“Ready…set…go—”

“Yeah?” he cheekily asked. “What do you need to tell me, Hugo?”

I groaned. “Not you, Set. I meant to say go, not—hey!”

“You said go!” Set cackled over the roar of his bike. “See you at Chione’s!”

“I’ll get you, Set!” Revving my engine, I sped out onto the highway after him.

Thanks to the AIs built into our outfitted motorbikes, me and Set did not need to worry too much about any obstacles. We dodged and slowed for every hovering vehicle in our paths, all of them as well equipped for crashes that would never happen. Egyptian highways, though not as advanced as either Australian or South African ones, still held a lower death rate than the colonies in the Saharan Forest.

“Woah!” I winced as rays of glaring sunlight blinded me.

Despite these technological marvels, the climate was nobody’s friend here.

Even along its northern edge, New Cairo felt like an immense maze of tiered apartments and layered buildings. They all blurred together under reflecting sunlight as we traveled 85 kph down the highway. And when the structures turned into jungle fauna, Set and I marveled once more at the wild beauty of the Nile Delta, now considered a protected international wildlife refuge. I could already picture the animals beneath us warily grazing.

Originally separated with New Cairo to the south, Alexandria to the west and Port Said to the east, the Nile Delta was connected by three mega-highways that were quick for commuters and fun for adolescents who loved to test either their new cars or motorbikes. Especially me and Set whenever we went to visit our classmate in Alexandria.

“Hey Anubis!” he barked beside me on the less-empty road. “Did you hear about Chione’s brother signing up for that Project Atlantis thing? He’s already half-way through the anthroid transformation!”

“I did!” I hollered into the commlink of my motorbike helmet. “Which species class?”

“She mentioned something about Hamadi choosing African Wild Dog Class!”

“There’s an anthroid class for that?” I laughed, swerving around the cars and their less-than-amused occupants. “Next thing you know, they’ll think of a Whale Class.”

“Or a Parrot Class,” Set added with a chuckle. “Then again, the thought of wings would sound good. Maybe I should volunteer when I graduate from school?”

“The idea of wings do sound cool,” I mused, “but I doubt they’ll let anybody become an anthroid, Set.”

“I know, I know…And don’t think I don’t know you’re rolling your eyes, kid!”

Groaning, I replied, “I’m three months younger than you!”

Before long, Alexandria’s shining high-rises could be seen over the desert sun and trees, and thirteen minutes later, Set and I pulled our motorbikes into a roadside parking garage several stories from the ground. Most people were wise and didn’t look down, but I always found enough seconds to glance over the ledge. Long enough to appreciate the engineering of the structural supports.

Entering the maze of vehicles and concrete, we left our motorbikes in the Nazari family’s garage unit before grabbing a quick elevator ride to their apartment. Set’s eyes stayed on his palmpad game.

“I saw you looking down again.”

“So? From what I remember, it isn’t a crime, Set.”

“Your parents would kill you for doing something reckless like that.”

“Says the boy who turns his motorbike AI off sometimes?” I smirked. “Besides, I can’t help myself. I love neo-modern architecture. I will not pretend to dislike something I don’t.”

“Whatever, Anubis,” he chuckled, eyes remaining on his palmpad. “Just don’t fall in love too much, or you may fall over too far.”

I rolled my eyes. “Haha.”

At long last, we arrived to the top floor of Osiris Towers, a row of soaring condominiums styled after structures dating back to the days of Ancient Egypt. The hallways leading to each penthouse brought me back to my childhood days immersing myself in the Museum VRs, yet my excitement grew at seeing Chione again. The last time Set or I saw her was during the holiday seasons, when they all visited Hamadi in Rio de Janeiro.

Chione’s mother eagerly let us inside her apartment, and we didn’t walk two steps before an ecstatic pair of light-brown arms wrapped around us like vices.

“Set! Anu!” she laughed with us. Thanks to her distant Irish and Russian heritage, Chione did not look like other Egyptians, but her friendship with me and Set did not waver a single second. We immediately returned the hug. “It is so good to see you two knuckleheads again!”

All three of us spoke a kilometer a second, overlapping each other’s speech about the past several months, from locations seen to school gossip and what our families had been doing since the schoolyear began. Chione’s family had her taking online classes while living abroad in Brazil with Hamadi.

“So…,” I asked, “is it true he’s choosing African Wild Dog Class, Chione?”

She groaned. “It is.”

Set and I laughed as we sat out on their balcony overlooking the rest of Alexandria.

“Out of all the anthroid classes on Earth,” Set pointed out amusedly, “Hamadi had to choose the one that doesn’t work well in tundra climates?”

“Well, he told mother and father that he wants to remain in Africa,” she argued. “Hamadi wants to patrol the Saharan Jungle.” She quickly changed the conversation, “So Anu, are you still hoping to go to that architecture college?”

“Sure am, Chione.”

To me, Alexandria always seemed like the city bordering two alien worlds. While New Cairo held the honor of mixing ancient monuments with glass skyscraper jungles, the northern side of our city was known worldwide as another ‘Gateway to the North’. Sure, there was another, more popular one in North America, but the Nile Delta’s ports along the Mediterranean Sea allowed much more mobility for ships.

And soon, our eyes diverted towards the enjoyment of the Nazari’s penthouse view. Set, Chione and I just sat there, enjoying each other’s company once again.