

# A NEW THREAT

Jubei slowly crept along the mountain face, knowing that any sound would give away his position. On the other side of the mountain was a valley which was being used to harbour a secret laboratory used by Kyos. Until now it was not clear what they had been doing but there were rumours regarding the use of genetics to produce an army that could destroy the Cardinals. Jubei had been entrusted to bring back information for Omegas. His armour was equipped with a digital data feed linked directly to his visor; anything he saw would instantly be stored and could later be broadcast to Gaia. Jubei moved even closer; now he could hear the machines of the laboratory. Finally his head was reaching the top of the mountain; any moment now he could peek over. He inched slowly forward; his hair now would have felt the breeze had he not been wearing a helmet. Finally his eyes gazed over. There in front of him was a laboratory; very sleek, made of shiny titanium with metal pylons providing it with power. The power source seemed to be coming from the core of the Earth; Kyos for sometime had developed a way to harvest the core's energy. Omegas had been against it because it risked the safety of the planet itself. Jubei continued to crawl over the mountain; his armour allowed him to blend with his surrounding area as long as almost complete body contact with the source was maintained. He was now approaching a small open pass which led to the laboratory. Finally he was at the edge of the mountain. He turned his body around, very much as a spider would do so, and set his feet on the ground; he was now in the small mountain pass. He moved slowly but with purpose; taking out his plasma pistol. He edged to the end of the pass. A large open valley was now in front of him. It was the perfect space for any defensive structure to lock onto his position and terminate him. Yet a detailed scan of the surrounding area revealed no automated turrets, missile platforms or landmines. Jubei was puzzled; what could be protecting this laboratory? He seriously doubted that Kyos had developed stealth technology to hide their structures; such a thing was incomprehensible given their current capabilities. They could however have cloaked infantry lurking in the valley ready to spring out. Jubei had no choice but to venture out into the valley.

He moved briskly, using the odd bit of vegetation to take a quick break whilst he planned the next part of his approach. Within a matter of seconds he had covered over four hundred yards, yet this was still only just passed half-way to the laboratory. He began his next brisk run to the nearest bush. Suddenly he was struck from the side by something very strong. The blow was enough to knock him off his feet and send him rolling across the valley. He stopped rolling after a few seconds and gathered himself together. His gun was gone. Rising to his feet he looked ahead to see what had struck him. Standing thirty feet away was something that Jubei had never seen before: a reptilian warrior. Standing well over six feet tall, broad shouldered and carrying a large sword, it was a formidable sight. It was similar to a Cardinal in regards to its posture and the way it held its fighting stance. Covering most of its body was armour plating; a more amateur imitation of what Jubei was

wearing and with no headgear. Not that any conventional headgear could fit the creature. Its face was elongated and its neck broad. Its skin was a dark grey with defined scales; the mouth almost like a man but with no lips. The eyes were bronzes with black slits running down the centre. The creature seemed to be waiting for Jubei to make the next move having already shouldered barged him. Jubei's visor continued to store vital images and data readings; the computers within his helmet were taking the creature's vital signs, biological make up and potential weak points in the armour.

Jubei was astonished to see the creature before him. It was similar to the Enaadi he had encountered in the past but the way it took up its stance and looked him right in the eye seemed to suggest that it had a heightened intelligence. The grip on its blade was similar to the fighting stance of the Fourth Trine. Perhaps the creature had been trained in this discipline which again would be a new development; someone was creating a superior race of Enaadi. Jubei had to get this information back to Gaia. Already his visor had recorded the images and taken some vitals from the creature. Now he had to return. But the creature was not going to have it. Suddenly it sprang forward at great speed and attacked using an aggressive strike used by the Fourth Trine. Jubei was quick to take out his Plasma Blades, which were part of his armour; in essence an extension of his arms and a trademark of the Second Trine, his chosen discipline. He defended the creature's attacks with ease and launched into a counter break. The creature defended but struggled to keep up with his pace, clearly lacking in speed and guile. Jubei noted this and increased his speed. Now the creature was falling back and Jubei was on the charge. It tried to parry his attacks with a weak counter strike but it only resulted in Jubei disarming it. Now the creature was at his mercy. The creature defended Jubei's sword strikes using its arms and surprisingly its skin was thick enough to withstand it, only suffering skin deep scratches. Jubei was baffled by this. Whilst the creature was by no means a worthy opponent in regards to skill, it did now seem that it was hard to kill.

The creature dashed forward and tried to slash Jubei with its claws but he was quick to defend and managed to swing the creature past him. It briefly now had its back to him and he did not miss the moment to strike. He took aim for the creature's neck and to his surprise it was easy to cut. His sword cut straight through the soft flesh; the creature had been decapitated. Dark red blood oozed out from the gaping wound. The head went flying several feet away, the body collapsed to the ground, totally lifeless. The blood continued to flow from the open neck. Jubei looked over at the head and was astonished to see that it was still alive almost as if it had not realised that it was now missing a body. The eyes were still reacting to the sight of him and the mouth moved as if it was trying to breathe. It was a truly hideous sight. Jubei wiped the blood from his sword and then turned to look once again at the laboratory. He wondered how many of these creatures might be lurking within that facility. One was a hard enough prospect, imagine an army of them. Even more alarming for him was the possibility that they had engineered better specimens. Jubei decided to turn away and head back home. He had the information needed to start formulating a strategy against this new threat.

As he walked back to the mountain side he was suddenly startled by a voice in the air. "Well done Jubei. You were the perfect trial subject for our

new warrior. Obviously we shall make further improvements to our fighting database using the data collected today”.

