

Novaris: The City of Thunder

A bright veil of light shone over the urban city of **Novaris**, as its sky exceeding scrapers glowed, illuminating the entire city. The streets below bustled with life and sound and the holographic billboards emitted neon hues of purple and blue, but in the heart of the urban sprawl, a stupendous adventure was growing, ready to thrive. High above the city skyline, on the helipad of the **Galaxy Tower**, the tallest skyscraper in the whole of the metropolis, stood **Courageous Collette**, a fearless woman with her sea moss blue afro hair flowing and her cape fluttering against the evening breeze, while her golden shoulder pads and mystical waist belt, lit the sky of Novaris. And beside her, adjusting his high-tech visor, was her outstanding sidekick, **Brilliant Benny**.

Benny always looked up to Collette, not jealous of her but instead as an older sister, who always had his back, and Collette looked forward to working with Benny because of his top-notch comprehending and listening skills, making him a sidekick with an as important of a job as the lead itself. “Collette! Look at this!”, Benny exclaimed pointing his red-gloved hand towards a luminous light almost like a shooting star that flew across the evening sky. He fumbled as he pushed a button on his wrist-mounted holo-computer and a holographic projection flared in front of Benny’s face disseminating a message oscillating in code, which to layman would look like gibberish. “I intercepted a signal, Someone, or Something is tampering with the Celestial Crystal.”

Collette’s eyes widened and sharpened as they would pierce through the projection. The **Celestial Crystal**, was a priceless artifact that powered the city with infinite sustainable energy, and was hidden, locked away beneath the concrete jungle within subterranean vaults and if tampered with would leave the city in danger, as it would strive for existence. “We don’t even have a nanosecond to waste then”, declared Collette as she threw a punch forward ready to soar like an eagle with her red cape. Benny activated his jetpack and his flyboard as he zipped after Benny with a whoop of excitement.

Kzkkz!, the sound made by Benny’s old, yet to be updated jetpack as they landed in front of the entrance of the **Sanctum Of Light**, an abandoned dungeon which almost looked like an old fortress where the **Celestial Crystal** was safeguarded using up-to-date technology and robots that could kill in split seconds. As they moved to enter, Benny’s visor flashed red, sensing danger. A notification popped up which dropped his jaw to the cement floor. “The security zone of this area has been deactivated”, he muttered as he looked around to find clues.

“Whoever, fiddled with it, knows exactly what they’ve been doing”, Benny said as he gulped a gallon of saliva down his throat, sweat dripping down his forehead. Collette’s fists clenched as if she was born ready to throw a few punches, but all with a calm and composed face which showed that she was not even a teeny bit scared, her confidence emitting out of her blue latex suit. But, at the back of her mind, she was just extremely glad her mother had enrolled her for taekwondo when she was 7 years old, making her the youngest black belt to date.

As they hurried inside, the grand chamber stretched before them, its glass floor glowing with streams of light coursing like liquid gold. And at the centre stood the **Celestial Crystal**, usually pulsating with radiant energy, now dim and flickering, as if someone sucked all its energy and powers out using a strong straw. Benny looked around so worried with a face that looked like he had just lost his engagement ring, which payed off as he saw. He saw a silhouette, a figure in a sleek black exo-suit, playing around with a strange dashboard in his hands. Their silver mask reflected the dimming light as they whispered commands into the terminal.

“Not on our watch!”, Collette screamed as he raced towards this figure, only to reveal **Specter**, a mad scientist who once worked on the city’s energy systems before committing a high-tech crime fraud, and been locked up behind bars for 50 trillion years. But, it looked like he had escaped and planned on taking his vengeful revenge on the city of Novaris. Specter’s face showcased a smirk as he quietly said, “Oh! I’ve been

expecting you Collette, and you've bought a new friend. I should've known you'd meddle. But it's too late because soon, the Celestial Crystal will be mine."

Just as Benny pushed Specter against a wall, grabbing his neck, Specter tapped on their wrist, and a swarm of drone sentinels emerged, their red eyes glowing like fireflies of doom. "But let's see how clever you are against these", Specter said. Fortunately, Collette signalled to Benny and he ducked right in time, dodging these drones. The drones shot forward, lasers firing in a deadly dance of red streaks. Collette dodged nimbly, her agility turning the battlefield into her playground. Benny, meanwhile, deployed a defense shield from his gauntlet, deflecting beams while typing furiously on his holo-computer.

"Collette, looks like they have rerouted the Crystal's power and the city won't just turn off, it's going to explode!", said Benny as smoke came out of his ears and eyebrows scrunched, raging with anger. "You're fighting a losing battle, Specter!" Collette shouted. "This city doesn't belong to you." Specter managed to take a breath, tightening his grip to a capsule-sized module as he proceeded, "No, but knowledge does! Novaris runs on secrets, and I plan to uncover them all."

On top of all this, Benny, who was working against time, suddenly sat on the ground and just a few moments later, Collette sensed a sigh of relief. "I got it! I'm rerouting the surge back to the core, but we need to secure it before Specter tries anything else!", said Benny as Collette smiled with happiness but didn't show it on her face. Collette nodded, as he readied herself. But Specter, realizing they were outmatched, pressed a final command and the sky came crashing down. The floor beneath them cracked, revealing the Void, that would swallow them whole.

"Benny! Grab onto something!" Collette lunged for the core's pedestal as the floor gave way beneath Specter. For a moment, time froze. The mad scientist, tumbled performing tens of front rolls, barely holding on to the edge. He dangled on to the cliff with just 3 fingers holding his body, and his other hand which struggled to hold the energy module slipping from their grasp. They looked up, their mask cracked enough to reveal panic in their eyes. Collette, breathing heavily, extended a hand. "Take it," she said. "No one deserves to fall." Specter hesitated but it was matter of life and death so he kept his ego aside and with a frustrated growl, they grabbed Collette's hand. With a mighty pull, she hoisted Specter back up. Benny, finishing the last command, cheered. "Power restored! The core's stabilized!" The golden glow of the Celestial Crystal flared back to life, flooding the chamber with warm, radiant light. The city, once teetering on the brink of darkness, was safe again. Specter, breathing heavily, looked at the heroes before them. Then, in a blur, they activated their cloaking device and vanished. "Coward," Benny muttered. "But at least we stopped them." Collette exhaled, gazing at the now-bright chamber. "For now. But next time, we'll be ready."

As they ascended back to the city skyline, the stars shone brighter than ever, a testament to the heroes of discovery, who had once again safeguarded Novaris from the shadows.

By Ishanvi Gupta

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BENNY