

The Second Defilian War:

Ensnaring the Beast

Harry was well prepared, but he knew this would be his last battle. His second in command, Jason, approached him.

"Harry."

"Hey, Jason. What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Just making sure that you're alright."

"Why wouldn't I be....?"

"I was wondering if you'd be alright fighting him again."

"PFFT. What kind of question was that!?" Harry demanded. "I'm rearing to beat the snot out of him this time. I think I've got a grasp of his techniques. If you and I join hands and work together we can beat him."

"... If you say so."

"So, this is the game plan," Harry said to his small force. "Right now, we're on top of this huge casino block, right?"

"Yeah," Jason and the soldiers nodded.

"We've got a pretty small force, so Jason will use his power to raise it up into the sky."

"Ah?" Jason asked. "Using my flame clouds?"

"Yeah," Harry replied. "Have you ever moved something so big before?"

"No, course not. All I've ever used them for is flying and moving small stuff like books, and the largest thing I've ever moved is that tank from Romania

last year. Moving a whole building and the ground all around it is out of the question!"

"No, I'm sure you can do it," Harry replied. "I'm counting on you here, and I believe in ya."

"Well..." Jason replied. "I'll give it a try."

"I know you can do it," Harry replied. "And after that, the Intrusinks will be drawn to here, and we can take them out on the flying building. With their kind of bloodlust, I doubt their superiors can keep them in line enough to develop a strategy."

"And then what if we can't hold it?" asked one of the soldiers skeptically. "We'll have nowhere to run, right?"

Harry nodded.

"The point here is that we don't let the Intrusinks run anywhere, and we can destroy them all in the building, and if we get backed up against the edge, we can escape on flame clouds."

"In other words, a suicide attack?" another soldier asked. "Isn't there a way where we can rout them?"

"This'll be our best bet," Harry replied. "We're not gonna be able to defeat them from inside the city, or if we run down to the streets. The only way we have an edge over them is if they don't have any more ground to spread out their army than we do. They won't have anymore forces than we do on the ground at a time then we do."

"We-do-we-do," muttered Jason, and Harry gave him an evil eye.

The soldiers nodded; it made sense.

"Harry, it was a good plan," Jason muttered, staring at the sky. "But..."

A massive swarm of spaceships covered the sky like a seething, black liquid, each and every one of them packed with monsters and powering towards Harry's small group at great speed. Inside, Harry knew exactly what kind of

monster awaited them – Herobane's army, made of the Intrusinks. These were tall, humanoid monsters with long limbs and rather high intelligence, enough to create and operate advanced weapons and fight in formation, although they lacked pure strength and could be overpowered by a human soldier in a one on one fight.

“They’re approaching and fast!” said a soldier.

“Jason, do your thing!” Harry yelled. “Hold them off and don’t let them land, men!”

The troops fired into the swarm of landing craft with their anti-aircraft guns and bazookas they had set up at the top of the casino block. Jason stood at the foot of the tower, and concentrated all his power into creating as big of a flame cloud as possible.

“Ugh...” groaned Jason, sending as much power into the already huge cloud that was forming underneath the casino block. Beads of sweat rolled down his forehead and chin, and he gritted his teeth until the pavement around the block began to crack and move upwards. A burning Intrusink carrier crashed to the ground and exploded down the road, but he ignored it and pushed the last few ounces of his power from his fingertips, exhausting his supply.

“Huff... huff... that’s it, I can’t go anymore,” muttered Jason, breathing heavily. “Just... fly already!”

Slowly, the pavement rose up out of the ground in a rough and wobbly circle around the block, pieces of concrete and debris raining down from the edges and bottom.

“Woah!” Harry said. “Now, get on, Jason!”

Jason clambered onto the island as it rose higher and higher into the sky, much to the amazement of the incoming Intrusinks.

“Alright!” the soldiers yelled. “Now we’re even, you filthy monsters!”

“Don’t get too excited,” Harry said. “Even if they’re easier to beat right now, they can effectively replace themselves with their superior numbers, while we technically only have one army. Imagine that they have a thousand of the same amount as us, that’s what we’re up against right now!”

