said. "He also imprisoned the Hands and controlled them to do his bidding - I imagine they acted as his replacements for Galeem and Dharkon who were already sealed away before that happened." Taking a bite of his bacon and blue cheese burger, he continued after swallowing, "Still feel sorry for ROB - he lost all his brethren when the Isle of the Ancients was destroyed. At least, with all of Tabuu, Galeem and Dharkon out of the way, we can look forward to a hopeful future."

"Yes..." Lucina nodded before looking to the side wistfully. "However long that may be... I hope it's long enough..." Trying to hide her emotions, she took another bite of her barbecue burger while Banjo dipped a french fry in garlic aioli sauce and tossed it flawlessly into Kazooie's mouth, and she happily gobbled it up.

"Hey, look at it this way," Terry told Lucina. "I'm aware that while this is my first Smash venture, it may also be my last. That's why I'm gonna live it up! It's an honor to even be here. Sure the bird
and bear feel the same, especially considering their... unique sitch." Banjo and Kazooie silently nodded in confirmation.

"And remember what I said, sweetheart?" Captain Falcon asked his girlfriend, who lifted her gaze to meet his. "We'll make the most of our time together, and strive for a happy future? Heck, maybe we'll be able to go on another adventure together... one with lesser stakes of course, hopefully."

"Of course..." Lucina nodded, smiling affectionately and putting her burger down. "Just spending time with you and everyone here in Smash City is enough for me to be content, babe." Recalling all the details her boyfriend told her about the Subspace incident, she praised him with, "The way you used your Falcon Flier to escape the Isle of the Ancients sounds amazing. I'd like to see your Falcon Flier in action someday..."

"Yeah, one day for sure..." He smiled at her before noticing something on her face. "Oh, Lucina...?" The Captain questioned. "You... have something on your mouth."

It turned out Lucina had a small blob of barbecue sauce on a corner of her mouth. The Captain volunteered with a smile, "I've got this," and leaned over to her, his lips covering the blob of sauce before kissing her passionately, prompting her to close her eyes and reach out a hand to lovingly touch his face.

"Oooooooh!" Terry cheered. "Bro, I GOTTA post this to Smashbook!" Pulling out his smartphone, he prepared to take a snap of the romantic moment before him when a familiar face popped up in the shot.

"Initiating 'photobomb' protocol."

"KOS-MOS?!" Terry shouted, recoiling in surprise. The couple also stopped kissing each other, slightly recoiling in surprise.

"Master Hand has instructed me to inform you that the festivities on the Smash Tower rooftop are coming to a close, and they would like to give you the appropriate accolades before the party ends at midnight."

"It's what... 10:00 PM?" Terry mumbled, checking the time on his phone. "We got enough time to spare. Just give us a few minutes to finish our grub!"

"Affirmative," KOS-MOS nodded. "Please do not take too long. They said they wanted to have all of you - including Lucina and the Captain - present for an introspective speech from Shulk, and for discussing plans for Smash City's future."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world," Captain Falcon reassured the gynoid.

"We'll see you soon," Lucina told KOS-MOS, as Banjo silently waved with a smile.

"So... looking forward to the future is nice," Kazooie spoke up, "But Banjo and I would like that catch up on all we've missed."

"Gladly," The Captain obliged. "So let's start with..."

...  

_Six months later..._  

_It's been six months since we became a couple... and six months since the Galeem and Dharkon_
incident. And life couldn't be better. We get closer by the day...

"Mmmm..."

...In more ways than one. Hehe.

Ever since Master Hand gave her a duplicate of the keys to Snake and Captain Falcon's apartment, Lucina would occasionally visit her boyfriend to spend time with him while Snake was out... or even spend the night with him.

Which of course led to morning lovemaking most of the time - as long as they remained relatively quiet.

And this was no different. She lay on her stomach in bed, maintaining the optimal position as he pounded into her from behind, his toned chest pressed against her back.

