Chaud and Protoman
Pen and Role
Fanfiction

I'm super happy today! I'm going to a big fancy party like in Cinderella. Mommy did my hair up pretty and told me to be on my best behavior. They were going to work for the people throwing the big party. I jumped to the car and we drove to a huge house with too many rooms and windows. It was like a castle.

We got in and there was one boy my age. He had funny black and white hair. His eyes were big and blue and he wore a little black jacket over a red tie.

"Hi!" I said to him.

"Hello." He said back.

"Who are you?" I said.

"Eugene. But call me Chaud."

"Okay Chaud! My name's Pen. I'm five. Do you want to do something?"

"I'm supposed to stay and listen to the company talks."

I frowned. "Okay! What should I do?"

"Stay quiet and listen."

I sat down and concentrated as hard as I could. If he was going to listen I could too. No matter how hard I listened, I couldn't understand the big words they used. I looked back at Chaud.

"Now do you want to do something with me?"

He looked around slowly then shrugged.

"I guess. You like to netbattle?"

"I don't have a Navi, but I like watching."

"Okay then." He walked out of the room and I followed. We went to a big machine with two netnavis on it ready to battle.

My eyes got big. There was a girl and a boy Navi, the boy was red and the girl green. The boy looked really happy to see Chaud and the girl looked at me.

"Master Chaud, we would like the Knight sword Battle chip for this fight now that Role is fully recovered from her ordeal." The red man said. Chaud gave him and the girl battle chips and smiled for the first time. Then I saw the red navi's long white hair. I giggled. The girl navi looked at me with purple eyes.

"Who's your friend, Chaud?" She asked.

Chaud looked back at me. "The new painter's daughter. She said her name was Pen." The red navi smiled even bigger. "Why're you so happy Protoman?" Chaud asked.

"Just excited for the battle." Protoman said back. He looked at the girl and she nodded. Suddenly the two navis jumped at each other and started fighting. Lights danced around them and I bounced on my heels happily. I rooted for the girl inside of me. I thought about what it felt for her to be fighting the navi called Protoman.

All the sudden a flash of light happened and I saw through the girls eyes. I learned through her that her name was Role. I felt a need to beat Protoman, so with one slash of our sword, we won the battle.

Protoman stood looking surprised and his hands were raised. I laughed again when I saw that, but it sounded weird.

Then I was back in my body. I looked at Chaud and the netnavis and they all looked back at

me.

"H- How did you do that? You've never even met her!" Chaud exclaimed.

"I don't know." I said.

"We did full-syncro, didn't we?" Role said. "Haven't you and Protoman been practicing that since you first met?"

Chaud nodded. "I think it's theoretically possible, if their biology is similar and..." He said some more things that I didn't understand. How can this boy be my age? He acts way older. And weird.

"We should get back to the party." He said after that. I nodded and followed him back to the big room with all the adults.

I sat next to my parents and ate a little food that they were having. Noodles in sauce. I don't like sauce though, so I only had a little. My head hurt a little. I think it was the lights. Or maybe the man in the corner that was smoking. I coughed very hard. Mommy asked if I was alright and looked at the man smoking meanly. I said I was fine.

Chaud looked over at me. He looked... I think angry, and I worried he was mad at me. I stood up to go over and ask him, but then I fell. I tripped and tried to get up. I coughed again and couldn't. I don't remember anymore of that night.

The next day I woke up and I was in my bed. Mommy was at the side of my bed. Daddy was standing.

"Do you feel better?" Mommy said.

I nodded my head.

"What happened to the party?" I asked.

"You fell asleep from the bad man that was smoking, but you're fine now." Daddy said.

Mommy then said, "you should thank that boy you were playing with. He made the bad man put out his cigar and he opened a window. He also said to give you this." She handed me a green PET. Inside of it was Role.

"Wow, really? " I shouted.

"Yes." Role said with a smile.

A couple months later, I learned that when Role left at night she was with Protoman. She and him kissed and talked about grown-up things. Sometimes, when they wanted to netbattle, I would even visit Chaud. Him and me would talk a little. He told me that he didn't go to school. He was too smart for it. Also, he was going to be the boss of his dad's company when he was a bit older. He told me that he and Protoman were police officers. I'm not sure I believed him, but he showed me his badge, so he must have been telling the truth. About Protoman at least.

Even later, when I was 10 and he was 11, He became the CEO of Blaze Quest. I invited him to my house, but he was always too busy. When his 12th birthday came around, he had to work then too, but I made him come to my house early in the morning to celebrate. We ate cake and he drank coffee to keep him awake during the rest of his day.

Protoman isn't always as happy as he was the first day I met him, but he always seems happier when Chaud is with me and when he's with Role.

The scene was the large field of Chaud's backyard, behind his giant house, a beautiful field of long grass, with one stone breaking the green serenity. I'd never been this far out from the mansion.

It seemed to go on forever. He looked down at the stone, intercut carvings curling all around it and a cross in the center. The word Eternity and the name Athinia ran across the bottom.

I tried to read his expression, but found it impossible. He was just staring blankly at the beautiful grave, almost as if I had disappeared.

"I've never shown this to anyone, never told anyone my story." He sighed. "I suppose, I suppose I was always too scared I would look weak, or it would be too painful."

"You don't have to tell me." I whispered softly. I can't bear to see him like this.

"Pen, please, don't tempt me. I have to tell someone. I trust you, you don't judge me by who I'm supposed to be. Only by what I am. You should know, we've been together long enough. The only people who know are Protoman and Father. Protoman thinks talking to a human will help me get over it, past the pain it causes me."

He looked as if he had to force out every word, but if he stopped he could never continue. He looked up at the only other thing in the huge expanse of grass. A large Red Maple tree, a beautiful tree that seemed to go up forever, and yet had branches low enough to climb.

Suddenly, I felt uncomfortable. I didn't have any deep past to share with him, he knew almost everything about me. I don't feel comfortable keeping secrets, but everyone is entitled to keep theirs. He started his story quickly, before he could change his mind.

"My mother and father met through an arrangement set up by my grandfathers. It was an arranged marriage in order to combine the two companies they owned. Mother's was the largest power plants in the world and Father's was, as you know, Blaze Quest, the largest gaming and advanced electronics firm in the world. The companies are now combined forming the largest and most dominating world-renowned company ever, which I am, at fourteen, now the CEO of.

'Because they needed an heir to the two companies, naturally, I was born. We lived very happily for a few years. Mother took me to museums and different countries. I became very smart for a two year old." He smiled wistfully. "Of course all good things must come to an end. After a few years, I noticed a change in my mother. She appeared frailer than I'd ever seen and had coughing fits. We couldn't go as many places as before and eventually she became bedridden. I could only see her once in a great while.

'I also began noticing changes in father. He talked to me even less, working longer nights and in his spare time all he did was stand outside my mother's room or in it with her. Even though I was young and didn't really understand, I think something inside me knew, somehow. Even so, It was still-," He choked and took a deep shuddering breath. "It still hurts." He said it all as if rehearsed, and maybe it had been. There was also an exhausted tone in his voice, ready to let go, just not knowing how.

"I'm so sorry." I whispered. I wanted to comfort him, but how? I'd never experienced loss this great and this wound had sunk so deep.

"Don't be," His voice cracked, but he continued. "She called me to her room that day. She had known from the start. When I walked in the room she gave me the sweetest, saddest smile I've ever seen." Chaud also had on his face a bitter-sweet smile, retelling the memory making it fresh in his mind as if it had been yesterday. The bottom of my lip trembled as the emotion of his story consumed me. My chest and throat were tight, I was going to burst into tears at any moment.

"She took my hands and gave me two things, Protoman's PET and a small digital photo album containing every picture of us together on every single one of our trips, and even some I hadn't remembered. She said she loved me. She told me to remember her, and to confide in Protoman. She closed her eyes, told me to be strong and I never spoke to her again." By now Chaud's hands were balled into fists and he was shaking. "At her funeral, Father told me not to cry, to be a man, so I didn't, but I never got over it either." He turned away from the grave, his eyes glistening with tears.

"She died from long term complications of my birth. That's why Father never looks me in the eyes. It doesn't help that we have the same eyes; he can't bear to see her in me. I can't let it out or he'll see and he'll disapprove. I want him so badly to approve of me, to accept me."

I took my hand in his and leaned on his shoulder, just to show I was there for him. "Do it, cry, now. It's no shame to cry. He's not here now. He can't see it."

He leaned on me and we cried together, next to the grave, under the red maple tree.

Chaud, as a netsavior, had gained the ability to crossfuse. Role and I were very happy for him. I was a netsavior by this time, Inspector Oda and Doctor Hikari saw me and Chaud netbattle. They had asked me to join the netsavior crew right away.

Chaud and I were the first along with another boy my age to become Netsaviors so young. There was a boy named Raika, but he was sixteen and lived in another country; Sharo I think. Chaud and Lan are the only ones able to crossfuse. I'm so thrilled with being a netsavior, it hadn't even occurred to me until now that I should probably try to crossfuse with Role soon. It's so easy for us to do full-syncro that it can't be that much harder to do it in the real world. It would help us a lot in the field if Darkloids can materialize in the real world now.

I sit next to Chaud in his car, suddenly feeling very vulnerable. He is so strong. He can do Crossfusion the second there is a dimensional area, but I would be defenseless. He looks at me and I feel my cheeks heat up. Strange. I've known him for so many years, yet it feels as if we just met. We've told each other every one of our secrets. Actually, no, I've told him everything about me, but there are many things I don't know about him. I doubt I'll ever know everything. That's okay though, they're his secrets to keep.

