

Solar Ascension

Chapter 16: Friends {1}

"I'll survive," yeah right.

Nox barely dodged a claw the size of a shovel as it slammed into the ground where he had been a second ago.

The attack kicked up a cloud of dust and debris, luckily, he had moved far enough to avoid being turned to paste.

The dust cloud cleared revealing his attacker. It was a seven foot tall Eclipsed that was also 'supposedly' tier one which he was having a hard time believing right now.

According to his knowledge, tier ones never grew past the size of a house cat, so what the hell was this?

The creature was walking on its four lanky but long limbs, each equipped with massive claws.

Like the one Astra fought, this one also had no eyes, but it could somehow tell exactly where Nox was.

The creature let out a roar, which sounded more like a screech instead, revealing an endless row of dagger sized teeth, before lunging at him again, causing him to narrowly dodge... again.

'This can't go on,' he thought, adrenaline being the only thing that was letting him keep up with the creature's speed....or so he thought, 'If I just keep dodging, someone else will steal my points.'

He looked down at his gauntleted hands before looking back at the Eclipsed who, at this point was tired of this pest's incessant dodging, it was now slowly circling him, looking for an opening and it soon found it, the prey was distracted.

So it lunged again ready to turn him into Eclipsed snack.

Nox, still distracted by the gauntlets, muttered, "please work."

He finally raised his head, only to be faced with a wide open maw aimed directly at his head.

◆ ◆ ◆ TWO DAYS EARLIER ◆ ◆ ◆

Luna led Astra and Nox out of the administration building and towards a separate one, a bit far from it.

One that students wearing the same gray uniform as Nox were walking into. In Luna's hand was a circular object, similar to the one Astra had ordered his uniform on.

"What happens if I fail?" Nox asked as he continued walking forward with Astra, ignoring the stares.

Though, this time, they were directed at Astra instead of him.

"For normal students, the temporary core within them will be removed and they'll be kicked out...if they survive anyway," Astra answered before turning to him and giving a smile, "but for you, failing would just give me enough excuse to keep you permanently chained up in a lab and find out how you can absorb SE without a core."

Her words caused him to swallow, they didn't sound like she was joking, not in the least bit.

In silence, they finally reached the glass structure. It wasn't as impressive as the administration building, but it was a whole lot better than any building he had seen in the slums....taller too.

The three continued forward, through the door and towards the reception...or that's what it seemed like.

At the desk was a man wearing the same uniform as Luna approached him. He gave a small smile as he watched her approach, his blue eyes behind a pair of transparent glasses lit up.

"What's the purpose of visiting me, my little elf?" He spoke the moment they were close enough, causing a visible blush to appear on her face, all the way to her elf like ears.

"Erm," Luna cleared her throat, trying to regain her composure before handing the papers and the circular object to him. "T-The Headmistress requested a new student be registered for the admission test, and also asked that he be assigned a room in the temporary hostel."

The man accepted the documents and the orb with a flourish that was, frankly, unnecessary. He scanned through them quickly before setting them down.

"I see... Headmistress priority." He whistled low. "That explains why she is here."

His eyes moved to Astra who just looked at him with a bored expression, before he wisely chose to look away.

"And this must be the student?" he said, finally acknowledging Nox.

Nox nodded in response.

The man raised a brow as he assessed, "Zone 9 background, no core implanted, hmm."

His tone was polite enough, but Nox could practically hear the judgment in it.

The man tapped on the orb causing it to open, revealing a black rectangular card.

With the card in hand, he started typing something into the glass terminal, and a holographic display came to life before him.

A new ID profile forming line by line:

[**Name**

: Nox

Status: Temporary Initiate

SE Compatibility: N/A

Lodging: Temporary Hostel – Room 312]

With that, he handed the card back to Luna with a smile on his face, as he said, "his room is on the tenth floor, the elevator should take him there."

"Thank you," Luna politely said, taking the card before turning to Nox and passing the card to him.

"This will act as both your room card and Assessment ID," she explained. "It will track your performance, survival... and corpse location if needed."

Well, the last part didn't sound terrifying at all....

But before he could ask anything, Astra interrupted, "alright then kid, try not to die. I just got you. After all, it would be extremely inconvenient if you dropped dead before I get to poke around in your insides."

"...Thanks for the encouragement," Nox muttered flatly.

"Anytime," she said with a proud nod, as if she had truly given him a motivational speech.

