

Schnell
Turn Around

1

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Tears and sweat streamed down Sam's face as he watched the trailer carrying the Farmhand shrink into the distance.

The Prodigal Son skidded to a halt in front of it. The hatch of the three meter tall powered suit opened. "What the hell did you do!?" Sam yelled and leaped to the ground. He marched to the man thumbing through a roll of bills in his hand. "What the hell did you do with the Farmhand?" he asked, pointing toward an empty garage in the distance.

Harold pointed his finger right in Sam's face. "First of all, remember who you're talking to, boy. I told you, I wanted the hay stored and the manure spread, or there would be hell to pay."

"And just for that, you sold my suit?" Sam screamed.

"This is the first time your junk has ever done me good."

"How much did you get? The Farmhand was mine, so that money is mine."

"And this farm is mine. You'd best remember who's been letting you freeload offa me instead of working like you should."

Sam's eyes grew wide. "You're a God damn thief."

Harold pointed his finger in Sam's face again, "Watch it, boy. You are this close. I'm sick of you playing with those damn toys when you should be doing your chores. Why can't you just do what you're told, you little bastard?"

Sam's face grew red. "That doesn't give you the right to sell my stuff."

The back of Harold's hand smashed into Sam's cheek. "I'm sick of you talking back to me, boy. It's time you stop playing with toys and learned how to work for a living," he said walked off.

Sam held his hand to his cheek, fresh tears pouring down his cheeks. "Take your damn farm and stick it up your ass." He ran inside to his room, grabbed his suitcase and emptied the

contents of his dresser. When he came out, he strapped the suitcase into the storage rack on The Son's back, unhooked the rusty red trailer, and got into the cockpit.

Harold stood at the gate, fastening the heavy, metal lock. He turned to Sam and crossed his arms.

The Son kicked off the ground by the hover thrusters in its feet and turned to the gate before blasting over to it. Grabbing it by the top piece and side by the hinges, gyros whirled and steel groaned. Metal hinges snapped off the wooden pole as the screws gave. Harold fell on his ass as The Son turned toward him, holding the gate over its head. The heavy machine tossed the gate three meters past him and the cockpit opened.

Sam glowered at his father, "I hope a meteor crashes on the farm, burns this house down and kills every living thing, but you."

The hatch closed and The Son blasted past the gate and down the road.

###

A pack of vultures circled overhead as Sam fiddled with the open panel on The Son's back, the glare of the sun bearing down on him.

A honk from down the road made him turn his head. A hover trailer coasted up to him.

Sam's skin broke out in goosebumps as he stared at it.

The paint was completely worn off, leaving a dirty, metallic hue on all the panels. A trail of blood red rust trailed down from the headlights and grill. The grill itself was filled with large holes, like punched out teeth. The truck came to a halt alongside him. The crane on its back attached itself to The Son, and loaded it onto the trailer.

Window rolled down and a balding man leaned toward it. "Where ya headed?"

"Anywhere but here."

“That’s where I’m going,” he said, and opened the door.

Sam nodded and climbed into the cabin.

“Mike,” the man said, offering Sam his hand.

“Sam,” he said and shook the proffered hand.

Mike tapped the console and the electromagnetic crane moved over the broken powered suit and loaded it into the truck bed. The suit secured, he popped the clutch and got back on the empty freeway.

“Thanks for the ride, Mike. *The Son* doesn’t do so well when it’s really hot. Or cold. Or ever really.”

“Don’t mention it. Where can I drop ya off? Home?”

“Anywhere except home.”

“Trouble?”

“You might say that.”

Silence hung in the air for a minute. “Your folks find your porn stash?”

Sam snorted and looked at Mike. “No, that’s got a three-layer encryption on it. My Dad thinks he’s going to get me to take over the nerf ranch.”

“What, you don’t like nerf burgers?”

Sam looked at Mike, “Do I look like a nerf herder to you?”

Mike smiled and shook his head.

“That powered suit you loaded up? I made that. Scavenged all the parts, put it together, painted it and named it. And it’s not the only one. I made a quad legged power loader, to help out on the farm. I finally found the parts I needed to get it running, today. What did that bastard do?

He sold it, and wouldn't even give me a share. I said, 'I hope a meteor crashes, kills and burns everything to the ground but you.'"

Mike nodded. "Yeah, I about said the same to my Pappy when last I saw him. Shame I didn't get the chance to tell him I was sorry before he died."