"Pen, the darkloids have created another dark chip factory. I shut down that first one, but they keep cropping up all over." I nodded seriously. "I can take care of this mission fine on my own. Why don't we drop you off at your house so you can get some rest?" He said this while looking out the window.

"Inspector Oda instructed me to come with you. How will I improve or do my duty if you do it all for me?" I asked. He didn't look back at me.

"I agree with Master Chaud." Protoman said to Role. "There's no need for you and Miss. Pen to come along."

"So you don't need us? Is that what you're trying to say? We're not helpful?" Role said it teasingly, but there was a terseness in the back of her words.

"Of course not." Protoman said soothingly. "We just don't want you getting hurt."

"What?! You DO think we'll get in the way! You won't have to protect me if that's what you're worried about." I exclaimed indignantly. "I'm not the little girl you met at the dance. I'm just as capable as you or Lan."

"Oh, you're much more capable than Lan. Did I tell you about the time he had trouble beating four Mettaurs? It was the same week I saved him from Desertman. It's just that you can't crossfuse. It would be a waste of your time and energy to come."

"In that case you don't mind if we come." Role said, carefully avoiding his change of topic.

Protoman looked a bit put off, but didn't object. Chaud said nothing more to me. The car arrived at the warehouse, I thanked the driver, something Chaud never felt it necessary to do, and walked up to the doors.

Chaud looked at me and I nodded, in full mission mode. We entered the first room, an entire wooden crate of dark chips sitting in the center.

"Trap." Chaud snapped immediately, pulling me back with one arm and bolting towards the door behind them. The second the word emerged from his lips, a dimensional area surrounded the

warehouse, trapping us within. Chaud pulled out his PET and Syncro-chip, yet, at some point in between there was a flash across my vision, and Chaud crumpled to the ground.

I gasped and a darkloid appeared above Chaud's limp body.

"Chaud!" I screamed. The syncro chip had flown across the room and slid to a stop at my feet. Protoman's PET flew in the opposite direction. The Darkloid appeared to be made of vines, and he lifted Chaud above his head, the vines snaking around him, another tendril reaching to Protoman's PET.

"Master Chaud!" I hear Protoman cry out.

The vines tightened around Chaud, a faint gasp escaping his pressed lungs, "Pen... Run." Panic filled my mind and I couldn't think, couldn't move.

"PEN!" Role screamed. "The syncro chip!" In a flurry of movement, I reached down and jammed the battle chip into my PET, not a thought went to the consequences of an unsuccessful cross. All I saw, even in the flash that meant Role and I were one, was Chaud's face, as his mouth was covered by another vine. His arms strained against the thick coils, every muscle working towards life. The Plant-man turned to me while I fused with Role, but by then it was too late.

I transformed my arm into a brilliant red sword, fire. I snarled at the darkloid, and he growled back. My blond hair had changed to Role's brown and ignited into flames as well, mirroring my anger. Chaud's eyes were filled with sorrow. He looked angry, but I couldn't stop to think about why.

"Put him down." I spat, my voice resounding with Role's strength. Smirking, the Navi dropped Chaud. He landed with a thud, each of his pained coughs breaking my heart.

"Does the little girl want to fight? Does she want to be the hero?" Cockiness filled his voice and my ears, sparking a white hot under my skin. It filled my body, coursing through my veins. I was so filled with disgust and anger, I was speechless. It was all I could do not to hurl myself at him, training forgotten. I managed to restrain myself and allowed him to make the first strike, blocking easily and igniting the reaching vine.

I lunged forward, closer to his body, slashing rapidly. This was so much better than full-syncro, but I had no time to revel in the brilliance. I severed another of his vines, but he had many, and was phasing through the earth under our feet. I stood stock still, waiting for him to reveal himself again. He came up behind me, a thousand spiny tendrils aimed straight for my heart.

My sword moved faster than I'd ever dreamed it could. Every one of his flailing vines were severed in an instant. The fire snaked up his arm. He swore and ducked away from my final blow. I clipped the gaudy flower atop his head, but missed otherwise.

I turned to keep my eyes on the Plant navi as he moved toward Protoman's PET.

"No!" I screeched, Role's fury and my anger sounding like a banshee call. The darkloid ignored me and just before he reached the PET, Chaud heaved himself to it and pulled it in towards his chest, cradling it from the villain.

Angered, the navi broke the floorboards under his feet, entwining his vines around Chaud's torso, neck, legs, arms. They grew a yellow flower around him, the bud growing faster than I could move. His eyes widened in panic and he clambered to push the petals away from him.

"Pe-Penelope..." He managed to gasp, I noticed the welt the darkloid had inflicted across Chaud's head, an ugly bruise turning a dark green-purple.

My reaction time was tripled, I shot to the darkloid and changed my arm to a hero sword. I sliced through him, his chest. He was deleted with a screech of anger.

The flower enveloping Chaud disintegrated in a blossom of pixels. Chaud coughed and fell on the ground, unconscious. I picked him up in my arms and carried him to the edge of the dimensional area.

"Chaud," I whispered. I set him down gently on ground and retrieved Protoman. "Protoman,

call Famous." He quickly complied and the dimensional area faded, Role's strength leaving me. I had the team that came confiscate the darkchips, an ambulance came, and Chaud was taken to the hospital.

I sat in by his side often, and when he finally woke up for a long enough time to hold a conversation, I steeled myself. I couldn't risk he would be gone before I had a chance to tell him how I feel.

"Chaud- This is going to be really awkward." I say, my mouth suddenly running dry. My face turns red as I realize I probably won't be able to say it out loud. I grab a slip of paper, apologizing profusely, and write on it in a shaky scrawl. "/Chaud, I really care about you. We've known eachother for a long time, and I want our relationship to be more. I've wanted to tell you for a long time, but I've been too scared./"

I handed him the piece of paper, shaking badly, my hands drenched in sweat. He takes his time reading it, and I can't bare to look at him. He turns to me and lifts my head up in his hand. He is shaking too. He nods ever so slightly and pulls me into a hug, and I feel my life click into place.

Nothing else mattered but this moment. We were going to find our happiness, regardless of all the pain he felt. I would heal it best I could, and he would do the same for me. We are imperfect, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

About a month later, Chaud called me with an urgent message after his day with Anetta. I wasn't jealous, I knew that he had to get to know her, and that he felt bad for her since her Navi was deleted in a hospital fire a few months ago. I felt bad too, but she hadn't asked me to go, she'd asked Lan and Chaud, and I was fine with that.

Anyway, Chaud called me saying that Dr. Regal, the famed scientist we had all trusted, had turned out to be the one distributing darkchips. Go figure. I guess Dr. Hikari may be bright, just not the best judge of character. After all, he'd been working with Dr. Regal for years. Chaud said that he was aboard an oil tanker and that Ms. Yuri had kidnaped Anetta. Oh, and darkloids were swarming Scilab, so me and Raika had to take care of that so they could rescue Anetta. Of course.

He said I should under no circumstance come to the ship. Not even if the darkloids turned out to be a ruse. Yet he wants Lan's help? What the heck.

I rush to scilab, and what do you know? Gravityman and Burnerman. Me, Role, and Searchman send them packing, Raika couldn't get here fast enough, living in Sharo. After the fight we sit anxiously in the viewing room of Scilab, waiting for a call, a sign, anything that would say everyone's safe.

"Pen?" Role calls from her PET. "I just got a really weird feeling..." She sounds to be almost choking on her words. "You know me and Protoman have linked emotion data, right?"

I nod.

"He just got really angry."

"He is in battle."

Role shook her head, "He's never been this angry. Not in our entire lives. I didn't even know navi data registered anger this intense."

Now she looked angry herself.

"Are you okay?"

"No! I'm worried!" She snapped. Role never snaps. We stopped talking. Chief Keifer, Inspector Oda, and Dr. Hikari all walked into the room.

"I just don't see how this could happen!" The doctor exclaimed, "We worked so hard! I've known Regal my entire working career!"

"What happened?" I interrupted. "Role said that she felt weird. Did something happen to Protoman?"

"How did you know?" Inspector Oda asked quickly.

"Role is connected to him through emotion data." I quickly countered, "Now tell me."

"I'm afraid Chaud was forced to use a darkchip." Chief Keifer said solemnly.

I shook my head. "He would never do that." My heart fell to my stomach. My throat closed. "He didn't."

Inspector Oda shook his head. "It's the truth."

"Where is Protoman now?!" Role screamed. She was clenching her hands to her head. Numbly, I raised my shaking hand to my face and ran it through my hair.

"We don't know. He fled after defeating Shademan." Dr. Hikari said carefully.

My eyes widened. "It was Anetta, wasn't it? She forced him to use it." Venomous hatred coursed through my veins. Chaud had known about her plan, how could he have fallen for it anyway?

"Don't go throwing accusations. She was unconscious, the tanker was going down, Shademan was attacking Regal for double crossing him and Chaud and Lan lost the battle. They had no other option." Inspector Oda reprimanded me.

"No." I shook my head, tears welling in my eyes. "It can't be true- Protoman!" I wailed, and Role wailed with me. My head was cradled in my hands as I rocked slowly side to side in my sobs.

"Where's Chaud?" I asked, trembling.

"Not back yet. He's coming on the helicopter with Famous and Lan now." Keifer said.

I ran to the roof, leaving them all staring after me.

About a minute on the roof and they were already back. Lan stormed out of the copter with his hands clenched. Famous looked simply depressed. Chaud came out after a few extra seconds. His hair was down covering his eyes. I approached him, and stopped a few feet away.

He walked right past me without saying anything.

The next day, Role was worse. She sat on the base of her PET and wouldn't talk to me.

Chaud's P.O.V.