Luna gave Nox a sympathetic look and leaned a bit closer to whisper, "If it helps... the fatality rate dropped from sixteen percent to... fourteen last year."

"...That doesn't help."

"Oh. Well... good luck!"

With that, the two walked out of the building, leaving Nox just standing there at the reception, turning around, he faced the man who was still looking at him.

"The elevator is that way," the man simply pointed to the left before sitting back down and continuing whatever he was doing.

Chapter 17: Friend {2} : Devon

The elevator ride up was a quiet one, with no other student joining him which was strange since the ground floor had been filled with them.

But Nox didn't spend time thinking about why he was alone in the elevator, rather, he spent it trying to make sense of what the headmistress had told him.

'Trying' was the key word, after all, nothing she had said made complete sense.

At the time, he had just nodded along, pretending he understood...which she knew he didn't, judging by her smile, but now that he was alone he tried, and failed, to make sense of her words.

"Well, she did say I'll understand when the time comes," Nox muttered before leaning back on the slowly ascending elevator wall.

"To reach the light, you must first descend into the heart of darkness." Her words replayed in his mind.

Ding

The elevator let out as it reached the tenth floor snapping him out of his thoughts. The elevator doors opened, revealing a massive hallway of golden before him.

The ceilings were high and covered with lights that showered the floor with golden lights, probably powered by SE.

Banking the hallway were doors, each holding a number at the front.

But what surprised Nox was the number of students in the hallway. They all wore the same grey uniform with golden patterns as he did and they all paused the moment the elevator door opened, looking at the new arrival.

Their stares only lasted a second though, as they went back to searching for their rooms and placing their cards on the doors when they found it.

Nox sighed and walked out of the elevator, as he joined them in searching for his own room.

He soon found room 312 at the very end of the hallway and like the others had been doing, he placed the card given to him at the scanner on the door and with a subtle flash of light, the door let out a click and opened.

The door slid open and Nox was immediately hit by the scent of soap and steam the moment he walked in.

"'bout time you showed up, I've been wondering who our last roommate is." An easy going voice was heard, causing him to turn to the left.

Standing by a doorway, which probably led to the bathroom, was a tall guy, easily six feet two, with dark skin.

He had a head full of locs tied to the back and one allowed to fall on his face, this one decorated with two golden rings on the end.

A white towel was draped over his head, with another hanging on his shoulder. He had on a black vest which showed off his built frame and the same grey pants as Nox.

The guy gave him a once over and grinned, rubbing the towel over his head. "Name's Devon," he said, offering a handshake. "Zone 3. Don't stress, I ain't as mean as I look."

Nox took his hand, albeit a bit reluctantly, "...Nox," he said.

Devon's grin widened. "Cool name, sounds like some anti-hero from a comic book."

Before Nox could reply, they were interrupted by a loud snore causing them to turn towards the sound.

Lying on the bed closest to the window was a guy with messy blond hair, half-buried under his blanket. His uniform jacket hung off the bedpost, his white shirt was half unbuttoned, and a thick book was open on his chest.

Devon groaned. "Ain't no way he's still sleepin'," he muttered, walking over and tapping the edge of the mattress with his foot. "Yo, Cass, wake yo' ass up. We got company."

The guy didn't even flinch. The only response was a soft, incoherent mumble and a snort before he rolled over, causing the book to slide off his chest and onto the floor.

The title read: **Theoretical Applications of SE Conductivity.**

"He like this every day?" Nox asked, as he turned towards the unconscious blond.

"Pretty much," Devon said with a shrug. "But when he is awake? Dude's a genius. Got all that book smarts, none of the common kind." He glanced at Cass again and snorted. "You'll see."

He walked past Nox and pointed toward the last bed near the wall, and said "that one's yours, you can put your st—"

Devon paused and looked at the empty handed Nox and frowned, "where your stuff at?"

"I... don't really have any," he replied, rubbing the back of his neck.

Devon was a bit surprised by the answer. "Huh? What you mean you ain't got—" He stopped mid-sentence, watching the look on Nox's face, "ah, got it."

He rubbed his chin, then sighed. "Aight then, don't sweat it. We'll figure somethin' out. If you want clothes or supplies, some of the vendors down on the shopping area sell decent stuff cheap. I'll hook you up later."

Nox looked at him, a bit surprised. "You don't have to—"

"Relax man," Devon interrupted with a small grin, back to his usual self. "This ain't no charity. You just gotta owe me one, simple as that."