Sam blinked.

"I don't suppose you've got your permits for that powered suit? It's got a micro-fusion reactor. You need a class 3 license to drive it in an urban area. If we get to Von Braun and you don't have them on you, or a guardian to get you through, I'm gonna have to take you in."

The truck jumped when it hit a dip and knocked a badge loose from its holder.

Sweat beaded on Sam's forehead when he looked down at it.

"Legal issues aside, you really like tinkering and making these things, huh?"

"Yeah. I guess I always have been. I was always reading how-to sites and making stuff outta scrap. I love it, and I'll do anything to keep doing it."

"Sounds like you're pretty good at it. Ever tell your Pappy this?"

"Why bother? He doesn't give a crap about anyone other than himself."

"Maybe if you just talk to him, respectfully, he'll understand. There is a market for these things, and if my boy talked to me about it like you did I'd be thrilled."

###

The stars twinkled brightly outside. Only a few rays of sunlight, and a few scattered clouds blocked the view.

Mike pulled into a solar station and parked the truck. "I'm gonna grab a coffee and a sandwich. You want anything?"

Sam shook his head. Sweat beaded down his forehead as another trailer pulled in alongside Mike's. Smoke poured out of the transmission. The driver got out and opened the side panel behind the cabin.

Sam's eyes went wide when he saw an LV-26 motor coil in almost perfect condition.

He worked the console and the crane unloaded The Son onto the concrete. Sam took a deep breath.

Sam got out and tapped the man on the shoulder, "Excuse me, sir, but I couldn't help noticing your engine trouble. Are you headed for Von Braun?"

"Yeah that's right."

"Then you should know, the color of the smoke coming out of your rig is a sign the insulation around the reactor is going. Von Braun enacted a ban on any first generation hover trailers without proper insulation. You can ask the bald guy in the deli line. He's a cop."

The trucker sighed and gave Sam a nod before making his way to the door.

As soon as the doors closed, Sam undid the clips around the coil and pried it out.

He ran to The Son, opened the hatch, popped the old coil out and replaced it. He opened the cockpit and climbed in. He booted up the reactor and the entire suit purred like a kitten. The onboard computer even booted faster. Sam whistled, and patted the side of the hatch. "Alright, partner, let's see what you're really made of."

The Son turned on its hover jets and headed for the road, the lights on its shoulders blinking to life. Sam ran The Son at cruising speed for five minutes before he flipped on the back thrusters. He worked the small console in front of him, and floored the pedal. White hot light exploded out of the back thrusters, accelerating The Son. The gauge inside hovered around one hundred thirteen kilometers an hour. "That's my boy," Sam said, his voice shaky.

###

Half an hour later, The Son came to a stop at a railway crossing, a huge freight train passing by.

As Sam waited, he looked around at the field. Several wrecked and rusted powered suits were scattered about in the plains. In the distance, small lights twinkled on an elevated highway to the East.

Five powered suits in a V formation came to a stop behind him. Flaming skulls were painted on the hatches.

The Son's engine sputtered, and Sam revved the accelerator. A grinding, popping sound issued from the back. Thick sludge burst out of the exhaust port all over the powered suit at the front of the formation, and the pilot who had the hatch open.

The man wore a red bandana, shades, and a scuffed-up leather jacket. He coughed and hacked up the sludge caught in his mouth, spitting it onto the ground with a bit of vomit mixed in. He grabbed a bottle of beer and chucked it at The Son. "You, sorry son of a bitch," he yelled.

The Son's head turned, and the man's seething face appeared on the pop up screen over the console. "Uh oh," Sam said.

The two powered suits flanking the lead man came up along The Son. The one on Sam's right slammed its fist into The Son's side.

"Hey, get out here, punk. I think you owe Scalp an apology."

"Bloody hell," Sam said. He flipped a few switches along the left side of the cockpit.

"Hell of a time to test this out."

The Son squatted. With a push from its legs, timed with an intense burst of its thrusters, it leaped over the train, and landed on the other side of the tracks.

Sam ignited the thrusters and blasted away from the train. However, the engine sputtered, and the thrusters stalled, leaving it at seventy-two kilometers an hour. “Come on, buddy, now’s not the time to get moody.”

Half a minute later, the train passed, and five sets of lights in the rear monitor lit up. Ahead of them was a derelict air field littered with broken down planes and old oil tankers.

Sam could almost make out the skulls painted on the torsos of the suits when the thrusters came back on.