It still feels like a bad dream. I gazed out my office building's window at the gray sky. I can't sleep. Everytime I close my eyes I relive it. Like that nightmare you can never forget. I wish it was just that, a nightmare, but it's not. It really happened. I really did it. To him, my only friend. I blinked back the hated tears of weakness. A torrent of emotions I couldn't control spinning around in my head.

He deserved a better partner, someone as faithful as he was. I put my fist to the window. Look at me, thinking in the past tense. I attempted to sit at my desk and get some work done, but found I couldn't see the page or concentrate on work, for the tears obstructed my vision. And the PET's empty screen mocked my feelings, flashing messages I had no desire to read. All alone again...

Why does everyone I care about leave me? Mother, a distant memory. Father, cold, disapproving. Protoman, the one who supported me through it all, gone forever by my hand. I deserve his hate for what I did to him. I deserve Fathers harsh glare. I deserve it all.

I couldn't keep back the tears so they fall freely now as I walked slowly over to the window.

I'm a terrible netop. We could've defeated Shademan without the Darkchip. I can't do anything right. I shook my head angrily as Protoman's last words to me in his right mind came back to me. 'I was honored to have been your Navi.' Then what he said after, was it true? Or was it simply the dark chip? '*And Chaud, you're nothing to me.*' I bit my lip. The truth or not, it still had hit right where it hurt the most.

A soft rap came on my office door.

"What?" I demanded sharply, quickly stifling my silent sobs. "Oh, it's you." I said

monotonously as a blonde, hazel-eyed girl walked into the room. I can't talk to her now. Not after everything that happened, Her eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep and her face was tear-streaked.

"Chaud, I...I wanted to see how you were holding up..." She said quietly.

"I don't want to talk about it." I replied, too stiffly.

"I just want you to know it's not your fault," the girl started.

"Pen! I don't want to hear it, okay?" I responded angrily. She's just being nice, what's wrong with me?

"Let me finish." She demanded softly. "No matter who put in the chip, it was Shademan's fault for attacking the ship and Regal's for making the chip, not yours. You can't carry the world on your shoulders."

"You don't get it, do you?! I put in the chip knowing what it would do, knowing what it would do to him." My voice cracked and I looked away, sharply closing my eyes.

"I'm going to Scilab. Nebula want us to give up. They're trying to put us down. I'm going to do something to help whether you will or not." She half-heartedly turned on her heels and went straight out the door.

But what if he doesn't want to come back?

I packed up a suitcase full of technology and clothes and unpacked it again. What could I possibly do without a navi? I have to prove to myself I can do just as much without a navi as with one.

"Get the car ready. I'm going to scilabs." I said through the intercom.

Pen's P.O.V.

Once at scilab, I went straight to Doctor Hikari's office. He had told me the night before he needed me on full duty because Chaud's navi was gone and Lan broke his PET. As I walked in the office, the doctor quickly put away what he was doing and came up to me.

"Is Chaud coming?" He asked.

"I'm not sure. He didn't want to talk to me." I replied sadly. The doctor nodded his head.

"Well, we'll make the best of it." The Doctor turned his back to me and fumbled through some papers. I tapped my foot nervously, everything that had been happening lately, it was so much, so hard to comprehend.

"Here it is " Dr. Hikari exclaimed. He pulled out a bright green PET, almost the exact same design as mine. Green with Orange decals.

"This is-," The door jerked open, and Chaud stood in the doorway. I smiled, and he came to stand next to me. He eyed the PET in the Doctor's hands, giving me the intense feeling that I was the only one that didn't know what was going on, again.

"You know I don't approve of this plan." Chaud snapped.

"We have no other choice." The doctor replied calmly. He knew perfectly well that Chaud could make him homeless in under a day.

"Will you both tell me what's going on?" I asked softly.

"I will, if Mr. Blaze will allow it." Dr. Hikari said patiently.

Chaud didn't reply.

"This," Dr. Hikari held up the PET. "Is my newest model of an anti-darkchip PET. I've kept it a secret from everyone but you two, but I'm going to release my research after today."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because if anyone found out, the darkloids would attack us and steal the data." He said.

"Why Role? Why not your son? You give him all your new prototypes."

"Because that's what they'll expect. I'll give my son the one I make with all the other scientists."

I was beginning to understand. "So when they attack, you'll have a PET already prepared for the attack if his isn't finished."

"Exactly. But in order for this to work, you can't tell anyone. You can't jack in, e-mail, access the internet or call other PETs. It's all traceable that way. We must use extreme caution."

"I understand."

"It will probably take hours to download Role into the PET, we should begin. If I may?" He gestured to take my PET. I gave it to him, he looked at Role, still crouched on the ground, and connected the two. "The transfer will be quick, but the initialization will take much longer."

He handed me the new PET and the now empty old one.

Chaud looked at me strangely. "We should go, want to take my car?" I nodded and looked at the PET screen anxiously. "It's fine." He said as he took my hand, but his heart didn't sound to be in it.

~Role's Mind~

The darkness is overwhelming. I can barely breath. There is pain and anger all around. It feels like two people are screaming. Or fighting. Or burning.

I hear his voice every so often. He asks to be forgiven, or to be let go, or to see me or Chaud again. Sometimes he asks for help. He is strong, but he cannot fight this. I can see the data he is trying his hardest to protect. Memory and Emotion data, but the memory is already slowly eroding. He cannot remember when we first met, but he's clinging to our first kiss. He lost when I was taken away from him, but he holds when he met Chaud.

Blasts of heat surround me and I don't know where I am, but then suddenly, all the chaos seems to be coming from far away and I can move again.

My surroundings make sense to me, I'm in a new PET and Pen is looking at me in concern.

"Pen, Protoman is losing."

"I know."

Pen's P.O.V.

Chaud and I were preparing for the inevitable attack on scilab when Lan was gifted his new PET up in one of the office rooms. I had my syncro chip in one hand, and my new PET in the other.

"Are you sure about this?" He whispered. He hasn't spoken in his full voice around me yet, but around anyone else he acts the same as ever. Besides his tussle with Lan, the day I got my PET.

"I'm positive, I'm going to stop all of this, you have to stop worrying. Nebula doesn't know I have this PET, they think Lan is our only hope since my crossfusion was never made public. It's going to be fine." I reply.

"Chaud!" I hear Anetta call through the hallways. She's been hanging around here since Chaud went with her to the mall. At least that's how I mark it.

He doesn't turn around, and inside, I feel as though I've won a great battle.

"You know that Protoman's going to either go after you specifically, or take great pains to avoid you right? And if it's the prior, he'll kill you." His soft voice diminished to nearly nothing.

I sigh, "I know." I place my hand on his shoulder. "I can do this."

He smiles weakly, "I know you can." I suddenly realize that he's positioned himself between the door and myself. He takes my hand with the syncro chip and folds it into mine. I notice once more the deep scar tissue marking it. Jagged ones crossed his fingers and the most prominent circular one from a battle with Darkman turned white with the pressure. He had calluses like mine where you'd hold a pencil, and his thumb and index finger's tips were rough. There was a fierceness in his grasp

that would've frightened me if it had been anyone else.

"But- I can't lose anyone else, I'm sorry." He grabbed the syncro chip out of my hand, and before I even had a chance to cry out he had bolted out the door, slamming it behind him. I lunged to catch him, but ended up jarring my shoulder against the door.

"Chaud!" I scream. He doesn't believe in me. I'd been harboring the fear for months and guess it wasn't unfounded. I pound on the door for a moment and then sink to the ground. My voice cracks form the strain of my yell.

"Role, he locked us in." My voice is lowered to a soft raspy lament.

Instead of crying like a sane person, I suddenly burst into hysterical laughter.

"What's funny about it?! Protoman's going to come, and if we don't get the syncro chip back, he'll kill Chaud! We won't get him back!" Her tears were flying off her face angrily now.

I smile and try to retain my conflicted emotions, "Chaud cares so much... He's just trying to protect me." I say it as much for her as for me. "He's just going about it the wrong way."

"You're insane." Role snarls.

Chaud's P.O.V.

I shake my head in resolve. I had to leave her there. She would have been killed by Dark Protoman, and everything he does is on me. I have to protect her. She's all I have left. And if she hates me now, at least she'll be safe. I didn't even want her to crossfuse in the first place. I grab my blue folder with the anti-darkchip data Dr. Hikari wanted me to research and run up to my office.

Entering my office, I see Lan sitting on the couch with his head down. He's still worried about Megaman, and frankly so am I. If Megaman doesn't heal, Pen may have to fight. Alone no less.

Anetta is standing in the middle of the room holding a basket in her hands. That's all I need right now.

"Oh, Chaud!" She greets me.

"Hi there Anetta." I strain to keep my voice neutral.

"So what are you up to Chaud?"

I throw away any thoughts I had about getting work done. Let's just hope Dr. Hikari calls us soon.

The second I finish explaining, she puts her basket on my desk and opens it.

"I call it Anetta's crossfusion sausage custard surprise!"

"Eugh." I groan. It's the ugliest mash of food I've ever seen.

"Don't give me that look before you've even tried it!" She exclaimed, "That makes me so mad! You computer nerds think gourmet cooking is a double cheese burger."

I can't even find it in me to respond. That was probably one of the most ignorant statements I've ever heard. I've never had a burger, let alone a double cheese one. When I eat, I eat with clients at five-star restaurants. Almost no exceptions. I give her my very best unimpressed glare and continued to type commands into the computer. She pulls a sandwich from the case and shoves it into my hands. Then she shoves another one into Lan's hands. He actually eats and enjoys it.

The sandwich in my hand begins dripping something yellow. Gaging, I drop the sandwich in the wastebasket as Lan's father tells him to get to his lab, because his PET is completed. Thank goodness.

Pen's P.O.V.