“That’s right, don’t loosen yourselves up one bit!” Jason replied, breathing heavily and looking rather pale. “Here they come!”

Harry's tactic worked far better than expected at first. The enemy struggled to even land more than three crafts on the floating island at once, and the soldiers holding it managed to blast through them with their guns. But each and every one of them had seen how many further ships there were, and they all knew the crates of ammunitions stacked in the block were nowhere near enough to beat the whole force. They would be forced to resort to hand to hand combat soon. Jason hurled a clump of flame cloud at one of the ships, blasting it to pieces. Harry blew another one up with a rocket launcher. More crafts were torn to shreds by the two anti-aircraft guns they had. The few crafts that managed to land had their crew quickly annihilated. Even the tank fired shells into the midst of the crafts. It was all going extremely well, and they had managed to take down over a hundreds crafts, but then things started to go wrong. One by one, soldiers began to run out of ammo, and grimly drew shortswords and combat knives and axes. A couple pulled out katanas. And then, finally, even the anti-aircraft guns were fired dry, and the Intrusinks howled with delight as they landed their first successful crafts on the island.

Harry led his force against them like a demon. He slashed wide arcs with his katana, destroying whole ranks of Intrusinks with a single attack, Jason blasted masses of them of the island with his flame clouds, and the soldiers hacked and stabbed and slashed and parried with all their might, and the piles of Intrusink corpses grew until Jason felt like even his flame clouds were going to struggle against their weight. A few soldiers began dumping the bodies off the island to help him. Harry cut clean through a clump of enemies at once with his sword, spraying blood high into the air before dashing past

and whirling through a second squadron. Jason crushed a third squadron inside a flame cloud and approached Harry in the midst of the fighting.

"Any sign of Herobane or Naerius?" Harry asked.

"Nope," Jason replied, breathing heavily. "But when either of them arrives, do you seriously think we'll be able to beat even one of them? What if they both come together?"

"I'm sure they won't," Harry said, slamming his elbow into an Intrusink. "But one thing does trouble me a little."

"Which is?"

"They're not fools... at least Herobane isn't, anyway. So he would surely know that he is outmatched, as neither he nor Naerius have the power of Mazog or Witherblood to pose a significant threat to our stronger members like Desmos or Zach. So, why are they still coming at us?"

Jason pondered this as he gripped an Intrusink by the neck and punched its head until its was dead.

"I get what you mean," he said at last. "You're saying that they could have hidden cards."

"Yes," Harry agreed, bashing a monster on the head with the hilt of his weapon. "But... oh, wait a minute."

Through the battle, a familiar person was walking towards them, cracking his knuckles and he tossed the limp body of a soldier aside.

Harry and Jason leapt backwards and instantly switched on their full concentration. Herobane hadn't particularly changed over the years. He still had the same cruel smile and piercing black eyes, with his two swords strapped onto his back and spiky white hair covering his head. He wore a black leather tunic with a red lining, which reached down to his ankles; he sported padded black battle leggings and brown leather boots. The sigil of the Defiler, a black planet enwreathed in flames with a hand underneath, as if grabbing it, was imprinted over his heart.

"You're just as puny as ever, runt," Herobane mocked. "I won't even use my swords against you to beat you."

He grinned and tossed his sword to an Intrusink, who nodded and disappeared into the crowd of monsters surging forwards. Harry nearly popped a vein.

"Y... you dare to mock me!?"

"Who are you to say that?" Herobane demanded, stretching his fingers. "Just shut up and come at me already, with you and your snobby friend."

Harry charged Herobane head on, and the two clashed in a flurry of slashes and fists. Herobane threw a straight punch at Harry's jaw, but Harry dodged and slashed in a wide arc at his head. Herobane ducked under the slash and readied both his fists, before punching forwards into Harry's stomach, sending the latter skidding backwards and coughing up some blood. Jason rushed in, and, enveloping his fist in a flame cloud and slamming it hard into Herobane's side. The cloud exploded like a grenade, and the force of the punch sent ripples through the air and small rocks flew off the ground in a ring of dust, and it also sent Herobane crashing into the bottom floor of the office block, where he slammed against the smooth marble floor and slid on his side up to the front desk.

