

The image is a stylized illustration for an Overwatch 2 short story. It features Orisa, a large yellow and green robot, as the central focus. She has a friendly, smiling face with yellow eyes and is holding a large, silver, cylindrical object. To her left, D.Va is shown in a smaller, more detailed view, wearing her signature orange and white pilot suit and helmet. The background is a bright, futuristic environment with green and blue tones, featuring a large, glowing yellow orb and a smaller, yellow and green flying vehicle. The overall style is clean and vibrant, typical of Overwatch's art direction.

OVERWATCH 2

HEROES ASCENDANT

UNITY

A SHORT STORY BY TOBI OGUNDIRAN

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Efi couldn't believe she was in Toronto, next to Sojourn herself! If only her best friends, Hassana and Naade, could be here. But she had promised to video call so they could say hi to Sojourn. And she'd taken loads of photos—particularly of the military dropship Sojourn had sent to collect them. Efi had no idea what kind of calls Sojourn had made to get it to them, but then, there weren't many other options for an in-person meeting. Orisa didn't quite fit in first class, let alone coach.

They walked down Bloor West Street, Sojourn pointing out her favorite places to Efi; Orisa, fascinated by the swarming pigeons, trailed behind them. Sojourn had thanked them for coming, said she'd wanted to see Orisa with her own eyes—to meet this new kind of hero built by the next generation.

Finally, they sat down on a bench in High Park, and Efi asked the question that had been gnawing at her.

"Is there any hope?" she asked. "Of Overwatch coming back?"

Sojourn looked grim for a moment. "I don't think so. I can't even get on a plane without international oversight."

"But why . . . didn't you fight it? The UN's decision to shut you down. You guys are heroes! The world needed you." She frowned. "It still needs you."

A shadow passed over Sojourn's face, but she smiled in spite of it. "Kid, there are many reasons Overwatch went away. I'm not even sure I know them all myself, but . . ." She shook her head, then offered Efi a smile. "If we inspired you to do what you did for Numbani, then we did something right.

You're our legacy, Efi, and your journey is just beginning. You are now a hero. Whether you like it or not, you've had a great responsibility dropped on you. Think long and hard about what it means to be a hero and about what your mission is. That includes you, Orisa."

"My mission is to defend Numbani," said Orisa from behind them. "No one can do it better than me."

Sojourn smiled. "Sure." And then she cocked her head, a twinkle in her eye. "Now. How about we get that ice cream you mentioned?"

Efi powered up the Junie on her worktable and stepped back.

Her small, six-legged Junior Assistant—or Junie—robots were growing in popularity across Numbani. They could help with most day-to-day tasks, but Efi was hoping this latest experiment would take her creations to the next level.

"Activate protective barrier." An ephemeral blue shield shimmered into existence, humming slightly. Obviously the Junie had no gun or an arm cannon or the countless weapons an enemy might wield, but all the little bots had the hardware necessary to produce a simple energy shield. With this software upgrade, they could put their existing hardware to good use. The shields they produced were smaller than Orisa's protective barrier had been, but still enough to protect civilians, and they should hold up just fine under fire. Efi had managed to squeeze a simplified version of Orisa's battle protocols into the same software upgrade too, so the Junie could effectively evade fire and multitask in the field, alert the proper resources, and aid in evacuations. "Excellent," she said, satisfied.

"What are you doing?"

Efi wheeled around to find Orisa, her robotic friend and greatest invention, standing in the doorway, head cocked suspiciously. "Orisa!" she sputtered, hastily tapping her data pad to deactivate the shield. "Nothing! I was just—"

"Upgrading the Junies," said Orisa, walking slowly into the lab, "giving them defense capabilities."

As she approached the Junie, it turned in her direction and settled into a combat stance. "You've recycled my old capabilities," said Orisa, incredulous, "and even given it some of my new ones."

Although Orisa did not have human facial expressions, Efi knew her well enough to read the hurt in her eyes.

“MY MISSION IS TO DEFEND NUMBANI.” SHE PICKED UP THE LITTLE JUNIOR ASSISTANT BOT BY ITS LEG. “HOW CAN I TRUST THESE LITTLE THINGS TO KEEP THE CITY SAFE?”

“Are you . . . replacing me?”

“No—that’s not what I—” Efi sighed. “We talked about this, Orisa. There are people outside the city who need our help. The Junies can defend Numbani, so we—”

“My mission is to defend Numbani.” She picked up the little Junior Assistant bot by its leg. “How can I trust these little things to keep the city safe?”

“What about the rest of Nigeria? What about the rest of the world? They also need our help. Keeping them safe will also help us keep Numbani safe.”

“The Idina robots once protected Numbani too, but they weren’t strong enough to stop Doomfist.”