"There's no where to jack into! Only a netsavior or employ here can open the door from the outside!" Role said again. "Protoman is getting closer..."

"I can't do anything unless someone comes by here." I answer. Suddenly, I hear footsteps,

someone that runs with a high bounce in their gait. Probably Anetta. Then I hear a rapid speed walk, boots tromping menacingly. Role holds her hands to her head and moans softly.

"Too close…" She mumbles.

I hold my breath and press my ear to the door. The second pair of footsteps halts and the room shakes. I hear a scream. He jumped at her. A snarl. He missed. Protoman always makes noises after his opponent knows his location in netbattles. Intimidation I suppose.

Role whimpers. I exhale slowly once the footsteps disappear. The tap of a third set of feet comes by after five long minutes of waiting.

"Dad, I'm on Anetta's trail. Yeah. Has Chaud caught up to her yet?"

"Lan!" I yell.

"Huh?!" Lan exclaimed, "Pen?"

"Lan, could you just open this door for me?"

"This one?" He opens the room next to me.

"The one to the left of that! You idiot!"

The door slides open. I give him a quick hug. "Thank you Lan!"

"Why'd you lock yourself in there anyway?!" He gives me the look that he always does, he thinks I'm crazy too. Oh, well, he can think what he likes.

"Long story. You got a spare syncro chip?" I say quickly, the only thoughts in my head on my mission.

"Course.- Oh! What? You can crossfuse? But- You should probably stay back until Dark Protoman is gone, Chaud and Anetta are handling it."

I let out a sound of exasperation, "Like undernet they are. You haven't got a single person that can crossfuse! He'll kill you all."

"W-we've got a plan… sorta."

"Mm-mm, I'm sure." I put out my hand and he grudgingly placed the chip into it.

"Hey, Pen, before you go, could you help me get into the ventilation system? I want to head off everyone without getting found by Dark Protoman."

I lifted Lan up into the vent above us, using my hands as a step ladder. He slid in the vent and I immediately started running.

Chaud's P.O.V.

"Got to get to the dimensional area, I'll trap him. It's our only hope." This thought runs through my mind a thousand times as the elevator drops two floors. I hear a thud on the roof and Anetta makes a sound of terror, tears in her eyes. I can't let her get hurt. She wasn't supposed to get involved in this. Her netnavi was deleted while I was there. She blames me. Nothing else can happen to her while I'm here. If only she would give me Lan's PET

Pen's P.O.V.

As I run through the halls, I jam the syncro-chip into my PET and suddenly I'm twice as fast, my feet flying across the floor. I open a locked down door in front of me and there is, What do you know, a darkloid right in the middle of the way.

"Hey girly. How ya doin'?" He looks me up and down, his glassy eyes and yellow head reminding me of an alien, as I'm sure his name will indicate.

"I'm Novaman! Nice to meet you! Meteor!" As he shouted the last word a huge black hole emerged from behind him. Now I've never used this new PET, but let me tell you, the effects were astounding. It was like watching everything in slow-motion. Balls of fire came barreling at me from the hole, but I stopped all of them with ease. The tips of my hair ignited into flames to match the

emotion that came with entering a battle.

"Aw, come on, stop flitting like a bird, I'll never hit you!" He said with a confident grin.

"I don't have time for you." My voice, deadly calm. My arm turned into a brilliant red sword. The green in my eyes intensified. I moved so fast I hadn't even realized I was close enough to attack him. By the time I swung my sword he had logged out, a look of panic finally crossing his face.

Once that was somewhat resolved, I opened the next door and made my way to the next room. There was still four corridors and a lab room left until I reached Chaud's location. First hall. Empty. Second hall. Empty. Third hall. A slow cackle sounded from behind me. The hair on the back of my neck rose and fell with every of the laughs. I spun around and there he was. Dark Protoman. His sword arm was completely shattered, but he looked way too smug.

"Hello, Role, Penelope." He said quickly.

I stood my ground ready for anything. Suddenly, his expression faltered.

"R-Role, Ms. Pen get out of here, It's not safe."

"Protoman!" Both Role and my voices sounded shrill and odd to me. We rushed up to him, and he swayed on his feet.

"N-No, get away from here." He pushed us away, but there was no strength in it.

"Please, Protoman, we can help you!" I cried.

"Heheheheh. Who said anything about needing help?" He cackled. He shoved us much harder this time. We fell backward and tumbled to the ground. A jolt of pain flashed through me. I-We screamed with it. For an instant, I thought his purple band turned white. He transformed his arm into a new sword. Dark Neo Variable Sword. He raised it above his head. We raised our own in defense. They clashed. He logged out.

As the dimensional area dissipated, my right arm moved involuntarily to the side, and a sharp twitch taunted the muscles.

"R-Role, he's gone..." I murmured.

"Gone-," She repeated, her hand twitching just as badly as mine felt like it was.

"What did he do?" I winced.

"I don't know, but our link feels-," She hissed with pain, "Stronger again."

Chaud's P.O.V.

"Anetta... I should really be going." I announce to the redhead as she attempts to begin another conversation about her terrible cooking.

She looks down sadly, yet in a perky voice replies, "Oh, okay Chaud! See you!"

I wave my hand, lost in thought, "Yeah, bye." Will Pen be too angry? Was it worth locking her in there to the risk that she'll hate me? I don't think she's like that, but lately, I haven't been able to judge her as well as I thought I could. Is it her acting different, or just me being paranoid?

Whatever it is, I better get over it. Even if we only see each other at work, she has to know I did it for her. All of this is my fault, I need to fix it.

I find myself in the doorway. Keyword in.

She's not there. Of course.

Pen's P.O.V.

I lay in the hall a moment longer and then use my left arm to push myself up. My right is still shaking, and I'm afraid to try and use it. Chaud will probably be looking for me in the room he locked me in, so I head in that direction.

As I walk, I try inspecting my arm. Nothing appears different, but there is a red mark where we were hit. Then again, that isn't unusual after a good battle. My pulse is pounding, but I make it out

of the hall and into the next one alright. In the following hall, Chaud is standing with his back to the wall.

"I hoped you'd come back here." He whispered, his eyes closed and his arms folded across his chest.

"Oh yeah?" I asked. "Why's that?"

"So I could- I don't know, scold you? Coddle you? Make sure you were alive?" He honestly sounded confused. "What do you want me to do?"

I shook my head, he wasn't supposed to ask me for acceptance, I was supposed to ask him. He was the one always sure of what to do next, how to react to everything.

"I just want to be sure you're not mad I didn't listen to you." I say carefully.

He opens his eyes. He's surprised by me. He shouldn't be, he's known me long enough.

"Angry? Yes, I'm angry, but not with you. I should be telling you that! After how barbaric I was-. I don't want that to happen again."

"Neither do I."

He nods his head, "Good. At least you have that sense." Before I can get indignant, he notices my arm. "What did you do?!" He gently lifts my arm and another spasm of pain jolts through it, which I choose to ignore.

I shrug.

"What happened? Did you crossfuse? Did Dark Protoman find you?"

"Yes, and yes." I refused to meet his eyes.

"This is exactly what I was trying to prevent." He mumbled scathingly. "What did he do? It's a wonder you're alive!" He grabbed my shoulders, making me defensive.

"He shoved me. It's no big deal." If he wasn't hurt, I wasn't either. How much my pride hurts is painful enough without him inquiring to my well being and being distressed.

"No big deal!? He was going to kill you!"

"Well he didn't."

He slowly lets go of me and looks away. "We should get you to the testing rooms."

"It doesn't hurt." I'm lying through my teeth, why?

"I don't care. We're going together."

"Fine."

We took the short walk to the infirmary/testing area of scilabs, where Chaud, Lan and I take the tests to make sure crossfusion hasn't had any negative effects on us. The closer we get to the room, the more unfounded dread wells up in my gut. Eventually, it gets so bad that I clutch my hands to my stomach.

"Chaud, I don't feel well."

"All the more reason to have Dr. Hikari give you a quick check up."

"No, like it feels like the stomach bug that's going around, maybe I should go home and get some rest, the tests take a while." I begin to feel like I'm begging.

He looks conflicted for a moment, "I-I suppose the check up can wait, crossfusion has never had any negative effects before."

I nearly bowl him over with a hug, "Thank you so much!" The tension in me completely dissipated.

"Just get plenty of rest." He says just before I run home.

Chaud's P.O.V.

"So where's Pen?" Dr. Hikari asks me.

"She went home sick." I say without looking in his eyes. I know she was lying, but why? She

never lies. She's the most trusting person I've ever met, frankly to a fault. She's told me incredibly random information I've never had any desire to know. She's made it so I'm comfortable talking about things I never thought I could relive.

The Doctor frowns as well, He knows just as I do that Pen never misses anything she's told she has to attend.

"Well then, let's just get this finished then."

I nod and go to the locker rooms where Lan and I change. I haven't crossfused lately, but we can never be too careful. I get into my blue paper operation gown and then enter the glass enclosed room that I'll be tested in. I splay myself across the table and try to drown out Lan's meaningless babble.

Thankfully, when the test starts he has the sense to shut up.

The scanners run up my body and I close my eyes as they run over my face. The second I do, a splitting pain rolls over my head. My face contorts and my hands fly to the area of the pain.

The machine turns off immediately and Dr. Hikari has Lan and me pulled out of the scanner. I open my eyes just enough to see Lan sitting on his side of the room. Dr. Hikari rushes over to me, but I can't get up when he shakes me, even when he pulls me to an upright position I can't form a coherent reply to his questions. I can't even tell what he's saying. I feel myself pulled from the table, and as suddenly as it appeared, it vanishes, leaving only me in my bewilderment. Lan is by my side, inquiring to my well being.