"Ahhhhh..." She sighed blissfully as his movements found the perfect pace, curling her fingers on her right hand up as his right hand's fingers interlaced and as he wrapped his left arm around her abdomen. Feeling his strong arms wrap around her filled her with a sense of comfort amidst the moment of passion.

The way we come together like this... it's perfect. We become one, not just physically, but emotionally too, on an almost... spiritual level, even. I wouldn't trade this for the world.

She heard him faintly moaning as he brought his lips to the nape of her neck.

Yes, babe... like that... Make me melt in your arms...

"I'm... close..." Lucina managed to utter before she reached a crescendo of ecstasy, mewling and quivering in rapture.

I don't want this... to end...

"Luci... ahhhh..." Falcon moaned before he felt sheer pleasure course through his veins as well, holding her tighter and sighing as he shuddered, the sensation of his breath on her skin giving her goosebumps.

So wonderful... Lucina closed her eyes, enjoying the two of them coming together in blissful harmony...

You cannot escape the darkness within you, or your dark future.

What?!

She could barely feel the fading sparks of bliss as that thought... those words from Dharkon that day echoed in her mind. All she felt from that thought on was nervousness.

Why now...? Why am I remembering all the manipulative things Dharkon said to me...?

"Sweetheart...?" The Captain asked her, softly backing away to give her some space.

I know all paths lead to you returning to that lonely future, be it within weeks, months, years, even decades...

"I..." Lucina trembled anxiously, her face starting to sweat. "I suddenly had a flashback of... Dharkon saying those disheartening things to me... like no matter what, I'd still return to a lonely
"I wasn't sure if... they were legitimately unaware of light also signifying hope... or if they were mockingly questioning me..."

"I... noticed that sometimes... when we spent the night in each others' arms, sometimes I'd hear you murmuring fearfully..." She softly drew closer to her lover and wrapped her arms around him.

"Looks like we both still have some healing to do..." The Captain murmured timidly.

"I know we can. Together." Lucina smiled at him softly yet confidently. "You helped me become stronger than I ever thought possible... and you're one of the strongest people I've known, too. Not just in battle prowess, but strength of character, too. You've been through a lot, and pushed on despite it all..."

"Heh... so have you." He softly kissed her on the forehead, prompting her to softly, affectionately chuckle. "It's no surprise we were drawn to each other... yes. We'll help each other heal, no matter how long it takes."

All of a sudden, they heard a knock at Captain Falcon's door.

"Hey, guys?" Snake asked them. "I appreciate you two keeping things quiet, but try to make it quick. Blythe is here, and she wants us all to head to Smash City Square soon... the Hands are bringing in a whopping THREE new faces at once. Well, maybe one of them may not be so new to you guys..." Blythe and her alternate dimension counterpart, Byleth, were a pair of professors who taught at the Garreg Mach Monastery and wielded the legendary Sword of the Creator. They arrived a month and a half after the Galeem and Dharkon incident.

"Coming!" Lucina called out. Looking her lover in the eyes, she told him, "Well, guess we can't be cuddling in bed all day. I'll go freshen up real quick." She climbed out of bed and dressed into her underwear, taking her other clothes with her as she approached the door. "Um, Snake," She called out to him, "I'll be heading to the bathroom. I'll be only in my undergarments, so... I'd appreciate if you didn't look."

"Okay, just make it quick." She opened the door.

After Lucina closed the door behind her, the Captain began to roll out of bed, sitting up briefly in thought.

What can I do...? I, too, feel some kind of uncertainty about the future, even though I made those promises to her... Eyeing the nearby dresser, he thought, Unless... I think it's finally time...

...
"Greetings Captain, Lucina, Blythe, Snake," KOS-MOS greeted the group in her usual robotic way.

"Hi, KOS-MOS," Lucina waved at the android.

"You guys ready for the big reveal?" Terry asked, sounding pumped up. "I have NO IDEA who they'll be! Oh man, this is exciting!"

