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# Prologue

## Introducing, CAPTAIN FALCON

*You are about to witness... The fastest, most punishing race in the history of the galaxy...*

Captain Falcon looked down at his pass for the Knight League. The first race in the F-Zero Grand Prix would take place here in Mute City. It would be starting soon but...

Cap. put the pass back in his pocket and picked up his helmet.

"*Captain Falcon!*" buzzed his repair droid that wheeled into the waiting hall. "It is almost time for the race!"

"I'll be ready," Cap. promised. "But I have to take care of something first." He put on his helmet and turned down the hall. "Be at the rendezvous point in *exactly* ten minutes!"

Minutes later, Captain Falcon had made his way out of the city and to the desert area beyond Mute City's walls. He'd left his ship behind so that he wouldn't alarm his target, but it seemed like Cap. was expected anyway.

Good think his target was alone.

"Caught up with you at last!" Captain Falcon called out. "Your slimy lizard-butt is mine, creep!"

"Cursed mammal bounty hunter!" the lizard man laughed, pulling out his ray gun. "*You die!*"

He fired off two shots, but the Cap. was faster. Dodging to the side and pulling out his own weapon, in one shot he fried his opponent.

The lizard man screamed as he crumbled to the ground. Captain Falcon gripped his gun as he stood over him.

*Name: Scale Head, Cap. thought, putting his gun away. Criminal file number: SJ-502-Z-4423... Wanted, dead or alive. For: Murder... Reward: 500,000 Galactic Credits. Not bad...* He reached down to pick up the carcass.

"Hold it, Falcon!"

Cap. looked over his shoulder at the man standing above him on the desert cliffs. Samurai Goroh, a large man with terrible fashion sense. It was almost adorable, seeing him with his nerdling army behind him.

"You made a mistake messing around here!" Goroh continued. "This is *my* turf... That's *my* bounty!" He pulled out his sword and pointed it at Captain Falcon. "Back away from that carcass... And I *may* let you live!"

Captain Falcon smiled, hearing the roar of his engine as his ship came swooping up behind Goroh. He stumbled down the short cliff and the ship hovered above him and the Captain. Lights flashed and dirt was kicked up from the pressure of the engine turbines.

A rope was lowered and Captain Falcon retrieved his bounty. "You lose, Samurai!" he called down as the rope pulled him up to the cargo hold. "And I've got no time for losers! See you around!"

"Nobody rips off Samurai Goroh!" Goroh shouted, shaking his fist at Captain Falcon. "I'll get you for this at F-ZERO! You'll pay!"

His shouts were lost in the winds, and soon the Cap. was gone anyway.

*One more stop*, Cap. thought as he threw open the doors to an office on the top floor of one of Mute City's many faculty domes. He stepped into the room and stared down the round man behind the desk.

This man was one of the people who funded the races of F-ZERO, and was one of the reasons Captain Falcon came to Mute City in the first place.

"Don Genie," Cap. said, crossing his arms. "I'm going to ask you to come with me."

"Come with you?!" Don scoffed. "You F-ZERO drivers really *are* crazy--! You must *like* pain!" He picked up his drink and regarded his men beside him. "Throw him out! And... eliminate him!"

They never stood a chance.

Captain Falcon delivered a swift uppercut to the first man to come near him. Then he elbowed the other man in the jaw. Neither of them were able to fire a single shot, and both were on the floor unconscious after just one hit.

"Who *are* you?" Don growled. "You're no ordinary racer!"

"Right, I'm the best," Captain Falcon smiled, pulling out his gun and the wanted poster. It marked this man's reward for retrieval as 15,000,000 Galactic Credits. "At driving *and* at bringing in scum like you. Looks like you're out of luck, old man."

---

*"Hello, to life-forms throughout the universe!"* the announcer shouted over the intercom. His voice rang through Mute City as spectators and racers alike waited for the first race to begin. *"This is the race you've all been waiting for! In just moments, the first round of the F-ZERO Knight League... will be starting at Mute City!"*

*"Now, let's introduce the drivers who are risking it*

*all to thrill you!"*

"I've got this in the bag," one of the racers chuckled as he slicked back his mohawk and pointed to the intercom.

*"Here we have a last minute entry-- **Samurai Goroh** in the **Fire Stingray!**"*

Goroh pumped his fist, psyching himself up for the race.

Falcon didn't want to see him here. They might have been rivals now, but they both used to work for the Internova Police Force. Stealing a bounty from him every once in a while was one thing, but Falcon wondered how he'd handle things if his bounty *was* Goroh.

*"Next, **Dr. Stuart**, the skillful driver of the **Golden Fox!**"*

Dr. Robert Stuart smiled confidently. He was a rich man, and flamboyant. Even after the death of his father in the F-ZERO races and earning a living as a Doctor he followed in his father's footsteps and became a racer. While not being the cruelest of men, he'd angered other racers before, either by his childish taunting or simply beating the wrong people.

He could be the target as well.

*"Here's that wild-running killer, **Pico**, in the **Wild Goose!**"*

Pico was a hitman, someone who obviously had a criminal record and wasn't afraid to show it. No one quite knew where this creature came from, or even what he was, but his knack for violence preceded him.

He could *also* be the target.

*"And, here we have the driver of the **Blue Falcon**, famous bounty hunter, **Captain Falcon!**"*

The Cap. felt all eyes in the waiting hall turn to him, but he remained still, leaning against a back wall as he watched the other racers.

*"With this line-up, it's going to be some race!"*



Dr. Stuart walked up to Captain Falcon, his helmet under his arms as he pulled on his gloves. "Hey, Falcon!" he called, a smug grin on his face. "Why don't you stick to making money with your gun..." he pointed to himself. "... And leave the racing to *masters* of the art... like myself."

"*AHH!*" Pico hissed, hearing them talk. "Soon the track will be littered with the smoking hulks of my opponents wrecked and burning machines. The thought itself is ecstasy! I can't wait!"

Captain Falcon smiled. He pushed off the wall and started back towards his ship. "You guys better buckle your chinstraps," he warned. "This is where the fun starts..."

The other racers glared at Captain Falcon as he got in his ship, but as the lights flashed in the waiting hall they quickly got to their own ships.

*"Drivers! To your machines! Let F-ZERO begin! Ten... Nine... Eight..."*

The gates opened and the ships were pushed to the starting line.

The crowd cheered in excitement as the race was about to begin.

"This is no game," Goroh muttered as he started his ship. "My butt is on the line!"

"I hate losing to any driver whose blood is red!" Pico hissed, engines kicking on.

"I shall win to honor beautiful women everywhere!" Dr. Stuart chuckled as dust was kicked up behind every ship.

*"Two... ONE... **START!!**"*

"Now you'll learn how men do battle!" Captain Falcon growled.

And the race for Mute City began.

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**Prologue: Introducing, CAPTAIN FALCON**



# Chapter 1

## Race for Mute City

*Pico, Samurai Goroh, and Dr. Stuart. The bounty said it would be one of the racers I'd be fighting against in the Knight League, and I've narrowed it down to those three.*

Captain Falcon looked through his visor at the other racers as they started the engines beside him on the track. He could hear the announcer's voice over the intercom counting down. Lights flipped on down the track, lining their way.

*Mines, Cap. thought. I hope these criminals are as good at racing as they are at killing; I can't collect my bounty from a pile of ashes.*

*If I'm going to find my true target, I need them alive off the track.*

**"Two... ONE... START!!!"**

The roar of the engines blasted as the racers took to the course.

Goroh slipped past the others, taking an early lead. Pico was close on his tail though, catching up quickly.

*Your ship may be faster, Captain Falcon thought. But I'm more experienced.*

*"An amazing move by the Blue Falcon!"* the announcer shouted as Captain Falcon slid through the first corner.

Goroh had used his breaks to take the turn, blocking Pico. But Falcon glided sideways right past them and shot down the road ahead.

Falcon's lead only lasted a moment however, as Stuart sped up.

*Using boosts, Falcon grumbled. Well, this is F-ZERO. Anything goes.*

He switched on his own boost engines, flying past Stuart, giving a smile and a little wave as he hit the ground and kept on going.

*Good thing I don't play by the rules either.*

"Again Falcon steals the lead!" the announcer exclaimed. "The other racers are gonna need some new moves to get past this racing tycoon!"

Not on my watch, Falcon grinned. He flipped the neutral mode on his engines, lending the Blue Falcon glide again as he turned it sideways. But this time he wasn't taking a turn, instead he drove straight through the narrow part of the race, blocking the road completely without slowing down!

"That's playing dirty!" Pico laughed, ramming into the Golden Fox. "I like it!"

Stuart fought for control of his ship, but Pico was pushing him closer and closer to the mines on the side of the track. Pico's short stunt was soon ended however by Stuart dropping power.

Pico went spinning and crashed into the mines, and Stuart ended up ramming back into Goroh. The Fire Stingray unwillingly pushed the Golden Fox until its engines kicked back on.

*"The Wild Goose is out of the race! Medics are being sent to retrieve him but he won't be continuing in this race!"*

"That was a cheap trick!" Goroh scolded. "Stay off my racer!"

Stuart pressed a button on his console and a hatch opened on the back of his ship. A single rose flew from the hatch, snagging the edge of Goroh's windshield.

"Why you...!"

Goroh blasted forward, ramming into the back of the Golden Fox and sending it flying forward. Stuart would've hit Falcon if Falcon hadn't reached the end of the narrow path. He flipped the forward engines back on and shot down the corner right as Stuart came barreling through.

*Halfway there, Falcon thought.*

The road opened up again, but it was now lined with a new obstacle along with the usual mines; razor sharp magnets. The path was built to pull racers off the course, they bring them down and chew them up.

It was uneven too, with the mines on one side and razors on the other, if Falcon pulled to far one he'd run right into the other.

*Same trick won't work thrice, Falcon chuckled, speeding up. But if I can just go fast enough to negate the pull of the magnets!*

*\*CRASH!\**

Suddenly the Fire Stingray was shoving the Blue Falcon out of the way.

"Move!" Falcon screamed. "You'll kill us both!"

Goroh couldn't hear him of course, but it seemed his plan had been the same. He was going to go faster to negate the magnet's pull, even if that meant shoving Falcon right into them!

"For earlier," Goroh chuckled.

With the Blue Falcon skidding at an angle, Falcon could see behind him, and sure enough Stuart wasn't out of the race yet. He was fighting his own racers, posers who were new to the F-Zero way of doing things. Stuart once again pulled back, letting the racers on either side of him to crash into each other.

They rebounded and one was sent flying into the magnets and the other was sent into the mines.

Out of the explosion Stuart came speeding through.

It was a moving pileup; the Blue Falcon tipped almost on its side, the Fire Stingray pushing the Blue Falcon, and the Golden Fox trying to drive *over* the Fire Stingray! With the Fire Stingray tipped backwards as it pushed the Blue Falcon, it made the Golden Fox's job easier.

But Cap. wasn't about to let it happen.

He kicked on the ground thrusters, repelling himself away from Goroh. The flames scorched the front of the Fire Stingray, and the force of it slammed it forward. It flipped, sending the Golden Fox hurdling through the air as the Fire Stingray flipped over itself.

Goroh tried to reclaim control, but his speed and direction made it impossible to avoid pulling away from the magnets. He managed to land upright, but he skid along the razors, chewing up the bottom of the Fire Stingray.

Goroh ejected as it burst into flames.

*"And that's it for the Fire Stingray!"* the announcer laughed. *"Seems like he couldn't get past Captain Falcon's ingenuity!"*

Another corner and the track evened out. The path curved up at the edges, but Captain Falcon kept swerving to keep Stuart from getting ahead.

**"How about I make you a deal?"** Stuart asked, his voice amplified by the radio he installed outside of his ship. **"You back out now, and I promise not to send you spiraling-"**

The Blue Falcon slammed on its breaks, crashing back into the Golden Fox. Stuart gripped his seat as he tried to regain control but the Blue Falcon had already left him in the dust.

"Oh I'll get you for this," Stuart swore as the rest of the racers flew past him as well. He kicked his console.

Captain Falcon smiled as he sped across the finish

line, skidding sideways on a power-slide as he reentered the hanger. He popped open the cockpit and waved to the crowd as the other racers finished behind him.

---

Falcon stepped back into the waiting area, just about to pull off his helmet before someone opened the door.

"Mr. Falcon!" the announcer smiled, stepping into the room. "Mr. Zero, I'm the announcer for the races here! I'd like to ask you a few *questions* about F-ZERO."

Falcon nodded, sitting back down. "Alright," he said. "What do you want to know?"

Mr. Zero took a seat opposite Falcon and pulled out a recording device. "First, long time viewers *have* to know, who *is*... Captain Falcon?"

Falcon chuckled. "I'm not taking this helmet off," he answered. "As for who I am, well... I'm Captain Falcon."

Mr. Zero laughed. "Of course, of course," he held the recorder closer to Falcon. "But we're looking for a straight answer, not a title."

Falcon stood. "What else do you want me to say," he smiled. "I am who I am, can't be anyone else but that!"

"But-"

"I've got business elsewhere," Falcon said, waving him away as he walked to the door. "I'll be back before the next race."

"Uhhh Mr. Falcon!" Zero stammered, jumping up from the couch. The door slammed shut and Zero lowered the device, sighing. "Very well... I guess we'll get answers some other time!"

---

Falcon walked through the hanger, running over the race in his head.

"*Captain Falcon!*" buzzed his little repair droid as rolled towards him. "*Damages to the Blue Falcon were minor; it will be finished soon.*"

Captain Falcon patted its head. "Good," he said. "Call in the Flyer, I've got somewhere I need to be."

"*The next race begins in a few hours,*" the droid warned.

"Bring the Flyer around," Falcon repeated. "Let's not waste any time then."

"*Right away,*" the droid wheeled off, beeping.

Falcon started for the exit. *Next stop; Mute City Medical.*



Considering how many injuries they usually received during the F-ZERO races, contestants were put in their own wing reserved for them in hospitals. This made it very easy for Captain Falcon to find and single out the people was going to question.

By the time he passed the finish line Goroh had already left for the next race. Falcon meant to wait and speak with Stuart in the waiting room just off the hanger, but he'd forgotten that after the races contestants were offered bothered by reporters. This left Pico, who had already been carried off towards Mute City Medical.

Falcon shut the door behind him, startling the alien as he was getting up from his bed.

"Captain!" Pico laughed heartily, watching Falcon like he would watch prey he planned to eat. "You're not who I expected."

"I came to ask you a question or two," Falcon huffed, turning a chair around and sitting. "Hope you don't

mind me bothering you."

"Ha! Take your questions and through 'em in the wind for all they'll do ya!" Pico cackled, walking towards the door.

Falcon flipped his gun out of its holster and clicked the hammer. "I'm not above using it to keep you here."

Pico nodded and raised his hands, but he didn't drop his smile. "Yes, fine," he sighed. "What do you want to ask?"

"First," Falcon said, putting his gun away. "I'd like to know if you angered anyone recently."

"Besides you?" Pico exclaimed. "Ah, no. None that I can think of, no. Well, none that I've left alive."

"Alright shut up," Falcon warned. "When was the last time you were in Port Town?"

Pico's eyes narrowed, did he know something? "Everyone's been to Port Town," he hissed. "For me, years though. Been a long time."

Falcon nodded, getting to his feet and staring down at the green skinned alien. "How long ago?"

"... Three years," Pico answered. "Went on an engine trade. Sold four ships that weren't mine. Paid in full. Plenty of people done worse."

Falcon nodded. "Thanks for your time," he said, already leaving.

---

*So it's not him, Falcon thought, flipping on the engines of the Falcon Flyer. He had to have been there sometime within the last month... But, just to be safe...*

He punched a few buttons on the console as the ship started flying back to the races. "Computer I want you to look up records of Pico from Port Town, last known sighting."



*\*Beep!\**

*"\*Pico was last seen in Port Town three universal years ago. Pico sold four marked-stolen ships. Pico currently has a bounty on his head for 13,000 GC. No other relevant information.\*"*

Falcon sighed, resting in his seat while the autopilot took him where he needed to go. "Then it's not him."

*And I'm out of time, at least for now.*

Falcon took off his helmet, looking down at the race track as he sat his ship near the hanger. *I need to focus on the races, and I guess Big Blue's next.*

---

## **Chapter 1: Race for Mute City**



# Chapter 2

## Big Blue Battle

The Falcon Flyer sat down in the capital of the water planet, Big Blue. Rumor had it this was the last year Big Blue would be active. Next year, the races would be moved to Odyapes, but they'd still be called the Big Blue courses as Odyapes was still a planet made of mostly water.

Of course, while the races were still here that meant the small city was still as cramped as usual. It took about an hour to get the Blue Falcon from the outskirts of town to the docking hanger for the races.

When at last he arrived, the other racers were already lining up their vehicles to begin. Falcon would have to wait until after the race again if he wanted to speak to Goroh and Dr. Stuart.

"*Excellent!*" Mr. Zero said cheerfully over the intercom. "*We'll begin the race shortly, but first a few words from our sponsors!*"

Falcon pushed his ship to the starting line, just behind the gate.

"So Pico's really out of the races for now eh?" Goroh laughed, sitting on the edge of his ship a lane back.

Falcon stepped away from his ship. "Almost looked like someone had it out for him."

"Sounded awful close to an accusation," Goroh growled. "That was Stuart's fault, not mine!"

"Never said it was," Falcon crossed his arms, leaning against the ship next to the Fire Stingray. "But I've actually got something I need to ask you."

"Ha!" Goroh waved him away. "After this morning?! You're getting *nothing* out of me!" He climbed into his ship, sealing the hatch.

Falcon huffed, kicking off the ship he leaned on and walking back to the Blue Falcon. *Fair enough*, he thought. *But you won't get away from me after the races.*

Looking over his shoulder he could tell the Fire Stingray still had damage it couldn't repair. One good hit at the start of the race, and he'd be out for good.

"*Alright! Racers at the ready!*" Mr. Zero called out. "*F-ZERO's second race, Big Blue will begin in ten... nine!... eight!*"

Falcon closed his hatch and flipped a few switches. His engines hummed and the ship picked up, hovering as the attendants pushed the ships out onto the track. The gate opened and the hanger pulled back, the crowd's cheering muffled from outside the Blue Falcon.

"*Five!*"

"Steal my bounty," Goroh muttered. "But you won't beat me this time!"

"*Four!*"

"I warned you," Stuart said to himself. "You wouldn't get away with that stunt you pulled!"

"*Three!*"

"If I can just take them out early," Falcon sighed. "All I'd need to worry about is the race."

"*Two!*"

Dust kicked up as the other racers inched forward, waiting. The ground swayed with the water hitting against it.

"***ONE!... START!!***"

***\*BAM!\****

Every engine fired off at once.

Falcon let the ship beside him pass, and rammed directly into Goroh. Not even two second in and Goroh was

slammed into the side wall, the other racers zipping passed him as his ship once again burst into flames.

"*And Goroh is out early!*" Mr. Zero exclaimed. "*That's gotta be embarrassing!*"

Falcon sped up, charging through the other ships. A few of them seemed a bit more courageous after the first race, as if they *just* realized there weren't any rules, but others seemed more deterred than before for the same reason. They were picking each other off, and in the first leg of the race, the roster was cut from sixteen to five.

Falcon waited for the first turn, a wide area, before making his own move. He kept his eye on the Golden Fox tailing him, and swerved to the side. As they came to the corner the other three racers made the turn easy, but Falcon cut off Stuart. The Doctor had to stop his ship completely or else he'd have crashed into the Blue Falcon.

But he wasn't out of the race yet, just behind.

Stuart picked up his engines again and flipped the turbo switch. He shot down the road, keeping steady on the narrow path as the track ducked under water.

Falcon was already raging ahead of the other combatants, once again picking up speed to avoid being pulled into the magnetized razors on either side of him. The others were catching up however, and Dr. Stuart had made his way back.

But then they reached the part of the track Falcon had been preparing for for a while.

The road zigzagged back and forth. Most racers would move with it, planning on using their side engines to push them in the right direction, but Falcon always made a plan for things like this. There was a reason he was the greatest racer in the F-ZERO tournaments.

Falcon kicked off the right side ground engines, and used the left engines to kick the ship on its side. Then he activated the rear engines, turning it up to full blast.

The path was narrow, but there was just enough room to make a straight powerful shot through the zigzagging road. He looked behind him; two others stalled, probably wondering how Falcon managed to pull off yet another impossible feat. But one of the new racers was gone, and judging by how quickly Stuart was gaining, Falcon suspected he'd done something to them.

*Not much race left*, Falcon thought.

He came out of the zigzagging tunnel like a rocket, kicking on his ground engines and leveling out as he took the next turn. He laughed, looking behind him again. As fun as it was, he realized he'd been just enough ahead this whole time, it felt boring.

But as they came out of the water, the track leading back up to the surface, Falcon saw his chance to give the audience a little entertainment. There was an 'ice' patch.

Basically, it was one great big magnetic plate that repelled the ships upward. You lost traction and it simulated ice, making your ship slip around with little control.

*Like bumper cars*, Falcon chuckled.

**"Captain Falcon!"** Stuart shouted through his speakers. **"You're messing with the wrong man!"**

Falcon smiled. As they drove out onto the 'ice' he slammed his breaks and spun. Stuart meant to rush passed, but Falcon was counting on it. The Blue Falcon crashed into the Golden Fox, sending it reeling across the 'ice'. Stuart rattled in his seat and Falcon ended up driving backwards down the track. He saluted, giving Stuart his own smug grin.

Then the last racer came through.

Their ship crashed into Stuart's as well, not having expected the slick ground. Falcon watched as the ship flipped over and over, eventually crashing into the far wall. Stuart was still spinning out of control, but Falcon spun his

ship back around to face the right direction.

**"Get back here!"** Stuart shouted.

"Try again next time!" Falcon laughed, considering getting speakers for his own ship.

A moment later he crossed the finish line, gliding back into the hanger with the sound of applause greeting him.

---

"Captain Falcon!" the familiar cheerful voice of Mr. Zero called. He held up his recording device again. "You seemed pretty adamant on destroying your opponents; any comments?"

Falcon stepped down from his ship, looking Mr. Zero in his cyborg-enhanced eyes. "Let me put it this way," he said, turning to the camera drone flying beside him. "There are two types of racers; me, and the losers." He grinned and waved them off. "You can quote me on that."

"You heard it here folks," Mr. Zero smiled. "Captain Falcon, racer extreme! No opponent is too much for him! I wouldn't be surprised if he won this whole tournament, and the Queen and King Leagues that follow! If the other racers were smart, they'd drop out now and save him the trouble!"

Falcon shook his head, walking through the hanger as he looked for Goroh. He knew he wouldn't want to talk, but while he had time he needed to do the job he was here to do. Once again however, he was redirected to a medical station. At least this time it was just at the back of the racing hanger.