"And what will I owe you?" He asked, suspicious, from the Slums, Nox learnt that nothing came for free, but Devon's answer surprised him.

"If we pass the admission test, you wake us up every morning for class," he said simply. "That's it."

"...That's it?"

"Yup." He shrugged, "See, Cass over there's allergic to alarm clocks—" he pointed a thumb at the still-snoring blond, "—and me? Let's just say I don't do early mornings unless someone's draggin' me outta bed."

"I see," Nox said after a while, "then we have a deal."

"Bet," Devon said with a grin as he walked away from the bathroom door. "Go 'head and get comfy, man. Hot water's still runnin' if you tryna freshen up. I got somethin' to handle outside real quick."

With that he grabbed the grey jacket hanging off the back of his chair, slung it over his shoulder and walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

With that, Nox finally had the chance to observe the room. It was bigger than his apartment back in the slums, like three times bigger or maybe more.

A bit after the door and towards the left was the bathroom. Just a bit forward was a space that Nox guessed was the general study area.

After that, there were four beds, each with a drawer for clothes at the bottom, by their side was a separate study desk and chair.

Even with all the stuff that filled the room, there was more than enough space remaining.

The bed close to the one Devon pointed as his had a bag on it which told him that there was a third roommate, one that was probably out.

"Let's get settled in," he muttered with a sigh.

Chapter 18: The Test Begins {1}

Two days passed in a flash, and soon enough, the day of the test arrived.

Nox now stood among hundreds of other potential students in a massive auditorium that seemed far too grand for an entrance exam. The room was a circular, with tiered seats arranged in rows.

All the seats were arranged to face the circular platform at the very bottom. Though its elevation took nothing away from its grandure.

Around it were instructors, knights, and examiners dressed in white and gold coats, all of whom exuded enough pressure to make even the most confident students stiffen.

Devon stood beside Nox, with his arms folded and his eyes scanning the entire hall. "Damn," he muttered under his breath. "They really pullin' out the big show, huh? Thought we'd just be takin' some written exam or somethin'."

"Yeah," Nox muttered, looking around at the hundreds of students, "I wonder what their passing rate is though."

Across from them, Cass stood yawning, rubbing his eyes with the back of his hand. "It's statistically low," he said absently. "Last year's passing rate was just under 3.2%. Most failed due to either not meeting the requirement or just straight up dying."

Devon turned to stare at him. "...You coulda stopped talkin' two words ago."

Cass blinked. "Oh. Right."

The three soon found their seats, and a moment later, the lights dimmed and a holographic emblem of the Solar Academy's logo appeared in the center of the platform.

"Attention, candidates."

The voice belonged to a man now standing on the platform below. He was tall with broad-shouldered, and dressed in the pristine white uniform of a high ranked Solar Knight.

On the left side of his uniform was an insignia that identified him as one of the Academy's Chief Examiners.

"You have all been granted the rare opportunity to prove yourselves worthy of joining the ranks of Solar Academy, the academy dedicated to preparing you to face the Eclipsed threat," he started.

His eyes moved across the tiers, seemingly scanning every one of them. "This evaluation will determine not only your admission but also your placement within the Academy's divisions. There will be no second chances."

Low murmurs rose among the students, but was quickly silenced when the Examiner raised his hand.

"The entrance assessment will be conducted in four primary trials," he continued, as the hologram changed from the school's logo to written words.

The first read: **KNOWLEDGE.**

"The first trial will test your comprehension of Solar Energy, its principles, properties, and applications. It will be both written and analytical."

The next holographic word appeared: **CRAFT.**

"The second trial," the examiner continued, "focuses on your practical understanding of Solar Engineering and your ability to repair, optimize, or construct Solar Tech under limited conditions."

Nox sat up a bit straighter as he heard what the next test was about, an action that Devon and Cass noticed.

"That your field?" Devon leaned forward and whispered in question.

"I know a thing or two about fixing Solar Tech," he responded, "I used to do that for a couple of creds back in the slums."

The two were silent for a while before Devon said, "Man, that musta been rough."

Nox said nothing else in response as they went back to listening to the examiner speak.

COMBAT. Those were the next words they saw when they turned back to the platform.

"The third trial," the man said, his tone a bit heavier, "will measure your combat proficiency. You will be tested in live conditions, where you'll have to survive against tier 2 Eclipsed."