"I... think I know who one of them might be..." The Captain grinned. "Not tellin', though!"

"You're no fun!" Terry teasingly complained before eyeing the Garreg Mach professor with them. "Helloooo, teach," he flirted at her with a whistle.

"Oh, I'm flattered," Blythe giggled. "But maybe wait until after the show? Everyone's waiting for us. Otherwise, I might have to take some... disciplinary action." She winked.

"Ohohohoho, she's the dominant type too! SCORE!" Terry pumped his fists in the air triumphantly.

"Seriously, though, let's go," Snake advised Terry as the six joined the other Smashers who were gathered around the main stage.

"Alright, here's the event you've all been waiting for!" Master Hand began. "Let's start with our first new face in Smash City-

Just then, a pool of dark energy materialized on the stage, prompting concerned murmurs at first, until a tall woman with dark skin and light lavender hair emerged from it. She appeared to be a combat android much like KOS-MOS, with a different... air to her. She seemed more sophisticated, more... human, even, in her appearance and mannerisms. Materializing a laser scythe out of nowhere, she began twirling it in a display that demonstrated both her finesse and fierceness.

"I almost forgot the Echo Program is still running! Here's one we enlisted from such a program - KOS-MOS's successor, T-elas!"

"Take me on, if you dare!" T-elas boasted.

The cheers continued as Daisy, Ken and Richter greeted the newest fighter brought onboard by the Echo Program, while KOS-MOS only observed from a distance, glaring slightly.

"Next up is..."

"No need to introduce me, Master Hand." A female voice said.

"Is that...?" Lucina murmured.

"I think so..." Captain Falcon whispered.

Walking onstage was none other than Elma, in the same true form she was in when Master Hand invited her to the Smash Tournament.

"Here she is, our first newcomer after that incident, who only now has finished her loose ends on the planet Mira - please welcome, Elma!"

She only smiled and waved at everyone as they cheered before noticing Lucina and the Captain waving at her, to which she responded with, "I'm finally here."
"Next on our list is..." Suddenly, two streams of ink landed on the stage - one a vibrant magenta, the other a peach color. Emerging from the ink were two similarly-colored octopi, which transformed into a humanoid girl and boy with octopus like traits.

"Veemo!"

"Oomi!"

"The Octolings!" The crowd once again erupted into cheer, with the Inkling Boy and Girl inking the sides of the stage, swimming up them, and congratulating their cephalopod friends.

"'Ey, Master Hand? Let me introduce myself."

All of a sudden, a beacon of a rather oddly stylized skull shone down on the stage, before a large beam of light emerged from it. When the light faded, a youth - about 15 years old - emerged, clad in mostly purple with spiky orange hair and headphones.

"...Neku?!" The Captain gasped.

"Neku!" Lucina happily shouted.

"...Neku Sakuraba, everyone!" The crowd once again burst into cheers.

"And last but not least, at least for now... Chrom, you remember how you finally got your chance after so long? Well, one more is getting such a chance!"

Everyone's attention was shifted to the sky as a giant lavender mech flew above them. It eventually landed, and a familiar face stepped out of it.

It was none other than Fiora, still a half-Hom half-Mechon cyborg, smiling and waving to the crowd.

"...Our next new Echo Program participant! Mecha-Fiora, ladies and gentlemen!" Cheers erupted once more, this time more thunderous than all the times before, as confetti rained from the sky.

"Whoa... four of 'em, huh..." Snake muttered. "Was not expecting that at all... gotta give it to the Hands and their penchant for surprises."

"Rest assured, there is still more to come, but for now, please welcome our newest faces! See you all soon!"

"Fiora! Elma...!" Lucina murmured, running to the stairs on the side of the stage. Captain Falcon, KOS-MOS, Chrom and Shulk took notice and followed her.