“Of course, but we have to start somewhere . . . The Junies are already in half the city’s homes—they far outnumber the Idina bots the city had before you.”

“Why not make me stronger?”

“You can’t be everywhere at once, Orisa.”

“Then make me *faster*.”

Efi sighed, glancing at the little bot on the table. “At least the Junies didn’t inherit your stubbornness.”

Orisa’s head cocked further at that.

“Ugh, Orisa, I didn’t mean it like that! I’m not trying to . . . Um, the Junies are simply . . .”

Orisa was already walking away.

“Wait!”

Efi ran after her, but her friend had already bounded off the balcony and into the street below.

“Great.” Efi sighed, chewing her lip. “Just great.”

She was doing what was right. She knew it, but . . . that did not make her feel any less guilty, any less like she was betraying Orisa. At that moment her data pad pinged, and she glanced at it to see the reminder GET GROCERIES flashing across the screen.

“Ugh,” Efi groaned. She had almost forgotten about that. Her mother needed some fresh veggies to make coleslaw for dinner tonight.

Minutes later she got off the #68 tram and started down Arroyo Street, the sun streaming overhead, the sounds of Numbani alive around her. Almost a year had passed since she first made Orisa, since they fought beside Lúcio to defeat Doomfist, and since she met Sojour. They'd successfully kept other threats at bay in the meantime, but worry still ate away at Efi that Doomfist might one day return, and that he might do so when both Efi and Orisa were away. What would Numbani do without its defenders? They couldn't be everywhere at once; they certainly couldn't be in Numbani all the time. It was why she had been programming the Junies' upgrades. She'd done it secretly because Orisa was a little touchy in that regard. Touchy, even though she'd upgraded Orisa's combat capabilities at her own request, made her even more mobile and imposing in the field.

Efi sighed, stepping aside as a couple of kids flying a kite raced past her. To think that just a year ago she had felt like a parent, watching Orisa's every step, teaching her not to crash through people's homes because that was the shortest route. Orisa learned fast, and Efi was proud of her. In the time since, they'd only grown closer, could even tell what the other was thinking. If she was being honest, Orisa had become Efi's best friend.

Even though we're disagreeing. But friends disagreed. She couldn't count the number of times she'd had an argument with Hassana and Naade. But they always found their way back to one another, even when the fight was over something big like this. She just hoped Orisa would—

A shadow fell over her.

Efi squinted at the sky, wondering if the rains had come again. One minute the sky could be clear with not a cloud in sight, the next . . .

Then she heard the screams.

A massive ship filled the sky, rings of fire sputtering from the gargantuan engines.

"Null Sector," she breathed. Terror crawled down her spine.

Null Sector was here. *In* Numbani. She recognized the design of the ship and the warbots from the attack in Paris yesterday, but she had quickly turned off the broadcast in fear. She didn't think the fighting could spill this far. And why would it? Null Sector's creed was all about equality for omnic—and nowhere were omnic treated more fairly than in Numbani, the city of harmony. Yet here they were. Efi held no illusions that they had come peacefully, not when a command ship was hovering overhead, ready to wreak havoc on her home.

Even as she watched, a hatch yawned open with a pneumatic *hiss* and out came multiple drop pods, swooping down onto the city like birds of prey.

She ran.

The first pods crashed into the streets and out came the warbots, marching in formation, arm

*MR. FARUQ SHOOK HIS HEAD.
“YOU’RE ALWAYS TRYING TO HELP EVERYBODY!
JUST LOOK OUT FOR YOURSELF!”*

cannons primed to fire, their metal effigies promising violence. Efi weaved through screaming pedestrians, panicking shopkeepers, dodging their jostling limbs. She had to get home. She had to make it to her lab. And where was Orisa? She whipped out her data pad—

The first cannon blast went off, deafening in its loudness; the next minute she saw a building down the street erupt in flames. For a moment she was back in the airport, ducking from Doomfist’s barrage of fire. Her blood roared in her ears as the stink of smoke and fire filled the air. But she saw shapes running out of the burning building, and then she was racing toward them, helping them, herding them away from danger.

A vise grip clamped around Efi’s arm, and she looked up to see Mr. Faruq, owner of the local Kofj Aromo, tugging at her. He yanked her as though she weighed nothing, and they dived into the alley just as a trio of warbots came marching into sight. They scanned the area, then marched on.

“What were you thinking?” hissed Mr. Faruq, once the Null Sector troops had passed out of earshot. “Exposing yourself like that!”

“I was . . . I was trying to help them.”

Mr. Faruq shook his head. “You’re always trying to help everybody! Just look out for yourself!” He glanced around. “Where is Orisa?”

“I don’t know,” said Efi. She noticed then that he had a gash above his left eye, weeping bright red. “You’re bleeding.”