His words caused some students to freeze as most hadn't even encountered an Eclipsed before, much less think of fighting one.

But the examiner didn't care as he went on.

Finally, the fourth word appeared: **STEALTH.**

"The fourth and final trial will assess adaptability, awareness, and control, it will assess how well you can survive undetected in hostile environments. This is not about strength, but subtlety, remember that."

"When all four trials conclude," the Examiner said, "your scores will be compiled and averaged. The area in which you demonstrate the highest performance will determine your assigned division within the Academy."

He paused, letting his words sink in.

"Whether you join the Combat, the Engineering, the scholar, or the Stealth Divisions, your results today will define your future."

With that, he walked off the stage, not even bothering to wish them luck. That'll just be a waste of his words.

After he left, the hologram on stage, change and showed the schedule for the tests:

[**1. Knowledge (Written) – 09:00**

2. Craft (Solar Tech Construction) – 12:00

3. Combat – 15:00

4. Stealth – 17:30]

It was currently eight in the morning, which meant they only had an hour to find their assigned exam halls and start the first test.

A ding was heard at the same time on the students' watch, one which had been delivered to him by Luna, and it functioned the same as the card handed to him, but with more features.

Nox looked at his as a holographic display projected just a bit above it:

[Name: Nox]

Assigned Hall: K-17

Section: Written (Knowledge)

Seat: 042

Countdown: 00:57:03

A voice came from the wristband, one that sounded completely neutral and female. "Candidate Nox. You are assigned to Hall K-17, located in Sector C, East Wing. Please proceed within the allotted time."

Then it went silent again.

Devon looked down at his own and said. "Hall J-11. West Wing. Damn, they really splittin' us up already?"

"I'm pretty sure that it was randomly done," Cass said, his blue eyes moving to his watch, "I got Hall A-12."

They walked out of the auditorium and together the corridor together for a bit, heading down a glowing corridor where signs floated midair, pointing them to their respective wings.

They soon reached the intersection where the hallways split, one path glowing gold, labeled EAST WING, and the other blue for WEST WING.

"Guess this is where we split," Devon said, lifting a hand in farewell. "I'll see y'all later."

"Yeah," Nox nodded and with that, the three went their separate ways each towards their various exam halls.

Chapter 19: The Test Begins {2}: Knowledge

Nox was a genius...when it came to stuff that didn't involve books.

As proven by the way he currently sat in Hall K-17, seat 042.

By the time he had arrived, everyone had already been seated and he felt so awkward being the last one to walk in.

How had they moved from the auditorium to the exam hall so fast remained a mystery to him, but luckily, the examiner wasn't in the hall yet.

The moment he stepped into the class, the floor lit up a bit with golden light, leading him directly to his seat, which was fine with him since that meant he didn't have to talk to any of the strangers here, some of which were currently staring at him.

Just a minute after he entered, the examiner walked in and twenty minutes after that, the tablet that lay on the students' desks turned on, presenting them with the question currently in front Nox.

Of course, some required general knowledge, but beyond that, he was left stranded.

Where the hell did the academy expect him to learn the formula for calculating total SE needed to power a solar tech or even understand half the damn symbols written on the screen?

He looked at the problem on his screen. It was. It definitely was.

The equation on the screen might as well have been written in some kind of ancient alien language.

"Damn," he muttered, scratching his head. "Who comes up with this crap?"

A student beside him, a pale girl with silver braids and circular glasses, glanced his way and whispered, "You should start from the basics. Just apply the SE Resonance Law and expand the radiant coefficient."

Nox was momentarily surprised by her help. "Yeah, of course, totally," he said quickly. "SE... resonance... coefficient... got it, thanks."

She smiled politely before going back to her work, and Nox stared at his blank screen again.

"Right," he whispered. "I idea what that means."

His eyes went to the time being displayed on his watch and he sighed, he only had thirty minutes before the exams ended, and it was obvious enough that he wasn't going to complete the remaining hundred and fifty question within that time frame.

"That leaves me with one choice," he whispered as he picked his digital pen back up, "let's guess the answers."

A hundred and fifty of the two hundred questions were multiple choice and the remaining fifty were theories and calculations he knew nothing about.

Fifty of the one-hundred multiple choice had been answered, since they were the general questions ones which left him with only hundred more, and what was he going to do?

That's right, he was going to guess and pray he got some of them right.