He headed for a cluster of planes. A few seconds later and he could clearly make out the skulls. However, he gunned the thrusters; creating bright flash of light behind him, and flew between two planes.

The two suits at the back of the formation crashed right through the hollowed-out airplane shells and tumbled along the ground in heaps.

Sam cut through a lengthy strip of hollowed out planes, but the three remaining suits split up, the leader still on his tail. He weaved in and out through the thick cluster of metallic corpses, glancing down at the rear monitor. The leader was still there, and gaining on him.

The two that split off were skirting the outside of the planes, slowly getting ahead of him. To the left was a hangar with just enough room for another powered suit to fit.

The Son squatted and bent over as it traveled underneath the wing of a Boeing 747. It veered to the left, swerving out of the strip of planes.

The leader swerved to the right, his suit too tall to fit.

Sam gunned the thrusters and slammed into the other suit, grinding it against the side of the hangar. The gang member tried to knock him away, but The Son held fast to the shoulder joint.

The front of the skull faced suit scraped against the metal of the old building until the two of them slipped through a hole in the sheet metal, and disappeared inside.

The two of them collided with a van. The gang suit sunk into the rusted vehicle.

The Son took a step back, raised its right arm and delivered a punch to the damaged left knee. The other suit pushed out of the van and made a swing at The Son, but the bulky machine's fist fell short. Sam boosted to the right, and his attacker tried to follow. However, sparks flew from the damaged knee joint, and it nearly toppled over. The Son locked its legs, twisted its hips and slammed its fist into the back of its opponent, sending him toppling forward.

Sam's brow raised when the lights settled over a rectangular object on the suit's back.

It had a stock on the end, and a piece in the middle that looked a battery or a magazine, but no barrel on the front. That part almost looked a thick, blunted sword.

The Son grabbed the handle. A small plug inserted itself into the base of the stock, and a window appeared on the monitor displaying the user interface. "A riot gun? Well, that should come in handy."

Sam headed for the hangar exit, but slammed on the breaks when the remaining two gang members appeared.

"You're dead, you little punk," came the leader's voice over an exceptionally loud speaker.

The other member brandished an axe, kicked his thrusters on, and charged at The Son.

The Son raised the riot gun, at it. The front end split open and the weapon made a humming sound that increased in pitch. Blue electricity crackled between the two ends. Barely twenty meters away, electricity arced out in a blinding flash of light, and the charging powered suit fell limp onto its face, sending it skittering across the floor.

As The Son turned to face the leader, warning signs shot up on the monitor. The riot gun began smoking, caught fire and the battery popped and exploded.

The leader shouted over the speakers. “God damn you, you little shit stain. I’m gonna rip you out of that piece of scrap and tear your arms and legs off.” The thrusters of his suit kicked on and he blasted toward The Son.

The Son switched its grip on the riot gun, placing both hands on the base. The hover thrusters in the feet came on, and it spun a hundred and eighty degrees. The riot gun smashed into the leader’s torso, sending him careening onto his back.

The riot gun snapped off the stock.

The Son threw the broken weapon to the ground and boosted toward the leader. Using its momentum to deliver a punch to the leader’s suit as he tried to get up, The Son smashed the hatch where the skull face was painted.

The leader’s suit groaned as the arms tried to push itself off the floor, but The Son took hold of the left hand and placed its foot on the leader’s smashed hatch. Steel strained and servos groaned as The Son ripped the arm off, metal components flying all over the abandoned hangar floor.

The leader’s hatched burst, and partially opened. The man inside whimpering and groaning as he pushed at the hatch.

The Son’s fingers slipped inside and tore the hatch open. Its lights focused on the gangbanger inside the cockpit.

The leader held his hands up. “Hey, come on, bro? Let a player play?”

The Son reached for the man, who shrieked, but stopped when the high-pitched sound of a siren approached.

Red and blue lights flashed over the pavement outside.

“Shit. So much for the highway.”

The Son let go of the leader’s suit and blew out of the hangar, cutting through a second strip of hollowed out planes. Once he was past them, he headed through an abandoned industrial complex adjacent to the airfield.

A minute later, Mike’s voice came over the old CB radio. “Sam? That’s you up ahead isn’t it? Sam, if you can hear me, answer.”

Sam grit his teeth, and looked at the rear monitor. The flashing lights were right behind him as well as the small figure of a white and black police powered suit.