"What're you ordering today?" Harry said from on top of the desk.

He hopped down and grabbed Herobane's head with both hands, and smashed his knee into his face, sending up flipping up in a arc. Jason ran in, another flame cloud in his hand, and pressed it deep into Herobane's back just as his trajectory began to arc downwards. The whole force sent him blasting straight through all twenty-eight storeys of the office block, and he crashed through the roof, before plummeting back to the ground on the other side of the building.

"Did we get him that easily?" Jason asked.

Harry shook his head.

"If my intuition is correct about his technique, then when we round this building he'll be alive, without a single scratch on him."

"How?"

"You'll see, hopefully."

The duo dashed around to the other side of the building and found Herobane slumped there on his side, unmoving, with his back to the pair.

"Sooo... we got him?"

"No," Harry put out his hand to stop Jason. "The body's too clean."

Harry was right. Herobane's 'body' didn't have even a hint of blood on it, and he slowly got to his feet, brushing off his shoulder as though nothing had happened to him.

"Jeez," he said, grinning at Harry and Jason, "You kids sure aren't pulling your punches. Kinda sad they don't do anything to me though!"

"Kinda sad like your hairline," Jason muttered.

"Shut up," Harry replied.

He flung a pebble at Herobane's face to shut him up, but he dodged it easily with a sarcastic 'aaah!'.

As I thought!

"I've got you all figured out," Harry smiled, pointing the tip of his katana at Herobane. "Now prepare to be skewered."

Herobane laughed and spread his arms.

"Invulnerability is easy to figure out," Herobane laughed. "What's hard is for somebody like you to try and defeat it!"

"Harry," Jason whispered. "What's the technique?"

"It's seriously hard to figure out," Harry muttered back. "But I think it's Reversal Technique."

"Reversal?"

"Yeah – stronger hits become weaker, like your flame cloud attacks and that twenty-story fall, but he dodged that weak pebble I threw at him, didn't I? And Herobane loves to show off his technique. He would have let that hit him, wouldn't he?"

"... Oh yeah!"

Harry dashed one way and Jason went the other, before closing in on Herobane from either side in a pincer movement. Harry slashed at Herobane's head, but he ducked under it and parried the blade with his forearm. Jason threw a kick at his side, but that too was blocked. Harry spun around and plunged his sword at Herobane's chest, but the blade bounced off his skin, and Herobane smiled grotesquely.

"Missed me."

Then he punched Harry in the stomach and sent him flying back into the side of the building with a crash, and Jason took his chance to close in.

Hit refined!

Jason threw what looked like a heavy punch towards Herobane's head, who smiled and didn't even bother to dodge or block the strike - just what Jason expected. But at the last moment, Jason pulled his fist to a halt and in a split second Herobane's eyes widened, but it was already too late. Jason whapped him in the head, quite softly, but Herobane was suddenly hurled across the ground, trailing blood, and rolled across the floor like a rag doll.

"Good job," Harry said, putting his hand on Jason's shoulder as he walked up, a small sliver of blood trailing from his mouth. "Now we keep doing this - but I feel like we need to change things up a bit - listen to me."

Herobane staggered to his feet and rubbed the left side of his face, before standing upright and glaring at the two warriors facing him with hatred in his eyes.

They really figured it out.

Herobane charged Harry and Jason like a bull, dashing this way and that like a bolt of lightning, and in a matter of milliseconds his knee was in front of Jason's face, and crushed him backwards into the wall of the building, but Harry interceded and threw a handful of rocks at him, forcing him to back away. Jason stepped back in, blood dribbling down the side of his head and from the corner of his mouth, and formed three small flame clouds in his palm and hurled them, in quick succession, at Herobane, the third one catching him in the chest and sending him flying straight off the edge of the floating island. Harry was about to jump off to chase him, but he cast a fleeting glance back to the battlefield that he had forgotten in he and Jason's battle - the Intrusinks were already completely in control of the island, with a few soldiers being cut down at the top of the building. Jason swallowed.

"Harry."

"Do it."