A violent feeling sweeps over me. I'm angry with Lan and Dr. Hikari. It was the doctor's job to prevent these sorts of things from happening to me, and Lan could never keep from making noise.

"Shut up okay?! I'm fine!" I brush away the doctor's concerned arms and push past him, out of the room.

I get in my black car and ride all the way back to BlazeQuest, then have my driver turn around. Why would I want to do more work? When the car turns away, enormous relief spreads through me.

"Head to the park. I need to cool off." I need to sieve off this bad mood if I'm going to do anything productive. And get rid of this massive migraine.

The car stops by the small canal on the outskirts of Dentech City by the state park. Hardly anyone ever visits the part closest to the canal, so I take advantage and sit on a park bench for some quiet. I close my eyes.

"I'll just stay here a minute, then head back to my office, take an aspirin, drink some tea and get back to working on the vaccine chip-." I stop talking abruptly when a jolt of new pain spikes down my head and I realize I'm talking to myself. Wow, humans are really accustomed to Navis. Through the headache, I hear someone call my name.

Pen is walking down the path to the canal, her hands in her pockets and a yellow scarf around her neck.

"Chaud," She says just loud enough for me to hear, "I'm glad you're here."

"That makes one of us."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't even know. I don't feel well, but it's like no sickness I've ever had. It comes on when I think about work." My hand flicks instinctively to my head.

She nods. "Me too. It's like... wait, did Dark Protoman touch you at all?"

"No." I move my hand to the back of my head and remember my close shave with my former best friend. "Wait- he- when he sliced at me, he cut off some of my hair. Why?"

"Well, he hit me in the arm, and ever since I've been trying to fight off the urge to hit the person next to me and when I do, the pain in it doubles. I can barely move it."

"You didn't listen to me! I told you to have that idiot Hikari check you!"

She raised her eyebrow at me.

"I didn't mean that- I-," I wave my hand and close my eyes again. "Like I said, I don't feel well."

"Anyway, It hurts around where he touched you right?"

I nod.

"So it hurts where he hit me. That's where all of this seems to be coming from."

I nod again. I can barely think. Can't she just spell it out for me?

"He did something to us, I just don't know what." She finishes. Well, that much is obvious.

"I think Dark Protoman siphoned off some of his dark aura into us. That's what it feels like at least." Role interjected. We looked at her on the screen and her programming was deteriorating further than I had even thought, and in a way I'd never seen before. Her right arm was eroded in purple splotches and it appeared to be unstable, shifting between sword and hand.

"Dark aura- He has so much of it that whoever he touches gets infected with it?" I ask. This seems utterly ridiculous to me, even after all I've seen, yet, Anetta said his dark chip was ten times stronger than the others, normal rules must not apply.

"I'm not sure. He didn't touch anyone else, so it's hard to know, but we all had bonds with him. That could've made it easier for his aura to get to us." Role had her broken arm held tightly in her other as she said this.

Suddenly, I was struck with a thought of violence, maybe if Protoman was deleted, this pain would subside. Then, just as vehement, was my returning thought. I needed, with every fiber in my body, to make Protoman my navi again. Until today that had been most prominent in my mind, but I had lost sight of that somewhere in the hours Dark Protoman had attacked.

As soon as this realization hit, I jumped to my feet. "Pen, the dark aura must have a defense system making us feel pain when we try to eliminate it, the vaccine chip's almost done, I can't believe I stopped working on it with Famous for a headache, I-," My voice caught in my throat, my knees buckled. A single gasp of breath escaped my mouth, my eyes closed, and I crumpled into Pen's arms.

Pen's P.O.V.

"Chaud!" I gasp softly as he keeled forward into me. I caught him, but my dark-arm protested so adamantly, that I had to settle for half dragging him with my good arm. "Role, can you- get Famous, or somebody? Just tell someone where we are, and what's happened."

"I- I'll try." She answered hesitantly.

"No! Role, you have to do this!" I yelled, I could feel tears and anger welling in my chest, and I swallowed several times trying to keep it down. I stumbled a couple times, Chaud's weight pushing down on me.

"I will." She replied shortly. After a minute of trying and failing to avoid pulling Chaud into any puddles of mud, I heard an odd sound, a sort of whirring. The pain in my arm began to subside to a constant throb, a beating, yet not my heartbeat. A swirl of colors flashed before my eyes, and I had to kneel on the ground to keep from falling over.

I lower Chaud to the ground before slamming into it myself. My hands feel heavy, my head as if it's being pushed down by an invisible hand.

"R- Role... wha-?" I begin, only to be cut off by what felt like a cold sheet of metal running over my mouth and pulling my arms to my sides.

"Heh, These humans are pathetic! They were already in a sad state by the time we got here!"

That voice, it could only be Videoman, and judging by the weight over my head, I'd say he was

with Gravityman. The lights would've had to be a dimensional area.

"Well, Role did say in her message to Famous that the child prodigy and his girlfriend were in a bit of a bind. Good thing we intercepted it." The voice paused for a moment, "We'll take better care of them then those men at scilab would anyway."

So someone else was with them, a woman. Sounded a bit like Lan's teacher, but smoother, more angry. Had to be Ms. Yuri. I only met her once, and that was the time she tried to drop a building on Chaud and me.

The video tape pulled taunt and lifted my upper body off the ground until I was in a somewhat upright position, my back cracked- I was still being pushed down by Gravityman.

"Hey Gravityman! Wanna stop so I can actually move them?" Videoman snarled.

"I SUPPOSE," Came Gravityman's metallic reply. The weight was removed, and my entire frame flung backwards, landing hard in the dirt at Videoman's feet. He lifted me again, and I found myself staring into Ms. Yuri's eyes. Or would've been, had she not been wearing pitch-black sunglasses. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Chaud being lifted by his arms by Videoman's tapes as well, his chin to his chest. My own chest tightened. Ms, Yuri removed her glasses.

"Hello, I was hoping we'd meet again." She paused as if waiting for a reply. "Come here Protoman, I think Penelope wants to see you too."

At this, my eyes narrowed in anger, and I tried desperately to escape Videoman's constraints. Dark Protoman walked into my plain of vision, his jaunty gait so much different than the controlled, calm pace he had before all of this madness descended on our lives.

"I'm happy to see you," He said with a grin. "I've been wanting to get you most of all." He stepped in front of Ms. Yuri and touched his gloved hand to my face. I pulled away in disgust.

"Aw, come on, we're old friends." His low voice was tainted with a grainy rasp. All feeling in my arm had stopped, and Videoman released it from his hold as if he knew. Protoman lifted my hand in his, raised it to his face.

"My dear Pen, how have you been since we last battled? I imagine your arm has healed?" I grit my teeth together as his voice hummed in my ears. "No? Well then, I'm sure Master Laserman will be pleased to see you. Almost as pleased as I am." With those final words, he kissed my hand and took a few steps away. Ms. Yuri came back up to me and reached for my PET. I let out a small sound of distress.

"Oh, don't worry," she said, "We need her later for the tests."

Tests? Oh- Chaud, you need to wake up!

Chaud's P.O.V.

I can hear voices all around me that make my blood boil, but I can't open my eyes yet, it's too painful. Only when I hear Dark Protoman's baritone voice do I look up and see him in front of Pen. He touches her, and it's all I can do to keep from screaming.

When he's done with her, he notices I've awakened, though as he walks toward me I can barely see him through the new spasms of pain jolting through my head and spreading to my neck the closer he got.

"Protoman." I whisper.

"Hello Chaud." He says with a smirk. "I made sure I didn't kill you before. Are you enjoying my dark aura? I said I'd get you, I don't think you believed me. How about now?"

"This isn't you, you don't want this," I spit out, my pulsing pain barely allowing it to escape my mouth.

"You still don't get it. This power is all I've ever wanted, I'm tied down to nothing and no one and I can defeat anyone."

"Then why are you Laserman's right-hand lackey?" He snarls at my sharp retort and rears back his hand. White hot pain erupts through my skull, but his strike cleared the steady pound and I can think again.

"He's given me more than you ever did." Dark Protoman growls. "Get them in the car. We can't hold up the dimensional area forever."

"Protoman, you won't break my heart again." I say it forcefully, willing it to be true, but Dark Protoman acts as if I haven't spoken.

With that, I watch as Pen is flung into the back of a large van, and feel myself fully wrapped by Videoman's tapes and roughly thrown as well by Gravityman's gravity drive.

Pen and I were the only things in the van and even as I could hear the dimensional area disappearing, our bonds remained. I looked at Pen and saw that they had left her damaged hand free. She pulled off the tape covering her mouth and then leaned over to pull down mine. I feel a scratch down my cheek and stare at Pen incredulously. She scratched me across the cheek, deliberately.

"Sorry! I'm sorry! I can't-" She barely makes a sound, the darkness and desperateness of our situation making her nearly mute. Her eyes are opened in panic, concern, and fierce concentration as she shakily pulls the gag from my face.

"Why?" I ask, my voice nearly as soft as hers.

She shakes her head, "Dark Protoman touched me again. He knows he can give us his dark aura. He put more into me, but I can still try to untie you with this hand." I turn so my back is facing her and she sets her hand to unfastening the bow Videoman tied.

"Do you think Role can get a hold of anyone at scilab?" I ask her.

"I hope so."

"Me too."

I try to think of something else to take my mind off of our situation, anything at all, when Pen says, "Can we not talk? I'm afraid I'll say something else because of this."

"Alright, but I'm still going to talk. If I can think of anything productive to say..." She released my right arm and then my left, then stopped, taking shallow gasps of air.

"Are you okay?"

She nodded.

I pulled off the tape from the rest of me, then set my hands to untying Pen.

"Thank you," She said softly.