While the Inklings were busy chatting it up with the Octolings, Chrom and Lucina called out to Fiora, "Fiora!" With KOS-MOS and Shulk in tow, while Captain Falcon shouted, "Hey, Neku!"

"Cap!" Neku ran to the Captain and gave him a high five.

"You finally made it, kid," Falcon congratulated the youth. "And you don't have to worry about the Reaper's Game here, either."

"I would hope not," Neku rhetorically remarked as he and the Captain burst into laughter.

"Excuse me, Neku?" Cloud asked Neku, walking over to him with the Luminary in tow. "My name's Cloud Strife. It's nice to finally meet you."
"We meet again, Sakuraba," The Luminary greeted Neku.

Chuckling as he scratched the back of his head, Neku remarked, "Please, call me Neku." As Captain Falcon left Neku to chat with Cloud and the Luminary, Fiora was receiving a very warm welcome indeed.

"Congratulations, Fiora!" Shulk hugged his girlfriend.

"I finally got my chance, Shulk..." Fiora muttered happily. "I'm beyond honored to fight alongside you, and Chrom, and Lucina, and... oh, KOS-MOS is here too?"

"Long time no see, Fiora," KOS-MOS greeted Fiora. "I do believe that is how the phrase goes."

"Heehee," Fiora giggled.

"My best friend finally joins Smash," Lucina congratulated her. "This is definitely cause for celebration."

"As someone who waited for his chance and got it, I knew you'd get yours someday too," Chrom told the cyborg. "And hey! The Golden Chains crew are back together, just like old times! And there's also Ryu and Ken too, but they're busy right now, haha..."

"Thanks, guys!" Fiora thanked everyone. "Can't wait for my new digs in Smash Tower! I wonder who my roommate will be... KOS-MOS, perhaps?"

"Unfortunately, that is not possible," KOS-MOS replied. "Miss Blythe, of Garreg Mach Monastery, is my roommate. I am quite surprised to see she has some aptitude for machinery, as she maintains my charging station with ease."

"Who knew?" Shulk commented with a chuckle.

"Fiora?" Elma asked Fiora as she approached the cyborg and her friends. "I'll be your roommate. Somewhat fitting, too, as according to the Echo Program, you're set to be my Echo in this tournament."

"Oh, Elma!" Fiora waved at her. "You... look a bit different."

"I'm... actually a xenoform. Or as you people would say, alien. This is my true form."

"You didn't opt for your mim form, Elma?" Captain Falcon asked Elma as he approached the group.

"Oh... Captain," Elma turned to him. "My mim will be accessible once Fiora and my apartment is set up. I just thought it was only proper that I officially join Smash City in the same form I was initially invited in."

"I guess that makes sense," Lucina commented with a chuckle.

"In any case, it's great to see ya again after so long, Elma," Falcon told the xenoform. "Y'know, you said once that you wanted me to tell you more about my world. I have a better idea... as a little way of celebrating you finally joining Smash, why don't Lucina and I show you my world?"

"Really...?" Elma asked. "Won't that... take a while though?"

"We'll be in and out in a jiffy, hopefully less than a day will have passed here while we're over there," Falcon told her. "You know how the flow of time differs here vs. in our worlds..."
"Indeed," Elma nodded. "Would you like to come too, Fiora?"

"I think I'll pass this time," Fiora declined Elma's offer. "Last time Shulk and I visited Mute City, things... got out of control fast."

"I don't think that'll happen again though, Fiora," Captain Falcon tried to reassure her. "After that incident, Black Shadow seems to be keeping his distance from me for some reason."

"Even so... I wanna celebrate with Shulk. It's my special day, after all."

"Understandable," Lucina told her friend. "You two have fun, ok?"

"Of course!" Shulk said.

"That only begs the question of who else will come with us..." The Captain murmured. "It'd feel weird if it was just me, Lucina and Elma..."

"Sign me up, boss!" A familiar young female's voice said.