“Sam, we don’t need to do this. Pull over, and let’s talk about this.”

Sam picked up the speaker on the radio. “There’s nothing to talk about, Mike. I’m not going back to the farm, or to my piece of shit father.”

“This isn’t just about your father anymore, Sam. You stole something from that man at the solar station. You’re also trying to enter the city without a license. Those are not minor violations, they’re felonies. There’s still time. If you come back with me, I’ll help explain things to the trucker, maybe get him to drop the charges, but you have to stop. Now.”

Sweat cascaded down Sam’s face as he set his jaw and revved the accelerator as far as it would go. “Voice command,” he said, and the console lit up. “Disengage safety limiter. Confirmation: fly free.”

Red warning lights flashed over the console as The Son’s thrusters brightened. The feet dangled a meter over the ground as it maneuvered around derelict cars, and whole pieces of buildings.

But Mike was still gaining.

The Son hooked a left and came into an open area littered with piles of scrap.

Half a kilometer away, was a narrow alley just big enough for The Son.

Behind Sam, Mike's thrusters kicked on, and the larger suit rocketed to within reach of the Son.

The Son's side thrusters ignited, narrowly dodging the grab by inches.

The Son slowly inched away from Mike's suit as it dodged and weaved through wrecked trucks and powered suits. The side thrusters blasted left, then right, weaving through the charred wreckage at a breakneck pace.

Eventually, The Son cleared the junk pile and made a beeline for the alley.

Right behind him, Mike slammed on the breaks and skidded to a halt at the mouth of the alley.

Sam let out a sigh and wiped his forehead. Several more warning lights flashed on the console. Sam let up on the accelerator. He rode the alley all the way to the end of the industrial complex and banked a right. The city walls were in sight, as well as the river draining from the city's wall.

Up ahead, a chain-link fence stood in The Son's path.

"All right, buddy, let's jump that sucker," Sam said and throttled up. However, as soon as Sam did that, the thrusters on the back of The Son and the feet stalled.

The Son crashed into the ground and tumbled over on itself. The screws at the base of the safety harness holding Sam to his seat gave, and Sam's head smashed into the console. Crimson fluid smeared over the screen as The Son crashed through the fence and ground to a halt on its back.

Sam laid in the cockpit, his vision spinning in a swirl of red and black spots.

The hatch groaned and squeaked as it was slowly forced open.

“Sam, Sam,” said Mike as he peered through the cockpit hatch, shining a light. “Sam, can you hear me?”

Sam coughed and spat blood onto his chest.

Mike crawled inside the cockpit, undid the buckle on the safety harness, and lifted Sam out by his shoulders. “Sam, I don’t know if you can understand me or not, but you’re under arrest.”

###

The next morning, Sam sat in the Von Braun police department in hand cuffs. From his seat by the window, The Son laid in a wrecked heap in a parking space.

The cockpit hatch was gone. One of the arms was missing and the legs were bent backwards.

Across the room, Mike and Harold shook hands.

“How is he?” asked Harold.

“The paramedics said he has a cracked skull, and a broken arm. They still need to do some X-rays, but they said he looked alright otherwise.”

Harold sighed as he looked at Sam. He gave Mike a nod and walked over to where Sam sat.

Sam kept his eyes to the floor.

Harold slipped a check for eighty-thousand dollars onto Sam’s lap.

Sam blinked. “What’s this?”

Harold took a seat next to him. “That’s the rest of the money I got selling your suit. When that junk dealer came to appraise the suit you made, he said he could give me two grand for it

then, and the rest later. I was sold when I heard two grand, but then he called to tell me I had to come to Von Braun and pick up the check.”

Sam picked up the check and stared at it. After a minute of silence, he took a deep breath. “I could have gotten twice that.” He flipped the check over. The line at the top was blank. “You didn’t sign it?”

“No. I did some thinking after I got it, and spoke with Mike. He said you almost made it all the way here in that old heap of yours. I always thought those things were just a hobby, something you did as an excuse not to do your chores. But, if you can give Mike the slip on something made outta scrap, maybe I was wrong.”

Sam looked up at Harold.

“Son, I’m sorry,” he said, his voice cracking. “I’m sorry I sold your suit without asking you, and everything I said at home. I want you to take this, and you can do whatever you want. If you want to leave and come work, or go to school here, you do that.”

Sam choked back tears as he stared at the check. Tears fell down his cheeks as he turned to his father and sobbed into his chest.