"No problem." I replied. I looked at her as I placed the final bit of tape on the other side of the van's back. Her hands are laced nervously as they seem to be more and more often lately and she won't meet my eyes.

"Look at me." I say, "We're going to get out of here, and we're going to turn Protoman back. We're going to fix your arm." I hesitate with my next phrase, but I take her face in my hands and say it with more certainty than I feel, "I promise." There are tears in her eyes.

"Chaud-," she whispered my name and a pleasant spark lit up my back.

"It's going to be alright." I say once more. She nods and leans into my chest, trying to smother her sobs.

Pen's P.O.V.

I wish I could be strong as he seems to be. He's probably already got a plan for escape.

I press into him, trying to forget where we are and what's going to happen to us. His heart beat is rushing, pounding in my ear. His hand runs over the back of my head gently. My arm is protesting even being next to him, but I have to, or panic will overwhelm me. I'm right handed, so

my right arm is stronger than my left so I fear that if provoked, I won't be able to stop something horrible from happening. I already scratched him. What if next time it's worse?

His voice is hoarse with the next thing he says, "Agent Misaki was their guinea pig, I guess we're next."

I remain silent, afraid of what I'll say in response, so I simply listen to him and the jostling of the van.

"I will get us out of this," He says once more. "Somehow."

The rumble of driving ceases, and we are left in utter silence for who knows how long. Then, without warning, the doors flew open violently, their slam echoing and a breeze hitting us full in the face. Light flooded into the small compartment. I squinted and felt Chaud tighten his hold on me.

"Well, well, looks like the love birds enjoyed their trip." Mrs. Yuri said in her sadistic drawl.

Chaud stood up, his hand releasing from mine slowly as he stood. My hand stayed hanging in the air, hungering for the warmth he had taken away.

I could now see that Yuri's arms were crossed, and her mouth was drawn in a tight smirk. Chaud took one step and he was on her, he punched her in the stomach and she drew back from the force of it. He reared back for a second swing, his face a mask of anger.

Chaud's P.O.V.

My uppercut had put Yuri back at least a foot, I'd have to compensate with a half-step forward. Just as I tensed for the shot, which I highly doubted she'd let me take without a struggle, I felt a strong tug behind me.

My arm was pulled behind me by what seemed to be a grip of iron, for I hadn't been expecting it. The surprise nearly sank me to my knees, and my arm was twisted farther back, so much so that I could barely move. All of my training deserted me in that moment, for I realized that there was only one person behind me.

"Pe-nelope?" I gasped. There wasn't a single sound from behind me, save for the slightest loosening of the hold. I took immediate action, pulling myself from my attacker and directing a side kick in the direction of Ms. Yuri. My foot hit her ankle hard, but she didn't fall. Instead she backed up again and in her place stood Dark Protoman. He pointed his sword at my throat. I raised my hands, only furthering my feeling of vulnerability.

My right arm is pulled back once again, this time my back arched back in pain as I was hit in the shoulder, just where the nerve is exposed. My left knee gave out beneath me, but not before I caught a glimpse of Pen.

One of her eyes is covered by her thick hair, the other seemed to lack the deep colors I was accustomed to, dulled almost to the color of sand. A jagged purple scar ran from the bottom lid down her cheek.

"Pen-" I exclaimed once more as Dark Protoman pressed his sword to the side of my throat. This is my fault, all my fault. I used the dark chip. Then I couldn't even keep Pen out of harms way. Pain seeps into me, but I can barely feel it over the emotions I'm struggling to retain.

Dark Protoman grabs my white hair in his gloved hand and pulls up my head so I'm forced to look at him. His normally cocky grin was replaced with a deep scowl, which only deepens when I fail to react to him. I assume he thought he could project his dark aura into me. He can't. I'm convinced of this, strangely convinced.

He will come back to me. One way or another, I will have him back as my Navi, and I will save him. I think this as hard as I can, and somewhere inside of me, I think the real Protoman hears it.

I tried to glower back, but couldn't muster the energy.

"Heh," Dark Protoman scoffs as if nothing has just transpired between the two of us. He lets

go of my hair, his sword turning back into his arm. My head falls again as if in defeat, but I know, no matter what they do to us, I will get out. I will save Pen and Protoman and we will get through this. Somehow.

Pen's P.O.V.
Inside and all around me there is darkness. Yet I fight. I fight as hard as I can, because I know what is happening and I will do anything to stop it.

Chaud's P.O.V.
Pen pulls me to my feet, her face completely unresponsive. Mrs. Yuri hands her a length of rope, afraid I'll punch her again I bet, and a strange sound comes from Pen's throat, a sort of hysteric strangled laugh. I looked at her again then, pain clear on my face, I'm sure, and she proceeded to bind my arms behind my back. The purple scar pulsates with an inner light, an ugly glow as I can see it webbing out at the bottom, spreading through her.

"Fight it," I whisper adamantly, "I know you can." She ignores me, but a look of pain crossed her face, if only for a moment. "Please."

She pushes me forward, out of the van and into a darkened room with monitors all along it.

"You can just sit down, because you'll be here for quite a while." Miss Yuri says with her infuriating grin.

I sit. I'm not going to speak any longer. I need to figure out a plan.

Pen is still behind me, she unties my arms and leaves me there, then goes to stand by Ms. Yuri with faltering steps. The seat I'm sitting on isn't really a chair, it's a table, an operating table much like the ones at scilab. Two navis materialize on either side of me; Dark Protoman and Videoman again. When her eyes lay on Dark Protoman, Pen's expression wavers again. No one else seems to notice, but they notice my wince when Dark Protoman grabs my wrist.

"Oh? What's wrong Chaud? I thought you liked me," Dark Protoman whispered in my ear. I could feel a coldness growing in my chest, but I swallowed it down and tried to wrench my arm away. His grip, as I had programmed it to be, was unbreakable by any mortal man and the dark aura coursing through him only made it more so. I pulled harder even with this knowledge.

My back slammed against the silver metal as Dark Protoman shoved my arm into a clasp, then let go suddenly, recoiling as if he was burned. Videoman pushed my arm in more casually, but that doesn't mean I didn't struggle just as hard against him.

I kick out as Videoman grabbed my left leg and managed to hit him in the face, but he still managed to force me into the cold claw. He looked at Dark Protoman, but he was standing on the other end of the room scowling. Videoman shrugged and I tried to kick him again, but he used his tape this time and lashed me in more impatiently. My torso rose in my last ditch effort to escape, but then I fell, the metal cutting into the exposed skin just beyond my sleeves.

Ms. Yuri snickered infuriatingly. Videoman jacked out again, but Protoman stayed there, his arms crossed leaning against the wall just as I had found myself doing in my younger years. I wouldn't be surprised if his eyes were boring into me under his dark shades.

Ms. Yuri walked up to my head, a needle in her hand. She held out a hand to Pen and she placed a syringe into the woman's palm. A purple liquid was inside and she attached the long needle.

"Night, night." She plunged the needle into my neck.

Chaud picked up his office phone which had been ringing incessantly, "Hel-," He started before being cut off by a sharp voice. His eyes widened in shock at the familiar tones and words.

"Come to the dark chip warehouse and I might spare all you hold dear." It growled.

"You!" Chaud replied before a loud laugh began echoing through the room. He dropped the phone and allowed it to clatter to the ground. He slammed his hand down on his desk and held his head with his other, covering one eye.

The phone spun across the floor and a thin crack appeared in the screen. It slowly emitted a black stream of smoke that condensed and formed a flaming ball of dark aura, the very same that had surrounded and possessed Protoman on that fateful day. Suddenly, two red coals emerged from the darkness. Chaud reared back in horror from the cackling mouth.

In his panic he stumbled, catching himself before crashing to the ground. He ran from his office and through the first hall of Blaze Quest. He ran past countless, faceless, nameless people, all unwilling to help him. Not that he'd accept their help.

Halfway down the twisting passages he had a had a childhood trauma, he didn't know which hallway to take to get out. He called out to his Father, to Protoman, but neither came. He had to keep running, to get to the warehouse; no one else could get hurt because of his mistake. In the center of the hall, after a turn, was Pen. She stood tall and erect, looking at something beyond him.

"Pen!" He called out, "you need to get out of here!" He reached out to her, but as he did- She disappeared. Like a ghost she vanished, his hand going straight through. His head began pounding to a foreign beat, a pulsating tattoo.

He continued running, chose a random door and ran through, not looking back.

The room was large and gray, the door shut behind him with a slam. This was where the call had told him to go. The room was empty, but digital data from a dimensional area slowly was filtering into the room like a wave.

"Protoman?" He called. "Are you there?" An eerie cackle began to fill his ears, seemingly from nowhere. It was the same grating laugh from the phone call. Blue, 3D cubes began condensing in midair in front of him, slowly forming the darkened form of Protoman, no, not Protoman, Dark Protoman.

He smirked at Chaud and said tauntingly, "You mean nothing to me." Chaud flinched at his words, no matter how many times he heard them the pain was still fresh and real. He remained still, knowing in this state Protoman wouldn't hesitate to kill him.

"Protoman," He whispered, "I know you're in there, fight back."

Protoman smiled smugly, "You still don't get it. I enjoy the dark, I'm stronger than I ever was with you. I enjoy the power!" With that Protoman roared and placed his hand to his head in agony.

"Master Chaud, get back I-," Protoman's normal, kind voice broke through for an instant only to be stifled by the cruel laughter. "No!" Protoman yelled again. "Get... Away! Master, Chaud... I tried..." The laughter grew louder and his body shook.

"Protoman!" Chaud yelled as he ran to his best friend, but Protoman used his free hand to shove Chaud halfway across the room. He was forced to lay there, helpless to do anything but watch as his navi succumbed to the darkness once again. It became clear that every part of Protoman's body was changing, Being rewritten into something else- his dark soul taking complete control. His hair fanned out and his white decals darkened, becoming purple. Now the laughing was coming from him, sending chills down Chaud's spine.