"...Lin?" Elma turned around and saw Lin Lee Koo standing before her. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to congratulate you, of course!" Eyeing Lucina and the Captain, Lin added, "And I couldn't help but notice that you guys are heading to the Captain's world... is it anything like ours, Captain?"

"Even better," The Captain grinned. "Earth's still around, technology has evolved in ways you never thought possible... we have cars that drive without wheels and go super fast!"

"Keep talkin'..." Lin bounced on the balls of her feet eagerly.

"There's also a lot of different alien races in Mute City, too," Lucina continued, "And... there's someone I'd like you to meet. I have a feeling the two of you would be really good friends..."

"AAAAAA!" Lin squealed excitedly. "WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?! LET'S GO!"

"Heh, she's excited," Elma remarked. "But yes. Lead the way."

"Okay."

Once they arrived in Mute City, Elma and Lin couldn't believe their eyes.

"So... if Earth was allowed to continue thriving, this is probably what would have become of it... it's wonderful," Elma remarked.

"Aaaaaaaa...!" Lin could not stop gushing at all the extremely advanced technology around her. "Soooooooooool...!"

"I can tell you two are impressed," Falcon boasted before noticing a familiar face approaching him from afar.

"Lily...?"

"It's been a while, Captain," Lily greeted him. "What brings you here..." It was then she noticed
Lucina with him. "Lucina...?"

"L-Lily..." Lucina stammered. "Listen... I want to apologize for how I acted that day... I felt so hopeless, I just shut you out... can you... forgive me...?"

"...Of course," Lily told her senior with a smile. "It was totally understandable for you to feel that way after all you've been through. At least, it's good you're back." Looking to the side, Lily continued, "What you did that day... was really brave, fending off Black Shadow while everyone else escaped. I should actually commend you for it. I'd probably run if I saw someone like him causing chaos in a public place..."

"Oh... thank you, Lily." Lucina invited Lily for a hug before telling her, "Oh, and I imagine you don't have a lot of friends your age..."

"Well, there's Princia," Lily said, "But she and I are often on way different wavelengths if you catch my drift."

"Well, I think you and Lin here will get along just fine," The Captain suggested.

"Lin...?"

"Yes!" Lin greeted Lily. "That's me, Lin Lee Koo, 13-year-old engineer at BLADE, at your service!" She saluted Lily.

"Lily Flyer," Lily introduced herself to Lin. "14-year-old support soldier for the Galactic Federation AND F-Zero racer!"

"OH MY GOD! YOU'RE SOO COOL, LILY!" Lin began geeking out.

"YOU'RE THE COOL ONE, LIN!" Lily gushed.

"YOU RIDE THOSE SUPER FAST VEHICLES?!"

"YOU BET I DO!"

"I TUNE UP GIANT ROBOTS CALLED SKELLS! OH, OH, AND WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHECK OUT MY SKELL FANFICTION?!"

"WOULD I?! SHOW IT TO MEEE!"

"AAAAA!"

"Heh, just as you two predicted, they're getting along swimmingly," Elma commented. "Any idea where we should all go first, though?"

"Hmmm..." The Captain held his right hand to his chin in thought.

"Babe... didn't you mention a sushi bar you liked to frequent a while back?" Lucina suggested. "I suppose we could go there for lunch..."

"Alright then," The Captain agreed. "Follow me, guys."

... 

After the five got their seats at the sushi bar, Lily asked Lucina, "So, Lucina... I couldn't help but notice you called the Captain 'babe' back there... did you get to...?"
"Tell him how I felt? Yes..." Smiling, Lucina looked to the side as she blushed. "We've been together ever since... and I couldn't be happier."

"He seems really happy with you too," Lily commented. "It's almost like... you two are each other's perfect match."

"You think so...?" Making eye contact with Lily, Lucina told her, "Thank you."