Jason grinned at him and relinquished the huge cloud that was supporting the island in the sky, sending it plummeting like a meteor.

Standing on Jason's smaller flame cloud, the two looked down at the carnage as the huge island slammed into LA, killing thousands of Intrusinks which had landed in the city and all of the ones still on the island. A humongous cloud of dust and rocks rolled across the deserted city.

"Take us down," Harry said. "We have unfinished business."

Jason complied and the flame cloud zoomed down to the ground, where they disembarked and faced down Herobane once again, who was glaring at them hatefully, standing in front of the huge crater he had made in the ground when he had fallen. No words were spoken, but all three of them charged on another, Harry slamming head on into Herobane and receiving a vicious blow to the side, but Jason hurled a volley of kicks that were barely blocked, pressing Herobane back. Harry dodged a punch that would've split his skull, and threw a massive wallop at Herobane, while at the same time Jason also

threw a punch of his own. The general held his ground, but he found that he was unable to predict which of the two was throwing a hard punch and which was a feint.

Is it both... or one of them!? Who the hell is

Harry's punch crushed into Herobane's head but did no damage, however Jason whapped him in the stomach and blood fell from Herobane's lips in a spurt, and he stumbled backwards. But the duo were relentless. They continued their strategy, attacking Herobane at the same time, unpredictably changing their pattern - two strong hits, one strong and one weak, two weaks, and so on - until a kick to the abdomen by Harry thudded him onto his back on the ground. Jason closed in for the final hit to finally end the feud between Harry and Herobane, but the former stopped him.

"It's mine," he said. "This is my rivalry. I'm gonna kill him myself... but I can't say that I could've done it without you. Jason."

Both of them were exhausted and breathing heavily from their long fight with Herobane, and it was the worst possible for Naerius to slam down behind them, smiling like a devil and splintering the ground under his feet.

"Missed me?" Naerius laughed, still giving off a horrid grin.

Jason wasted no time and charged the other general head on, but Herobane dashed behind him, grabbed his shoulder, and drove his knee deep into Jason's back in quick, powerful consecutive jabs, before letting go and letting Jason slide to the ground.

"Shoulda brought someone stronger," Herobane said to Harry.

Harry stared at Jason lying motionless on the ground.

"You..."

He hurled a volley of bombs in their direction and they exploded in a wall of flame, but neither Naerius nor Herobane were affected. Harry slashed at them with his sword, and Naerius blocked them all with one arm

"You," Harry hissed at Herobane. "You, don't get cocky. Someone high-ranking from the CSA will come beat you into the ground before you know it."

Then Herobane threw a short, sharp jab into Harry's stomach, and he collapsed, winded, and coughing up blood.

"Hmph!" He said, grinning at him. "Well then, get your half-assed friends together and come at me with all you got with someone strong enough to beat me. Until then, I'll be cocky!"

He shoved the middle finger up at Harry, and then Naerius boomed with laughter and punched him full in the face. It felt like being charged by a rhino with rocket thrusters for a second, and Harry was sent spiralling through the air before smashing into the base of a hotel. He demolished the revolving doors and slid across the floor, until he came to a stop just before the receptionist's desk.

"A-agh... keuk..."

Naerius's silhouette appeared in the doorway, and Harry glared at him from his spot on the floor, blood cascading down his face like a waterfall, with no strength to even stand.

"No mercy."

And Naerius brought down his fist onto Harry's head.

"You've lost your touch," Naerius sneered to Herobane. "Now you're nothing but a weakling, to be beaten down by opponents of this ridiculous calibre."

"Shut up," Herobane snapped back. "All you did was score the final blow. I did most of the work!"

Naerius snorted.

"If I hadn't intervened, you would've died. I don't even know why I bothered to save you."

"If you didn't show up I would've KILLED THEM MYSELF!"

"Don't care," Naerius jeered. "Go slink back to your ship and check your orders already!"

Herobane turned to leave, but paused.

"Say, Naerius."

"What now?"

"Hypothetically, if I were able to grow stronger from every battle I fight, how strong do you think I can get?"

"Hmph! Why're you asking such meaningless questions? Hurry up and go away already!"