

**March 30, 2094**

***Cairo, Egypt***

Newly annihilated debris tears at my feet, ripping away its leather, revealing a cascade of crimson. Calluses no longer protect but only provide a mere facade over what this world has really become: the devil's playground. A society suffocated under a velvet glove concealing a rusted dagger, its people burnt by the searing manacles of oppression.

Buried deep in the desert sand are the echoes of a lost world. What was once a flourishing metropolis remains a residue of lost alleyways. The Tharax promised a world of prosperity, but delivered a poison of silence. The horizon fills with the excrement of our decaying world, the sun held captive by the jangling discords of humanity.

There's an old adage saying that death is the only certainty in life. But since the story has already been written, why not fill the pages with a symphony of adventure, laughter, joy; why not make the story worth telling? And when the music rings its last note, let it fill the hall with resonance.

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Years ago, the Tharax commenced the construction of a subterranean network connecting their vast empire. But soon, they decided to abandon the tunnels, leaving them unattended.

There, nuzzled in the folds of the Tharax tunnels, we found a lifeline, a sanctuary of peace and camaraderie where our hearts beat a little bit stronger and our minds drew a little bit closer.

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It all started with myself, Yomar, and Naidra - three friends, three dreamers seeking to carve a greater future. Using the sunlit desert sand, we adorned the tunnel walls with intricate mosaics of variegated creatures, their vivid echoes lost to time; dolphins leaping through waves of bright blue, lions prowling in the wake of gold, and fireflies illuminating the space like glinting stars.

The second phase was creating the community, the Harmonics we called it. Soon enough, the whispers raged like a wildfire. People were coming from all over the world, traveling thousands of miles for the opportunity of camaraderie. An opportunity that has proven to transcend the barriers of human prejudice and diverse cultures through nature's common language: *music*.

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"Aero Ponticello!" I hear a bellowing voice shout. *Tharax*. I've faced them before, but this time, *they want me*. A sour note rings in my ear. Everyone senses the ominous entity. What

was once a rambunctious jumble of song has faded into the soft exhale of the wind, its gusts gently carrying the grainy desert sand.

In the next moment, the world is engulfed in the flames of a thousand suns. An earth-rattling boom fills the air. I fall to the ground, the burning embers of the explosion searing on my thin tunic. Smoke courses through the air, its acrid fumes clawing at my lungs. What was once an oasis for friendship, peace, and connection has devolved into a ravaged battlefield. One where a man turns a bloodstained page without any reflection. A battlefield where wolves will devour their own pack.

I feel a hand latching tightly onto my arm. *Yomar*. I exhale a sigh of relief.

“Aero! Let’s go!” I’m yanked out of the crimson maw and joined by *Naidra*.

The thick smoke fumes fill my mind with haze. But I do remember one thing. *Emergency bunker*. *Just in case*, I had told myself. *Naidra* and *Yomar* quickly slide down its opening hatch. I turn to follow, but my eyes irresistibly linger down the tunnel.

All that remains through the smoke is the raging *Tharax* army, coming right at us.

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**"Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile."**

— Albert Einstein

An animal that I have always found very admirable is the bee. Bees will do *anything* to protect the hive.

I’m not just carrying myself now. It’s so much more: the seeds for a world of unity, a legacy of peace.

It’s time for me to protect the hive.

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*I need to buy time*. Time for *Naidra* and *Yomar* to get away.

*If the Tharax want me, here I am*.

I step toward the vast army, slamming the bunker hatch behind me. I draw the dagger from my old, rugged utility belt. Finally, I’m at peace. At peace with my life, my decisions, and the future.

As the steel amends with my ultimate destiny, I hear a faint ring in my ear; the soft melodies and harmonies of yesterday still linger in the embers, drifting in the wind.

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I've reached my final page, my closing sentence. My story is over, but the tale still plays on. This isn't the final chord of the symphony, merely the finale of a movement. Because as long as there are still hearts that crave a better tomorrow and share the same pulse of defiance, the symphony of friendship will always echo another note.