

**BWL Development***Epically Awesome in Every Way*

|---[Chapter 7]---|

Fallen

by The Wildcat

What had his name been? Did it matter anymore? Had it ever?

It was an old name. Millennia old. His newest name was more fitting. He had exceeded his humble beginnings and created his own name.

He had been a simple knight, but his mind separated him from the brethren. Experience earned the right to his first bionic upgrade. But it was lethal cunning that built his prowess among the others. And it was his ambitions that made them fear him.

An aged human, who was greatly studied in the arts of what he called sorcery, introduced the knight to the first of countless realms to which his home was border. Wielding an ancient alien artifact, he dubbed a summoning staff the human called upon the knight on many occasions.

The old man was greedy and demanded the defeat of his enemies. Thus, each foe met fate in his time. Of course, the knight grew stronger with each victory. And after each conquest, the knight returned home to rule his territories as baron.

Yet he knew the want of greater power. Ultimately, he grew weary of the old human. During one final summoning, he butchered the man and collected the summoning staff.

Through the artifact, the baron found freedom. Freedom to traverse many realms. Freedom to hunt as he pleased. Freedom from the brethren's meager control.

With time, the baron's freedom brought jealousy. He had become too strong for the brethren to combat individually. The fact that he could travel to and fro with ease frightened them. Thus, a legion of the brethren joined in concentration to mass one portal. Together, they dispatched a battalion of their own kind, one-by-one to face the baron on his favorite hunting world.

There, six brothers joined their powers and technology to build the Vortex Crystal. The regiment of brethren carried the crystal into battle and were confident of their triumph. Yet, always the forward thinker, the baron had anticipated their efforts.

Many insurgent forces loyal to him counted themselves among the multitude. Dissidents resided in each of the great houses and during the battle, they created strife and unrest. The great houses turned on each other, an act that crippled their attack.

The baron personally dispatched the six brothers of the Vortex Crystal. Nevertheless, as the last of the brothers drew his final breath in a cave he used for shelter, he hid the crystal in hopes that a second assault would be possible after his forces were rebuilt on their fiery border world.

Alas, the baron returned to his home territories and eliminated the brothers' shrines before they could be reconstituted. The other brethren would not dare face the baron again. Consequently, he traveled without limitation, hunting where he pleased.

However, a second party took interest in his wanderings. The ancient alien race, the Ariesians, had been plagued by the brethren and other disasters on each of their major colonies. As such, they had returned to their home world and remained in seclusion for eons.

The baron was unaware that his use of the summoning staff had been noticed. Nor did he realize the full implications

of the battle he had won. Such mass teleportation to Aries' neighboring world had given its inhabitants rise to concern.

Still, they might have refrained, had it not been for the Vortex Crystal. Such a weapon could prove fruitful and warranted the risk of exposure. They awaited the inevitable reappearance of the baron and struck.

Search parties scoured the caves for the crystal. Contingents flanked the baron and drew him into a crossfire that rivaled the blazes of the fiercest firestorm. Yet the baron stood. Without the crystal, the battle was for not.

It was in the waning hours of the conflict that a human champion arose. The champion, driven by the torments and deaths of his people, sought the Vortex Crystal. With an inhuman strength of will, he found and implemented the weapon.

With the human's sacrifice, the baron fell.

In the wake of that reign of terror, the Ariesians took the depleted crystal to their home world. Their desire to correct its many dangerous flaws drove them to ignore the approaching pestilence.

In the baron's defeat, they were revealed. The brethren knew of their home world. Teleported by the multitude, solo warriors began picking the great Ariesian cities apart.

Even so, it was a natural disaster that ultimately destroyed their world. They knew of the threat for years and had prepared to escape, but the brethren changed their plans. No colony would be safe from the monstrous beings that would undoubtedly follow them.

In the last days, they completed the great rings. Teleportation gateways that would lead to a new colony in a distant border world between the realms. The improved Vortex

Crystal would protect the Ariesian colony and their people would be hidden once again.

Unfortunately, the brethren's gorilla incursion slowed progress. The Ariesian's found themselves overrun in the twilight hours of their evacuation. Their great weapon was complete, but the onslaught targeted their researchers. The weapon was lost.

As the rain of fire and rock fell, the last Ariesians gave their lives defending the great rings. In a final act of defiance, they reprogrammed the rings to target each other.