---

As soon as Goroh saw him he threw a tray at

Falcon's head. He missed of course, but that only made his temper worse.

"Relax," Falcon scolded. "Just wanted to say hi."

"Shut up and get out," Goroh growled. "I got *nothing* to say to you!"

"I needed you alive," Falcon said bluntly. "Couldn't risk you dying in the race before I had a chance to speak to you. I knew if I got you out early you'd be fine enough and have time to fix your ship before the next race. You should be thanking me."

Goroh shook his head. "They can't hold me here," he barked. "I'm leaving!"

He tried to move passed Falcon, and the door opened. A nurse froze, seeing the angry looks on the racer's faces.

"We'll need a minute," Falcon warned, shutting the door again. He blocked Goroh's way. "I just want to know when the last time you were at Port Town was."

"I was there a month ago to pick up some things for the race," Goroh answered, glaring up at Falcon. "What of it?!"

Falcon shook his head. "And what exactly did you 'pick up'?"

Goroh opened his mouth to speak, but instead he smiled, crossing his arms. "You're interrogating me?" he scoffed. "You're after a bounty, huh?"

"Maybe," Falcon answered.

"I ain't answering," Goroh said. "Seems to me like you don't even know who you're after. Well, I know it's not me, so you'd best either get out of my way, or I'll put a bounty on *your* head!"

Falcon grabbed Goroh's arm, preventing him from leaving. "What did you steal?"

"Who said anything about stealing?" Goroh ripped his arm away. "I got my ship legitimately! I told you, I

went to pick it up, simple as that! Even paid through legal systems! Now let me go so I can get back to the race before it starts!"

Goroh stomped away and Falcon let him pass.

*Paid through legal systems, Falcon sighed. If I find that you're lying...*

—

"Computer, search for Samurai Goroh's payment records in Port Town."

*\*Beep!\**

*"\*Goroh paid through the Galactic Banking Federation to purchase the Fire Stingray from an Antonio Guster... Searching... No information available on where Antonio Guster purchased Fire Stingray originally. Goroh currently has no known bounty on his head. No other relevant information.\*"*

Falcon sat back in his seat on the Falcon Flyer. He was headed to Sand Ocean, the location for the next race. "What non-relevant information did you find?"

*"\*Goroh has been seen on numerous occasions with Antonio's sister, Lisa, AKA Lisa Brilliant.\*"*

Falcon laughed, shaking his head in disappointment. "That can only end badly," he sighed. "... Computer, just so I can get ahead of myself for once; when was the last time Dr. Robert Stuart was seen in Port Town, and what was he doing there?"

*\*Beep!\**

*"\*Stuart was last seen in Port Town a month ago. There is no known bounty on Stuart's head... Searching for relevant and irrelevant information pertaining to Dr. Robert Stuart... No information found.\*"*

"What do you mean no information found?" Falcon asked.



*"\*No information found.\*"*

"Well that's helpful," Falcon sighed. He punched in a few commands on the console. "There's time before the next race... What say you we make a little detour?"

*It's clear now that there's not going to be anything useful in the data records, Falcon thought. And I know Stuart won't be willing to cooperate with me after what I did in the races. So I guess I'm just going to have to go and search for answers on my own.*

Falcon set course for Port Town.

---

## **Chapter 2: Big Blue Battle**



# Chapter 3

## Detour to Sand Ocean

*"Name: Unknown. Criminal file number: Unknown. Wanted dead. For: damage to property, theft, murder, and grand arson."* Falcon sat his glass down on the counter. "No anyone that fits that?"

"Nope," the bartender said, shaking his head. "Too vague, could be anyone. All I could tell from that is that they're dangerous."

Falcon nodded. "Only other thing I got, was that whoever it was would be racing against me in the Knight League."

"Where'd you find a bounty like that anyway?" the bartender asked, cleaning the counter and putting away Falcon's glass.

"Didn't find it," Falcon answered. "Someone sent me a notice."

"Someone?"

"It's not my first anonymous bounty," Falcon explained. "Some people don't want others to know they'd do something like this. But at the same time, there are those who wouldn't want to go through the Internova Police Force either, simply because they don't do what it takes to find these criminals."

"You'd know all about that," the bartender chuckled. He dropped his smile seeing the bitter look on Falcon's face, or at least the thin line that was Falcon's mouth. "You still where the uniform."

Falcon sat back in his seat. "It used to mean

something," he muttered. "... Thanks anyway, I should get back before the next race starts."

"Of course," the bartender nodded.

Falcon got up and left the bar, stepping outside to look up at the towering skyscrapers and office pyramids. Port Town was a busy site, with a lot of people coming and going, so there had to be *someone* who knew *something* about this bounty.

*Maybe I have to take back that rule about anonymity,* Falcon thought. *I can't work with nothing.*



An hour later and Falcon was back on his island.

*My ship's computer can only access the UniNet,* Falcon thought, entering his home. *But using my equipment here...*

He stepped down to the basement, a large white steal chamber, lined with computer terminals and ship schematics. "Computer, start up!"

*\*Beep!\**

Falcon sat down and the screens lit up, a holographic console buzzing on in front of him. "Open the message sent to me about my current bounty."

The notice appeared on the main screen.

"Can you trace it to its source?"

A smaller screen beside it clicked on, coding hacking into the message.

*"\*The message was sent from several different sources. The message was sent from zero sources. The message was sent from several sources, relayed through different channels. The original source seems to be hidden behind walls of data. It will take time to find a conclusive answer.\*"*

Falcon sighed. "Right," he said. "Tell me as soon as

you've got an answer. I need to make it my next race." He stood to leave but the computer beeped again.

*"\*There are hidden encrypted files locked within the message, though it does not seem to have been intentional.\*"*

"What does that mean?" Falcon asked.

*"\*Whoever sent the message must be someone of high intellect, however it appears they've made mistakes.\*"*

Falcon nodded. "Tell me what you find."



The thing about space travel was that day or night could last forever depending on your timing. It seemed for Falcon that for the moment he stuck in a never ending morning, judging by the sun just beginning to rise on the horizon as he docked in at Sand Ocean.

*Maybe I had more time than I thought,* Falcon figured, making his way to the hanger in the Blue Falcon. *At least the streets are empty.*

When he arrived at the hanger he noticed that not many other racers had shown up yet. He wondered if they were all afraid of him after what Mr. Zero said, or if it was just too early in the morning for them. Either way, he had time to kill, and he knew enough about Dr. Stuart to know that he *would* be here early.

And after a look around Falcon found the Golden Fox sitting at the starting line, waiting for the race to begin. But it was empty, so Stuart wasn't here, just nearby.

Considering this planet was pretty barren, there wasn't a lot here. Just in this small city, there were a few housing areas, the docking bay, the racing hanger, and the short hotel for the racers. If Stuart wasn't here, he was at the hotel.

*I have time now I think,* Falcon thought, walking

down the long desert streets. *Just wish things were closer together.*

---

He kicked the sand out of his boots and brushed off his pauldron as he opened the swinging door to the hotel. "I'm looking for Dr. Stuart," he told the man at the desk. "He's a fellow racer."

Falcon was redirected upstairs, but before he reached his destination he found Stuart in the elevator.

"Ah, Falcon," Dr. Stuart grimaced. "Just the man I *didn't* want to see."

Falcon stepped into the elevator, letting the doors shut behind him before Stuart could escape. "I just want to talk," he started. "I was in Port Town recently, trying to find a lead on a bounty. Your name came up, heard you were there recently. You wouldn't happen to know anything about it, would you?"

"Don't take me for a fool, Falcon," Stuart warned. "I have friends in high places, and I know you've singled me out along with Pico and that Samurai. But let me tell you something," he waved a finger at Captain Falcon. "I'm not your target, nor your enemy. On the circuit we are rivals, yes, and if you continue your childish behavior I *will* retaliate, but I am not your enemy."

"I just want to know what you were doing in Port Town," Falcon sighed. "That's all."

Stuart looked at the elevator doors as they opened behind Falcon. "I was investigating my father's murder."

"Murder?" Falcon asked. "I thought it was an accident."

"My father was the greatest underground circuit racer," Stuart growled. "He wouldn't have been killed like that..."

"Well?" Falcon asked. "What'd you find?"

"None of your concern," Stuart hissed. "Is that all you wanted? I've nothing else to say. I've done nothing wrong, and if your only reason for being here is to collect some bounty then I suggest you get lost."

"You're the last possible suspect for this bounty," Falcon pressed. "I've already confirmed it's not the other two, but you seem suspicious to me, so if you want to prove that you're not my target I suggest you come clean with whatever it is you're hiding."

Stuart glared at Falcon, neither one of them moving. Falcon crossed his arms, waiting.

"My father had dealings with a man before his death," Stuart whispered angrily. "I'm trying to find out who, but as of right now, I don't have any leads." Now he waited for Falcon to make a move.

Falcon stepped aside. Stuart tilted a bit on his feet, eventually moving passed him. Standing in the door though, he stopped. "I suggest you take a long hard look at yourself in the mirror," Stuart suggested. "I think, you're being played. And if you're not here for the races, if you're not going to take this seriously, then I suggest you leave; just quit while you're ahead."

"Just one more thing," Falcon added as Stuart entered the hall. "Regardless of my intentions for being here, whatever your intentions for winning are, I'm going to race. If you're not my target, fine, but I was put in the race for a reason other than that, so I'll win."

"Of course," Stuart scoffed, half smiling. "Of course you'll win. Who would dare oppose the great *Captain Falcon*? You said it yourself; it's just you and the losers, right?"

The door shut on Captain Falcon, Stuart walking away.

---

*"Welcome back folks to the exciting third race of the F-ZERO Knight League!"*

Falcon's engine hummed behind him. He was placed at the back of the race behind the seven other combatants. Goroh was at the head of them, with Stuart close behind.

*They could be lying, Falcon thought. Easily.*

*"We're halfway through today's events, so to those of you at home on other planets, thanks for sticking with us, join us on the UniNet to find out how to get here in person. But for right now, let's get these racers ready! Shall we?!"*

The hanger gate open and the walls pulled back as the ships were pushed out.

*"Ten... Nine..."*

Falcon shut his eyes, trying to wrap his head around everything. He knew it wasn't Pico, his story checked out, and so did Goroh's. He hadn't had time to confirm Stuart's story, but he didn't seem like the kind to lie about something as serious as his father's death.

*"Six... Five..."*

And the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to know who sent the bounty in the first place.

*"Three... Two!"*

*"I think, you're being played."*

Falcon shook his head, focusing on the track ahead.

*"ONE!... **START!!**"*

As the ships set off yet again, the force of the engines kicked up a sand storm in their wake. The old rusted pipeline path they followed creaked beneath as they roared down the track.

Falcon kept his eyes on the other racers, watching them as they tore over sand dunes. The newer racers were starting to get the hang of things, bumping each other like

some kind of game. Goroh seemed agitated though, furiously trying to get passed them without risking his own ship. Falcon figured he'd had enough of being blown up.

As for Stuart, he was taking things slow like Falcon. Most likely he was waiting to see what dangerous stunts he pulled this time around.

*Depends, Falcon thought. You plan on getting in my way again?*

The ships rounded a corner and Falcon glided in front of the others, testing them.

*"If you're not going to take this seriously, I suggest you leave."*

Falcon scoffed, looking over his shoulder at the Golden Fox. Stuart was making no attempts to pass. I'm not trying?

Falcon hit the boost, ripping passed the rest of the racers and jumping into the lead. He took the sharp turn like the expert he was and kept going, leaving the others in the dust.

*It's not even a challenge anymore, Falcon sighed, easily moving around the rough magnetic ground. It's like you're not even there.*

It really was just him and the losers, no one else could compare! It wasn't like he was even showing off, he was just better at racing. He half wished there was someone else as good at it as him, then it'd be a challenge.

*Whoever I'm after was racing against me in the Knight League, huh?* Falcon chuckled, picking up speed and rounding another corner. He launched over another dune. *Might as well just be racing against myself.*

He could see the finish line now, swinging around the last turn. It was too easy; everyone else was just too scared now.

*\*BASH!\**

The Blue Falcon shuddered.



Falcon gripped the console, cranking his ship back in the right direction. In front of him, Stuart was storming forward. He'd used his boost engines, and rocketed passed Falcon.

He'd waited until the last stretch, when Falcon no longer had time to regain the lead.

Falcon grit his teeth and slammed on the breaks as he slid into the hanger after Stuart. *You win this time*, he admitted. *You just got in my head*.

Stuart waved to the crowd as he exited his ship. The other racers piled in, Goroh coming in dead last.

"Dr. Stuart!" Mr. Zero called, jumping in front of the others trying to speak to him. "After two humiliating defeats, you've finally pulled out a win, how do you feel?"

Stuart looked down at Falcon from his ship. "He was so busy expecting to win," he smiled. "I guess he just... forgot there was more than him."

Falcon crossed his arms, staring up at Stuart.

---

### **Chapter 3: Detour to Sand Ocean**



# Chapter 4

## Truth at Death Wind

*\*Beep!\**

...

*\*Beep!\**

...

*\*BEEP!\**

Falcon stepped into the Flyer, grunting as he took his seat at the console. The small screen in front of him blinked, signifying his home system trying to contact him. "Yeah... Yeah. What'd you find?"

*"\*The signal source was traced back to Mandrill 4,\*" the computer beeped. "\*Trying to hack the servers in the usual UniNet system proved to be a failure. However, after decrypting the accidental internal coding, I have discovered the origin is in fact from Mandrill 4. Upon further analysis, it also seems as though the 'accidental' coding wasn't as accidental as first believed.\*"*

"So, they wanted me to find that," Falcon mumbled. "They wanted me to trace it back to them, why?"

*"\*Unknown, but I suggest you move quickly; the next race will be starting soon.\*"*

The computer clicked off and Falcon kicked the ship into gear.

*Mandrill 4, Falcon thought. Why do you want me to go there?*

Mandrill 4 was a lot like Earth; many different cities spread through the surface, each one somehow completely different from the last. Most alien planets seemed to develop consistently worldwide, but this place was different. And of all the strange cities on Mandrill 4, Falcon ended up tracking the signal to the worst place of all.

*This must have been what Chicago looked like in the 22nd century, he thought, hovering over the city in the Flyer. Like they stuck a bunch of LEDs to a trash can and called it good.*

He heard gunfire echo in the still air. Kids ran through the streets, carrying weapons, but they didn't seem to pay Falcon any mind. This was a world gangs came from regularly. It may have developed similarly to Earth, but the differences were clear.

Knowing this was just the way things were here, Falcon kept to the shadows, tracking the signal his computer gave him. It led him to an old garage building on the south end of town, the door locked.

Falcon pulled out his gun, ready to blast open the lock, when the door beeped. He put the gun away as a screen flickered on beside the keypad. An image of a three toothed skull showed, and the door unlocked.

Throwing open the door he was greeted with a sight he'd seen several times before, but never to this extent.

Bodies, everywhere. Each one chopped up and hanging from chains. In the center of the ring of victims was a computer, the screen showing the message that had been sent, and a new one recently written.

*"\*Captain Falcon... You paying attention yet?\*"*

Falcon shook his head, walking away. As he stepped back outside he channeled through his helmet com to call the IPF.

---

*What am I missing?* Falcon thought, setting the Flyer down at Death Wind. *Someone sent a message, and they were killed. Was it a trap, or was I just too late to save them? Who killed them, and who really hired me? And on top of that, who am I really after?*

*The bounty, or the murderer?*

The more he looked into this job, the less it added up. But one thing he *was* sure of, was that it involved the F-ZERO races, and whether it involved the other racers or not, it's what he needed to focus on for the time being.

So he waited, sitting in the Blue Falcon, counting the seconds down until the race started. He could hear the roaring winds outside the hanger gate. The other racers chatted around him, those that were left anyway, only four.

Stuart seemed to be in a similar mindset as Falcon, sitting quietly in his ship, ignoring everyone else.

Falcon growled at himself, too many questions in his head for him to focus. He lifted up the hatch and stepped out, stomping over to the Golden Fox. The hanger was suddenly quiet around him, only the people too far to see him still talking.

He thumped on Stuart's ship, telling to get out. Confused, Stuart rises out from behind the ship's windshield, looking down at Falcon.

"Mandrill 4," Falcon barked. "Do you have *any* connections there?" His voice echoed loud enough that those still talking took notice.

"Getting desperate for answers?" Stuart asked.

"Do you or do you not?"

"No," Stuart answered. "I don't think I've ever been to Mandrill 4-"

Falcon walked off, only having cared for the answer, not the explanation. A mechanic backed away from

Falcon as he got back in his ship.

*It's not Pico, Falcon thought as the match closed above him. It's not Goroh, it's not Stuart...!* He pounded his fist on the control console. *What did I miss?!*

*"Alright!!" Mr. Zero cheered as the intercoms came on. "Here we are at the semifinals of the Knight League! Only four racers remain, and only two will be continuing to the final race! So racers, try your hardest and give the people the show we've all been waiting for!"*

Falcon took a deep breath, waiting for Zero to finish the announcements. He could worry about the job later, right now he *had* to win the race!

The hanger pulled back and the gate opened as Mr. Zero started counting down. The storm winds rushed in, but anyone not in a ship had already gone to cover. The viewers were safe behind their storm proof glass, blissfully unaware of the troubles of the racers, only watching for amusement without understanding.

They'd probably never know what it meant to be an F-ZERO racer, what it meant to put your life on the track.

*Let them make their bets, Falcon thought, gripping the controls. Let them play their games...*

*"Three..."*

*I'll show them all...*

*"Two..."*

*What it really means...*

*"One!"*

*To be an F-ZERO racer!*

***"START!!"***

Falcon didn't bother waiting this time.

---

This track was straight and narrow, only four turns; just like the old-school Earth races. Except this track had

three hundred mile-an-hour winds that could blow you right off the track if you weren't careful, or directly into the landmines and rough spots if you weren't lucky.

This meant nothing to Captain Falcon.

He grit his teeth and fought against the straining winds that threatened to tear his ship apart. The three other racers were merely spots behind him. They weren't about to give up, but their determination was lost on Falcon. He knew he'd win.

*Race against me in F-ZERO, Falcon thought, taking the first turn. He flipped on the boost, rocketing forward. Was it someone other than those three? Should I have looked more closely at the new entries?*

He shook his head. *No, he decided. Their backgrounds were easy enough to find. I singled those three out because their histories were riddled with holes or crimes. But after this new information...*

The next turn came up quick but he didn't stop for it. Sliding into the wind he swung sideways and powered on.

*Maybe there isn't a target, Falcon growled. It's not those three... The people who were killed had to be the ones who sent the message, but why? Were they working for who killed them? Were they hiring Falcon to save them, or to trap him?*

*"\*Captain Falcon... You paying attention yet?\*"*

He tried to calm himself, piece things together.

The message was sent by an anonymous user.

His target was meant to fight against him in the Knight League.

Where the signal was tracked to, the people had been killed.

Falcon shook his head, not understanding the purpose of it all. There was no motive, there were no answers! And this wind was the most annoying thing of all!

It felt like it was pushing him back, slamming him towards either side of the track. It was easy enough for him keep moving straight, but he kept losing concentration.

*Not that it matters, Falcon sighed. I'm too far ahead of the others anyway.*

He rounded the third corner.

*Let's try working backwards.*

The people who had been killed, he remembered them as it was a hard sight to forget. They looked young, possibly a local gang, most likely high school students. Falcon knew that with the right help they could've easily bounced the signal around as they had, but something felt off about it as a whole, the message especially. The coordinates were placed there on purpose, so he was meant to find them. That had to mean that those kids were placed there as a second message, but that they also weren't the ones who sent the original.

So who sent the original?

He didn't have an answer for that, he'd have to figure everything else out first.

He could see the hanger in the distance as he rounded the last corner.

Now that he had one answer though, he moved onto the next: Who was he meant to find? Who was it that was racing against him that was secretly his target? Who was the bait in this game of cat and mouse?

*"Of course you'll win. Who would dare oppose the great Captain Falcon? You said it yourself; it's just you and the losers, right?"*

*"I think, you're being played."*

He heard Stuart's words echo in his ears over and over again, and it finally clicked, now his own words haunting him.

*You just got in my head.*

*Might as well just be racing against myself.*

*...Racing against myself...*

*This whole time, I wasn't trying to find someone else. It was always about me. I was the target!*

Falcon shut off the engine, skidding to a stop and turning on the ground magnets so the winds wouldn't blow him away. The hanger was right in front of him, but he hadn't crossed the finish line.

*"What's this?!" Mr. Zero exclaimed. "Has the Blue Falcon malfunctioned?! What's going on?!"*

Falcon waited, eyes shut tight as the other racers zipped passed him. They all crossed the finish line, and Falcon finally got out of the ship, still in the middle of the track. Standing in the cockpit he looked up at the cameras zooming in on him.

He held his hand up facing the camera, then clasped his fingers together and pointed at himself. The universal signal for "Bite me."

*"Well," Mr. Zero chuckled. "No need to translate that! But it seems that Captain Falcon is out of the races..."*

...

...

...

*"\*Captain Falcon... You paying attention yet?\*"*

---

## **Chapter 4: Truth at Death Wind**





# Chapter 5

## Silence at a Stalemate

*Blue Falcon stalls! End of Falcon's racing career?*

*"\*Falcon is no longer eligible to race in the F-ZERO Finales!\*"*

*"Did you hear? Falcon actually lost in the semifinals!" "I bet he lost on purpose." "Nah, that Stuart guy cheated; he probably bought Falcon and told him to lose!"*

***Final race in F-ZERO to be held on Silence***

*"Can't believe Falcon's not gonna be in the last race!"*

*"F-ZERO's not even worth watching anymore."*

*"They should just cancel it now, or at least cut out that other guy and put Falcon back in."*

*"It's not fair! His racer stalled, right? They should give him another chance!"*

***Falcon refuses Interview!***

*"Maybe he's just done with racing altogether?"*

*"I saw the recording, Falcon was kinda rude!"*

*"The fall of a great hero, just sad."*

***Stuart VS Falcon, the match that will never be***

*"Wouldn't have been worth it anyway."*

*"At least we know Stuart knows what he's doing!"*

*"Falcon may be gone, but the race is still on!"*

*"Exactly!"*

***Falcon goes missing!***

*"Probably in hiding."*

*"Can't stand to show his face anymore!"*

*"Him and the losers, right? Guess he's finally one of us!" "What?" "You get what I mean."*

...

*"\*See how quickly they've turned on you?\*"*

It had only been a few days, but the public media had blown up with the leave of Captain Falcon. Fans were divided, and the tournament had been delayed as they built off the hype and made Stuart more popular.

*"\*Imagine if they knew the truth.\*"*

Falcon glared. "No," he hissed. "I've had enough! No more games, I'm ending this now!"

