

“Antebellum”, a preview to “The Riven God”, by Diego Valenzuela

ANTEBELLUM

A PREVIEW TO

THE RIVEN GOD

THE ARMOR OF GOD (BOOK 3)

BY DIEGO VALENZUELA

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ANTEBELLUM

Finish it.

Garros could hear battles miles away through Milos Ravana’s ears. He could even hear the voices of the humans who had been left behind outside of Clairvert—the fools who refused the one ride to safety offered by Jade Arjuna and Besoe Nandi.

There were too many voices around him—people’s terrified howls, the dying whimpers of someone who had been hurt far away, and other voices that didn’t belong to humans, voices that appeared to echo in the void.

One of them still resembled Erin’s, and she had whispered to him, leading him to the protective prison that was Milos Ravana, and now whispered to others she called ‘her children’ in a melodic, colorful voice.

The other resembled Akiva’s, whose angry and iniquitous growl made his soul freeze, and he cried for an army of his own. Both seemed to be acutely aware of the tension between them that, above Garros, manifested in literal shocks and sparks of purple and yellow light.

There should be a third voice; Garros didn’t know how he knew, but there was something missing in the soundscape—it felt one third incomplete.

Garros. Help me.

It was time to fight, and he was wielding the strongest weapon in humanity’s arsenal; he couldn’t waste a moment. Garros looked to his left, separating his eyes from the Riven God for the first time. The people of Clairvert stood in a cluster half a mile away from the mountain’s base; it was hard to tell whether they were safe, so he could only hope.

Garros gripped the sword with Milos Ravana’s hand and held it in front of him. Bending his knees for power, Garros took off in a quick sprint, splitting the floor under his feet. The Armor of God could understand its pilots’ intentions, and automatically initiated functions to accommodate them.

It knew he was going to fight the Riven God high above the earth—

Garros ran up the base of the mountain. It was an almost vertical dash, and yet he could do it with ease as Milos Ravana’s feet appeared to dig into the stone walls, always finding their bearings and balance. Garros jumped up, climbed using its hands, crawled, chest to the wall, drove the sword into the stone if needed for holding, and kept jumping up until he reached an angled surface on which he could stand.

There was no hint of fatigue in him or the Creux. The energy was even stronger as he approached them and he could feel power surging into Milos Ravana, and into him. He was getting lost in it.

This is too much strength, Garros thought. It’s all in Milos Ravana—maybe Davenport wasn’t a great pilot after all.

After a massive drop below him, the wasteland stretched to a colorful horizon. Even without Milos Ravana’s eyesight he would’ve been able to see far—for the first time, the clouds above the planet had begun to dissipate.

The face of the world was already changing.

Trying to ignore the infinite streams of whispers in the void, he listened to the sounds of the earth as he climbed and ran up, sword in hand. He swung the blade of light and felt it cutting through the face of the mountain.

When he finally began to run up deep cracks and crevices, he knew that he was—

A heavy hit from one side almost knocked him out, and sent Milos Ravana flying against the loose rocks, breaking and shattering the mountain as he tumbled down.

When he stood, feeling how broken systems in Milos Ravana had crashed and began to recover, he saw the black entity’s hand which had swatted him away coming down to crush him flat. He rolled to avoid the enormous appendage and as it slammed down to further shatter the rocky floors, Garros noticed it was not

its hand but merely a tendril, an extension of it in the shape of a tentacle; its hands were to his side, spread defiantly before his sister.

In one moment of distraction, his hand lost the sword. He turned and saw it was falling down the side of the mountain, cutting everything it touched with its azure light.

Garros jumped after it, dodging another swipe that would crush him, and fell down the mountainside. He intercepted the falling sword in the air, crashed against the mountain wall, and regained his balance.

Milos Ravana climbed again, eyes now on the black shape. He ran up the edge of the broken earthly shell and saw, below him, the massive pool of light that had borne the split god. It used to be Clairvert, and it was now drowning in the overflowed light of the Asili.

Erin had disappeared into it—had become a part of it.

The power and rage bled into him again, and Garros roared. He jumped and held the sword’s hilt with both hands. Though Milos Ravana could jump, it could not fly, and didn’t go very far into the air when he felt the sword cut into the black figure’s side—its light meeting its flesh exploded into sparks that made it look like a night sky for a moment before they dissipated.

The dark god made no sound and took no notice of the wound because there had been none.

It’s of no use, someone thought inside the void—it might have been Garros himself.

Leave; this fight isn’t for you yet, Erin’s voice said as the white being stretched her hands to the side, then raised them. She brought them down with one quick motion and slammed her fists on the area that would be the other’s neck.

It howled in pain as it fell backwards, further destroying the mountain and finally liberating itself from it. Garros could see what appeared to be the black figure’s legs stumbling back, cutting through the mountain and making the entire world shudder.

As the dust settled and the figure regained its balance with a deep tremor, a grim reality he had been too blind to see finally hit Garros:

The white being was, in some capacity, Erin herself.

He looked up at it with Milos Ravana’s orange eyes, trying to recognize in its lightly visage any of his wife’s features—but there were none. It had no face, only a mirror plate of light, and waves of a blueish hue for eyes.

Erin . . . ?

The only response came not from Erin, but from something else: an almost precognitive response in Milos Ravana warned him to look down.

Changing his stance, he tried to see down the mountain, but there was only dust, blowing in unpredictable gusts of wind, and in the midst of the maelstrom, there were two fiery orbs. And then, when the dust settled, he saw and heard the monster they had named Lazarus.

Milos Ravana’s gnarled, twisted twin was climbing up to him, digging its claws into the side of the mountain, its eyes burning like they hadn’t burned before. The wound which Davenport had dealt it was visible only in its armor; the black flesh underneath was almost intact—it had healed.

Through the void that connected all of them, he heard it snarl.

Its mouth opened to roar. And was immediately silenced.

Garros had taken a dive towards him, holding the sword before him. Its blade of focused energy hit its mark, and dug deep into Lazarus’ mouth and what would be its throat. He heard it scream in the void and both tumbled down towards the wasteland.

There was a moment of panic as he noticed how far both Creuxen had flown away from the mountainside, and how fast the broken earth was rushing up to meet them both with a deadly greeting.

Less than fifty feet from the crash that would surely crush Garros if not Milos Ravana, he swung the sword with a desperate scream. The blade flung a powerful discharge of light that crashed against the wasteland with an explosive boom that made the citizens of Clairvert scream.

When the light shot by the sword met the earth, it created a deep, massive gash that stretched for at least a hundred feet.

Using Milos Ravana’s understanding of the air around him, he rotated mid-fall and aimed for the dark rift as though he was in fully controlled flight. Both Milos Ravana and Lazarus fell into the gash in the wasteland’s floor. Digging the sword into the newly cut walls, his velocity decreased. He let go, and hit the broken ground with his back.

Garros couldn’t breathe. Despite his attempts to diminish its force, the crash had been too strong. The images conveyed to him through Milos Ravana’s eyes were growing dim as he slowly lost consciousness.

Then, there was total blackness and only the noise of the millions of whispers—voices meeting in the void, the ether. Some were telling him to get up and others urging him to stay down, saying it was no use to fight anymore.

Or yet.

And there was Erin’s. *Your fight is just beginning. You have to finish it.*

But Garros still couldn’t breathe, and then even the voices were silenced.