"Hey, hey, Lily!" Lin piped up, pulling out her FrontierNav device. "I got my Skell fanfiction right here~"

"OH MY GOD SHOW MEEEE."

Elma and the couple watched the young girls' interactions, happy they had found friends they could relate to. Within minutes, their lunch was served - Lin's lunch was a ramen soup, Lily's was a shrimp tempura dish, Elma's was Japanese style fried rice with steak, shrimp, and various vegetables; and the Captain and Lucina had a shared sushi platter, with sodas of their choice. Once they were done, Dr. Stewart walked through the doors of the establishment.

"Hey, Cap," Dr. Stewart greeted him and his traveling companions. "I see you've got your girlfriend and Lily with you, but who are the others?"

"Dr. Stewart, meet Elma and Lin from the planet of Mira," Captain Falcon introduced them to the Doctor. "In their world, Earth was destroyed, so for them to see a thriving Earth like this..."

"It's exhilarating," Elma spoke up. "I take it you're also an F-Zero racer?"

"In fact, I am," Dr. Stewart answered her. "Say Cap, you up for a race? Hope you didn't drink any booze or anything!"

"Don't worry, I didn't!" Falcon and Stewart had a laugh before Falcon stood. For a brief second, Lucina thought she saw something fall out of his back pocket. Turning to the others, he said, "You can watch the races on the TV sets! I'll see you guys soon!"

"Oh, Captain," Lily spoke up, "I'll race too!" She stood and followed Falcon and Stewart.

"Good luck, babe!" Lucina waved to her lover. Elma and Lin followed suit as the Captain, the Doctor, and Lily left.

"Oh, what's this?" Lin questioned, noticing a small, square black object close to the chair the Captain once sat at.

"Ah!" Lucina reached for the object, carefully examining it. "It's a...box?"

"Have you tried opening it?" Elma suggested.

"Where do I..." Lucina found the opening, and opened the box.

"What?!"

Elma and Lin got a closer look at the contents of the box - and what it was was most surprising. A diamond ring.

"I... wow," Elma muttered. "Do you... know what this is, Lucina?"
"No... I really don't."

"This is an engagement ring!"

"A... what?"

"When it comes to romance and courtship, this is the ultimate sign of taking things to the next level," Elma explained. "It's a sign that you two want to get married."

"W-w-whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa-?!" Lucina covered her face with both hands as she blushed intensely.

"You give that ring to your beloved and ask if they want to marry you."

"I..." Taking the box and closing it, Lucina's heart began to pound and she began to feel shaky. 

**(Should I... do it? Propose to him like this...? Might as well. It's now or never.**

"I'm going to give this to him!" Lucina declared. "And I'll ask him if he wants to marry me!"

"I..." Realizing Lucina had it backwards, Elma still encouraged her. "Lin and I will be behind you every step of the way. But... isn't he still racing?"

"Oh..." Glancing at the television for a moment, Lucina then said, "But I'm sure he'll win first place anyway. He always does..."

"Yeah, but..." Lin began, "How are we gonna get there?"

All of a sudden, a familiar alien male voice with a slight Brooklyn accent spoke up. "You need a ride, ladies?"

"PJ!"

... 

As expected, Captain Falcon won first in this racing cup, with Lily Flyer placing second, and Black Shadow placing third. As the three prepared to board their podiums, Black Shadow told the Captain, "So... I couldn't help but notice you returned here with that girl."

"Don't you **dare** think about going after her again," Captain Falcon warned the wanted criminal.

"After how she wounded me that day, I wasn't even planning on it," Black Shadow cackled dryly. "You certainly have trained her well."

"Flattery gets you nowhere," Lily objected. "Don't go after the Captain, either."

"Fine," Black Shadow obliged. "However, I am interested in joining that Smash Bros. tournament..."

"If you do get in, and that's a big **if**. The Captain began, "I'll put in a word with Master Hand to ensure you don't cause trouble for me or Lucina... or anyone else in Smash City."