*\*BANG!!\**

...

---

*[24 hours earlier]*

Falcon tossed aside the paper. He wasn't in hiding, he wasn't missing either. He was busy; busy trying to find the answers to this twisted riddle!

He still had a few connections back in the IPF, but even though they were willing to help him despite his current bad PR, he didn't feel any closer to finding the person behind all this. Things *had* gotten worse however, with the deaths of the two other racers.

When Falcon disappeared to go after who sent the bounty, the racer who was meant to go into the final race with Stuart was found dead in their apartment. The following day the runner up had been killed on the street.

Someone wanted Falcon in the race, and Falcon knew that someone wouldn't stop until it happened.

*If I could only find him!* Falcon swore, staring at his monitors. *Before he tries anything else!*

There were no leads. He'd searched for every bit of evidence but couldn't find any, it was like this man was a ghost, if it was even a man at all! Even after inspecting several different major crime bosses, gang lords, smugglers, and small time dealers, none had connections to either the racers, the deaths, or anything that would make them more guilty than the crimes they're already known for.

Falcon stood, setting his hand on top of his helmet that sat beside him. *I guess there's just one way to play this*, he decided. *If I can't find you, I'll make you come to me.*

The little light blinked on the galaxy map as Falcon walked away, putting his helmet back on.

Next stop; Silence.



All kinds of people from all kinds of planets were there, waiting for Falcon to make an appearance. Mr. Zero was currently talking to Dr. Stuart about the recent message Falcon sent out to every channel in the galaxy, the message stating that he had something to say to Stuart.

"The two of you have been rivals in the races since the start of the Knight league," Mr. Zero said, holding a mic to Stuart. "What do you expect him to say if he really shows up?"

"Well if he says he'll be here, he'll be here," Stuart smiled. "As for what he'll say when he *does* appear, I haven't the faintest idea. But if he's here to issue a challenge, then he might as well hand me the trophy now. If he thinks he can win after what he's done, he has another thing coming."

Mr. Zero laughed. "Well alright then!" he said, excitedly. "Sounds like you're issuing *him* a challenge! Do you expect to fight him in the final race?"

"It'd be a letdown if I didn't," Stuart admitted. "But it's really all up to... him."

Mr. Zero turned to follow Stuart's sudden dark expression. Behind him, the crowd parted as Captain Falcon stepped into the hanger. He walked straight through, his footsteps echoing as the people were too stunned to say anything.

"There he is!" Mr. Zero cheered. "Captain Falcon! Star player in the F-ZERO races since as long as matters! Mr. Falcon, what is it you've-"

Falcon shoved passed Mr. Zero, glaring at Stuart. "Sorry I'm late," he joked. "Something came up."

"Well as I told Mr. Zero," Stuart started. "If you've really come to race, you can forget it. Even if you-"

"I heard you," Falcon chuckled. "Trophy's all yours."

Stuart's expression went blank and Falcon turned to the camera.

"I am here to issue a challenge though," Falcon declared. "Not for a race, not even for a fight. There's someone out there killing people, and they're doing it just to get under my skin. I don't know who you are, or what you want, but I know it has to do with the races, and everyone's watching this so I know you can hear me. If you want me, come and get me, but I'm not racing in the F-ZERO finale." He jabbed a finger at the screen. "I'll be waiting at Red Canyon. Just me and you."

Falcon walked away, ignoring Mr. Zero who pestered him with questions. Stuart was left standing there in front of everyone. He was stunned, nor excited that he'd technically won F-ZERO by default. He wasn't even angry at Falcon for making a fool of him in front of the galaxy.

No, he was annoyed that he wouldn't be given his fair fight.

*Disappointing, Falcon,* Stuart thought. *You weren't*

*the only one with something riding on these races.*

---

Falcon waited inside the Falcon Flyer at the base of the Red Canyons, dust blowing through the high canyon walls. It wasn't until late into the day that finally a ship appeared in the sky above him. The ship lowered itself, landing a few meters away, and the bay door opened.

*What is this?* Falcon thought, seeing the two armed guards in armor step outside. *Royalty? ... No, something worse.*

Falcon opened the hatch, standing just above the windshield. "Too afraid to show your face?" he called, seeing another armed guard placing a holodevice on the ground in front of their ship.

The one who sat the device down pointed his gun at Falcon and fired immediately. As the tranq stuck in his neck, the other two guards came up and retrieved him from the ship. They drug him towards the holodevice and sat him on his knees.

*"\*Don't worry,\*"* a garbled voice said, coming from the projector. *"\*It's only a mild tranquilizer. You'll be fine.\*"*

"Who are you?" Falcon growled. "Show yourself, not this Vox crap."

*"\*You called me out,\*"* the voice continued. *"\*Did you really expect me to come willingly and cooperate with you?\*"*

"I don't expect you to waste my time," Falcon spat. "But you clearly have something to say, otherwise you wouldn't show up at all... So out with it; what do you want from me?"

The voice laughed, causing static in the projector. *"\*I want you race in F-ZERO,\*"* it ordered. *"\*I want you to*

*play my game. You've caused so much trouble for me over the years, consider this payment.\*"*

"I told you I'm not racing," Falcon hissed. "I don't know who you are, or what I did to you, but I'm not playing your game!"

One of the guards holding him down kicked him.

"*\*Too bad you don't have a choice,\*"* the voice continued. "*\*You'll do as I say, because if you don't, the whole galaxy will know what you did.\*"*

"What?" Falcon scoffed.

"*\*Your darkest secret,\*"* the voice threatened. "*\*The real reason you quit the Internova Police Force.\*"*

For a moment the wind seemed to howl in Falcon's ears.

"... What... are you talking about?"

"*\*Do you know how the people see you?\**" the voice asked. "*\*Since your failure to win one race in the F-ZERO tournament, they've completely turned their backs on you.\*"*

In the holodevice's projection an image appeared; an UniNet article, accompanied with various reactions from fans across the galaxy. On the day of, when Falcon lost the race, they almost seemed like they were still on his side, but after Falcon refused the interview they started seeing things that weren't there. They read too much into Falcon's decision to stay out of the public eye while he worked.

Media was always tricky, one wrong move and everyone would turn against you.

But that wasn't why Falcon did what he did. He didn't do it knowing the people would see him as a hero, that didn't matter.

*That doesn't mean I can let this get out,* Falcon thought. *Their opinion of me might not matter, but I can't do any good if...*

Falcon pushed the guards off his shoulders,

reaching for his gun as he stood.

"*\*See how quickly they've turned on you?\**" the voice mocked. "*\*Imagine if they knew the truth.\**"

"No," Falcon hissed. "I've had enough! No more games, I'm ending this now!"

***\*BANG!!\****

...

Falcon lowered his arm, letting go of his gun.

"Next one won't miss," the guard threatened. "Try anything like that again and you're dead."

"*\*What would you have done, anyway?\**" the voice asked. "*\*You can't do anything from there, you don't even know where I am.\**"

"Shooting the projector would have at least made me feel better," Falcon growled. He shook his head. "No... how do I even know you know my secret? You could just be bluffing."

"*\*We all have secrets,\**" the voice answered.

"That's not an-"

"*\*Douglas Jay Falcon.\**"

Falcon froze. There were very few people who actually knew his name. That was part of the IPF process, erasing the past. If the man on the other side knew that much...

Falcon turned to leave. "I'm done."

"*\*No matter how many people you help,\**" the voice said. "*\*No matter how many lives you save, you'll never justify what you did.\**"

Falcon stopped, looking up at his ship. "Go ahead," he said. "Do your worst. How can I trust you won't tell everyone anyway?"

"*\*Because unlike you, I'm a man of my word,\**" the voice answered. "*\*You race at Silence, and I won't say a word.\**"

Falcon huffed, stepping onto the Falcon Flyer.

"\*Douglas,\*" the voice chuckled. "\*Just tell me one more thing; how proud of yourself were you?\*"

Falcon slammed the hatch shut, the tinny laughter ringing in his head.

---

When Falcon landed back on Silence the city was already abuzz. At first it looked like they were already celebrating the end of the F-ZERO tournament, but when Falcon finally made it to the hanger he learned the truth.

"You didn't send that message?" Stuart asked, surprised.

"No," Falcon growled. "The person I'm chasing did. They want me in the races, killed off those other racers to make sure I'd qualify despite losing."

"So what does he have on you?" Stuart asked. "I thought nothing was going to stop you from staying away."

"He knows something he shouldn't," Falcon answered, watching the hanger attendants bring in the Blue Falcon. "I have to do this to keep him quiet."

"Don't think I'm going to let you win to save your hide," Stuart nodded. "I need this for myself."

"Your father," Falcon acknowledged. "Sorry, but I can't let you win either."

Stuart grinned. "Then I guess I'll actually have to try this time." He held out his hand.

"\*Ladies and gentlemen, the race is about to begin!\*"

Falcon looked him in the eye from behind his helmet. "... Yeah," he huffed, shaking Stuart's hand. "May the better man win."

---

## Chapter 5: Silence at a Stalemate





# Chapter 6

## The Leading Man

The last two contestants sped down the track, pushing passed each other as they fought for first place. The Blue Falcon might have been faster, but the Golden Fox had more strength, so every time Stuart hit Falcon, Falcon had to struggle to get back on the road. Not that it took very long for Falcon to catch up once again anyway.

With no other racers on the track, they were able to race faster than ever before. Soon they arrived at the trick turn a third of the way through. If you made the left turn and cut through, you risked hitting the landmines spread through that path, and then there's the sharp turn just after it. It wasn't much shorter, but if you pulled it off it gave you just enough of a lead to make it worth it.

So of course Stuart took his chance and turned down that road.

Falcon planned for this, as he always did, and took the longer path. He slid sideways, building momentum and waiting for Stuart to be back in his sights. As soon as he rounded the corner he saw Stuart speed out ahead of him.

*He had trouble*, Falcon realized, seeing the burn marks on the back of the Golden Fox. *Shouldn't have risked that.*

Falcon rammed into the back of Stuart's ship, just before the ramp that would have sent him over the rough patch in the track. Stuart spun towards the magnetic ground, grinding across as he watched Falcon fly over him.

*Not fair*, Stuart growled, pulling out of the rough

patch.

They took turns beating each other off the track, trying to dodge the walls during the sharp turns. By the final stretch, both of their ships were badly damaged.

Once again, neck and neck, Falcon's console sparked. *It can last*, he thought. *Just a bit longer.*

Then he heard the beeping. A side screen lit up, and Falcon hung his head, pulling back on the controls. His ship shook and Stuart pulled ahead, just enough to win at the last second.

*You owe me for this*, Falcon swore.

Stuart threw his helmet away, cheering in victory as the crowd in the hanger ran up to meet him and Mr. Zero announced the end of the Knight League.

Falcon simply got out of his ship and slipped away, hurrying to the Flyer.

---

Falcon jumped into his seat and spun around to face the console, tossing his helmet aside as he activated the beacon on his computer. He'd been tracking the voice in the projection since he realized it was a set up, but he knew he couldn't trace it then and there, it would take too long and the conversation would end before he could finish.

So instead he hacked into the signal and copied the internal coding, then traced the path through that on his computer. After that all he needed to do was stall for time and put on a show, waiting for his software to do its job.

And now, he had a marker, a target.

He'd found whoever was out for him.

*You won't get away this time.*

Just then there was a knock on the Flyer's side door.

Falcon jumped down from his seat and opened the door, staring down at Samurai Goroh. "What do you

want?" Falcon asked. "I'm a little busy."

"Heard you lost the race," Goroh laughed. "Seem to be doing that a lot lately. Just wondering why?"

"Didn't need it this time," Falcon answered, already starting to slid the door shut. "Look we'll catch up later, I've got business I need to take care of."

Goroh grabbed the door. "You lost on purpose," he said bluntly. "Not just once, but *twice!* Possibly *three* times!"

"Didn't mean to lose the first," Falcon admitted.

"That's still two races you lost on purpose!" Goroh growled. "I'm not okay with this, especially since you started losing *after* I could no longer compete!"

"Maybe next time you should just try harder," Falcon huffed, shutting the door. He sealed the magnetic lock and pressed a button on the intercom. "***You might want to back away from my ship now.***"

Goroh shook his fist at the Flyer as it lifted off the ground. "I won't let you pull this kind of crap with me in the Queen League!" he promised. "You'll be sorry then!"

Falcon blasted off, away from Silence.

Next stop, Lightning.



Thunder rumbled above him and bolts of electricity struck the tops of towers around him as he flew over the streets of the city named Lightning.

Falcon was close, he knew it. Whoever it was that had sent him on this wild goose chase was in this city. Whoever it was that was threatening to uncover his past. Whoever it was that was jerking him around like this... They were here.

He headed straight for the Shadow district, the cruelest place on the planet. Villains from all over the

galaxy met up here, traded secrets and corpses, money and lives. Falcon couldn't get an exact location, but this would be a good place to start.

The Flyer sat down just outside the crowded hanger bay and Falcon stepped out. Most criminals here had heard of him, plenty of them had been put away at one point or another *by* Falcon, but they all knew that as long as they kept their heads down he'd stay on his original target.

So of course the person he first spoke to panicked.

"You're not taking me in!" the criminal screamed, pulling out a gun. "I don't care how famous you are among the bounty hunters of the galaxy, there's more of us here than there are of you!"

Falcon kicked the gun out of the man's hand, grabbing him by the collar. "Look around you," he growled. "I don't think they care."

The criminal stammered in response but Falcon slammed him against a nearby wall.

"I'm not after you," Falcon assured him. "So don't give me a reason to be. I'm looking for someone else, and they've made it pretty clear they're looking for me."

"There's a *lot* of people looking for you," the criminal cringed. "Lot's of people looking to settle old scores."

"This person would have said something," Falcon pressed. "Talked about actually trying something. Would you have heard anything like that?"

The criminal shook his head. "No, not at all!" he admitted. "I'm sorta new to this whole thing... I don't know much about *anything*, honest!"

Falcon dropped him. "Fine then," he sighed. "But if I were you, I'd stay *out* of this business."

The criminal got up, brushing himself off. "Not all of us get to play the hero." Before Falcon could argue the guy disappeared into the crowd of other criminals walking

the streets.

Falcon started walking to, listening in on passing conversations, trying to find a place where higher end crime bosses would gather. Eventually he found his way towards a lower section of the city, where people had mentioned such bosses, but the way down was blocked by a guard.

"I need to head through," Falcon said. "Any chance you'll let me pass."

"I know you *Falcon*," the guard huffed. "We don't let bounty hunters down here, *or* former cops."

The guard's face was hidden behind a steel mask, but Falcon recognized the voice. "Sounds hypocritical of you, Rick."

The guard froze. "You... you weren't suppose to know me," he hissed. "You'll blow my cover, just stay out."

"Can't do that," Falcon said, turning sideways. "I'll give you one more chance. Let me through."

"I can't," Rick said through gritted teeth.

Falcon nodded, then looked away from Rick, crossing his arms. "Hey is there anyone else I can talk to!?" he shouted. A few people stopped for a moment. "I've got a problem with this guard here!"

"Hey shut up!" Rick barked, pointing his gun at him. "Try something and I'll shoot!"

Falcon grinned but he raised his hands. "So what'll you do instead? Arrest me?"

Rick fired a shot, the blast whizzing passed Falcon's head but he didn't flinch.

"That's a warning," Rick growled. "I'm gonna have to ask you to leave."

"Why are you making this so hard," Falcon sighed. "I was trying to make this easy on both of us." He took a step closer to Rick, opened his mouth like he was going to say something, then grabbed Rick's gun, pulling it away.

Rick stumbled and Falcon pushed him aside. "I'm out of time, I've got business here."

Rick stumbled to his feet but the door to the undercity had already closed, his gun laying on the ground on the other side.

---

It was surprisingly easy to find his way through the undercity, considering after just a few minutes someone called out for him to follow them. She looked like a flight attendant turned assassin.

She led him down a long back alley, neon lights flickering along the floor, the ceiling hidden in shadows. Falcon expected there to be an ambush; for enemies to drop from above and have him surrounded. That didn't happen though, and instead the assassin attendant led him to a blank wall.

She pulled a card out of her pocket and held it out in front of her. A light shone from below, then a wall of LEDs lit up beside her, scanning her. The seamless wall slid open and she motioned for Falcon to follow.

Two guards stood beside the inside of the door, just out of view. If they wanted to attack Falcon would've never seen it coming. The door slammed shut behind him, and the guards blocked his way, but the attendant didn't look back.

Falcon continued following, walking behind her down a long hall with high columns on either side of them. Finally they came to another door, one that was obviously a door, and she had the four guards here open it. She stepped aside, waiting for Falcon to walk in.

She didn't enter behind him, but the door locked, trapping him.

Falcon huffed, keeping a hand on his holster. "Hello?" he called out. "Took a lot to find you, I'd like my

efforts to be worth it."

"I've been keeping an eye on you since you arrived in my city."

Falcon pulled out his gun, pointing it at the other side of the room. There were no lights that far, just darkness. "Who are you?"

"The King of crime," the voice answered.

*Male*, Falcon thought. *Human, most likely large figure*. He clicked off the safety, keeping a finger on the trigger.

"I've gone through a lot of trouble for you," the man continued. "Setting things up."

"Why are you after me?" Falcon growled. "What did I do to you?"

"Your bounty hunting is starting to get on my nerves," the man answered. "You've already eliminated or imprisoned so many of my men... It's getting hard to get work done."

"Too bad," Falcon muttered. "What do you want from me?"

The man laughed. "I want in your head," he hissed. "I want to break you, so completely, that you'll tear *yourself* apart."

"But why!?" Falcon exclaimed. "I take out a few of your people, and you want to torture me with games? That doesn't make any sense."

The man laughed harder. "Falcon!" he chuckled. "I expected more from you." There was a shifting sound, like he stood. "I'm the bad guy, you're the good guy, I don't need a reason to continue being evil. It's just what I do." He stepped closer, just outside the light's reach. "And I'm really good at what I do."

Falcon grit his teeth. "Why don't you step out into the light," he said. "Show me who you are. At least even the playing field a little."

"Oh but I like the darkness," the man answered snidely. "It is my domain after, the shadows. And one day... I'll drag you down with me."

A figure began to emerge from the darkness. First a heavy boot, then a wide chest, a strong jaw, then a set of long pointed horns. The figure's cape was draped over his shoulders. He was a beast of a man, too strong for Falcon to face in a fist fight.

"Who are you?" Falcon asked again.

The man smiled. "You can call me... the Black Shadow."

Falcon gripped his gun tighter.

---

## **Chapter 6: The Leading Man**





# Chapter 7

## Return to Mute City

*"You can call me... the Black Shadow."*

*Falcon gripped his gun tighter.*

*"Oh, you recognize me?" Black Shadow mused, pacing.*

*"I know you," Falcon grunted. "You're the biggest crime boss to date. There isn't any kind of illegal activity you don't have a hand in. Which begs the question; why waste so much time toying with me? If you really don't have a reason, there doesn't seem to be a point."*

*"We all have our hobbies," Black Shadow answered, folding his arms behind his back. "I toy with heroes, and you race with you life on the line. You think what I do is out of character? Why would a bounty hunter, fighting on the side of good, risk his life so recklessly? If you die, who's there to stand up for the little people?"*

*Falcon could hear the mocking tones in his voice, he didn't appreciate them. "What's your point? Why have me race in the first place? I probably would have done so anyway."*

*"Perhaps," Black Shadow admitted. "But you would have won. I'd rather you lost. Seems my plan worked."*

*Black Shadow smiled and Falcon pulled the trigger. The blast whizzed passed Black Shadow's arm.*

*"ARGH!"*

*An armored guard fell into the light, a hole smoking in his back.*

*"Impressive," Black Shadow nodded.*

*"Targeting system," Falcon lied. In truth, the metallic gun caught the glint from the lights, reflecting just enough that Falcon could react. "Nothing gets passed me."*

*"Good," Black Shadow stepped up to Falcon, looking down at him. "I think I've made my decision."*

*"Decision?"*

*Black Shadow grinned. "Consider everything up to this point, your first trial."*

*"First?" Falcon huffed. "What are you talking about?"*

*"I have a job for you," Black Shadow answered, turning away. "But before I explain what that is, I'd like you to complete another task for me."*

*Falcon wanted nothing more than to be done with all of this, take Black Shadow out like any other criminal... But there was no telling how many more guards surrounded him. They'd kill him in an instant if he tried anything. He had no choice but to play Black Shadow's game. "... And what would that be?"*

*"The Queen League," Black Shadow answered, stepping back into the darkness. "I want you to enter it."*

*"... There's more," Falcon said. "What else?"*

*"This time," Black Shadow explained, sitting back down. "I want you to win."*

*Falcon holstered his gun. "You want me to win?" he scoffed. "... Fine... But you'll pay for my entry."*

*"It's already taken care of," Black Shadow said. The door behind Falcon opened and the assassin attendant stepped inside. "Just show up, and win. That'll be all."*

---

*Just show up and win, Falcon thought, sitting in the seat of the Flyer.*

*It had been two months since that day. Two months*

since the end of the Knight League. There were videos all over the UniNet on Dr. Stuart and his incredible victory, but the people of the universe were already moving onto anticipating the next race.

Dr. Stuart promised his return, claiming to win this league and the King League at the end of the year, defending his title of champion. Samurai Goroh was also rumored to be returning, wanting revenge on the other racers. And even Pico was open about his return to the races.

There were a few other returning racers from the last league, but Falcon didn't know them then, and as far as he was concerned they were unimportant now.

But then there was Captain Falcon himself.

Even over Dr. Stuart, people were more excited about Falcon's return. Of course, he still refused taking any interviews, but there were articles in every newsletter hyping his return. People wanted him to make some grand comeback, taking his title back from Stuart.

*Not like I have a choice*, Falcon sighed, looking at his reflection in the visor of his helmet. He sat the helmet beside him on the dashboard, turning his attention to the viewscreen.

***F-ZERO Queen League! First race to be held in Mute City!***

*Tomorrow*, Falcon thought. *Back at it again, tomorrow.*

---

Tomorrow didn't come quietly.

The streets were once again crowded with people, and it was nearly impossible to get the Blue Falcon to the race's hanger. And even when he *did* arrive, he was swarmed by reporters and journalists asking questions

about whether or not he planned to win this time. He was also met with looks of anger and disdain by the other racers who actually *wanted* the spotlight.

"Are you going to give up again?" Dr. Stuart asked as Falcon readied his ship. "Or are you going to actually try this time?"

"I did try," Falcon corrected, not looking in his direction. "You beat me fair and square."

"Believe me," Stuart scolded. "I'd love to believe I'm better than you, but I've looked over the recordings of that last race... you gave up. Why?"

Falcon looked up, leaning on the edge of the hatch. "I didn't need to win last time," he admitted. "You did."