"Man, that was tough," Devon commented.

They were currently out of the exams hall and in the Academy's cafeteria...well one meant for the candidates anyway, since they were not actual students yet.

Nox sat on one of the seats, his head laying on the table, one could literally see the smoke coming from his ears.

Though both their reactions to the first test was the complete opposite of Cass's.

He sat across from them, perfectly calm, sipping from a glass of something that looked suspiciously expensive for cafeteria juice.

Well, that's because it was.

In the past two days, the three had learnt quite a bit about each other and unlike the two, Cassian...or Cass, was from a wealthy background with some complications.

Something too personal to share with people he had only known for a few days.

So yeah, Cass definitely had enough creds to afford expensive juice, but that wasn't what bothered the two right now.

What bothered them was the fact that his expression was infuriatingly serene as he took a sip, like he'd just finished a calming activity instead of a mind-melting exam.

"That was fun," he said casually, flipping through a digital copy of the test questions on his wristband as if reviewing them for pleasure.

Devon stared at him like he'd grown a second head. "Fun? Man, what part of that brain torture was fun to you? I thought my brain was 'bout to short circuit halfway through question fifty."

Cass looked up, completely unbothered. "I mean, it wasn't that bad. The resonance equations were basic. They only tested the third and fourth Laws of Conversion. I was expecting fifth-level theoreticals."

Devon leaned forward, squinting. "You sayin' that like I even knew there were five of 'em."

"There are seven, actually," Cass corrected flatly, going back to his screen.

Devon groaned and slumped back in his chair, dragging his hands over his face, "I swear, if he mentions the exam being easy one more time, I'mma jump him."

Nox just lazily raised his head from the table, his golden eyes locked on the blond boy.

He was suddenly having some tempting thoughts of strangling Cass but before he could act on them or do anything, a voice was heard behind him.

"Excuse me..." the voice sounded extremely familiar so he turned around.

Standing behind him was a girl with silver braids, and glasses, wearing the same grey uniform as they were.

She was the student that had offered Nix help earlier during the exams. She was currently standing with a tray in hand as she hesitantly looked at the three.

"Um...can I sit with you three?" She said again, looking at the empty space beside Cass who was still scrolling through the question, "t-there's nowhere else to sit "

She was right, though the Cafeteria was massive, so was the number of students, judging by the number assigned to him, Nox guessed they easily numbered over a thousand.

So the cafeteria was currently filled to the brim right now, leaving no extra seating area.

Devon was the first to answer. "Course you can, shorty," he said, flashing his easy grin and gesturing to the empty chair. "Ain't nobody guardin' that spot."

The girl gave a small, relieved smile. "Thank you." She sat down carefully, placing her tray on the table.

Chapter 20: The Test Begins {3}: Craft

It was one thing being lost during an exam and it was a whole other when info of how lost you were makes it out of the exams room.

And that was exactly what was currently happening when the girl suddenly recognized Nox.

"Oh, you were the one sitting next to me," was the first thing she said, as she looked directly at him, "you... seemed a bit lost during the exam."

"Y-yeah, thanks for the help though." Nox responded, a bit embarrassed at her mention of his struggle in the exams hall.

Seeing the embarrassment on his face, the girl immediately apologized, "I—I didn't mean it like that. Sorry! I just... noticed."

Nox waved it off. "It's fine. You weren't wrong."

She nodded, smiling sheepishly. "I'm Linda, by the way, from Aurion."

"Ain't that the industrial district?" Devon asked.

By industrial, he meant mostly the folks responsible for keeping Aureum's lifeblood running — the engineers who maintained the SE power lines, reactor grids, and conduits that kept all the cities in Aureum lit.

Linda nodded before responding, "I... suppose? My family worked in the lower reactor grids, maintaining SE lines. I've been studying Solar Energy since I was seven."

Well, that explained her knowledge during the test... at least it made Nox feel a bit better, knowing that most of the students here have been tutored since young.

They held the advantage, which meant it'd be even more satisfying if he got into the academy while most of them didn't.

"Even if I do, it wouldn't be in the Scholar division," he muttered, reminding himself of the fact that he had guessed 2/4 of the questions.

There was no miracle that'd make him pass, not unless the gods of probability decided to take pity on him, which, judging from their silence for the past decades, had an even lower probability of happening.

Nox leaned back and let out a sigh, he still had three more chances.

"Anyway, nice to meet you Linda," Devon said, "name's Devon."