"You sure drive a hard bargain," Black Shadow taunted him. "However... I do have something that could be of interest to you. Whether or not I join that tournament, I will have you know that being the leader of an intergalactic crime syndicate, I have access to certain... information."
"What do you mean...?" The Captain questioned.

"I know that your memories of your youth are somewhat hazy, that you don't remember certain details of your life before you turned 27 years of age," Black Shadow explained. "If you ever want that information... you know where to find me."

"... I'll consider it," Falcon said after a moment of hesitation. "But in no way does this make us friends, got that?"

"And I'd prefer it stays that way," Black Shadow replied sinisterly. "At any rate, better not keep our adoring fans waiting..."

Eventually, it was Captain Falcon's time to be interviewed on F-ZERO TV. Before Mr. Zero could ask his question, however...

"E-Excuse me!"

Everyone's attention shifted to Lucina, who somehow found a way into the studio. "Somehow" was an understatement - it was PJ who took her, Elma and Lin to the studio and convinced the guards to let them in.

"Lucina?!" The Captain shouted. The cameras focused on the intruder as she walked over to her boyfriend and announced, "I... have been considering this for a while, but... if I don't do it now, I'll regret it for the rest of my life..." She pulled the box out of her pocket, opened it, and held it out to him with her arms outstretched as she shouted, "Captain Falcon, will you marry me?!"

The whole studio erupted into surprised gasps as the Captain stood still for a few seconds, dumbfounded, before asking, "I... where'd you even find that?"

"It... fell out of your pocket as you were leaving the sushi bar..."

"I..." Walking over to her, he took the box and said, "L-Lucina. You know that it's supposed to be me proposing to you, and not the other way around...?"

"Huh?"

"I mean, that ring is WAY too small for my big meaty fingers!" He laughed, as did the rest of the studio, including Lucina. He then motioned for her to hold out her right hand, during which he took the ring out of its box and slipped it onto her ring finger, at which she softly gasped and blushed.

"...But it fits perfectly on yours."

"I..." Lucina could feel her heart fill with unadulterated joy as tears of happiness began to flood her eyes.

"So... without further ado," The Captain began, his voice soft and affectionate, "Lucina... will you marry me...?"

"...Yes," Lucina sobbed as she tightly embraced her now fiancé, kissing him passionately on the lips as the whole studio erupted into applause.

The cameras cut back to Mr. Zero as he said, "Well... that was unexpected, but a joy to behold. We congratulate Captain Falcon and his new fiancée, Lucina! See you all next time on F-ZERO TV!"
Eventually, Captain Falcon took his fiancée, as well as Elma and Lin, to an empty race track as he did a few victory laps in his Blue Falcon for his betrothed.

"Pardon me, Lucina," Elma began, "But shouldn't we head back soon? 12 hours have passed in Smash City at this rate..."

"In a little bit." Eyeing the hand that now wore the engagement ring Captain Falcon gave her, she held that hand to her chest happily. "I'm just... so happy."

"I can tell..." Elma and Lucina's eyes were drawn to the center of the racetrack, where a hologram of a red falcon and blue butterfly in flight appeared. Next to it was the following text, scrolling from bottom to top:

To my dearest Lucina,

I honestly don't know where my life would be if I hadn't met you.

It's still amazing how a chance meeting under less than ideal circumstances blossomed into something greater.

It was your voice that helped me come to terms with the real me, to not be afraid of the "what ifs" anymore.

And I know it was my voice that pulled you out of your darkest despair, that reassured you you're never alone.

We've been through so much together, and I know that together, we can bravely face whatever the future has in store for us.

After all, we are truly two sides of a coin, and we'll always be together, no matter what.

Yours, now and forever,

Captain Falcon

"Yes..." Lucina whispered, closing her eyes and smiling. "Life may catch us in the rain from time to time, but we know how to come from it dry... No matter what... we'll face the future... together."

Fin

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