"Are you saying you allowed me to win for my own benefit?" Stuart scoffed.

"Was it worth it?"

Stuart looked up at him, crossing his arms. He thought about his answer for a moment. "... It... was a dead end."

Falcon shook his head. "Sorry to hear that," he said truthfully. "I'm also sorry to say that the same won't happen this time."

"Oh?" Stuart asked. "How so?"

"I mean I won't be letting you win again," Falcon explained. "Can't let that happen."

Stuart turned to look at the hanger doors. Behind him the other racers were getting ready, and attendants were preparing for the track to open. "I don't like this," he growled. "I liked it better when the races were about racing."

"And what do you mean by that?" Falcon asked.

Stuart waved him away, walking back to his ship. "If it didn't pan out," he called back. "You did help me in my time of need. You seem to have similar reasons this time around, I suppose I could return the favor."

He was gone before Falcon could respond, but he knew at least this time he'd go into the races with an ally.

**"Racers!!"** Mr. Zero shouted over the intercom. *"The first exciting race of the Queen League is about to begin! Racers start your ships, and viewers prepare for amazement as star players return for another chance at victory!"*

Falcon flipped on his engines, the ships around him doing the same. The hanger doors were opened and the ships slid out onto the track.

**"3!"**

*"I have a job for you,"* Black Shadow's words echoed in Falcon's mind.

**"2!"**

*"I'd like you to complete another task for me."*

**"1!"**

*"The Queen League... I want you to enter it."*

**"START!!"**

*"I want you to win."*

The racers blasted off down the track.

—

It was the same track as last time- if not slightly altered for use in the Queen League- so each of the returning the racers knew their way around. The newer rookies had trouble keeping up, but Falcon made note of how skilled even they were.

As they made their way down the track though, Falcon focused on just staying ahead. He made the first sharp turn easily enough, skidding passed Pico who was currently fighting off a few other racers. Goroh was tailing him though, using his drift to try and speed passed.

But the ring in the round was coming up quick. There was a break in the path where it split in opposite

directions at 90 degrees either way, and just before Goroh could zip passed, Falcon shifted to the left, then spun and used his boost to fly down the right path.

Goroh nearly slammed into the mines that lined the wall, but managed to pull out just quick enough. Though every other racer also got ahead of him with ease, forcing him into last again.

*The new racers may be skilled,* Falcon thought, riding over a jump plate to avoid the rough patches. *But it's still the same ones causing trouble.*

The track started zigzagging, and Pico seemed to have finally figured out how to get through without crashing. He caught up to Falcon, trying to push him off the road. Falcon could see Stuart behind him, but he seemed contempt for now with holding a steady 3rd place.

*You might want to dodge,* Falcon thought.

He slammed on the breaks suddenly, smashing the back of his ship into Pico's. Pico went spinning backwards and Stuart swerved just in time to avoid it. The Wild Goose crashed into two other racers behind it, partially blocking the road.

Falcon spun passed the final turn, Stuart close behind him. Falcon kept an eye on him, half expecting Stuart to fly passed at the last possible second. It almost looked like he would, the finish line just ahead and Stuart now catching up beside him.

*You're not going as fast as you could be,* Falcon realized. *...But I'm not either, am I?* He activated his boost again and shot passed the finish line, sliding to a stop at the end of the hanger.

The crowd cheered, excited that Falcon had won again in the F-ZERO races. But Falcon himself wasn't focused on that. In the crowd of the hanger, he thought he saw someone, a large figure. They turned around before Falcon could see their face, but it was him; Black Shadow.

*So you came to watch,* Falcon growled.

Suddenly there were lights in his eyes as cameras flashed in front of him. He hadn't even realized he was standing in the open hatch at the top of the ship.

Photographers and newsmen tried to grab his attention, but Falcon had already jumped down and started to walk away.

*You're a big guy,* Falcon thought. *You shouldn't be too hard to find.*

---

After a four hour search of scanning the city and running every kind of targeting algorithm he had, he finally decided otherwise. Somehow, this giant of a man *was* hard to find.

*Fine,* Falcon huffed, giving up for now. He looked at the viewscreen, turning it off. It went dark and so did the cockpit of the Falcon Flyer. *What is it you want from me?*

It couldn't be as simple as just winning. After doing a bit of research after meeting with Black Shadow, Falcon discovered some pretty horrible things. This man was a killer not because it was his business, but because he enjoyed it. It seemed Black Shadow had a long and hidden history with the F-ZERO races, and killing combatants he decided he didn't like.

This man was feared by the almost the entire criminal underworld, and those who didn't fear him simply didn't know of him.

This begged the question of course; what *did* he want with Falcon?

---

## Chapter 7: Return to Mute City



# Chapter 8

## Port Town Showdown

“So are you going to tell what we’re dealing with here,” Stuart asked as Falcon stepped back into the hanger to retrieve his ship. “Or do you plan to keep me in the dark?”

Falcon chuckled.

“Believe me,” Falcon answered, clicking open the hatch to the Blue Falcon. “You’d be better off not knowing.”

“I don’t like owing debts,” Stuart swore. “That’s the only reason why I’m helping you in the first place. That being said, clearly you’re racing for someone other than yourself this time, and I’d like to know who and why.”

Falcon sat on the edge of the hatch opening, his feet dangling in the ship. He looked down at the controls. “It’s-”

*“What did you think you were doing!?”* Goroh shouted. “I should drop you off a cliff for that stunt you pulled! Could’a killed me!”

Falcon huffed, shaking his head. “It’s F-ZERO, Goroh,” he sighed. “You all signed the warranty.”

“That’s not just dirty racing,” Goroh growled. “That’s attempted murder! I’ll have your head for this, Falcon.”

“Get in line,” Falcon responded, dropping into his ship.

Stuart and Goroh stood there for a moment, watching as Falcon backed his ship out of the hanger.

“What’s with him all of a sudden?” Goroh asked.



"No idea," Stuart admitted. "... In the Knight League, did he ever mention anything to you about a bounty?"

"Figured he was going after someone," Goroh answered. "Told him as much, but he wouldn't say who."

"I don't think he knew then."

"And he does now?"

Stuart didn't answer.

"Wonder who it is," Goroh mumbled. "The good old Captain never had a problem taking out a target before."

"Something's going on," Stuart said quietly. "I'm going to get to the bottom of it."

—

As the Blue Falcon finished locking into place aboard the Flyer, Falcon took his seat at the main console. One of the side screens was blinking, telling him he had a message. Opening the file, two things popped up; first, the message, but also a file with coordinates.

Falcon checked the coordinates first, just to confirm what he suspected. They were in fact the coordinates to the base Black Shadow had in Lightning. It was his way of showing that it no longer mattered to him about keeping his location a secret, and of informing Falcon it was from him.

Skeptical of the message, Falcon opened it, reading the subject title.

**You paying attention yet?**

*"I wasn't too proud of that race, Falcon. I expect better from you. You're head's not in the game, and you're not even trying. I want a show! The next race is in Port Town,*

*and I expect you to try harder.*

*I want you to take a few hits next time, rough up your ship before zipping into first. Entertain me."*

*~Black Shadow*

Falcon shook his head in disbelief. This criminal was calling him out now, and making demands of him. *But I don't have a choice, do I?* he thought. *This is the most powerful crime boss in the galaxy, not even the Internova Police Force are willing to touch him... and he knows my past...*

*Is it really that much of a problem if others knew? It's not like I get along well with others anyway.*

Falcon leaned back in his seat, turning off the monitor. He weighed his options, taking into consideration the consequences of either side, and realized how much he hated both options.

*What a lousy situation I've gotten stuck in,* Falcon thought sarcastically. *Fine, you want a show?*

---

Since he had no reason to go anywhere else this time around, Falcon had went directly to the next race to wait for it to start. Though it would still be a few days before the Port Town race actually began.

During that time, Stuart planned to get his answers.

He confronted Falcon at the hotel the racers were staying at, similar to how Falcon had done during the Knight League.

"I believe you were about to answer me before that Samurai interrupted us," Stuart spat, blocking Falcon from leaving the elevator. "What are you racing for in the Queen

League?"

Falcon looked him in the eye, thinking carefully about his answer. "Get in," he told him, stepping back and crossing his arms.

Stuart hesitated, but entered the elevator and leaned against the opposite walls as the doors shut. "Well?"

"A crime boss by the name Black Shadow has information on me I'd rather leave in the dark," Falcon said bluntly. "During the Knight league he'd sent me on a bounty hunt for myself. I tracked his last signal to Lightning- letting you win the League- and he told me he had a job. Before he would tell me the details however he wants me to win the Queen league. If I don't, he'll reveal my past, and I'll never know his end game. He may also decide to kill me and all the other racers in the Queen League just for fun, considering that's what he considers a good pastime."

When Falcon was done Stuart only stood there, trying to wrap his head around all that.

"Well?" Falcon scoffed. "You wanted answers."

"Yeah," Stuart huffed, shaking his head. "That's quite the mess you've fallen into."

"So what are you gonna do with this information?"

Stuart shrugged. "I guess I kind of have to let you win," he said. "Don't I? From what you say, if I don't he could kill us all."

Falcon nodded, the door to the elevator opening. "One more thing," he said as he was stepping out. "He wants me to give him a show this time. He's not satisfied with me just winning; he wants me to give the other racers a challenge along the way."

Stuart looked at the ground. "Well then," he sighed. "I guess we give him a show, yeah?"

The doors shut between them.

---

*"Racers, start your engines!!!"*

The ships hummed to life as the hanger doors opened. The track pulled them out into the race and the crowd cheered with the same enthusiasm they always had.

*Hope you're watching, Falcon thought. This better be worth it.*

*"Three... Two...!"*

*\*BAM!!\**

Everything went quiet as all eyes were turned to the smoldering wreck that had been the Fire Stingray.

Medics were already on the scene, carrying Goroh away from the race. Mechanics began removing the ship, retrieving pieces of it off other racer's ships. After only a few moments it was like it never happened.

*"... Well then," Mr. Zero chuckled nervously. "These things happen in the F-ZERO races! Haha! I'm sure he'll be fine but it's time to start the race! Alright!"*

The ship engines all clicked back on, one after another, like they were waiting to see if anyone else blew up before risking it themselves. When all the racers were ready once again, Mr. Zero continued counting down, but that sudden nervous air seemed to linger.

*"Three... Two...! ONE...! **START!!**"*

The ships kicked off, speeding down the course.

Having been placed at the back of the track this time, Falcon started in last place. All the other racers swerved ahead of him down the narrow path. It was a straight shot so far, but there was almost immediately a rough spot in the way, but only a single jump plate was placed in front of it though.

Each contestant fought against the others to be the one to use the jump plate and get over the rough terrain first. Two racers were knocked out of the way right at the

start, each skidding passed Falcon as he tried to push his own way ahead.

*Of course*, Falcon huffed, clinging as close to the sides of the track without blowing up as he watched Pico reach the ramp first. He flew over the rough patch and a few others followed, Stuart being one of them. Some of the racers got caught by the road, grinding the bottoms of their ships, but Falcon having been in last made it to the ramp with relative ease.

The chewed up racers passed by beneath them as he jumped into sixth place, landing with a crash as he immediately went into the following turn. He passed two more there, having always been better at turns than the others.

But when he reached the zigzagging part of the track things got complicated. Once again the path narrowed, barely allowing for one racer to pass through. Falcon, on his own would have made it passed in a second, but Stuart and Pico were in the way with the other two combatants.

*You wanted a show?* Falcon growled, hitting his turbo. *Watch this!*

He slammed into the back of Pico's ship, ramming it into the back of one of the others. The Golden Goose tipped backwards for just a moment, and Falcon took his chance.

Pushing his turbo boost to the max, Falcon used Pico's ship as a ramp and jumped over the other racers, as well as the next turn. Pico spun out of control, crashing hard, Falcon landed on the other side of the zigzag, sliding into the next turn like a pro, and Stuart continued fighting off the other racers so they wouldn't get ahead of him.

*One more trick*, Falcon grunted, suddenly feeling himself get pulled to the side.

The track had widened, but there were magnets of the sides now, pulling him into the mines. Behind him, a

racer skimmed passed Stuart, charging for Falcon.

*Just a little closer*, Falcon thought, trying to pull away from the magnet. *Get between me and the wall, and I'll break you!*

It didn't work.

Just as the racer was about to pass between Falcon and the wall, the magnet changed sides. In an instant, Falcon was slammed into the other wall by his own speed and the other racer! He tried to pull away but he was too late!

**\*BAM!!\***

Falcon cringed as the wall exploded beside him.

...

But he was still moving.

Falcon continued flying down the path, but he risked looking back for a second. Just before Falcon hit the wall, Stuart had gotten in the way. It could've looked like he was just trying to pass to the audience, but Falcon realized Stuart just his risked his life and place in the race to keep him from losing.

*I'll thank you later*, Falcon promised, shoving the other racer off of him and spinning ahead passed the next turn.

Only two racers left, and neither of them solid competition, Falcon didn't bother with them. Moving through the final turn, he boosted down the final stretch through to the finish line.

The crowd cheered and as always reporters crowded his ship as soon as it cooled, but Falcon just tried to catch his breath.

He was glad to have won, considering the stakes, but he had to make sure his friends were okay.

---

## Chapter 8: Port Town Showdown



# Chapter 9

## Red Canyon Blues

Falcon leaned against the hospital wall opposite the bed that Stuart was sitting on.

"I'm fine," Stuart sighed. "Any word from our friend in the shadows?"

Falcon shook his head. "No," he said solemnly. "He's been awful quiet. Part of me thinks he knows you're working with me."

"Does it matter?" Stuart asked. "Either way he gets his show, and we're still wrapped around his finger. You still get to win, and we all nearly kill ourselves in the process. He wins no matter what."

Falcon turned to look out the window overlooking Port Town. "Yeah," he huffed. "But I don't think he wants me getting help from you."

Stuart leaned back against the pillow. "He wants you to fight against us," he agreed. "He wants you to hurt us yourself."

"Yeah," Falcon muttered. He put his hands in his pockets and continued staring out the window for a moment before backing towards the door. "I'm gonna go check of Goroh."

"Falcon," Stuart said. "I don't like this, not one bit. This job he wants you to do, and what he's willing to do to make you accept it... It's not good for me, especially if I end up getting killed for it."

Falcon nodded. "You backing out of the races?"

Stuart didn't answer, he just kept staring his arms

folded in his lap, thinking.

Falcon shut the door behind him and started walking down the halls. It was always busiest after the races, with doctors running around trying to fix racers who had been injured. Falcon dodged a crash-cart that was being pushed through the narrow halls as he ducked into Goroh's room.

"Well look who got out unharmed as always!" Goroh growled. "Ladies and Gentlemen, the man who wins simply by entering the race, because everything's always stacked in his favor! The Captain Falcon!"

Goroh threw a silver tray at Falcon, but it simply landed at the end of his bed and bounced off, clattering to the ground.

"Glad to see you're alive," Falcon huffed. "Next time you throw a tray though I'm throwing it back."

"Bite me," Goroh spat. "What do you want this time?"

"Nothing," Falcon answered. "Just checking to see if you were alive, that's all."

"I saw that!" Goroh barked as Falcon reached for the door. "The way Stuart swooped in before you crashed! He didn't move until after you were about to hit the mines; meaning he risked a lot to help you win."

"You're seeing things," Falcon chuckled. "He made a mistake."

"No he didn't," Goroh growled. "Don't talk to me like an idiot! I know he did that on purpose, and I want to know why! It's not right, and you know it!"

Falcon was silent for a moment. *If he noticed it, did Black Shadow? Who sabotaged Goroh's ship in the first place? Was that Black Shadow? If I bring Goroh in on things, will Black Shadow go after them as well?*

"Tell you what," Falcon offered. "If you're still around after the next race, I'll tell you then."



"You know I didn't qualify," Goroh said bitterly. "Never even stood a chance..."

"Sorry about the conditions," Falcon apologized. He meant it too, but Goroh didn't seem to care. "With any luck, I won't be in the King League at least. Maybe there won't be as much trouble for you."

"No you don't!" Goroh shouted, stopping Falcon again. "You're racing in the King League! I don't care what kind of trouble you're in, I'm getting a fair fight! I *will* beat you, Falcon!"

*Yeah*, Falcon sighed, leaving the room and shutting the door. *If I live that long.*

---

Falcon stepped into the Flyer, his racer already back on board. Before he could even sit down though, a message popped up on one of the smaller screens. A voice recording, Falcon noticed, opening the file.

*\*Falcon.\**

*Black Shadow*, Falcon growled.

*\*You did good in the last race, not many people noticed Stuart helping you along. Good show, really. But you're pushing it.\** For a moment he went silent, probably to think of what he wanted to say next, or to make Falcon worry about what he was going to say next. *\*These races are dangerous, Falcon. Sometimes, people end up dead... I'll let you decide whether or not that person's you.\**

*\*Click!\**

Falcon leaned sideways in his chair, staring at the hatch of the flyer. He half expected Black Shadow to throw open the door and make a threat in person, but no... Black Shadow was too subtle for that. He played things true to his name; in the darkness.

*So now he wants me to off another racer myself? Or*

*what?*

Falcon clicked the reply button on the message, but the account had already been deleted. Black Shadow wasn't looking for a response; he wanted Falcon to follow blindly.

*I can't hurt anyone else... but I'm not allowed to lose either.*

Falcon looked back at the screens again.

*What move do I make?*

—

"*Hellooo dudes!*" a new voice said over the hanger intercom. "*Names Vic, substituting for Mr. Zero today. Anyway, welcome to Red Canyon! Ah, brings back memories; those were the good ol' days. But I digress, no one wants to hear me prattle on like always, we've got a race to witness!*"

"What accent *is* that?" Stuart muttered, bringing his ship into the hanger.

"Beats me," Falcon huffed, jumping down from his own ship. "But we've got bigger problems."

"Our friend in the shadows?" Stuart scoffed. "What does he want this time?"

Falcon crossed his arms. "He wants me to kill someone in the race today," he said, lowering his voice so only Stuart could hear. "And he's also not impressed with how you were helping stay alive."

Stuart bit his tongue and shook his head. "I hope you're not hear to tell me you're going to kill *me*," he hissed. "... So what's the plan?"

Falcon looked at the hanger door. "Beats me," he sighed. "But if I don't do something, he'll take matters into his own hands again."

"Again?"

"I think he was behind Goroh's ship exploding,"

Falcon said grimly, looking back at Stuart. "He was there, in the hanger, after the race... He could've been there before."

"He was *here!*?" Stuart exclaimed, shifting back to lean against his ship. "And *you* let him escape?"

"I went after him, but he has experience hiding," Falcon admitted. "He was gone in an instant."

"Then what are you-"

"I don't know," Falcon growled. "I can't just kill someone, but I'm afraid of what he might do in response."

Stuart nodded. "Well whatever you're going to do, figure it out. If this man will blow up someone just to show his power, I don't want to stick around to find out what he'll do to someone he's already said he doesn't like."

"Fair enough," Falcon agreed, already stepping back towards his ship. "Until this is over, we shouldn't talk in public. I'll see what I can do."

Stuart nodded and Falcon returned to his ship, the other racers and mechanics crowding the area as the new guy, Vic, announced the start of the race.

*"Alrighty amigos! Let's get started! Are y'all ready for the most grueling of gauntlets? The most dangerous of dashes? A competition of wit, grit, and pure determination to stay in a vehicle moving at about mach 3? Then take your seats, and let us... begin."*

The hanger gate opened and the ships were brought out to the track. Engines heated up and the high canyon walls blocked their view of the race.

*"Three!"*

*"Dos!"*

*"ONE!"*

*"**START!!**"*

They sped off down the narrow path, trying to stay as far as they could from the other racers as they tried to make the first turn. Almost immediately there was another

sharp turn, and a few racers took some damage as they rammed into the walls, two of them didn't make it out.

*Already we're down two racers, Falcon thought, dodging as Pico tried to get ahead of him. But I need to take one of them out myself.*

*I guess you as good a target as any.*

Falcon swerved through the next corner, letting Pico dash passed him. There was a break in the canyon walls just passed the next turn, the track leveled out, and it wouldn't be too hard to knock Pico out of bounds.

But as they made the turn, Stuart seemed to have other plans. He crashed into the Blue Falcon, nearly throwing *him* off the track!

"What are you doing!?" Falcon exclaimed, knowing Stuart couldn't hear him.

Stuart charged forward again, swerving to the right as the path zigzagged side to side. Falcon wasn't sure what Stuart was planning, but suddenly they passed by a magnetic wall. It pulled them both towards the mines lining the race, and Falcon realized Stuart had expected it!

Stuart rammed sideways into Falcon, trying to knock him into the mines.

"Knock it off!" Falcon roared, swerving right, pushing Stuart back.

While Falcon fought off Stuart, a few other racers got ahead of them, using them as shields to stay off the magnets.

"We're both gonna lose!" Falcon hissed. "What are you *doing*?"

Falcon was lost; he had no idea what Stuart was doing anymore. This wasn't usual for him. Stuart had said they wouldn't be openly working together, but he wouldn't do something like this, right?

They cleared another turn and ahead of them was a jump plate. Stuart boosted ahead of Falcon, flying off the

ramp.

And that was when Falcon realized it; Stuart wasn't in control of the ship.

Falcon sped off the ramp after him, using his boost to smash into the back of Stuart's ship.

*I think this makes us even now,* Falcon thought, sending Stuart flying back towards the track.

The other racers kept going, fighting for first place as Falcon watched, falling back towards the ground at alarming speeds.

*What was that you said, Goroh?* Falcon sighed. *I always come out unharmed?*

The Blue Falcon took a nose dive into the ground, the whole ship going up in flames.



Stuart could nothing but watch as Falcon crashed. Only after he himself landed back on the track did he regain control of the Golden Fox.

With still half a race left, Stuart kept going. He couldn't let himself lose after that, but if Black Shadow could control his ship remotely, did he even have a choice?

Pico was in first, half the other racers close behind. Even if he tried, Stuart doubted he'd make it that far anyway.

*No,* he huffed. *I don't have a choice.*

Stuart let his ship cruise slowly, letting the last of the other racers pass by. He allowed himself to fall into last place, just waiting for the race to be over.

As soon as he was back in the hanger, Pico was already celebrating his victory.

*This is wrong,* Stuart thought, looking around the hanger. Mechanics walked around, repairing ships, and medics were bringing back injured fighters... but Falcon

and his ship were nowhere to be seen.

... *Did Black Shadow already get to him?*

---

## **Chapter 9: Red Canyon Blues**



# Chapter 10

## White Land Part 1

"You've really checked everywhere?" Goroh grunted, sitting on the side of his hospital bed.

Stuart started listing off places on his fingers. "The hanger, the repair shop, the hotel, the bar, and I asked around the hospital before coming to see you."