"Master Laserman has granted me new power!" Dark Protoman appeared just in front of Chaud, lifting him up by his hair and roughly turning him around. "See?" He hissed in Chaud's ear, "I kept my promise. Everything you hold dear." Chaud had been forced to turn and see three large square pits of downwardly swirling data. He was staring down into the first one, in the center of which held the form of his deceased mother. A tear ran down his cheek as the image of her slowly faded away.

Dark Protoman yanked his head back, straining his neck back as he pulled him over to the next pit. In it was Penelope. Her eyes were closed and her head was back, lying in the twisting data.

"Pen!" Chaud screamed before Dark Protoman covered his mouth.

"Now, now we wouldn't want to wake her, now would we?" Chaud began struggling in panic from Dark Protoman's grasp, thrashing his legs, as Dark Protoman lead him to the final pit.

Chaud had an awful sense of Deja vu as he realized who was inside. Dark Protoman shoved him to the edge of the pit, allowing him to gaze upon the real Protoman's limp body.

Protoman raised his head slowly and moaned weakly, "Mas... Master... Chaud." He was waist deep in the blue and lavender data. "Please, don't come... don't come any closer. You won't be able to escape. I tried... so hard to... to keep him away... away from you. I'm so sorry Master Chaud. I failed."

Chaud reached out his hand to his Netnavi, then heard Pen's piercing screech, "Chaud! Help me! I'm sinking!" Chaud raced to the edge of Pen's pit and saw her struggling to keep her head above the data. She reached her hand out to him as her head slipped under the data.

"Pen!" He yelled as he slide down the side of the pit in an attempt to save her. Just as he reached the bottom her hand slipped under the data, brushing his fingertips, she was gone.

"NO!" He yowled, "Protoman! I need you! I'm not strong enough on my own! Protoman!" The pounding in his ears grew deafening, until he couldn't even hear his own screams-

I jolted up on the table, my heart beating so hard I thought it would burst through my chest. I took in air in harsh gasps, looking around the room. A man was at my side, holding several testing probes and watching a monitor screen.

A shock ran through my body and a muscle spasm put me back against the table.

"Keep 'im par-lyzed!" The man shouted distractedly at one of the monitors. "I can't rightly figure out what makes 'im tick if you keep lettin' 'im wriggle about like a fish!"

There are probes connected to all of my limbs and my temples.

"Shut up and work. Nebula needs to know how he finds it so easy to crossfuse, and why Dark Protoman's dark aura no longer effects him."

I can no longer move, but I can place the deep voice as being Laserman, leader of the darkloids. At least I'm conscious again. I never want to got back there. But then again, all of this is my living nightmare, and I've dragged everyone else into it.

Pen's P.O.V.

A flicker of light emerges in front of my eyes, I grasp it with both hands, and then, after what feels to be hours of struggle, I can see again. Role's PET is in my hands and I can see half of her entire body is corroded with dark aura. I blink a few time to clear my head for I can still feel the tendrils of shadow around my conscious mind.

Ms. Yuri stands in front of me. She says into an intercom, "I'm ready to begin the girl's tests."

She holds her hand out to me without looking back, as if expecting me to hand her my PET. I make a sound of disbelief, and before she can realize what's happening, I pick up a part of what looks to be a metal table and swing it down on her leg. Hard.

She screeches in pain and curses as I grab her PET and race for the door. Slamming it open, I race down the left hall and look in each room on the way. My heart rises to my throat, anxiety and panic making my feet feel clumsy and awkward. Four doors down I encounter a man sitting next to an operating table, Chaud lays on it, his eyes closed and his chest going up and down unsteadily.

I stood with my chin held high, as I had every right to be here. The man looked up at me angrily. He had a tan PET. Electrodes were hooked into Chaud's arms, legs, and forehead. A thicker cord was protruding from his chest. The cords from his head were connected to a screen next to the man.

"I-," My throat closed for an instant, but then I found an access reserve of courage. "You're

relieved of your duties." I can feel my face heat up, I'm a terrible liar, he'll call my bluff-

He looked at me in disbelief, "W-why would I be relieved of ma' duties? I am the only da'k aura sci'ntist this here orgn'zation has "

"Doctor Regal has seen fit to do it on his own, you are free to leave."

"Yes ma'am." He says. I could see the difference in his resolve the moment I mentioned Doctor Regal. He stood up and left the room. He actually believed me The second he closed the door I rushed to Chaud's side. I pull the cords from his limbs out first, then notice the clean incision in his side that the man had been operating on. A slow stream of blood was falling into a bucket. I took his vest and wrapped the wound, praying that it wasn't serious.

His eyes fluttered open while I wrapped the injury, he looked at me, but didn't speak until I had completed the task.

Chaud's P.O.V.
"You came. I knew you would. I knew you were strong enough." I say feebly, my mouth dangerously dry. Pen's cold hands left my side slowly, searching for another way to stop the blood.

She takes the cords off of my head and I slowly reach up to pull out the ones embedded in my chest, my paralysis wearing off. Pen offers her hand to help me up, but I wave her off.

"I'm fine."

"You have a hole in your abdomen, you're not fine."

I look down at my side where Pen had covered by my vest. I shrug, "I've had worse." I stood up slowly, anesthesia making my head spin. The doctor had done his task well, I couldn't feel the open wound in my side at all. I picked up my shirt from the table and put it over my arm. Couldn't waste precious time pulling it on, regardless of how cold I was.

Pen walked out the door, reaching out her hand to mine. I fold my fingers into hers, taking the small comfort I could without wasting any time. We race down the first hall when we hear two voices around the next corner.

"Yeah, I haven't heard from Yuri in a while, wanna go check on her?"

"Hmph, the human can fend for herself, why should I care about her pitiful safety?"

"I'm just saying man, she's kinda been acting edgy lately, maybe we should check that she's doing her part."

"Regal already knows of her standings. There's nothing she could possibly do at this point to ruin the operation." The tapping of a third pair of footsteps approached, there's a lag to the second step. The person is limping. Yuri. The limp slowly goes away. Her leg is already healing. I wince. She knows Pen and I are free.

"Speak of the Devil-," I now place the more arrogant voice as being Dark Protoman, the next being Swordman.

"Eh? What's with you?"

"The girl and Chaud, they took my PET and escaped." Yuri hissed.

"Useless human." Dark Protoman scoffed.

Yuri fails to respond.

"I'll catch 'em " Swordman says.

"No, Regal has a different mission for you, you have to distract Lan and Megaman before they come and help the two twerps." Yuri orders.

I hear Swordman log out. We have to get out of here. Dark Protoman will come looking for us.

"Find another Navi to help you." Yuri says as her final order. Dark Protoman makes a sound of annoyance, but doesn't disobey. As their footsteps disappeared down the hall Pen turned away and

pulled my arm with her. Captivated with their conversation, it took me a moment to turn to her direction.

"Chaud," She whispered, "Chaud we have to go."

I nod in comprehension and we slowly make our way to the next hall, trying desperately to not make a single sound. Two steps in, and I heard something behind us. Pen's head jerked up and I could tell she heard it too.

"Chaud, whatever you do, don't let go." She pulls out her PET without letting go of my hand and puts in her syncro chip with a flick of her fingers. There's a flash of light and her and Role have fused, but I see to my dismay that the hand I'm holding looks just as corrupted as Role's. I squeeze her fingers in mine and I get a faint response back, the twitch of her fingers.

We turn around together.

"You didn't think that I didn't know you were here, did you?"

Dark Protoman.

Pen's P.O.V.

At the sight of him I feel Chaud's warm hand tighten around mine. My free arm I turn into my default sword and my hair lights up once more.

"Protoman." My voice is full of Role's longing and my own despair, "You have to let us go."

He smiled and backed against the gray wall. "Oh, I won't be stopping you, I couldn't care less about either of you, but I'm afraid my coworker here has come bearing a grudge." As he said this in his static filled voice, grains of sand trickled from the ceiling in front of my plain of vision. They were black and purple, shimmering in the pale glow of my sword and the swaying light bulb in the hall behind Chaud and me.

The sand piled in two spots, quickly, before either of us could react. Instead, my throat closed and heart pounded harder than if I had been on a stage with a million people watching. The sand built up, defying gravity and shaping into a somewhat humanoid form. The spine appeared exposed and hunched, while the face was contorted. The mouth hung open too wide, the eyes pulled to slits and the nose was a single hole.

I narrowed my own eyes, but he didn't move. His feet were wide and the sand on them was flowing like water, the purple and black alternating waves, and I doubted it would be able to lift either of them.

Suddenly, the figure raised one of its arms and pointed it at Chaud. I pushed Chaud away and took the maelstrom of black sand meant for him. It covered my eyes, my ears, my mouth. I sliced the source of the sand with my newly formed Hero sword, after that had been severed, the sand fell from my face, but still trickled around my body. My hand began its dull throb again, but I tried to distance it from myself. It was just something I had to deal with.

The creature fell to the ground as a dropped stone would when I swung the first time, then I jumped away from the gathering sand.

I spared a glance at my immobile hand just as Chaud called out from behind me, "He's trying to reactivate your dark-aura " To my horror, the sand he'd propelled at me previously had all condensed on my motionless arm. I grimaced, but I couldn't give up the battle. There was too much at stake.

