

Jaguar and the Mech

by Jaeden Cole

This is it. Xomahaar. A once peaceful, diverse, and technologically advanced planet, it's now a barren wasteland that survived a nuclear apocalypse...well, barely survived.

Kento, a juvenile jaguar, roams the desert looking for anything useful that might help him survive. The desert, a rather strange and unpredictable environment that hasn't fully been explored yet, is filled with strange creatures that might be dangerously hidden. Kento takes a beat. Looking across the desert, taking everything in. He hears a mix of a grunt and a snort. The sound is so loud it makes him jump a bit, but as he looks around, he doesn't see anything. He briefly looks up at the sky, where he spots a mutated condor flying in the area. Kento starts pacing back and forth, even looking behind him, before deciding to go into this unexplored desert, get whatever he might be looking for, and then leave quickly.

Kento explores the desert and sees remnants of the war that turned his home into its current state. He sees many destroyed military cars, hoverbikes, armored assault trucks, helicopters, and jets. Kento continues to look around, moving his head from side to side and being a bit overly cautious until he bumps into something so firm that it makes him yelp a bit and fall onto the ground. He does get back up, though, and once he does, he sees something that sparks his interest immediately. He realizes he's bumped into the remains of a humanoid military colossus, with it just lying there in the ground on its right side with its giant head disconnected from its robotic body covered in some sand that seems to almost be stuck to it. Kento's eyes widen and his mouth drops; wanting to see what's inside, he quickly runs towards the mech, jumps up, and pounces on its torso, catching himself with his claws and using them to climb up until he reaches the top.

He starts walking all around the torso looking for a way in but doesn't find anything. He starts sniffing around trying to find any loose spots but still doesn't find anything but a logo of the military, which he walks over to and then suddenly falls in. He lands on his right side and screams at the impact, almost like a human scream. He's able to brush it off and begins to wander around looking for anything that might be worth salvaging. Kento closes his eyes, listens very closely to anything, and uses his sense of smell as a way to activate his jaguar senses, and this time refuses to not find anything. Kento stops. He's caught a signature for something, what? He's not exactly sure. He speedwalks; the faster he goes, the stronger the scent becomes, but in the end, he finds nothing but a backpack. Kento moves forward, sniffing the pack, tilting his head unsure of what to do with it. Ultimately he decides to take the backpack, grabbing it with his mouth, and escapes through an open hole in the side of the mech. Kento, with the backpack

now in his mouth, sighs in relief. Feeling the energy and the need for some excitement, he starts speed walking, building endurance, and in the heat of the moment starts running like his life depends on it.

By the time he's outta the desert, he's almost out of breath, drenched in sweat, and panting to the point where he drops the backpack from his mouth and falls over. Something starts to change in Kento: his body starts shaking, his eyes glow a bluish-green color, and his body begins to morph into a humanoid figure. Kento lies on the ground, exhausted but not as much as before. He sits upright, not as a jaguar but as a human. Kento looks over and grabs the backpack before forgetting. He slowly gains control of his body again and stands up. Before leaving completely, though, Kento takes one more look at the desert; he gives an annoyed grunt, realizing he was scared for nothing, and then leaves completely, walking into the horizon.