Goroh shook his head. "So he's really vanished," Goroh huffed. "Great, what does that have to do with me?"

"What?" Stuart scoffed. "You're not the *least* bit worried?"

"Why should I be?" Goroh growled. "All he's done is steal my bounties and beat me in races. If he's gone that means I'll never beat him in a fair fight, but at least I'm out of whatever trouble he's been causin'!"

"You-!" Stuart jumped to his feet, but stopped himself before he did anything. "Don't you get it? This is bigger than just Falcon! Black Shadow is behind this, so if Falcon really is dead, he'll move on to one of us to finish the job. And if Falcon's just in hiding, Black Shadow will start killing us off until Falcon comes back. Just because he's not here doesn't mean the trouble's over, it just means now we have to deal with it ourselves."

Goroh chuckled, not even sure what to say to that.

"And I don't think we can handle this ourselves," Stuart finished.

"Maybe you can't," Goroh jabbed, getting to his feet. "But I've dealt with his problems before. Trust me, it's best to just leave it all alone."

Goroh was about to step passed Stuart, but Stuart moved in front of the door. "Where do you think you're going?"

"I've got a damaged ship," Goroh muttered. "Probably gonna fix that."

Goroh shoved passed Stuart and left him standing there alone.



Stuart walked slowly through the halls of the hotel, wasting time before the next race. It was a day or two away still, depending on which planet you were on, but there wasn't much he could do until then.

Finally he took a seat on a bench outside the hotel. Red Canyon wasn't too cold this time of year, but the sand in the air meant most people were off the streets. Being a racer, Stuart was used to harsher conditions, so it didn't bother him much.

"Mr. Stuart!"

Stuart looked up to see the familiar face of Mr. Zero walking towards him. "I'm not answering questions today," Stuart said apologetically. "Sorry."

"Not here for questions," Zero answered, taking a seat next to him and spreading his arms on the back of the bench. "Well, at least, not interview questions. Just wanting to put my mind at ease is all! Think you could help with that?"

"This is about Falcon," Stuart said. "Right?"

Zero nodded.

"I don't know what happened," Stuart answered. "Or where he went."

"Fair," Zero nodded. "But what are you going to do now that he's gone? You've had some luck in the races before, even with Falcon in the way, but now that he's out



of the competition, should be pretty easy for you to win this thing?"

"He's not out of the competition," Stuart corrected. "I don't know what happened to him, but he'll be back."

Zero gave him a sour look. He took a deep breath and slapped his knees, getting up. "You seem pretty sure of that," he chuckled. "Any particular reason why?"

"Because he's Captain Falcon," Stuart growled. "He has a habit of showing up when you least expect it."

"Ha!" Zero exclaimed. "Do let me know when you see him."

Zero walked across the street, a car flying passed, kicking up dust behind it. When the dust faded Zero was gone.

*Creepy bastard*, Stuart muttered.

---

Finally, the day of the last race of the Queen League had arrived. The ten remaining racers waited behind the large hanger doors of the White Land track. Only one thing was missing; Captain Falcon.

Stuart sat on top of his ship, arms crossed as he stared at the hanger doors, waiting for them to open. This had happened before, Falcon not being expected to come to the race, but after his last second appearance then, the racers now were a bit more skeptical. Of course, the last anyone had seen of Falcon, he'd flown off the track trying to keep Stuart from killing himself.

If Falcon was going to make an appearance at all, it'd be a miracle.

But more than that, if Falcon *didn't* show up, it would mean Black Shadow succeeded in killing him. Which meant any one of the remaining racers could be next.

"If you're gonna back out, now's your chance!" Goroh grunted, sneaking up on him.

Stuart dropped down from his ship, now looking back through the crowd of racers and mechanics. "Your ship blew up last time," he told Goroh. "You're not the least bit worried Black Shadow will try something like that again?"

"It's not the first time I've taken a hit like that," Goroh scoffed. "And it won't be the last! There's plenty of people on my back already, what's one more?"

Stuart shook his head. "And everyone else?"

"What about 'em?"

"Are you that selfish?!" Stuart exclaimed.

Goroh grabbed Stuart by the collar before he had a chance to say anything else. "They know what they signed up for," Goroh hissed. "So did you. We all signed the same deal with the devil, I don't have any obligation to feel sorry if you regret it."

Stuart pushed Goroh away. "That deal came with a debt," he said. "Are you ready to cash it in?"

"I am," Goroh said, looking straight at Stuart. "Are you?"

"Of course not, that's why I'm-"

"Then quit!" Goroh barked. "If you can't stand up like the rest of us, then get lost! All you are to them is another slot taken in the roster; they won't think twice if you back out!"

"Goroh-"

"And what's more; stop coming to me with your problems!" Goroh threw a glove on the ground, glaring up at Stuart. "It's not my job to fix it! You and Falcon got yourselves into this mess, and one of you died. If you want to follow him, be my guest! But leave me *out of it!*" He scooped his glove off the ground and stormed back to his ship, waiting for the race to begin.

Stuart didn't get in his ship until after the mechanics left though, waiting outside to do a last second inspection. When they were all gone, Mr. Zero began announcements as Stuart ducked under his ship. Mr. Zero's voice was muffled as Stuart inspected the inner workings of his engine, but he was loud enough that Stuart could hear when the race was about to begin.

Unable to find anything, and hearing the other engines around him kick on, Stuart decided his ship was safe for the time being. He jumped into the cockpit and turned the ship, the engine humming and lifting the ship up.

*"The Queen League is almost over ladies and gentlemen!"* Mr. Zero exclaimed. *"Only two races left, welcome to the semifinals! Racers, ready!"*

The racers started moving forward.

"3!"

The hanger doors opened.

"Oh my god," Stuart mumbled.

"2!"

Every racer froze and the crowd went silent.

"1!"

Hesitantly, and only because they didn't want to get stuck in last, the other racers continued onto the track, moving around the Blue Falcon, already waiting for everyone else.

"But... How?" Stuart mumbled.

**"START!!"**

They blasted off, Falcon taking the lead in an instant.

---

*"...Falcon..."*

...

*"...Falcon..."*

...

"...Falcon!"

*Falcon choked, waking up on a cold steel floor.*

*"I don't like to be kept waiting," Black Shadow grumbled, staring down at Falcon. "Get on your feet."*

*"Not that I don't appreciate being pulled from that wreckage," Falcon grunted, forcing himself to stand. "But why do any of that in the first place? I know it was you controlling Stuart's ship, he wouldn't act like that."*

*"That wasn't me," Black Shadow corrected.*

*Falcon stood there frozen, staring up at Black Shadow who was sitting down a sort of throne at the back of the dark room they were in. It was the same room as before, in Lightning. He'd taken Falcon all the way back here from Red Canyon.*

*"... If it wasn't you, then-"*

*"Well that's what I'd like you to find out," Black Shadow said sternly. "Someone is messing with my work here, interrupting my races... I don't appreciate that."*

*"You have more resources than I do," Falcon growled. "Can't you figure this out yourself and just leave us alone?"*

*"I could," Black Shadow agreed. "But you can think of this as a sort of... side quest, to your current task."*

*"Winning the Queen League under your thumb," Falcon spat. "And now hunting the person responsible for interrupting that?"*

*Black Shadow merely glared down at him. A moment later however, his glare broke into a wide grin. "Yeah," he smirked. "Do that."*

*Falcon took a step forward, but that woman from before, the attendant assassin, grabbed his arm. He turned to see several armed guards behind her as well.*

*Falcon looked back at Black Shadow. "Fine," he mumbled. "Any leads?"*

*Black Shadow leaned forward in his throne. "Ever wonder who runs the F-ZERO races?"*

*Before Falcon could ask any more questions he was dragged out of the room, the magnetic door sealing in front of him as he watched the lights dim in Black Shadow's throne room.*

---

*Who runs the F-ZERO races...*

Falcon had no idea what Black Shadow was referring to. No one man ran the races, it was an organized sport, controlled by so many individual companies that it was impossible to track. To ask him to find one person amidst all of them, one person who had more control than anyone else, would be asking him to do the impossible.

*Perhaps that what he wants, Falcon thought. Keep me busy, and divert my attention away from him.*

Deciding not to let Black Shadow disrupt his focus again, Falcon shoved those questions out of his mind and focused on the matter at hand; the White Land race.

He'd taken an early lead, but these rookies were starting to get a little more adventurous. They were taking risks that most pros have already deemed too unsafe, even for the F-ZERO races. These rookies were literally bouncing off the walls, using the momentum they built up from turns to blast off the corner walls, rocketing passed and sometimes over those in their way.

It didn't help that most of the turns were covered in ice, but there was a new trick as well.

Stuart was coming up quick behind Falcon, who had finally just shaken off Pico who wasn't content with staying behind this time. Pico was still trying to charge after him, but he suddenly stopped, his ship crashing into the ground and flipping.

Stuart and Falcon managed to miss it by sheer luck, but there were batteries in the ground, batteries that sucked the energy from your engine. It took quick maneuvering to dodge Pico's ship, but at least it blocked the path for the time being.

Now Stuart fell behind, letting Falcon pass him. He wasn't sure why he didn't say anything on his return, but what Goroh had told him was still swimming around his head.

*"You and Falcon got yourselves into this mess, and one of you died!"*

*He doesn't want to be connected, Stuart thought. And Falcon's realized talking to us endangers us all as well...*

He didn't like being kept out of the loop, especially with his life on the line... but he was willing to give up the lead if it kept him off Black Shadow's radar.

*I really hope you know what you're doing, Stuart sighed, watching as Falcon slid back into the hanger.*

*"He's done it again folks! WHAT a comeback!"*

---

## **Chapter 10: White Land Part 1**



# Chapter 11

## White Land Part 2

There were only three days until the final race of the Queen League. It was being held in White Land still, so there was no reason for the racers to leave the planet, but Falcon felt twitchy having to wait like this.

He was getting nowhere on this Black Shadow problem, only ever running into more questions. Supposedly, he wanted to hire Falcon for something, but he still hadn't said for what, and the only way to get that answer is to win the Queen League. This of course is easier said than done, considering Black Shadow could throw a wrench in the works whenever he wanted to it seemed. Even if it wasn't him who took control of Stuart's ship, it was still definitely him who blew up Goroh's.

And there's still the matter of what Black Shadow had said before the race at Red Canyon. "*These races are dangerous, Falcon. Sometimes people end up dead... I'll let you decide whether or not that person's you.*"

He showed up like he was expected to at the last race, but would he still be expecting to eliminate a player here? In the finale?

Falcon heaved a heavy sigh and dropped his helmet beside him at the foot of his seat aboard the Flyer. He wondered if it would better to just go in guns blazing, attack Black Shadow head on. He'd fought criminals before...

*But this is different, Falcon thought. This isn't just a criminal; this is a man regarded by the IPF as one of the*

*most dangerous men in the galaxy.*

No, attacking head on would only put more people in danger, and Falcon would have to risk his own life to do it. There'd be no stopping him if Falcon died, he had a feeling he was the only one willing to stand up against Black Shadow at all.

*But I have to keep you invested,* Falcon thought, looking at the map on the view screen. It was a blueprint for the final track. *How do I keep you focused on me?*



Time passed, and at last the day of the final race had arrived. It was always during the last race that the most people showed up, filling the seats just outside the start of the track, or buying a racer drone to watch from home. The hanger was also packed with interviewers, asking each of the racers questions.

The rookies seemed excited, as they usually did, but the more experienced racers knew something was off.

"Hey Goroh!" Falcon called, catching Goroh swatting away the camera drones.

Goroh looked over his shoulder, but ignored Falcon and got back to work tuning up his ship.

"Goroh," Falcon grunted, grabbing Goroh's shoulder.

"Get off of me," Goroh grunted, shoving Falcon back. "Go talk to Stuart if you've got a problem! I told him to leave me out of whatever's going on!"

"That's the problem," Falcon hissed. "No one's seen him today."

Goroh laughed. "So he's disappeared too!" he exclaimed. "Well if he's anything like you, he'll probably turn up at the last possible second."

Falcon shook his head. "Not this time," he said. "I



was hoping maybe you'd seen him, but I guess not."

"The races won't stop without him," Goroh said, turning back to his ship again. "He probably got too into searching for Black Shadow, got himself killed."

Falcon huffed, stepping away.

"Mr. Falcon!"

Falcon sighed, stopping by his ship as Mr. Zero came up to him with a microphone. "Any statement on where you went after Red Canyon? That was quite a show you made of things, waiting outside the hanger like that."

"Where I went is my business," Falcon said. "Now if you excuse me, I've got a league to win."

Mr. Zero stepped in front of him. "Reports say now Dr. Stuart is missing. Anything you'd like to add to that?"

"I'm not his keeper," Falcon answered. "Where he went is *his* business."

"Do you think he croaked under the pressure?" Mr. Zero pressed. "Wouldn't be surprising, considering all the things that seemed to be happening around the races lately. Ships mysteriously blowing up, racers going missing, etc. It's all *very* suspicious."

"Oh is it?" Falcon asked. "I hadn't noticed." He shoved Mr. Zero out of the way, and stepped up onto his ship. "Go back to announcing the races, let's just get this over with."

"Confident you'll win?" Mr. Zero asked.

"If I must," Falcon answered, throwing his arms out and bowing sarcastically. He dropped into the cockpit and closed the hatch, Mr. Zero walking down the lane to the next racer.

---

It took several more hours to finally get the reporters out of the hanger, and then the mechanics had to

finish their jobs, and finally the racers where in their ships. All but one anyway; Stuart was still nowhere to be found.

His ship had been moved out of the way, but they couldn't wait forever.

*"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to the final race of the Queen League! It's a lovely day here in White Land, perfect for the grand finale that gets bigger and better with each tournament! I'm sorry to say Dr. Stuart will not be joining us this time, but returning veteran racers Pico, Samurai Goroh, and Captain Falcon, are sure to put on an excellent show for you today!"*

*"Racers, to the ready! Start your engines!"*

The hanger hummed to life as the last four racers prepared to start.

*"Three... Two!... ONE!..."*

*Focus on this, Falcon thought.*

Before Mr. Zero could start the race, Falcon shot forward, grinding the side of his ship across Pico's.

*"Um... **START!?**"*

Goroh quickly followed, jumping ahead of Pico, but both of them left the rookie in the dust. Falcon of course, wasn't slowing, and flew down the first stretch of the race, only going faster as he made the first rounded corner. But Goroh was gaining, coming up right behind Falcon as they took the sharp icy turn.

"Who do you think you are!?" Goroh growled, regardless of Falcon being unable to hear him. "You think I'll let you win by cheating!?! Not in a million years!"

The track came upwards, ending in a sharp turn coming back down the other way. As Falcon made it to the top, Goroh activated his ground boosters, almost back-flipping off the track. He propelled himself over the corner, landing right in front of Falcon.

However, he was surprised to find that the track zigzagged, and almost immediately ran into the wall. The

momentary pause while he tried not to kill himself was just enough for Falcon to take the lead back, and it also gave room for Pico to pass.

"Come on!" Goroh shouted, pounding his fists into his control panel.

Falcon slid down the sloped track, using his side thrusters to blast off another sharp turn at the bottom. Pico was smart enough to do the same, and was quickly coming up behind him.

"Doesn't matter," Falcon sighed. "In fact... the closer the better."

One more turn and Falcon reached the ramp. Without hesitation, he blasted forward, and as soon as he cleared the ramp, he opened a hatch in the back of his ship.

Pico tried to brake, but he was moving too fast, and the small explosive device Falcon dropped was enough to send Pico slamming into the wall, as well as collapse part of the track.

There was no way for the other racers to continue.

Falcon finished the race without a chance of losing, cruising into the hanger before popping out of the cockpit to greet the reporters.



It took a long time for Falcon to finally make it out of the hanger with his ship intact, the reporters all trying to get some quote from him on how it feels to win back the title from Stuart. He replied with "Pretty good," or by simply waving them away.

After weaving through the crowds, towing his ship out as applause and celebratory music rang over the speakers, Falcon finally made it out of the hanger. The people watching from view-screens were only really watching because of bets, cheering because their pick won,

but the people outside were the people Falcon actually enjoyed seeing; the real fans, the ones there for his autograph or a picture.

It was almost enough to make him forget the whole mess with Black Shadow. That is, until he saw him in the distance, just beyond the crowd of people swarming him.

There was no way Falcon could reach him from here, or even attempt trying. Before he would've even had a chance, Black Shadow was gone anyway.

After that, the rest of the day was a haze, trying to focus on winning, but only being able to think about what could happen if his tricks had failed. It wasn't until the end of the day, in his hotel room in White Land that he was finally about to think clearly, away from all the noise.

So of course, there was a knock at the door.

At first, thinking it was Black Shadow himself, Falcon drew his gun, slowly reaching for the door handle.

When he opened it though, it was Goroh who stormed in.

"Of all the dirty tricks!" Goroh fumed, unable to come up with the words necessary to explain how furious he was. "What do you think you're doing!? A *bomb*!? How'd you manage not to get disqualified for that!? They have *rules* in place for things like that!"

"Since when?" Falcon scoffed. "The F-ZERO races have always been near total free-reign. Anything goes."

"But not destruction of track!" Goroh countered.

"Unless the track has been scheduled for demolition," Falcon crossed his arms and leaned against a wall. "In any other race, I'd have been disqualified, yes, but I've been going over the rules since the end of the last race, and I found a neat little loophole. Quote 'If a track has been scheduled to be demolished, a racer/participant of the F-ZERO races, can, if agreed to by the demolition team, destroy parts of the track with controlled explosives, so

long as no other racers are killed to avoid legal fallout for the demolition team' end quote."

Goroh stood there stunned for a moment, finally taking a seat in a blue velvet chair. "You behind our backs," he huffed. "Made a secret deal... That's cheap, Falcon, real cheap."

"Don't have many choices anymore," Falcon sighed. "With Black Shadow on my back I can't-"

"I don't wanna hear it!" Goroh barked, waving his hand. "I don't want to be a part of it-"

"You already are," Falcon hissed. "It was him who blew up your ship; he already knows you've been speaking with me, so you're doing this to yourself by coming here."

"I'm not-"

*\*Knock knock\**

Falcon hung his head. "Excuse me." He crossed back to the door, keeping one hand on his gun. This time when he opened the door however, he was met with a young man in uniform. A police officer. "Something I can help you with?"

"I have a message from Dr. Stuart," the officer said, handing a piece of paper to Falcon.

"You found him?" Falcon asked. "Where was he?"

"In an F-ZERO warehouse," the officer answered. "Workers found him there, possibly investigating something, but what that is is unknown."

"Well why don't you just ask him?" Goroh grunted.

"Can't ask much of a dead man," the officer answered.

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## Chapter 11: White Land Part 2



# Chapter 12

## The Trail Ends

Falcon nearly dropped the note he'd been handed. "Wh- he died? How?"

"Not sure yet," the officer answered. "They only found him recently, autopsy hasn't come back yet."

"No obvious bullet wounds or stab marks?" Goroh asked.

"I'm just here to hand off a note," the officer said. "I actually thought you guys would've heard by now... er, well, I guess you were probably busy with the races all day."

"Yeah, thanks," Falcon shut the door in the officer's face, moving to sit down in a chair.

"Not gonna take your helmet off to read?"

"Nope," Falcon unfolded the note, skimming over it. "... He was following Black Shadow... lost sight of him... Black Shadow must've snuck up on him, got him from behind."

"Why paper though?" Goroh huffed. "Don't we have recording pads for this kind of thing?"

Falcon looked up at him like he was stupid. "Yes, because talking out loud to record yourself is *exactly* what you'd want to be doing while tailing the galaxy's most wanted criminal."

"Whatever," Goroh growled. "It's not like it saved him anyway. Anything actually useful?"

"No," Falcon shook his head. "Black Shadow must've been leading him into a trap, planning to kill him

when he was alone. I think he knew he was being followed."

"I told him to drop it," Goroh sighed. "That spoiled brat never listens."

Falcon folded the note and put it in his jacket pocket as he stood, looking down at Goroh who was resting with his head in his hand. "Well it doesn't stop here," Falcon sighed. "Just because Stuart's dead doesn't mean Black Shadow's going to just stop whatever he's doing."

"Yeah, figures," Goroh huffed, getting to his feet. "I'll take this as my chance to leave."

"Leave?"

"The races," Goroh answered, crossing to the door. "Stuart tried to warn me the same way I warned him; it's best to just leave it all alone." He reached for the doorknob and turned back to Falcon. "Don't expect me to come back for the next league, that one's all yours."

A moment later Goroh was gone, and Falcon looked back down at Stuart's note.

---

There was still work to do. Falcon still had to figure out who was running the F-ZERO races before Black Shadow did something else drastic. Since Stuart's death however, Black Shadow had gone silent. Falcon wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing, but it at least allowed him to work in peace.

First, he tried to follow the money. He researched each of the companies responsible for funding the races, and investigated the people in charge of those companies. Some were more disappointing than others, but despite the races being one of the most dangerous sports in the galaxy, there were very few actual criminals involved in its production. Going through the ranks of people in those

companies, he discovered a few corrupt officials, and even got some of them locked away, but none of *them* had anything to do with F-ZERO, they just happened to work for companies that *funded* F-ZERO.

That was a month's work, ending up pointless.

Next, he attempted to find the person who created the F-ZERO races. Falcon figured whoever was 'in charge' of it all, must have some connection to that person, right? Wrong, considering, again, it was more than one person. It was a group of people a long time ago, all of them dead now with no living relatives. He even investigated friends and possible long-lost descendants, but came up empty yet again.

Another month had gone by, and the King League was starting to be advertised all over the galaxy. Falcon decided it was best to secure a place in the race early, just in case Black Shadow wanted him there anyway.

Finally, he tried to find connections between the races, and Black Shadow. Of course, he needed to know who Black Shadow was first, which he didn't, so he didn't get very far. Instead, he tried looking at it all together.

He looked at each of the heads of the companies, and cross-referenced them with friends or possible relatives to those who started the races.

And finally, a name matched: ShigaruMiyamoto. He was the CEO for a company called Wintendo, located in Light Port.

A little more than a month left until the start of the King League, Falcon set out for Light Port.

---

Light Port was a station located near the center of the galaxy, sending out signals to all the beacons in space like some intergalactic traffic system. Because of its job, it



was also called Beacon Port, but there wasn't much there other than machines for reading and directing those beacons.

Wintendo was the company that owned Light Port, and this Shigaru Miyamoto was the grandson of the original company owner, who had helped fund his friend in starting the F-ZERO races. It was a small connection, but Shigaru seemed to be a pretty big fan of the races, even paying to keep them going and with the help of his Light Port was able to direct construction wherever it needed to be.

If he wasn't the guy Falcon was looking for, then that person simply didn't exist.