Still, the brethren's warriors found the rings and endeavored to activate them. As Aries became an unlivable wasteland set afire by repeated impacts. The last of the brethren's warriors sabotaged the rings. Though the rings continued to target each other, they would connect to the brethren as a relay.

Someday, the Ariesian technology would belong to the brethren. A gift from some unfortunate soul that would reopen the great rings. The brethren would be free.

In all of the conflict between the brethren and the Ariesians, the baron was forgotten. He was dead and of no consequence. The human champion had given his life to ensure that.

But the baron was struck down before the Ariesians had removed the many flaws of the Vortex Crystal. The baron had not been destroyed, only weakened. His great powers were gone, but he survived to walk the world as a specter. He was trapped in a state of immateriality.

With time, he learned that he was not altogether helpless. He took possession of a human as a parasite in a host body. He lived on as many of the most feared tyrants the world had ever known.

He developed a new plan to regain his powers. He took many wives and concubines until one poor victim produced twins. Each infant boasted great but conflicting powers. One of dark and one of light.

With the last of the energy in his summoning staff, he dispatched the half-breed infants to border worlds that would amplify their powers.

Throughout the centuries, he gained and lost empires among men. He dispatched armies to search for ancient artifacts, but lost all gains at the end of his host's lifetime.

He watched humanity progress and waited for a technological advancement that would give him greater life.

For his solution, he again needed a woman. A scientist that believed that she might gain immortality through a mechanical body. Her efforts were funded by military contracts, but the funding inevitably fell short.

With the sacrifices of the baron's final human host, he offered funding to the woman. She developed four prototypes, each greater than the last. Each designed for military implementation.

The fourth model, however, was something superior. More than a war machine. The artificial intelligence and processor chip set was a major advancement in technology. It was an achievement that would allow her machines to reason as humans.

Regrettably, the woman never saw her immortality. She passed with a broken heart when she witnessed the evil that the baron brought to her machines. For, though he was no longer the baron, he now possessed a superior body and the means to build a new empire.

The Wildcat hefted a chunk of debris and tossed it aside. He knew she was dead. Everyone in the building was probably dead. But there might be a survivor or two. There might be someone trapped alive. He had to try.

He had seen the little girl. No older than three or four. He had made a single millisecond of eye contact as she fell amongst the debris. Clutching her mother's severed hand and shielded only by a blanket, the little girl had fallen into the rubble pile near the top. She might have a chance.

But that thing. Those things. As long as those two beasts were roaming the streets, no one was safe.

Even as his rage drove him onward, his own mind began to reason out the sequence of events. Something else was involved. He had encountered three strange beings and overly suspicious law enforcement. Then the ERCU Scouts had appeared.

It was as if horrible monstrous beings were drawn to the same little city. But why? The simplest answer was power. The single most coveted possession for any monster in any species was power.

He needed to know more about the city and the nuclear blast that had first drawn his attention. For that information, he would need to inquire of the city leadership.

He would follow up at the city jail. Criminals always seemed to have information that the authorities were unwilling to discuss.

He would also need a new base of operations somewhere in the city. He would need to scout for an empty building. In one of the pouches of his belt, he carried a gift. He had never used the device. It seemed too fantastic. But perhaps the time had come.

Her hand. He had found the little girl and her hand was moving. He could hear her sobs. He could sense her fear and torment. He would have pulled her free had he not heard the thump.

He spun and spread his arms to shield the girl from as much of the grenade's blast as possible. Blazing orange filled his vision, dimmed only by the protective lenses of his helmet. The crime fighter could feel himself lift from the ground. Pain raced through his body starting at the point of impact.

Wildcat crashed to the ground on the opposite side of the rubble heap. He sought cover behind a parked car and waited. Twin grenades hammered the pavement. Then the first of the machines cleared the top of the ruins.

ERCU Assault Squad. Twenty machines standing six and a half feet in height. Their glistening thick body armor and fully equipped assault rifles made them far more dangerous than the Scouts had been. And an Assault Commander with his heavy armor and mini-gun would take cover and snipe.

The Wildcat looked on with concern. Traditionally, the ERCU forces chose to shoot their targets and seek cover. That made a clean firefight possible. Nonetheless, the Scouts had taken a hand-to-hand strategy, pressing forward until within arm's length.