“Who are you?” Jubei interrupted.

“It is not so much who I am but who we are. We are the Collective and soon we shall destroy your beloved Second Trine along with any others that dare to stand in our way”.

“Do you really think these Enaadi counterfeits stand a chance against the Second Trine?” Jubei uttered boldly, almost hiding his fear of the voice in the air. But it knew he was rattled.

“Jubei my friend, your thoughts do not coincide with your words. We will destroy the Second Trine”.

“What a pathetic dream!” Jubei exclaimed.

“We shall see...”

Suddenly the surrounding area started to become hazy and Jubei noticed several shapes emerging. Now before him were more reptile warriors, all donning the same armour as the one he had killed; but now they had different weapons. Some of them had swords, some large mallets and one had a mace and shield. Jubei counted eight. They were directly in the path between the laboratory and the mountainside. Jubei had no choice, he had to fight.

“I shall send your dreams into the raging fires of Chimmeria!” Jubei yelled as he extended both of his blades and charged towards the creatures.

The creatures spread themselves out but before they could assemble into a defensive position Jubei was upon them. He jumped right over the first two and sliced their heads off before they could even turn around. Next he engaged one of the mallet wielding warriors. It tried to strike him with an overhead blow but Jubei easily dodged the attack. The creature planted the mallet into the soft ground and was effectively disarmed. Jubei decapitated it in an instant.

Three down, five to go.

“Impressive Jubei...” the voice applauded.

Four sword wielding creatures remained along with the one who carried a mace and shield. The mace wielder was slightly different to the others. Its skin was darker and it had a leaner build. More interestingly the others seemed to rally around it as if they were a personal retinue.

Jubei advanced onto them. Two of the swordfighters engaged him head on. Their attacks were too predictable and lacked variation. Jubei was too quick on the counterattack. What was more he was now very angry and once Jubei was angry his abilities with the sword magnified considerably. One of the High Guardians once said that Jubei could kill the whole Guardian Council if he got angry enough. Now at this moment he was seeing red and the creatures had no chance. He got himself between the two of them, parrying their blows simultaneously. The mace wielder watched on. Jubei disarmed one of the swordfighters by cutting off its head just below the elbow. He then turned and attacked the other with both his blades. He cut both of its arms clean off and then dug both his blades into its chest. The armour offered some resistance but not enough to prevent his blades from going right through the creature’s torso. He then extended his arms and pulled them out of the creature’s sides, tearing its body apart in the process. Dark red blood covered

his armour. The creature was dead. The other one grabbed Jubei in a tight head lock using its one remaining hand, attempting to strangle him from behind. Its strength was immense and Jubei was struggling to break free. He recoiled blades and began to elbow its chest. But its grip only tightened. Jubei was now feeling his energy sap out of body. From the corner of his eye he could see the last warrior rearing up to engage him from the front, its mace spinning over his head like a helicopter blade. Jubei dug deep within himself. He searched for his inner energy, what Cardinals called their '*chi*'. It was a potent electric charge which could expand several metres if the user had the necessary concentration. Jubei could now feel his chi building up. His eyes began to glow a bright turquoise blue. Soon the electric charge was emitting from his body. He reached back and grabbed the creature's head. An intense bolt of several thousand volts ran through his arms directly into the creature's brain. It screamed in pain, Jubei held on, and within moments its head was completely fried. The headlock loosened and the creature fell to its knees, its head sizzling like a hot plate of grilled meat.

Jubei used his chi once more and extended a destructive lightning bolt at his remaining foe. But the creature used its shield to protect itself from most of the blast. Jubei kept the bolt constant for a few seconds but then could feel his energy dissipating. He was now quite exhausted. The creature charged forward. Jubei only managed to extend his blades within a fraction of a second before it dealt the first blow with its mace. It caught Jubei on the forearm and broke his bone. He tried to counterattack with his other blade but it parried using its shield. It smashed him across the face with its shield. He fell to the ground and instantly rolled away to get some distance. His left forearm was broken and his face badly smashed. Blood was oozing out from the wound. The creature ran at him. Jubei got to his feet and charged at its shoulder first. Its mace caught him in the chest and flung him several metres away. The plating in his chest armour was strong enough to prevent his bones from breaking but he was winded. The creature was now upon him again. Suddenly Jubei could see his gun in the corner of his eye. He rolled over, dodging the creature's charge and picked up his gun in his right hand. He took aim. The creature was only a few metres away. He activated the grenade launcher and opened fire. The creature exploded into several pieces.

Jubei held his chest and rose to his feet. Already his healing abilities were kicking in. His forearm was now only fractured and his face had stopped bleeding. He had fought eight of these foul beasts and come out on top.

The voice began to speak once again. "Congratulations Jubei. This has been a most fruitful experiment. You truly are an exceptional warrior of the Second Trine".

Jubei was now fully healed. "I hope for your sake I never meet you for I swear to you I shall rip that voice out of your throat!"

"All in due time Jubei"

Jubei could see more hazy shapes appearing around the laboratory. This was a fight he could not continue. He turned and ran as fast as he could back to the mountain side. Hazy shapes appeared all over the valley.

The voice was now laughing at him. "Run you coward! RUN!"

The hazy shapes started to take form. The valley was now full of reptilian creatures. But Jubei was almost at the end of the valley. Several of them blocked the final part of his journey but using his momentum he jumped

right over them. As he did so he dropped several smoke grenades. The creatures were lost and confused in the smoke. By the time it had cleared Jubei was gone. He had lived to fight another day.