He sat down the Flyer outside the main building, the golden lights around the roads sparking as he stepped out. The doors opened for him as he walked closer to the building, and inside was a desk against the far wall, a computer screen sitting on top.

"Automated clerks," Falcon sighed, activating the program.

The screen blipped on and a simple face appeared. *"\*HELLO, HOW CAN I HELP?\*"*

*Old school,* Falcon thought. *Doesn't even have a voice, just text...*

REQUEST MEETING WITH SHIGARU MIYAMATO, Falcon typed. URGENT.

The screen beeped, loading. *"\*ACTION UNRECOGNIZED.\*"*

Falcon sighed. "Yeah, whatever, I'll find him myself."

He walked away from the computer and started for the door to the side of the room. It opened to a hallway turning sharp to the left, going down in a slight angle. There were rows of doors along the way, but the first few were locked so Falcon figured he'd just keep going until he saw a sign pointing him in the right direction.

He found a couple of signs actually, but they all pointed him to generic rooms like the mess hall, bathrooms, lobby, or exit.

*What are all these closed rooms for?* Falcon wondered.

There were too many of them for them to be unimportant, but there were no windows or signs for him to know what they were for. After climbing two flights of stairs and walking through too many hallways however, he figured he'd attempt to open one.

*No one around to argue,* Falcon decided.

He grabbed the knob, pulled up, and slammed his shoulder into the door.

It didn't budge.

*Well...* Falcon looked down either side of the hall, then pulled out his gun. *Not much choice here...*

He held the barrel to the lock-

"Captain Falcon..."

Falcon froze, then stood up straight. "Hey, I was just uh, trying to find... anyone, really."

"I know why you are here. Face me when I talk to you."

Falcon turned to face the old man. He was short, possibly of Asian-Earth descent. "Are you Shigaru?"

"I am," the man answered.

"Where's everyone else?" Falcon asked.

Shigaru smiled. "It's their day off," he motioned for Falcon to move and walked to the door Falcon had tried to open. "Everything is run by computers nowadays... not much need for us *people*, anymore."

Shigaru opened the door and stepped inside, Falcon behind him. It was a massive computer, barely even room to walk. Walking space was about three feet, but the room had to have been at least twelve feet wide.

"It is a powerful system," Shigaru nodded. "Only

the best, from Wintendo."

"You don't seem to proud of it," Falcon mumbled, hearing the disdain in Shigaru's voice.

"It was meant to help the galaxy," Shigaru explained. "Direct traffic through the stars with our beacons, allow for free movement anywhere in the galaxy... but when our president died a few years ago, another man took over, and bought in to all the corporate schemes, only caring about money."

"It can't be that bad," Falcon said. "Right?"

"This system controls the galaxy," Shigaru countered. "If we decide to, we can quarantine entire sectors, block trade routes, cause 'accidents', and no one could stop us."

Falcon was silent for a moment as Shigaru ran his hand over the machine. "You tell this to every stranger who walks in?"

"You are no stranger," Shigaru said. "You are Captain Falcon, the most famous F-ZERO racer. I've kept my eye on you, working behind the scenes to bring you here."

"What?"

Shigaru looked up at Falcon. "I am the man you are looking for, yes? The man who controls the F-ZERO races?"

---

Shigaru led Falcon back to the mess hall, explaining how there was less of a chance to be heard there. When they arrived, Shigaru locked the doors and sat down at a table in the middle of the room. Falcon sat across from him.

"How'd you know why I was here?" Falcon asked. "Or that I was here at all? And what do you mean you brought me here?"

"The security cameras told me you were here," Shigaru answered. "And you requested a meeting with me... that faulty computer sends me the message but keeps saying 'Action unrecognized' or something..."

"Why'd you let me wander for so long then?"

"I am old!" Shigaru laughed. "Couldn't keep up, I need speakers or something."

Falcon shook his head. *Crazy old man.*

"Now," Shigaru whispered. "About Black Shadow. Yes, I know him, and I am well aware of him contacting you. I should explain that it was I who controlled your friend's ship in the race, prompting Black Shadow to send you after me. I did this on purpose, knowing it would work out this way."

"Okay," Falcon nodded. "But why?"

"Because, I know what Black Shadow is planning," Shigaru said. "I know the mission he is going to send you on, and I'm going to ask you not to do it."

"I don't have much choice," Falcon hissed. "If I don't..."

"There's no telling what he'll do," Shigaru agreed. "But it's more than that for you, isn't it?"

Falcon hesitated, but nodded. "How do you know so much?"

"I run Light Port," Shigaru grinned. "I hear many things." He dropped the smile, looking over his shoulder before turning back to Falcon. "Sensors picked up movement outside... Black Shadow is here."

"What does he want with me?" Falcon asked hurriedly. "What do I do?"

Shigaru eyed the door behind Falcon. "It's all been leading up to one thing," Shigaru sighed, the doorknob twitching. "He wants to take over the Light Port, control the galaxy..." The door cracked open a little.

Shigaru got to his feet. "He wants you to kill me."

The door opened, and there stood Black Shadow.

---

## **Chapter 12: The Trail Ends**



# Chapter 13

## Revenge of Mute City

Falcon jumped to his feet, pointing his gun at Black Shadow as he walked in.

"Put your gun down," Black Shadow waved his hand and behind him a blast was fired. The attack struck the gun from Falcon's hand, momentarily startling him.

There was no attendant this time, just soldiers who stood behind Black Shadow.

"What do you want?" Falcon growled.

"Oh?" Black Shadow chuckled. "I thought he would've told you by now."

Falcon gave a sideways glance to Shigaru. "So you were telling the truth?"

"I wouldn't lie about this," Shigaru nodded.

Falcon took a step back, inching closer to his gun in case he needed to jump for it. "I'm not letting you take control of this station!" he hissed. "And I won't let *him* die either!"

"You forget," Black Shadow scolded, a slight grin on his lips. "I still have leverage over you."

"Go ahead," Falcon barked. "What my past is doesn't matter when the galaxy's at stake."

Black Shadow laughed. "You think your past is the only thing I have on you?" He moved towards Falcon, pushing a table out of the way. "So selfish to think yours are the only secrets I hold."

Falcon grit his teeth. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm planning to take over the galaxy," Black

Shadow said. "You really think I'd focus all my intelligence on *you*?"

"Then why use me at all!?" Falcon exclaimed, still inching towards his gun. "You could've come here yourself, taken over by force! If it was really just about this station, you wouldn't need me."

"Oh but it's *not* just about the station," Black Shadow corrected. "You have a part to play in this, I assure you, and it all starts with you killing that man." He nodded to Shigaru who was slowly backing away.

"Why?" Falcon growled. "Let him go, and you can take over anyway, he doesn't have to die. Even if he went to the authorities, they still wouldn't touch you."

"I'm what's called, a 'multitasker'," Black Shadow explained. "I *can* take over this station without him dying, but I need him dead for something else, and I need *you* to kill him." He turned around and motioned for his soldiers to grab Shigaru.

"Let go of me!" Shigaru exclaimed. "Unhand me!"

"Mr. Miyamoto!" Falcon growled. He glared at Black Shadow. "I'm not killing him."

Black Shadow moved passed Falcon and picked up Falcon's gun off the floor. He held it out to Falcon. "Perhaps you need an incentive," he said quietly. "If you do not kill this man... I'll destroy Port Town."

"Destroy...?" Falcon stumbled backwards. *Could he really have the capabilities to do such a thing?* "You couldn't!" he growled.

"This man," Black Shadow ordered. "Or the biggest space station in the galaxy! Your choice."

"Falcon," Shigaru hissed. "You can find a way to take back-*ARGH!*" Shigaru keeled over as one of the soldiers punched him in the gut.

"Miyamoto!"

Black Shadow grabbed Falcon. "Choose, now."

Falcon had a feeling he knew what Shigaru was trying to say. He could take the station back from Black Shadow, but he couldn't repair the damage to Port Town if it wasn't a bluff.

*But the damage he could do with Light Port is WORSE than the destruction of Port Town!*

"Can't decide?" Black Shadow asked.

"I'd rather choose you," Falcon growled. "But I have a feeling Port Town would be destroyed anyway, and whoever's next would step up and take over the station for you."

"Right you are," Black Shadow grinned. "Now aim at Mr. Miyamoto there, and *fire!*"

Shigaru looked up at Falcon. "It's okay," he grunted. "For the fate of the galaxy... it's okay..."

Falcon raised his hand, and took the gun from Black Shadow. "You'll pay for this..."

---

The death of ShigaruMiyamoto was in every news article on the UniNet. Reports were spread through the galaxy claiming the murderer to be none other than Captain Falcon himself, and the galaxy responded with mixed emotions.

Some decided the media was lying, that Falcon would never do something like that. Others tried to petition against F-ZERO letting Falcon back into the races.

But in all the confusion, no one stopped to wonder what had happened to the Light Port.

It had taken a while for Falcon to find out just who Shigaru was, but that's only because he wasn't looking for the CEO of a company exactly. He knew Shigaru was the CEO, as did everyone else, but there was nothing on the UniNet talking about who would replace him, or what



would happen to the company now that he was gone.

Falcon suspected Black Shadow had something to do with the silence, probably keeping things quiet while he set up his organization in Light Port.

As for why Black Shadow left Falcon alive... he still didn't know. Black Shadow's soldiers escorted Falcon out of the building, but Black Shadow had left a few parting words before shutting the doors to him.

"You did well so far," he said in a low rumbling tone. "You were fun to toy with, but your true part is coming soon. Just keep playing for now..." He gave a slow, grating laugh as he stepped back into the building. "Stick around Falcon." The doors slammed shut behind him and Falcon was left sitting on the long concrete road leading back to his ship.

*If you'd just say what you mean!* Falcon cursed, slamming his fist on the ship's console, now back up in space. *If just once, I could catch you off guard!*

He sighed, still staring at the monitors hoping they'd eventually tell him what he was looking for. *At the very least... I still have my plan B.* He looked at the note Stuart had left him. *Sorry Stuart...*



There were only a few more days until the start of the King League, and the galaxy was already celebrating the conclusion to the F-ZERO races. Whereas rookies could enter in the Knight League, and continue to the Queen League, only experienced racers were allowed in the King League. Most entries this season had about twenty years of racing, and more than a few trophies under their belts from previous F-ZERO tournaments, or even underground matches.

Goroh would have qualified, but he'd kept his word

from before, and decided it was best to stay out of it. Pico *hadn't* qualified, and he was definitely bitter about the whole thing. Stuart wouldn't be returning either, for obvious reasons, so this left Captain Falcon as the only veteran to return from the previous F-ZERO Leagues from earlier in the year.

That being said, there were twenty two other combatants fighting against him in the King League, none of them rookies.

But there was one man who stood out from the rest.

The day of the first race arrived, and the racers were waiting in the hanger of Mute City ready to start the champion league, when Mr. Zero's voice rang over the speakers.

"*We've got a late entry, folks!*" Mr. Zero exclaimed, getting everyone's attention. "*Let me introduce to you, Mane Killua!*"

The people of the hanger parted to make way for a dark purple ship making its way through, the man in front of it waved to the crowds and camera drones flying around him. He made his way towards the other racers, taking the slot right beside Captain Falcon.

Mane Killua smiled, waving away his mechanics, and turned to Falcon.

"Call yourself whatever you want," Falcon grunted. "But whatever you're doing here, you won't get away with it, *Black Shadow*."

Killua laughed, slapping Falcon's shoulder. "Just wanted to make sure you knew your place."

"*Racers, to the ready!*" Mr. Zero said cheerfully. "*We'll begin the race momentarily!*"

'Killua' stepped away, dropping into his ship. After a moment, Falcon did the same, slouching in his seat and taking off his helmet for a moment. He rubbed his forehead, trying to think of what trick *Black Shadow* was

planning this time.

"So then... it's come to this..." Falcon sighed, placing his helmet back on, shaking his head. "I'm out of options... what do I do?"

"*Start your engines!*" Mr. Zero shouted. A rigid air blew through the hanger as the doors opened and the racers were pulled onto the track as Mr. Zero continued his countdown. "*Three... Two!... ONE!... START!!*"

It was the same track as always, just currently in the middle of deconstruction, so the road shook as the racers sped down it. And even though it was only the start of the race, most rookies would've fallen out by now, not being used to the track falling apart beneath them like this. But these were veterans, expertly rushing around the other racers as well as the debris and damage.

Not that other experts in the race was really a problem for Falcon, he's just as much a veteran as any of them; no, the problem was Black Shadow fighting in the race with him.

*Do I win?* Falcon thought. *That would only serve to piss him off... but, if I just give up and let him win, would he pull some stunt claiming to 'not have been entertained'?*

Falcon shook his head, dodging around a few racers to get closer to the lead. *Always in the forefront of my mind,* he growled, having nearly crashed into one of them. *I can't see anything with you in the way!*

"\*Careful,\*" Black Shadow said from somewhere inside Falcon's ship. "*\*Don't want to make it look too easy.\**"

*You're not just in my head,* Falcon hissed. *You're in my ship!*

"I don't know if you can hear me," Falcon barked, taking a sharp turn and launching over another racer. "But I'm not just gonna let you win!"

"\*Gasp! You'd beat me in a race? Yeah! That'll

*show me! Go ahead and do that!\**" Black Shadow started laughing, taunting him as they entered a narrow zigzagging path blocked by construction. *"\*Wouldn't want to risk your hometown, would you?\*"*

*He can still blow up Port Town!* Falcon punched the console, closing in on Black Shadow.

*\*Beep!\**

Falcon looked at the small screen to his side; a message popped up. **Port Town is safe\_ Win**

"Well okay then," Falcon grinned. "That's all I needed to hear!"

He punched forward, slamming into Black Shadow as they entered the mine field. The bombs were placed to demolish the race after it was over, but it was useful for now!

Black Shadow spun, fighting for control as Falcon disappeared down the track.

*"\*That's a dangerous move, Falcon,\*"* Black Shadow warned.

"Yeah," Falcon agreed, taking the last corner. "That one was for Mr. Miyamoto."

Falcon passed the finish line, turning completely backwards to watch Black Shadow cross after several other racers.

*Take that,* Falcon thought proudly. *What else you got?*

---

## Chapter 13: Revenge of Mute City



# Chapter 14

## Death Wind Assault

Falcon pushed away the last of the reporters that swarmed him, and opened the door to the back room of the hanger. "Goroh," he called. "I thought you weren't gonna show up to the races this time."

Goroh took a seat on one of the couches, watching the highlights play on the screen across from him. "I said I wasn't gonna be *in* the races," he corrected. "Figured I'd at least watch."

Falcon crossed his arms. "And what did you see?"

Goroh narrowed his eyes, focusing on the screen. "That last-minute-man," he growled. "Mane Killua... that's Black Shadow, innit?"

Falcon nodded. "I don't think he's really fooling anyone," he said. "But even then, it would draw more attention if people found out the biggest crime boss in history is racing in F-ZERO. Unwanted attention, of course."

"Of course."

Falcon shook his head, walking over to the couch, also watching the highlights. "Wouldn't it be great if we do this kind of thing for fun again? Instead of trying our best not to get killed for it?"

Goroh laughed. "You do realize what F-ZERO is, don't you!?"

Falcon smiled. "Yeah, well, you know what I m- what was that?"

"What was what?" Goroh grunted.

Falcon pointed at the screen. "What was *that*? Go back!"

Goroh scrambled for the remote, grabbing it off the coffee table and hitting rewind.

"There stop!"

Goroh hit pause and Falcon stepped closer to the screen. "Play it back slowly."

Goroh did as he was told and Falcon watched his ship as another came up behind him. Falcon hadn't seen this part, near the end. It was after the mine explosion, and apparently Black Shadow hadn't had much of a problem getting through it as Falcon had thought.

A ship came up behind Falcon, boosting and ready tackle, when Black Shadow knocked the opponent out of the way before falling back behind a few other racers. It all happened so fast it looked like just a normal shove that ended up setting him back, but Falcon could tell; it was deliberate.

"He let you win," Goroh huffed, having caught it as well. "Guess you ain't as talented as you thought."

"I'm plenty talented," Falcon grumbled. "But no... there's something else to this... there always is."

Goroh sat down the remote. "You can go figure it out somewhere else," he ordered. "I don't want to be part of any more mysteries."

"Fair enough," Falcon nodded, starting towards the door. "Thanks for the talk." he gave a mock salute and stepped back outside. Racers were still just getting out of their ships after avoiding the press, and mechanics were still lingering while they fixed broken equipment.

Falcon almost made it back to his ship without someone calling him out.

"Captain Falcon," Mr. Zero grinned, stepping out in front of him. "Have a minute to talk?"

"Nope," Falcon smiled, moving on.

"No comments on winning the first race of the King League?" Mr. Zero asked. "It's a pretty big step for racers, and you took the first win!"

Falcon held up his arms. "What did you expect?" he laughed. "I'm the greatest racer in the galaxy!"

"You sure about that?" Mr. Zero taunted.

Falcon huffed, folding his arms. "If I wasn't, would I have won the Queen League?"

"If you were, would you have lost the *Knight* League?"

Falcon waved him away. "I had my reasons."

Mr. Zero jumped in front of him again. "And as a reporter it's my job to know those reasons."

"Gees, whatever happened to 'right of privacy'?"

"Freedom of the press?" Mr. Zero joked. He pulled a recorder out of his pocket and held it up to Falcon. "There's a story here, and I want to get to the bottom of it!"

"Funny," Falcon sighed, half smiling. "Dr. Stuart said something similar once... wonder where he went."

Finally unable to come up with a response, Mr. Zero let Falcon continue to his ship.



Falcon flipped on the lights to the Death Wind hotel room, not at all surprised to see Black Shadow waiting for him in a chair across the room. He was in his usual bull-horned suit, instead of the lion-like costume he wore in the previous race.

Falcon shut the door and leaned against the wall beside it. "You know, I just got it," he said. "Mane Killua, because you wear a lion costume. Did you just have extra fur lying around from a previous poaching job or-?"

"I don't appreciate you pulling ahead," Black Shadow said bluntly. "I didn't say you were allowed to

win."

"No offense," Falcon grinned. "But you're starting to scare me less and less."

Black Shadow was at his feet with his fist around Falcon's throat so fast it took a moment to register. When it did however, Falcon did little more than narrow his eyes. "You're not gonna kill me... you still need me alive... for some reason."

Black Shadow tossed Falcon against the wall, turning his back for a second before sitting back down and watching Falcon get comfortable on the ground by the door. "I thought I warned you; continue to act recklessly, and it won't be *your* life on the line. In just a few more days, I'll have my organization running Light Port completely. Until then, I can still destroy Port Town, or anything else I want."

Falcon got to his feet and crossed the room to the monitor on the far wall. "Display news for Port Town." The screen flickered on and showed a few windows of text and a couple of videos. Falcon looked at each before turning back to Black Shadow, arms crossed. "Everything seems okay to me."

Black Shadow grit his teeth. "... What did you do?"

"Looks like you're not as in control as you thought you were."

Again Black Shadow launched to his feet, but this time Falcon grabbed his arm before he could do anything. "Careful," he warned. "Don't want to risk ruining any *other* part of your plan."

"You might want to be careful yourself," Black Shadow scoffed, ripping his arm away. "You don't want to become more trouble than you're worth."

Black Shadow left, slamming the door behind him. Falcon let go of his breath as he slumped down onto the couch, the monitor still playing the news.



**\*RATTATTATTATTATTA!!\***

Falcon ducked as the far wall of the room exploded behind him. He was far enough away that none of the glass from the shattering window reached him, and when ducking there was also a couch between him and the attack, but the bullets splintered the wall in front of him as well. Through the storm of bullets however, Falcon risked pulling out his gun and firing over the couch.

After firing a few shots of his own the attack stopped.

*Black Shadow?* Falcon thought, poking his head above the couch. Nothing else shot at him, so he stood and inspected the damage.

*Wasn't shooting to kill,* he realized. *Shots were too high... too far apart...*

Falcon holstered his gun, turning back to the direction the attack came from. The window was basically gone, and parts of the surrounding wall had been chipped away. The couch he'd been sitting on acted as a sort of barrier between the living area and kitchen area of the hotel room, so the glass fragments didn't reach him, but they covered the floor.

*A warning,* Falcon sighed, sitting down against the wall under the monitor. If anything else shot at him it couldn't hit him from there.

Then a message popped up on Falcon's visor.

**You shouldn't win the next race.**

Falcon chuckled. "Yeah," he muttered. "You think?"

---

It was early the next morning when someone shook Falcon awake. In an instant he was at his feet with his gun pointed at the intruder, but he holstered it again when he

realized it was an officer from the IPF.

"You're late," Falcon growled. "If I'd actually been shot I'd have been dead by now."

"We can only respond as fast as we get called out," the officer grumbled back. "What happened here?"

Falcon looked at the shattered window. "Possibly a drone, considering how high up the room is."

"Any idea who sent it?"

"A few," Falcon answered. "If you'll excuse me, I have a race to attend soon."

"Any *names*?" the officer pressed. "I can't work with nothing, Falcon."

"*Captain*, Falcon," Falcon corrected.

"You may still have our uniform," the officer growled. "Modified as it is, you stopped being a captain when you left the force."

"Are you here about the attack," Falcon asked, turning back around to face him. "Or are you here for me?"

"A little of both," the officer admitted. "The office got a call, and I wasn't exactly the closest unit available, but when I heard it could be you I opted to check it out."

"Why?" Falcon asked. "You don't exactly sound like you like me."

"On the contrary," the officer took off his helmet, revealing an older man's face. He'd probably been on the IPF for a long time. "I was a big fan at the start of your career, though that was a longer time ago for me."

Falcon nodded. He'd met fans like this before, ones who were young when his career started, but because of the time difference with Falcon jumping through space constantly, they'd all grow old and he wouldn't. Granted, the time difference wasn't always too different for most racers, but for someone like Falcon who was also chasing after bounties, he'd seem almost immortal to anyone who remained planet side for most of their lives.

"Of course," the officer continued. "When I entered the IPF I heard you used to be a part of it as well; I always wanted to ask why you left."

"Why do you think I left?" Falcon asked.

The officer shifted slightly. "No one knows exactly," he answered. "But some of the guys think you turned criminal, and left before you could be processed. Now you're just untouchable due to you being too big of a racing star."

"Why do *you* think I left?" Falcon repeated.

The officer looked at his helmet. "I've been on the force a long time... I understand sometimes you have to make a few tough decisions, but... I guess you didn't like that. Am I close?"

Falcon nodded. "Wasn't too fond of all the red tape," he explained. "Or sitting behind a desk."

The officer nodded. "Hey Falcon," he called as Falcon opened the door to leave. "You've been on both sides, right? The IPF and as a bounty hunter... I've always wondered which-"

"We're on the same side," Falcon told him. "I just go about things my own way."