"This is Cassian, but you can just call him Cass..easier to remember." He pointed at Cass who was still scrolling through the questions on his watch.

"Nox," Nox introduced himself next and Linda smiled a bit as she said, "nice to meet you all."

The conversation went on for a while before Linda spoke again, looking at Nox. "You know... for someone who claims the guessed half the test, you don't look that worried."

Nox shrugged, resting his chin on his palm. "Worry doesn't fix anything. If I fail, I fail. If I pass, good for me."

Well, that was a lie, and he just remembered that if he failed, he was going to become a lab rat and just imagining the things Astra might do to him, made him shiver.

"You good?" Devon asked.

"Yeah, just an unpleasant thought." He answered and Devon nodded, but before anymore words could be said, an announcement came from the speaker that hung on the cafeteria.

[Attention candidates. The second trial, Solar Tech Construction, begins in twenty minutes. Please proceed to your designated workshops.]

With that, a couple of dings responded in the cafeteria as new info was uploaded to their watches.

[Name: Nox]

Workshop: Bay 06, East Wing

Section: Craft (Solar Tech Construction)

Countdown: 00:19:58

"Well, there goes our break." Nox muttered as he looked at his watch.

"Ain't this your turf?" Devon said, as they all stood up...well, the three of them anyway, Cass was still deeply buried in the questions.

"You're an engineer?" Linda asked, a bit surprised.

"Not really," Nox answered, "I just know a thing or two about Solar tech."

That was just another way of saying he never hit the books for solar tech, but he knew his way around them.

"Cool," she muttered in response but asked nothing else.

"Yo Cass," Devon called out.

"Hmm?" Cassian answered absentmindedly.

"You do know we've got another test in twenty minutes right?" Devon asked again.

"..."

There was silence before Cass switched the screen on his watch

[Name: Cassian Burns]

Workshop: Bay 12, West Wing

Section: Craft (Solar Tech Construction)

Countdown: 00:15:32

He immediately stood up with the rest and with no words exchanged, they walked out of the cafeteria towards the hall that led to their various bays.

Turns out, both Cass and Devon were in the same bays this time and like before, Nox and Linda were in the same.

The two soon reached their assigned bay, and yet again, most of the students were already seated...well, standing next to their table.

Unlike where they wrote the written exam, a hall that looked like the typical lecture room, this one looked like a lab of some sorts.

The same floor light led Nox and Linda to their various tables where a white lab coat with golden patterns lay, alongside a couple of tools, some of which Nox had no idea what they were used for.

The instruction on his watch told him to put on the lab coat with the gloves and wait for further instructions from the examiner.

He took the time to look at the tools provided, yes, some looked strange and different from what he was used to using but he still couldn't see how this qualified as 'restricted conditions'.

Well, he was the only one who shared that sentiment as the faces of most of the other candidates held frowns.

They instantly identified the tools before them and therefore the type of test they were about to face.

Soon enough, the examiner walked in.

This time, it was a woman wearing the same lab coat as them and her face looked completely bored as she scanned the entire class.

Behind her, two drones followed, each carrying a box,

The woman didn't waste time with introductions. She set the boxes down on the central table and clapped her hands once which worked to quiet down the muttering students.

"Alright, candidates," she began, her voice sounded as bored as she looked. "You're here for the Solar Tech Construction Trial. I'm Examiner Ilyra Vale. Some of you might know my name, most of you won't. Either way, it won't matter if you fail."

That certainly got everyone's attention.

"The goal of this test is simple," she continued, motioning to the hovering drones. "You will each receive a damaged Solar Tech. Your task is to repair and reactivate it within one hour using only the tools provided."

"If you're familiar with the system's structure, good. If not..." She shrugged. "Then may the light guide you."

The drones split and began moving towards each row, dropping sealed cases onto each student's workstation with soft metallic thuds. The moment they touched the table, the golden seals faded, unlocking the lids.

Nox raised a brow when his case landed in front of him. "You think they got these things from a scrapyards?" he muttered under his breath.

Linda, standing beside him, had already opened hers. Inside was a half-melted Solar rifle, its internal tubing exposed, the main emitter cracked...in short, it was completely busted.

She sighed, pushing her glasses up. "A Type-4 SE rifle... this'll take some time."

Nox opened his own box next and was a bit surprised at what lay before him. The examiner's voice was heard again, "You have one hour, begin."