His skin still burned from the heat that had penetrated his mask's open-air vents when the first scout exploded in his face. ERC Units always self-destructed, but never with such a fierce LOX based chemical fuel.

They were trying to wear him down. The new tactics were simply intended to make him weak and to distract him from the true reasons for an ERCU presence.

He placed a hand on his hip holster. Big Iron, the trusted super-revolver of his own design. It might prove to be his

only recourse. He dared not risk losing it too early in the fight.

The Assault Squad spread across the street and began the advance, rifles burning the air with heated metal. The Wildcat stood and spoke the muted command to close his air vents. He had thirty minutes of internal air supply. If the machines wanted a fist fight, they could have one.

He charged into the hail of bullets. Each shot stung like an unobstructed punch. The mini-gun's spray was the worst. It was like a crushing flow of liquid metal that forced him to slow down.

Wildcat dove onto the first machine and pulled it over him. The countless streams of bullets stopped, but not before completely eradicating the machine. Even its self-destruct mechanism had been torn apart, the explosive chemical components remaining unmixed.

The second machine was swift. It dragged Wildcat aside and slung him into a brick wall. He pulled himself to his feet and countered a fierce punch. The exchange was a whirl of fists and kicks.

Another machine joined the brawl. Then another. Wildcat soon found himself pinned to the ground with the numerous machines drilling punches to his chest and head.

He was easily overpowered, but he had anticipated the machines actions. He spoke, and the nozzles mounted beneath the back panel of his shoulder pads hissed to life. The first two machines were blown apart by the flow of compressed gas and exploded atop a parked SUV.

Wildcat strained to lift his legs and exposed another machine to the stream. It snapped in two, both halves bursting high above the street.

Other machines made retreat and the loss of weight allowed the thrusters to push. Wildcat gripped twin machines under each arm and twisted for flight. Together, the three combatants streaked into a corkscrew.

As they passed the rooftops, The Wildcat altered his course and plunged headlong toward the ground. The collision was brutal, but the crime fighter had pulled up. His victims conversely were left with collapsed heads. Both fireballs scorched the nearest building and fractured its face.

The Wildcat allowed himself to lift away from the street and banked around to make a second pass. He battered his way through the machines with his claws outstretched.

Then it struck him.

It was a pain he had not felt before. He almost lost consciousness. Even as he spiraled into a brick wall, he knew. It was a flaw he had never worked out. The Assault Commander's mini-gun had found the thinner lining of the micro-thruster nozzles.

Moments after the fragments of wall fell atop him, the second compressor tank ruptured. Excruciating pain coursed down his spine.

Grenades and armor piercing rounds spattered into the debris. It was needless insurance of their success. Wildcat pulled himself free and crawled into the street. The taste of blood was in his mouth.

Through the flames of repeated attacks, he glanced back at the collapsed apartment and buckled to the ground. He almost failed to notice the new sounds. Thumps and pops, muffled by his audio filters and the ringing in his ears. He mustered enough strength to turn his head back toward the open street.

An armored personnel carrier sat parked in the nearest intersection. Beyond the APC, he could see a white van bearing the markings of the Chamberlain Research Institute. A dual top-mounted mini-gun spat fire at the machines. Soldiers wearing expensive body armor with the CRI logo emblazoned on their breast stood ready behind the APC.

Grenades were exchanged and massive levels of firepower filled the intersection. Nonetheless, it was the mini-gun turret that won the battle. Even the Assault Commander was cut into large chunks.

As the smoke cleared, lab coated civilians approached the downed vigilante. Fire extinguishers dowsed the surrounding flames. One young woman looked down at him with dread in her eyes.

"He was trying to help them," she said while nervously stroking her hair.

"The matter is already settled Doctor Colt," the man said dismissively. "I'll leave the security team to help with the search for survivors. Join Doctor Hillcot in the van."

Wildcat could feel great heaviness in his chest. He started to gasp for air. It took all of his concentration to listen.

When the woman turned away, one of the soldiers approached. "Sir, they have been spotted near CRI. Should we follow?"

"No. We'll take Target Alpha to the satellite lab. Keep your team here to cover our departure. Let Doctor Fields worry about Kain and his little helper."

With his last sigh of breath Wildcat spoke. "*Kain.*" λ