"Of course," the officer said, putting his helmet back on. "I'll see you in the races, Falcon. And don't worry about the mess here, I'll take care of it."

Falcon saluted back, and shut the door as he left.

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## Chapter 14: Death Wind Assault



# Chapter 15

## Trouble in Port Town

The race at Death Wind was little more than a joke.

Falcon let himself fall behind, holding himself back from using his more dangerous techniques... allowing Black Shadow to pull ahead. Falcon could have easily won, but Black Shadow-- or to everyone else, Mane Killua-- wouldn't like that. Instead, Falcon came sliding into fifth.

"The greatest racer in the galaxy, huh?" Mr. Zero taunted, having been waiting for Falcon to exit his ship.

"Ah, well," Falcon shrugged. "Can't win 'em all."

"You can barely win any it seems," Mr. Zero jabbed. "You have more loses than wins at this point, don't you?"

"No," Falcon answered casually. "It's five to seven, I have more wins at the moment."

"At the moment," Mr. Zero nodded. "But that's almost half your races that you've lost."

"But I still have more wins," Falcon smiled, already starting to make his way through the crowds. He quickly lost Mr. Zero, and made his way to the back rooms. It would still be a while before the mechanics were done tuning up their ships, and the reporters, drones and other racers often stood around for a while after the races, so Falcon decided to stay in the back until it was all cleared out.

---

By the time night had fallen the hanger was almost completely empty, only a mechanic or two and another racer remaining. They didn't bother Falcon as he took his ship from the hanger and rode out into the streets.

The hotel he'd stayed at was cordoned off, IPF officers talking behind holographic barriers. They were still trying to figure out what had happened, but Falcon didn't want to give them any answers just yet since they'd just get in his way or make things worse, so he hurried quickly passed towards the outskirts of town. However, the IPF had obviously expected this, and a few officers were waiting just outside his ship.

Falcon sighed, popping out of the hatch. "Something I can help you with?"

"We just want to ask a few questions," one of them said. "I'm officer Lerry. Would you like to step out of your vehicle for a moment?"

"Actually I'd like to put my racer in the Flyer if you don't mind," Falcon responded, folding his arms and leaning forward on the top of the ship. "What's this about?"

"The attack on the hotel last night," Officer Lerry answered. "You were *there*, right? It *is* your room, right?"

"Yes and yes," Falcon nodded. "But stuff like that happens a lot to racers like me; for some reason, certain people don't like entertainment."

"Well that may be," Lerry agreed. "But our detectives think it's more than that."

"How so?" Falcon asked sarcastically.

"Those were warning shots," Lerry explained. "Fired in a wide arc, as if it whoever was shooting you was actively trying to avoid actually hitting you. Any idea why this would happen? No... criminal activities on the side?"

"Nope," Falcon smiled. "I *catch* bad guys, I don't sit and question the victim. Thanks for caring, by the way."

The officer's eye twitched. "Alright look," he

growled. "We have a warrant, and permission to check your ship for anything we don't like. We *were* going to just kick down the door and do it while you were away, but we decided to be *nice* since we *are* the good guys."

Falcon jumped out of the Blue Falcon. "Wait you actually have a warrant?" He stepped up to them. "That almost *never* actually happens. Let me see it."

Another officer pulled out a folder, showing it to Falcon.

Falcon immediately ripped the folder to shreds. "Warrant?" he chuckled. "What warrant?"

"That's not how this-"

Falcon grabbed Lerry by the collar. "You're not allowed on my ship," he said flatly. "Why don't you go investigate the crime scene again, look for the *actual* villain." He let go of the officer. "Pretty sure it was a drone that shot at me, try looking for that."

"Mr. Falcon-"

"*Captain*," he corrected, stepping back towards his ship. "Why does everyone keep gettin' it wrong?"

"This isn't the end of it," Lerry growled. "Just because you tore up this copy of the warrant doesn't mean we haven't already filed it back at HQ. We're still going to search your ship."

Falcon dropped back into the ship, only his head remaining over the hatch, smiling. "I'd *really* like to see you try."

The engines to the Blue Falcon kicked on and he zipped passed the officers, forcing them to duck out of the way or risk getting hit. The cargo door to the Flyer slid open and the Blue Falcon entered, the door locking behind it.

A moment later, as Falcon stepped out of the racer, there was a pounding at the ship's main entrance. Falcon popped open the little window on the door and looked

down at Lerry. "Goodbye."

The officers made sure to stay far enough away as the Flyer pushed off the ground, the rockets propelling it up and away from Death Wind.

---

*Home sweet home*, Falcon thought, looking down at Port City as he descended from the atmosphere. He could see the track as well, and all the equipment as he got closer. Like Big Blue, the Port Town track was being decommissioned and moved to another location, but also like Big Blue they were all still expected to race on it while it was still there.

Not that it made any difference to Falcon; condemned or not, he could make it through any race. What mattered was whether or not Black Shadow would *allow* him to.

Falcon sighed, setting down just outside of town like always. As he was getting out, his visor beeped, a message appearing.

**Black Shadow won't be a problem this time, go ahead and win.**

*Well, okay*, Falcon thought. He'd like to ask why, but these messages only worked one way so he wasn't able to send anything back. Knowing he also wouldn't get an explanation as the messages were always short, he focused on just moving his racer into the track hanger.

He'd wasted some time making a few unnecessary stops before arriving at Port Town, taking a few days longer than he needed to, so instead of arriving a day or two before the race he arrived the day *of* the race. Almost all the other racers were already lined in front of the hanger door, ready for the race.

Mechanics angrily escorted Falcon's ship to its

place, annoyed that he'd taken so long. Normally, maintenance was done early, so the hard part of their jobs should have been over by now. After that they muddle around until just before the race starts for final checks, but since Falcon was late they spent the whole time expecting to jump up at any moment.

"Sorry about that," Falcon apologized to the head mechanic. "Lost track of time I guess."

"Yeah well, I guess I just expected *racers* to move a bit faster," the mechanic jabbed. He stepped back and kicked the side of the Blue Falcon. "Balance is good; with Mane Killua out of the running I expect you to win this time, yeah?"

"Wait... out of the running?" Falcon asked.

"You hadn't heard?"

*I heard he shouldn't be a problem,* Falcon thought.

"Any idea why he dropped?"

The mechanic shrugged. "Heard a reporter talking about it, and the next thing I know it's all the racers are saying too. I don't see him here, so I guess they're right."

"I guess," Falcon mumbled to himself.

"But hey!" the mechanic chuckled, slapping Falcon's shoulder. "He wouldn't be the first racer to show up at the last second for unexplained reasons."

"Ha ha," Falcon said dryly. "Thanks for the tune up."

"Don't botch it!" The mechanic walked away as Mr. Zero finished announcing the start of the race. The rest of the hanger cleared out as well, the countdown beginning.

"Ten!" Mr. Zero started.

*Okay,* Falcon thought, starting his ship. *Should be simple... Black Shadow's not here... He told me to go ahead and win... Why not?*

*"Three!... Two!... ONE!... START!!!"*



---

It was a close one, the construction equipment constantly getting in their way. Detours were made through the track, winding and at times even extending the track; other parts were almost too narrow to drive through unless you could fly on your side. Most of the racers were able to perform such feats, making it more difficult for Falcon to pull ahead, but in the end it was between him and two other veterans. Of course, Falcon had been racing a long time and at the last second pulled back to let them slam into each other, then used the grounded ships as a ramp.

Falcon flew into the hanger, almost too fast to stop!

The second and third place victors didn't seem to mind however, despite their ships being nearly wrecked. They'd been traveling fast enough that even after crashing they skid across the finish line before the racers behind them.

*Better sports than most*, Falcon chuckled, waving to the camera drones buzzing around his head.

After the usual spectacle however, as he was pulling the racer into the Flyer, his visor beeped again with another message.

**Go to the lower docks, central ground-ship platform 34**

*Directions?* Falcon thought. *But... why? Is Black Shadow there?* He knew not to question the information, but a reason would've been nice. *Okay, I'll trust you I guess.*

Falcon backed out of the Flyer again, taking the Blue Falcon back into the city.

---

The lower docks were a set of compartment tracks

built into a deep pit, the Central Platform being in the direct center of the city, with the ground-ship dockings being the top layer of it. The lower levels were meant for space docking, not to be confused with the Upper docks which were in space and only used for larger spacecrafts like heavy cargo ships and cruisers.

So, Falcon rode into Platform 34, easily blending with all the traffic this area got, not entirely sure what he was looking for.

"You know Falcon, I blame you for this."

Falcon looked over his shoulder to see a figure step out from behind some large metal crates. "Rick," he sighed. "Sorry about that."

Rick shrugged, stepping forward with his hands up. Black Shadow stepped out behind him, holding a gun to Rick's back. "Yeah well," Rick muttered. "It was bound to go south at some point."

"Is this why you skipped the race?" Falcon asked. "To tell me you caught Rick?"

"I skipped the race because you made me realize something," Black Shadow answered. "I wasn't entirely in control of the situation. I decided to change that."

Falcon moved his hand closer to his own gun. "I guess that makes sense-"

"I know about your informant as well," Black Shadow smiled. "When you showed me Port Town wasn't destroyed, I figured you had an inside guy."

"And you think that guy was Rick?" Falcon laughed.

"No," Black Shadow answered, laughing as well. "No... No... *He* was."

Falcon heard a thud from behind him and risked turning around. From out from behind more crates Black Shadow's assassin attendant stepped out, an injured man at his feet.

"I must admit," Black Shadow huffed. "I was a bit surprised to see him."

The man looked up, though it seemed to hurt him. "Hey Falcon," he mumbled. "Long time no see."

Falcon stared down at him. "Hey Stuart," he sighed. "Sorry I'm late."

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## **Chapter 16: Trouble in Port Town**



# Chapter 16

## Dead Red Canyon

*"... You want me to fake my death..." Stuart shook his head, mulling over his options.*

*It was still three days before the second White Land race, and Falcon thought he finally had a way to get ahead of Black Shadow. "I know a guy who's already on the inside," Falcon explained. "Name's Rick. I'll get him to help you set up a new identity working under Black Shadow, see if-"*

*"Wait hold on!" Stuart ordered, holding up his hand. "If we have a guy on the inside already, why don't we just use him?"*

*"He's not going to cooperate that well," Falcon answered. "I knew him from when I was IPF, and I ran into him when I was first going after Black Shadow. He didn't like me much either time."*

*"Then how do you know he'll help at all?" Stuart asked. "I'm liking this plan less and less."*

*"He'll help because he doesn't want to be stationed there forever," Falcon said. "Whatever it is we do, either way it'll blow the whole thing open."*

*Stuart considered it for a moment, looking at the ground. "And what do I get in return?"*

*"What?" Falcon scoffed. "You get to help take down Black Shadow, greatest criminal in the galaxy!"*

*"Not enough," Stuart said bluntly. "Just working with you is putting my neck on the line, but this?... Faking my death, and trying to get close to what you claim is 'the*

*greatest criminal in the galaxy' is just suicide!"*

*Falcon opened his mouth to respond, but didn't have an argument. "Okay, what do you want?"*

*"I want to know what he has on you," Stuart answered, staring directly at him. "Whatever this... great secret is you've been keeping from us."*

*Falcon crossed his arms, eyes narrowed behind his helmet's visor. "Well, I believe Black Shadow doesn't actually know it," he finally answered. "Otherwise... It's big, this secret. Galaxy ending big."*

*"You really that much of yourself," Stuart muttered. "No offense, but how could any secret of yours be 'galaxy ending'?"*

*"Because it doesn't just affect me," Falcon growled. "It's bigger than that."*

*"What is it?" Stuart asked.*

*"It was my last job in the IPF," Falcon said slowly. "I was in charge of arresting a criminal the court had decided was guilty. There was no evidence of course, but they needed someone to blame, and it was just convenient for them to pick him. Under orders I arrested that man, brought him into HQ... and they sentenced him to death."*

*Stuart tilted his head slightly. "The galaxy's a big place," he said. "You sure they didn't see something you didn't?"*

*"The man they had me bring in was my father," Falcon responded. "And I'm positive he was innocent. I know, because after his unnecessary death, the real killer murdered another three people before we caught him in the act. Some small time thug, who just happened to slip through our fingers a few times, but because the IPF wanted to save face, 'protect the image of the police force in the galaxy,' they sent an innocent man to his death, and then covered up the true murderer."*

*"Covered up?" Stuart scoffed. "So to everyone else,*

*the killer was your father? They never said anything about getting it wrong?"*

*"Then the people would have less faith in the system," Falcon growled. "And the problem is... that's a bad thing. As corrupt as the IPF is, it's still the biggest, well-funded, mostly solid organization working to catch criminals. If rumors spread the IPF didn't care who they caught, and were willing to cover up the truth so easily, the entire thing would fall apart, and there would be a power struggle in which any powerful crime lord could take over. Someone like Black Shadow, or possibly worse. The galaxy would fold in on itself, new organizations cropping up everywhere, each with their own twisted idea of justice. It would be chaos."*

*"And being a bounty hunter was better than that?"*

*"This way I'm doing things alone," Falcon explained. "I can do things my own way, and I don't have to worry about leading a cult."*

*Stuart was silent again, shaking his head.*

*"That's why no one else can know," Falcon added. "And also why Black Shadow needs to be stopped. Because if he does know the truth..."*

*"Game over," Stuart hissed.*

*"Exactly," Falcon finished. "So, are you willing to help me stop him?"*

*Stuart looked up, seeing Falcon holding his hand out. "I didn't think much of you when we first met," he admitted. He shook Falcon's hand. "But I underestimated you... I'll play my part."*

*"Good," Falcon huffed. "Then let's get started."*

---

*Three months had passed in the blink of an eye, and Dr. Stuart-- now known as Leonard Rey-- began working*

*under cover with Rick June to infiltrate Black Shadow's criminal operation. The F-ZERO's King League had begun, and by then Leonard had managed to work his way up to Security Manager. It was partially due to his impressive, though fake, criminal background as a professional marksman/entrepreneur. It was an offer Black Shadow couldn't refuse, and because of this Leonard had managed to secretly prevent the destruction of Port Town, and slow production of the rebuilding in Light Port.*

*Through it all, Leonard sent messages back to Falcon, updating him on his progress and informing him on Black Shadow's movements. But after Black Shadow's warning to Falcon at Death Wind, Black Shadow had begun to grow weary of his subordinates. He began inspecting their activities, even if there was no reason to suspect them of anything. And finally, he caught on to Leonard.*

*They had an argument, and it was revealed that Black Shadow had suspected Rick of treason for a while. It didn't take long for Black Shadow's troops to overwhelm them, and Black Shadow used Leonard's communication gear to contact Falcon, telling him to win the next race. Afterwards, he told Falcon to meet him at the Lower Docks, central ground-ship platform 34.*

And now, Dr. Stuart, no longer Leonard Rey, lay beaten on the steel ground at Black Shadow's attendant's feet.

"I wonder," Black Shadow grinned. "How far did you think you could go? How long did you expect this charade to last?"

"Long enough to put a stop to whatever you're doing," Falcon answered.

"Well you didn't make it far enough," Black Shadow continued. "You see Falcon, there's no reality where you beat me. You don't get to play hero, defeat the

villain, take down the *evil corporation!*... And you're not making it out alive."

"Maybe," Falcon muttered. "Maybe not... But you still need me for something, otherwise I wouldn't be here."

Black Shadow smiled, shooting Rick.

"No!" Falcon exclaimed, dropping down to catch Rick. It didn't matter though, the shot went right through him.

"I still need *you*," Black Shadow agreed. "But I warned you; I wouldn't show such mercy to your friends." He aimed his gun at Falcon. "I also warned you not to become more trouble than you're worth." The weapon charged. "You've hit your limit, Falcon."

**\*BANG!!\***

Falcon looked up at Black Shadow, stunned. Black Shadow also had a surprised look on his face, his gun smoking but not from the barrel.

"Well," Black Shadow chuckled. "I'm actually offended." He looked up at his assassin attendant. "But you understand just as well as he does that you can't kill me."

"Yes," she agreed. "But I know you can't kill Falcon either."

Black Shadow laughed. "You realize what you've done, right?" he asked. "I mean, you were part of the planning for this whole set up."

In an instant, they were all surrounded by Black Shadow's troops.

"I knew there would come a time when I had to blow my cover," she admitted. "Now's as good a time as any."

"Wait, you were on *our* side!?" Falcon exclaimed. He glared at Stuart. "This is why I can't stand the IPF, they just let their own die."

Black Shadow kicked Falcon in the face, pushing him over. "Shut up," he grunted. "Alright, well, if there are



no more surprises..." he waved his hand, signaling his troops to march the parameter inward. The closed in on the three of them with Black Shadow stepping back and Rick's body getting shoved aside. "Ready for the end game?"

Falcon didn't have time to react before getting knocked out.

---

Falcon woke in a cell. It looked like Black Shadow's base in Lightning, but he could feel the roar of engines beneath him, so he was probably on a ship.

"Hey!" he called, getting to his feet and walking to the bars a few feet from him. "Anyone else awake!?"

Across from him, in another cell he could see Black Shadow's former attendant slowly waking.

"Get up, I want some answers," Falcon grunted.

The woman forced herself to wake up all the way, and sat against the far wall. "This didn't go as planned," she muttered. "My name's Neeka, I've been investigating Black Shadow for about two years now, working my way up. But every time we think we've reached the extent of his reach... His crime ring spans the entire galaxy, and it's so embedded in corporate organizations, that taking him down could potentially shut *everything* down."

"So you have no plan," Falcon growled.

"None," Neeka admitted. "But he wants you for something. I don't know what that is though, he won't tell me."

"Where's Stuart?" Falcon asked.

Neeka strained to look through the cell bars, peering down either side of the hallway. "Hey Stuart!"

"Yeah," Stuart mumbled, still trying to wake up.

Falcon leaned against the bars. "So what do we do?"

"I have no idea," Stuart sighed, feeling defeated. "I

don't think we can stop something this big."

"I say we find a way out of here," Neeka offered. "Take out as many people as we can on the way, even if it's Black Shadow."

"No," Falcon shook his head. "You just said he's embedded into everything."

"There'll be a power struggle," Neeka nodded. "The IPF recognizes this, but they can take over if Black Shadow's gone. It'll be worse if Black Shadow wins."

"Or," Black Shadow suggested. "You sit quietly and wait for us to arrive at our destination." The all watched him walk though the hall, wide horns nearly hitting the walls and long cape dragging on the floor. "You, Falcon, will finish the next race as usual. That is all you need to worry about."

"You won't get away with this," Falcon swore.

"A little late for that," Black Shadow chuckled.



Falcon half expected to be brought out of the ship in chains, but instead Black Shadow led him dressed as Mane Killua. The ship was docked right outside the track hanger of Red Canyon, but Falcon couldn't help but notice just how empty the city around them was.

"I decided it was best to cordon off the surrounding streets," Mane hissed, ushering Falcon into the hanger. "I didn't feel like dealing with any unnecessary distractions."

As they entered, Falcon saw that the hanger was also nearly empty. There were only the other remaining six racers and a handful of mechanics. There weren't even camera drones.

"What did you do?" Falcon growled. "Buy out half the city?"

"I did what I had to do," Mane answered. Suddenly

he took a step back, pulling a communications device out of his pocket. "What."

After a moment, Mane pocketed the device again and glared down at Falcon. "You will win this race," he ordered.

"And you?"

"I'll be dealing with your friends," Black Shadow stormed out, slamming the door shut behind him.

Mr. Zero was already announcing making the opening announcements as usual, but with so few people here his words echoed like he was just yelling into an empty canyon.

Falcon chuckled to himself. *Well, I guess this is it*, he thought, walking slowly to his ship. *Almost over...*

*"Ladies and Gentlemen, CAPTAIN FALCON!!" Mr. Zero exclaimed over the intercom. "Only two more races left of the King League! Who will be crowned 'King' of the F-ZERO races!? Falcon always seems sure of himself, and Mane Killua's out of the running! But that still leaves six veterans that aren't gonna back down easy! Think you can handle it hotshot!? Find out next time... on F-ZERO!!"*

Falcon looked up at the tiny speaker on the far wall, raising an eyebrow but knowing Mr. Zero couldn't see anyone's confusion.

*"That's... just a joke," Mr. Zero coughed. "Alright let's get started!"*

Falcon entered his ship, feeling more and more uncomfortable every time.

*Alright, Falcon thought. Let's end this.*

---

## Chapter 16: Dead Red Canyon



# Chapter 17

## Fire Field Finale

It was painfully clear that Black Shadow had paid the other racers to let him win. None of them even bothered to try to get ahead of him, and instead stayed pretty far back away from Falcon. In the end, Falcon won the Red Canyon race without even a scratch, and the audience wasn't pleased. There were no interviews after the race, just F-ZERO officials trying to hold back angry fans.

*They think I did it, Falcon thought, taking his ship into the empty streets of Red Canyon. They think I cheated... But it was most likely Black Shadow who paid them off, just like he bought out these streets.*

Two other vehicles had been waiting for him outside the hanger; Black Shadow's escort. They led him back to the dock where Black Shadow's ship remained, and Falcon wondered how things would go if he'd tried to escape now. It was just two ships, and the Blue Falcon was faster, but he knew Black Shadow would kill Dr. Stuart and that undercover IPF agent, Neeka.

So Falcon let things play out according to Black Shadow.

The escort brought him into the ship, and put him back in his cell where he sat back against the far wall and waited. That was when he realized something was missing.

"Neeka," Falcon called, getting back up and looking into the cell across from his. "Stuart!" Neeka's cell was empty, and Stuart wasn't answering. "Black Shadow! Where are they!?"

"Neeka," Black Shadow growled, standing just out of sight. "Managed to escape after I escorted you to the race." He stepped into view, arms folded behind his back and a dark scowl on his face. "Dr. Stuart is otherwise busy at the moment, so I figured we could have the chance to talk."

"About *what*?" Falcon spat.

"The final race is approaching, and I have almost everything in place," Black Shadow turned his back to Falcon, facing Neeka's empty cell. He raised his hand and leaned against the bars. "I'm going to bring this galaxy to its knees, Falcon... And you're going to help."

"I don't care who you threaten Black Shadow," Falcon swore. "This has gone far enough! Neeka was right; even though someone else would just take your place... I should have killed you a long time ago."

"But you can't," Black Shadow smiled, turning back around. "Because as much as you want to believe that killing me will make things better, you're fear of the unknown outweighs that belief! Racers like you... always thinking twelve steps ahead, always deciding they'd rather deal with what they know... what's right in front of them. You wouldn't risk changing what you're already struggling with."

"You don't know me as well as you think you do," Falcon growled. "Before this race is over... I'll have found a way to stop you. And if not me, then someone else! You may reach across the galaxy, Black Shadow, but you aren't all-powerful. Someone, *will*, stop you."