The sand began rising again in the middle of the room, and I remembered something Lan told me a couple weeks ago, 'It was so awesome! Water made him stop in his tracks and I could've used that to defeat Desertman if Chaud hadn't shown up.' then Chaud had said, 'you were out of your crossfusion on the ground. I was the one who stopped him, and I didn't need to resort to hydrophilic tricks.' I groaned in exasperation. I couldn't for the life of me, remember what he said after words. If

Chaud's method had worked better, I should remember

"Chaud!" I yelled to him as I changed my arm to an aqua sword, "How did you get rid of Desertman?" I glanced over to him before swinging my sword at the shapeless mass of sand, and he looks conflicted for a moment. He appears to have been searching the room, for he's moved around a bit behind me.

"Just- keep fighting. I'll handle tactics. I've nothing better to do anyway."

"Then hurry about it!" I screeched when the sand flew toward my face again with a horrendous sound emitting from its deformed mouth. I shoved the sword into the mouth, but the grating noises only grew louder. I tried to shake off the sand, but it covered my plain of vision. I could feel the sand push against my skin, and I had to close my mouth guard. Even after it was shut, I could feel the sand that had managed to get in already moving along my neck and up my face. I had to finish this now.

Something brushed against my side, grabbing my right hand and wrenching me to the side just as I was about to fall to my knees. The sand began moving more rapidly now, to my nose and mouth. I pursed my lips in a final attempt to keep it out, when all at once, the sand was released from me entirely. The only thing that kept me from falling to the ground was the hand still gripping my right hand and now arm as well.

"Chaud?" I asked as I now saw the person holding me up, was in fact, Chaud.

"Sometimes the key to knocking down a sand-castle lies in a single grain." He said it without looking at me. His gaze was held by Dark Protoman who hadn't moved during the entire fight. The only change was his smile. He seemed to have been enjoying the entire thing up until Chaud's intervention.

"What? Surprised I can still operate without you?" Chaud said. The tension in the air was so thick I could barely take a breath.

The darkloid smiled once again, "Yes, actually. Pleasantly surprised. I would've been disappointed if the human I spent the worst years of my existence with was a complete bungler."

"Glad I'm still up to your expectations. Now we're going to leave, and you're not going to stop us."

"I'm not sure you want to leave Chaud. I'm still here after all. What will you do?"

"I'll fight you if I have to. Let us leave and you won't be deleted."

"As if you possibly could."

My hair flared, and intimidation trait that Role triggered. Protoman snarled, "You think I care about your flashy moves? You won't fight me, and you won't leave here. I'll kill you if you try."

"No you won't." I walked right up to him, disabling my sword and stood in front of him. He put his sword to the Navi symbol at my chest.

"So eager to die?" He questioned with the smile that was not Protoman's, but a cheap imitation made to be cold and angry.

Instead of answering, I pushed his sword aside with all my strength and hugged him.

"Protoman!" Role cried, "I love you." Darkness crawled and snaked all around us, but we didn't let go. We went blind, but still we did not release. Laughter was all we could hear. But we did. Not. Let. Go.

Chaud's P.O.V.

I knew she was crazy, but when the dark aura surrounded her, I panicked. I raced to their side, regardless of the consequences. Darkness enveloped me as well, but a faint light stayed in front of my eyes. I couldn't find Pen. I groped blindly, the small space of before much larger now. The light turned red, and took the shape I'd longed to see for weeks.

"Protoman." I voiced in disbelief. Not Dark. Perfect, just like when I'd got him. He was really here! Or maybe-. "Are we dead?" It was so illogical, I sounded like an uncertain kid again. I wonder what my father would think. Would he care if I was gone?

Protoman, the real one, smiled, a kind smile, real. He shook his head slowly and put forward his hand. I grabbed it, and his light went into me. He turned gray, all the light gone, but he stayed smiling.

"P-protoman! Don't leave me again!" I yelled. I let go of his hand, tried to pull him closer to me, but he disappeared, fading just as Pen had in my dream. This time however, I was not thrown into a state of sadness. I was instead filled with confidence, and stranger still, hope.

Red fire glowed all around me. The darkness disappeared into faint wisps around me. Pen was on her knees, tears streaking her face. Dark Protoman stood, frozen and damaged badly. Pen and Role had done it, weakened the dark aura just enough so that the real Protoman could contact me.

I took a step forward. Dark Protoman jerked to life, moving swiftly in between Penelope and myself.

"You're not leaving here. Not with her at least. If I can't have both of you, I'll just have to settle with one. I will take everything you care about. I know you better than you know yourself. I-"

"Get out of the way."

"As if you could make me you spoiled brat."

"Get out of the way."

I sound tired, weary. I just want this night to be over. All the pain to end. I want things to go back to the way they were. Not perfect, but as close as a person like me can get.

I take another step forward.

Dark Protoman transformed his arm into a badly fragmented sword. He put it to Pen's Navi symbol.

"I'll do it, you know I will!" He's shaking now.

"So much pain…" Pen murmured without moving. Her eyes are opened and fixed on something invisible to me. Perhaps the dark aura, perhaps something worse. I wish I could have shielded her from it, I wish I could take her away from all of the hardship that comes with my life, but I am selfish.

I walk calmly up to the demon and push his sword away, but not before he pushes the sword directly into Pen's body. It barely leaves a mark, he's so weak.

"I'll give you one more chance to walk away from this" I said sternly. He hissed and backed away as the aura surrounding me touched him.

"I'll get you. He can't protect you forever. I'll kill him, then where will you be?" His voice echoed in my ears as he disappeared into the shadows.

I shook my head in exhaustion.

"Pen." I whispered. She looked at me vacantly.

"Chaud. It was so cold." She mumbles before tumbling into my arms and out of crossfusion. I lift her off the hard ground, holding her close to my chest. Her eyes close, and for now she is content to be carried out of this horrid place.

I make it all they way to the ground floor when Pen sturrs in my arms. She turns into my chest, but does not seem to have the will to leave me. That's fine. Protoman's strength has finally left my being, but I still have the stamina for this. I'll probably reach my limits once into safety. I hope someone will catch me.

Pen's P.O.V.

I flash in and out of lucidity, my limbs feeling heavy and weak. I'm insanely grateful for

Chaud's strength, as I always find myself thinking. I don't have it in me to walk for myself, so for now I was content to lie in his strong arms, leaving him to finish our mission. I sigh happily before falling victim once again to my exhaustion. I was so happy we were out of there, we'd made it together, and there was hope for Protoman. I could feel it in my bones.

It took months, but the vaccine chip was finally completed. Dark Protoman was lured to an abandoned warehouse and defeated by Lan, Megaman and Chaud. Role was too crippled by the dark aura nearby to be of any help, as much as that tore at my soul. Chaud had been injured, and Protoman had just barely been saved. They were recovering for the final battle against Laserman, but it looked like Lan would have to face that with only me as an aid.

A day later, we beat him, the only mystery left being the giant meteor in the sky that I couldn't actually see.

As soon as Protoman was well enough, Role went to speak with him.

"There was a moment- where I had to choose... And I chose Master Chaud. I protected him over you and Miss Pen."

"And I'm glad you did. I can be repaired, Chaud can't. And you finally realized that whatever you promised me in the past, I am strong enough on my own. I can look out for myself just as well as you can." With that she pulled him close and kissed him.

Protoman pulled away, "But I put Ms. Penelope in danger!"

"It wasn't your fault, you did your best. We're all okay now, that's what counts. We got you back." She smiled, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Please don't cry." Protoman begged.

"They're happy tears." She murmured, "I was so scared when you turned dark- I thought I'd lost you forever, we all did."

"I'm so sorry. I never wanted you to worry about me, I never meant for any of this to happen."

"It's over, we're all together again."

"And I'll never leave you again. I can't."

"Just like I'll never *let* you leave again. I'll protect you to my last breath." Role said adamantly. The two navis fell asleep together somewhere along the way. Role woke up first to see Protoman asleep with a troubled expression. He sat up out of sleep mode, breathing heavily.

"Protoman?" She asked.

He waved his hand dismissively. "I'm fine."

"Protoman, I can feel the pain, don't lie to me."

"It was just a nightma-" Protoman fell to on knee, clutching his navi symbol. "just a nightmare." he struggled to say, "M-master Chaud has them all the time."

"Navis are not supposed to have nightmares Protoman, and you know it."

He remained silent for a moment. "I will have Master Chaud look into it."

Role looked at him dubiously, but chose not to inquire farther. She could tell it was a sliver trace of dark aura still left. Nothing dangerous to his being, but it would cause him pain. She made sure he had it checked out within the day.

Chaud looked at the programming, his lips pursed, "I don't think there's any way for me to take it out without damaging the core data- you would never be the same, personality, memories- I definitely can't risk it."

Protoman nodded, "Yes Sir. That's fine. Just had to be sure what it was."

Role didn't look content with that answer at all. "There has to be some way to fix it!"

"Don't worry." He said again. "I'm fine."

My navi looked up at him, wide eyed. "Protoman, do you remember our shared data?"

"Of course, how could I forget?" He drew her into his arms and I was overwhelmed with the desire for Chaud to hold me like that. Role placed her hand on Protoman's navi symbol, and he looked up at her, confused. She closed her eyes and both their navi symbol's glowed brightly. "Role-wh-what are you-?"

She shook her head, drawing back slightly. A sliver of black energy hung between her fingertips and his navi symbol. She pulled her hand towards herself, and Protoman grabbed her wrist, trying to stop her. She was determined though, and he could not stop her hand from completing its journey to her navi symbol. The sliver of black severed from him and disappeared, leaving both navis gasping in each other's arms.

"W-why the he-hell'd you do that?!" Protoman yelled, pulling her closer.

"You won't have any more nightmares." She whispered weakly.

He buried his face into the crook of her neck, "You idiot."

"Whatever, it won't be so bad as long as you're not in pain." She said with a smile. "And you can help me."

"I'll do all I can."