Black Shadow pressed his head against Falcon's cell, staring him in the eye. "And when that day comes," he hissed. "It will already be too late."

Falcon slammed his palm against the bars, but Black Shadow had already stepped away. "What are you planning!?" he exclaimed.

"Like I said," Black Shadow grinned as he turned back around. "You're going to help me destroy the galaxy... and if not you, then someone *like* you." He laughed, his voice echoing off the walls. "Someone, a *lot*, like you! HA HA HAA!!!"

Falcon sat back down, folding his arms in his lap and staring at the floor as the hours ticked by slowly. He didn't even realize he'd been asleep until he was woken by the alarms going off. He opened his eyes to see the cell door slide open.

*What?* Falcon thought, taking a cautious step out. He looked down either side of the hall, red lights flashing above him, but there was no movement. *Well, when opportunity strikes...* Falcon hurried down the hall, passing the many empty cells before reaching a door. Before he could even attempt to open it, the ship was hit.

*So Black Shadow's under attack.* Falcon figured it had something to do with Neeka's escape. She probably got out and got help from the IPF. *Well, I guess some of you can do something right.*

Falcon got the door open, the mechanical lock seeming to disengage when the ship is being attacked. The hall took a sharp turn, and it ended suddenly behind a long console desk. The man standing behind it, the guard, was looking right at him.

"Uh, hey, you haven't happened to see my gun around have you?" Falcon asked, raising his hands as the guard raised his weapon.

"Get back to your cell, in a moment the attack will be over and-"

Falcon charged him, ramming his shoulder into the guard's gut. He grabbed the gun and punched the guard in the face. Not wasting any time, Falcon vaulted over the console and headed out of the cell block.

However, he stepped right into the main cargo bay,

which was filled with Black Shadow's troops, most getting into fighter ships to defend their main cruiser.

Luckily, they hadn't noticed him in all the commotion, and Falcon was able to duck behind a crate before getting spotted. *Well, with any luck, I just might make it out of this.* He peeked behind the crate, scoping the room as they got hit again. The fighter ships dropped out of the cargo bay, and the troops running around were too focused on what they were doing to bother with Falcon even if they *did* spot him.

And at least Falcon had a weapon, so there's that, but there were three doors he could go through, and no idea what the layout of this ship was. He was usually escorted as far as this, and then they enter a drop ship which would take them to the planet's surface. He couldn't get a ship here, not with too many troops around, they'd kill him before he got out, so he needed another way out and off this ship.

*Well a one in three chance is as good as any,* Falcon thought as he hurried for the closest door. He stayed low to the ground and hid behind crates when he could, but with the red lights blaring, the alarms sounding, and the IPF attacking, Falcon was a blur in the background and easily made his way through the door.

This time, he entered another long hall, but there were ramps leading up and down to different walkways. Most cruisers this size had the docking bay in the back on the lower decks, so Falcon took a ramp leading down, hoping for the best.

---

The bridge erupted into flames as Black Shadow slammed the sliding doors shut, the force of it nearly knocking him off his feet. The IPF had finally broken through his armor, and it wouldn't be long before the rest of

the ship was destroyed as well.

*That's fine*, Black Shadow thought, hurrying down the corridors. *I have plenty more of these ships, and people in charge of the IPF under my thumb. This attack won't last much longer anyway.* The ship rumbled above him as he dropped down onto a lower platform, working his way towards the nearest escape pod.

A few launched before he could get to them, but he managed to reach one at the end of the hall just as its door shut. He ripped open the hatch, the gears grinding as the mechanism tried to close the door.

And as he stepped inside, he laughed, shaking his head. "Of course," he muttered.

"Get your own pod," Falcon growled, pointing a gun at him. "This one's occupied."

"I don't think so," Black Shadow hissed, stepping inside. The doors automatically slammed shut behind him, and the pod seemed incredibly small with both of them inside. "You can either cooperate, and get us both down to the planet below, or you can-"

**\*BANG BANG BANG!!\***

Black Shadow gripped his side, blood dripping from his wounds. Falcon had shot both his legs as well, so he was almost completely immobile.

"You're gonna shut up, and sit down," Falcon growled. "Or you're going down with your ship."

Black Shadow scoffed. "*You're* the captain," he chuckled.

Falcon smacked him with the gun, knocking him out. Then the ship shook again and he sat down, turning on the escape pod. *I should kill you*, Falcon thought, detaching the pod from the ship. *But what would be the fun in that?*

They dropped towards the planet below. Falcon assumed this was where the next race was being held... but Fire Field felt like an insult to injury at this point. It was



one of-- if not *the* most-- dangerous track in the galaxy. It was also not the track Falcon remembered being scheduled as the final track for the King League.

*Is this the wrong stop?* Falcon thought. *Is this just where we ended up during the IPF attack... or did Black Shadow change something in the races?* Knowing Black Shadow, it was most likely the latter.

*I guess it's not exactly my concern,* Falcon decided, maneuvering the pod away from the flaming lakes of Fire Field and towards solid ground. *I don't think I'm racing in this one anyway.*

*\*Crash!!\**

---

Falcon woke to a blurry red sky, lights flashing above him. Dazed, he at least managed to sit up. *I survived that?* he thought, rubbing his head. *How long was I out?...* *And where's my helmet?* He found it a few yards away and forced himself to stand.

The escape pod he'd crashed in had sunken halfway into the rocky ground, and it had thrown him quite a ways away. Or maybe he jumped off at the last second? His head hurt so much he couldn't remember; it was all as blurry as his sight at the moment.

He grabbed his helmet and put it back on, checking his sensors to see where he was and what was happening. According to the internal clock, seven hours had passed, and there were also no living creatures within a ten mileradius. So he hadn't been in a coma, and Black Shadow was either dead or long gone.

*Okay,* he thought, pulling up a map of the area on his visor. *Step one; find civilization.* The map blipped and a dot showed where a factory lot was built. *There.* He set out, walking the burning paths of Fire Field. It was far, and the

fires around him made his head spin, but if he survived an escape pod crash, then this was nothing.

---

"Hold your fire!" the IPF commander ordered. He stood from his seat at the bridge and looked at the large window-like view screen. Black Shadow's ship had been disarmed, its bridge destroyed, all the escape pods jettisoned, and its engines offline. "Begin boarding. Find Dr. Stuart, Captain Falcon, and if possible, Black Shadow. Move!"

Shuttles were sent down and broke into the ship's exterior. Black Shadow's troops had all been defeated, so there was nothing to stop them from. After an hour of scanning and searching the ship however, they found no signs of Captain Falcon or Black Shadow.

"But you found Stuart?" the commander asked. "Bring him aboard."

The commander waited in a conference room on the IPF battle cruiser's main deck. Dr. Stuart was soon drug into the room by IPF officers, setting him down in a chair.

"What did they do to you?" the commander asked. Stuart shook his head. "Everything," he mumbled. "I... forgot what they wanted."

"Do you know where Falcon is now?"

Stuart shook his head again. "... Dead... Alive... I don't know anymore."

The commander sighed. "Was he on the ship with you before the attack?"

Stuart hesitated, then nodded. "In the cell block... where I was held before..."

The commander nodded, getting to his feet. "Well, we couldn't find his body, so either he got sucked out into space, or he got out on an escape pod."

"Escape pods," Stuart nodded solemnly. "Space... couldn't beat Falcon."

The commander huffed. "Good to know," he waved his hand slightly and two IPF soldiers stepped inside and grabbed Stuart. "Then he's down on the planet. Find him."

"Wait," Stuart mumbled. "Where am I going?"

The commander stepped around the table. "We just needed to know if Falcon really survived, and you seem sure that he did, so now we can put you right back in your cell."

Stuart's eyes widened. "What... no. No! You were the good guys!"

The commander laughed. "Sure... take him away, and get down to that planet. If Black Shadow's down there get him as well."

They took Stuart to an IPF cell kicking and screaming.



Falcon hopped down from a short rocky ledge and sat for a moment, staring up at all the factory buildings rising around him. He could see the hanger building close by, where the main ships were docked, and the track hanger where the racing ships waited.

Even if he didn't plan on racing, he still needed help getting off Fire Field. He just hoped Black Shadow hadn't made it this far before him.

"Falcon," Black Shadow said, standing above him on the ledge he'd just jumped down from.

"Black Shadow," Falcon sighed, hanging his head. "You know, I'm not even surprised at this point."

Black Shadow dropped down, but he didn't sit. "You're going to finish the race," he ordered, folding his arms and staring at the factories. "My spies in the IPF will

have taken over the battle above and captured Stuart if he isn't dead, and thrown that traitorous... whatever her name was, out the airlock."

"So what you're saying is that there's no way to stop you," Falcon nodded. "You already control half the galaxy, and once you finish setting up the Light Port operation you'll control the rest of it. So why do you so badly need me to continue racing? What's so important that my being there changes so much?"

"Because it's all been leading up to this," Black Shadow explained. "I've spent my time working to control half the galaxy as you say; buying off officials, planting cops, monopolizing corporations, and paying the right people to look the wrong way. With Light Port, I will dictate where people can and cannot go within this galaxy. I will have effectively taken over the known universe... But that's not enough."

"Not enough!?" Falcon scoffed. "What else *is* there!?"

"The *unknown* universe," Black Shadow answered. "I want *all* of space. But I don't just want control over it, because there's always a chance of rebellion. No, I need to squash any chance of resistance, and that starts with F-ZERO, the most famous sport in the galaxy. Every company has their hands in it, as I've proved to you, and so many people are invested in it, as you've seen for yourself, that if F-ZERO suddenly went away..."

"Then they'd find something else to occupy their time," Falcon muttered. "That's how it works. Just because you ruin one thing, doesn't mean you've ruined everything."

"Tell me, have you ever heard of a sport called baseball?" Black Shadow asked. Falcon didn't answer; admittedly, there were plenty of sports that had died out years ago, but that only proved his point.

"No," Falcon said. "But if it died out, and it didn't

cause the galaxy to fall into chaos, then how are you sure that will happen with F-ZERO?"

"Because it'll be all that's left," Black Shadow answered. "I said I would control the galaxy, so if I get rid of F-ZERO, the galaxy's last chance of banding together, I can make sure nothing will rise to take its place. There will be no chance of rebellion, no resistance, no hope."

Falcon huffed, thinking about how that would work. He couldn't think that far ahead, but there *had* to be a problem with that logic. And yet, the more he thought about it, Black Shadow made sense. He could keep people from communicating with the Light Port, and he could shut down any resistance with his paid officials. If F-ZERO went away, the last thing binding the galaxy together, there really *wouldn't* be any hope for the future.

"So you will race," Black Shadow said. "Whether you want to or not, because you don't have a choice, and neither does the rest of the galaxy."

"You really think I'd give up that easily?" Falcon grunted, standing up. He took a few steps back and got into a fighting stance. "If the fate of the universe is hanging in the balance, I can't just sit down and roll over for you. I've done some things I regret, hoping I could come up with a better decision later, but you've made me realize that taking you down... it doesn't matter who takes your place, they'd *have* to be better than you, because you're as bad as it could possibly get."

"Why thank you," Black Shadow bowed. He also lowered himself into a fighting stance. "But I'm afraid it's too late for you Falcon; there's nothing left to fight."

"You're standing right there," Falcon hissed. "This time... I'll take you down."

He darted forward, jumping into a spin kick, hoping to catch one of Black Shadow's horns. But Black Shadow dodged, coming back with a swift uppercut. The blow hit

Falcon square in the back, but Falcon used the flip to slam his fist down on Black Shadow's head. While he was off balance, Falcon jammed his knee upwards into Black Shadow's jaw.

Black Shadow growled, spitting the blood out of his mouth from broken teeth. He jumped, bringing both fists down on Falcon. Falcon managed to get his head out of the way, but the strike hit his shoulder, sending him toppling to the side. He tried to throw a kick in the air as he fell but Black Shadow just grabbed his leg and slammed him into the ground.

"Say goodnight," Black Shadow grunted as he punched Falcon in the face.

Falcon struggled to stay awake, grabbing Black Shadow's fist before he could strike again. His helmet had taken most of the blow, but after the escape pod crash, and all the walking in the intense heat, he was losing his strength. He tried to throw Black Shadow off, but it was no use, he was just too big.

"Just give up!" Black Shadow ordered. "By the time you wake up, it'll all be over!"

"No!" Falcon screamed, still holding back Black Shadow's fists. "*No!*"

Black Shadow's hand slipped out of Falcon and slammed into the ground by Falcon's head. But Falcon's fist swiped upward, catching on Black Shadow's horn and sliding part of Black Shadow's mask off.

Falcon froze, looking at Black Shadow's face.

It only lasted a moment however, before Black Shadow used Falcon's hesitation against him. Falcon didn't have the time or energy to block that last hit.

---

Stuart fought as hard as he could, but there were

four soldiers holding him down as they dragged him through the halls. As they reached the holding cells he struggled harder, but one of them just tasered him into silence.

The door opened, and they dropped him.

Stuart rubbed his eyes, watching each of them fall over, their armor riddled with holes. "What... the...?"

"Get up!" Neeka barked, tossing him a gun. "Are you good enough to shoot?"

Stuart looked at the gun for a moment before it registered what was happening. "Uh, right. Yeah, I can shoot."

"Good," Neeka nodded, helping him to his feet. "Then we need to get out of here."

"Are you... still IPF?" Stuart asked.

"Starting to realize why Falcon left," Neeka answered.

"You don't know the half of it," Stuart muttered. "What's our next move?"

Neeka grabbed his arm and shifted him back upright. He was conscious, but they'd done some serious damage to him. It didn't even look like he realized he was falling over any more. "We blast our way out," she told him. "Unless you have an army we could use."

Stuart nodded, then paused. "Wait, yeah, do you have any kind of communication gear?"

"... The comms center is just a floor up," Neeka answered. "You have an army?"

"I don't," Stuart admitted. "But I know someone who does."

Neeka nodded, standing Stuart up again.

---

Falcon jerked awake, hitting his knee on the console

in front of him and almost bashing his head into the hatch above him. *Wh-what happened?* Falcon thought, trying to get his bearings. He was in his ship, the Blue Falcon, and through the view screen he could see the hanger door that lead out to the final track.

Somehow, Black Shadow had gotten Falcon into the ship, but the race hadn't started yet, so he still had a chance. He sat up and pressed against the hatch.

It didn't budge.

He tried harder, but it was stuck. The auto-lock should've disengaged for Falcon just on touch, but it seemed Black Shadow had done something to it.

"That's fine," Falcon muttered. "I'll just sit here at the start and let someone else win."

*"Alright everybody!"* Mr. Zero said over the intercom. *"It's time for the grand finale! It's finally here! The last race in the King League tournament of this year's F-ZERO!"* He paused for the crowds at home to cheer. *"And so without further ado, these last four racers who I don't even need to introduce again, will now compete for the title of racing champion of the galaxy! Racers, start your engines!"*

"No," Falcon muttered.

Suddenly his engine kicked on, same with the others.

"What?" Falcon slammed his hand against the view screen. "Hey! HEY! Get me out of this thing!"

*"Starting with five this time!"* Mr. Zero exclaimed. *"Say it with me; Five!"*

*Not good,* Falcon huffed, slamming his feet against the front of the ship, hoping to break the bulletproof glass with sheer willpower.

*"Four!"*

"Come on!" Falcon screamed, pounding his fists on the hatch again, still kicking the view screen. "COME



ON!!"

"*Three!*"

"SHUT UP!!" Falcon roared.

"\*Just give up,\*" Black Shadow suggested from somewhere in the ship. "\*Just enjoy the show.\*"

"*Two!*"

"Get me out of this ship!" Falcon ordered. "Now!"

"*ONE!*"

Falcon stared helplessly out into Fire Field as the race began, his ship no longer under his own control.

"***START!!***"

---

Stuart and Neeka stood just outside the door to the IPF ship's main bridge. The last of the soldiers up to this point were all either dead or unconscious, and all that was left for them to do was fight off the entire rest of the ship.

"I hope that army of yours gets here soon," Neeka muttered. "We'll need all the help we can get in a moment."

"Yeah," Stuart nodded. "We should have just gone for the escape pods."

Neeka looked at him, eyes narrowed. "Did you lose you accent?"

"What?" Stuart asked.

"I could have sworn when we met you had a British accent," Neeka said. "What did they *do* to you?"

Stuart shrugged. "Barge in on three?"

Neeka sighed. "As good a plan as any."

They took a step back, aimed their guns at the door, and pressed the panel to open the door. As expected, Black Shadow's planted commander was waiting on the other side, with an entire IPF army waiting behind him.

"Neeka," he grinned. "It's about time."

"Stand down and we'll make this quick," Stuart ordered, charging his gun.

The commander raised his hand and every soldier behind him charged their guns as well. "You don't stand a chance," he laughed. "And you've served your purpose."

**\*CRASH!!\***

The bridge shook violently, throwing everyone to the ground as a large boarding funnel broke through behind the commander's army. The sudden crack in the hull pulled half the soldiers out into space before the funnel sealed.

Then the funnel opened, and Samurai Goroh stepped out. "Stuart!" he grunted. "You got a lot of nerve telling me to attack an IPF battle cruiser. What's this all about!?"

"Talk later!" Stuart argued. "Just start shooting!"

Goroh fired a shot at the commander, blasting straight through him. The rest of the soldiers seemed to back off as Goroh's armed nerdling army stepped out.

"Now what?" Goroh asked.

"I've already sent out the message through the IPF to scan for a specific broadcasting channel," Neeka explained. "Every Black Shadow plant is tuned into it just in case they need orders, so the good guys in the IPF will be hunting them down."

"Well that takes care of that," Stuart nodded. "But what about Black Shadow himself?"

"We need to go get him," Neeka answered. She looked at Goroh. "We need to use your ship to get down there."

"Sure," Goroh muttered. "Anything to get this over with."

Stuart patted Goroh's shoulder as he boarded the ship. "Always good to have you on our side."

"Wait, weren't you British?" Goroh mumbled.

---

The Blue Falcon moved on its own, following the track like a runaway train on nuclear rails. The other racers lagged behind him, not able to keep up with the speed, but they were close. Falcon however, was still trapped inside his racer, unable to stop or abandon ship.

The metal ground warped in the heat, making even the straighter parts of the track hard to stay on, and yet Falcon was pulled along without choice. At the sharp turns Falcon expected to be flung off the track, but it was like some kind of magnet was pulling him forward, defying physics.

*How do I get out of this?* Falcon thought, still pressing against the hatch. He tried use his ship's computer, or his helmet's communications, to send out some kind of SOS, but nothing worked.

There was no way out.

---

Goroh's ship docked in the main hanger, hoping to catch Black Shadow before he left. But by the time they got there, there was no sign of him.

"Did he get passed us?" Stuart asked, disembarking. "I didn't see any other ships taking off on our way down."

"Is he at the race?" Goroh asked.

"Not according to the view screens," Neeka answered, checking the security footage. "If he really was here, he's long gone."

"But it doesn't matter, right?" Stuart asked. "We took down his organization, even if he got away, he'd have nowhere to go."

"We took down his troops in the IPF," Neeka confirmed. "And that's a powerful blow, but it's not everything. His set up at Light Port is getting shut down, but he's still in control of so many politicians and

companies... this isn't over."

"Then what do we do?" Goroh asked. "Cause standing around isn't doing anything."

"First we get Falcon," Stuart decided. "He's in the race, right? So he's alive, we just need to tell him to stop racing."

"Maybe," Neeka nodded. "But where we go *fr-kuh...*" She looked down at the hole in her chest, dropping to her knees.

"Neeka!" Stuart exclaimed. "What...?"

"Holy..." Goroh shook his head, looking for who shot her. Then he saw him; Black Shadow, stepping out of the darkness cast by the many large ships around them.

"Black Shadow," Stuart growled. "What are you still doing here!? Why can't you just leave!?"

"Because I hate losing," Black Shadow hissed, firing a shot at Goroh's gun before Goroh could attack. "I just wanted you to know how hopeless it is to fight me. Doesn't matter if you won this time, if you've taken away my soldiers in the IPF, I'll come back."

"Try saying that *without* a gun in your hand!" Goroh roared.

Black Shadow fired at Goroh's feet. "Oh, and don't bother trying to save Falcon," he added, backing towards the darkness. "There's nothing you can do for him now."

"What are you talking about?" Goroh hissed. "What did you do?"

"This will be the last F-ZERO race," Black Shadow smiled. "I will have at least this victory."

In a moment he was gone.

"Take care of Neeka," Stuart growled. "I'll go after Falcon."

"Stuart," Goroh said. "She's dead."

"Then try harder!" Stuart barked, already leaving.

---

Stuart broke the door open into the comms room in the racing hanger, startling Mr. Zero. "Give me the mic!"

"You can't be in here!" Mr. Zero exclaimed. "And, weren't you dead?"

"It didn't take," Stuart growled, shoving Mr. Zero out of the chair. "Falcon! Can you hear me!?"

Falcon stopped for a second, not sure if he was even able to answer.

"We took care of Black Shadow!" Stuart said. "Or at least his IPF goons! Black Shadow himself got away, but he said this would be the last race! I don't know what he's planning, but you need to get out of there, Falcon!"

Falcon rested his hands on the controls, staring out the view screen. He hadn't even dented it, and the hatch still wouldn't budge. He was coming up on the last corner as well, and could see the crowds in the cooled stands just outside the hanger.

The finish line was close, and Falcon wasn't slowing. The other racers were right behind him, but there was still no way they could get passed him.

"Falcon!" Stuart yelled. "Get off the track!"

"That's not exactly an option right now," Falcon muttered, finally giving up. "I think I was just a pawn this time around... Black Shadow was right, I don't have a choice..." He tapped a button on his helmet, starting a recording. "I should have killed him when I had the chance. There'll be a power struggle, but it has to be done. Stuart, or anyone, if you find Black Shadow... don't you *dare* hesitate."

He could see the finish line now, and the wall of oil tanks just passed it. He laughed. "So that's his plan, blow this whole place sky high. At this speed... I don't think there's a way out for me, not this time."

"*Falcon!*" Stuart yelled again. "What are you *doing!*  
Get. Off. The track!"

Falcon tapped the button on his helmet again, ending the recording. "At least you shut him down," he muttered. "That's more than I--"

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**Shigeki Yamashiro**  
**Takaya Inamura**  
**Masanao Arimoto**  
**Naoki Mori**  
**Novelization- Lincoln Reign**

**The race is over...**  
**You are an F-ZERO master!!**  
**Goodbye from Captain Falcon and the F-ZERO crew.**

—

...

And that's it for the F-ZERO races, at least for the time being.

... I'm sure they'll be back again someday, and when that day comes I'm sure Captain Falcon will take the lead once more.

But for now, this is Mr. Zero, signing off one last time.



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## Chapter 17: Fire Field Finale