“I ran into one of those monsters,” he muttered, wiping absently at the wound. “But I’m fine.”

Efi unzipped her bag, reached for her data pad. “I—I’ll contact Orisa.”

At that moment the ground rocked, windows rattling as an explosion went off in the distance.

“Once we get to safety,” hissed Mr. Faruq. “We have to get off the streets. Come on.”

They navigated the labyrinthine streets of downtown Numbani, avoiding clusters of Null Sector forces, until they reached Kofj Aromo, where several people were already huddled.

An elderly woman Efi recognized as Madam Coker was helped forward by her Junie. “Is it true?” she asked, her eyes wide with fear. “Is Null Sector here?”

"Yes," said Mr. Faruq. "We've seen them."

"They took my friend," one of the omnic patrons said. "Put something on him—a device—"

"But why? What do they want?"

"Who the hell knows?" one of the younger survivors shouted. "We shouldn't be talking. We should be barricading the doors! And the windows. Quick! Quick!"

The nearly two dozen customers sprang into action, pushing chairs and tables to block the doors and windows. Efi found a corner, rapping at her data pad as she desperately tried to contact Orisa, but for some reason she couldn't get through.

"Come on, come on," she muttered, rebooting her data pad and attempting to ping a nearby satellite. Something was blocking the signal.

Mr. Faruq gawked at the holoscreen where the destruction of Numbani was on full display. Even as Efi watched, a skyscraper in the business district went up in flames, billowing black smoke into the open sky. Several injured humans were scrambling away from the wreckage.

The warbots were tearing through the city with no regard for life or property. At this rate, there was no telling how long Numbani had.

At that moment, the holoscreen in the café went out. A collective gasp ran through the shop. Then every screen in the cramped space, except Efi's data pad, came alive with a broadcast. The omnic in the message was a vision of terror: an R-7000, one of the models most feared during the Crisis. He wore a faceplate that looked like a skull, with synthetic hair waving in the air like snakes; a titanium exoskeleton covered a torso fashioned after human ribs. In one arm he held a staff.

"My fellow omnics," he said. "Do not be afraid. This is not war. This is liberation. Since our creation, humans have oppressed us. You have lived in fear. That ends now. We will shatter the chains that have held you in servitude. This marks a new era, one of equality, of unity. Conflict and strife will be relics of the past. Together, working as one, we will lift our people. Together, of one mind and purpose, we will make this world a paradise. The humans will fight us. Change frightens them. We frighten them. They believe we are not their equals. Together, we will prove them wrong. Do not betray your fellow omnics by defending injustice. Join us. Take your place at our side. Only together will our strength manifest. Only as one will we ascend. We welcome you into the Iris."

Silence descended upon the shop.

A boy began to cry. "I'm scared, Mama!" he sobbed, tugging at the hem of his mother's skirt. She scooped him up, muttering in his ear as she tried to calm him.

"They've come for us," said an omnic wearing a green-and-blue patterned iro and buba. Of the twenty people clustered in the room, six of them were omnics.

"Any luck contacting Orisa?" asked Mr. Faruq.

"No," said Efi. "I can't get through to anyone. I think . . . I think Null Sector is jamming the signal."

Mr. Faruq looked grim. "They're isolating us. They think we will turn on each other—humans and omnics."

There was a heavy pause as his words settled into the tense air of the café.

"But that means Null Sector does not know Numbani."

An omnic patron jumped in. "We already have unity in Numbani. And it makes us strong."

"Stronger than Null Sector!"

Efi gritted her teeth. Their words were hopeful, in the friendly air of Mr. Faruq's coffee shop, but no one could say how the rest of the city was faring.

Null Sector *was* isolating them. It was a brilliant strategy, one she would have appreciated if the tables were turned. This was no haphazard attack like Doomfist's had been—intended to sow chaos and discord, to ensure the strongest rose to the challenge. No, this was carefully plotted, the bombardment rolled out in stages with little chance for the people of Numbani to regroup or defend themselves.

Efi looked over at the Junie in Madam Coker's arms. Maybe the people didn't need to defend themselves. Wasn't this exactly what she had been preparing for? There were Junies in nearly every household, in every corner of the city, ready defenders of Numbani. All she needed to do was give them a new directive and bring their defense upgrades online.

She approached Madam Coker. "Hello, ma. Do you mind if I borrow your Junie?"

The woman looked at her, her glasses magnifying her cataract-milky eyes. "I know you," she said. "You're that girl—the one who makes the Junie bots! My grandson won't stop talking about you."

Efi gave her a quick smile. "I want to get you home to your grandson, but I need to borrow your Junie."

The woman put the bot down. She nodded at the Junie, and it marched over into Efi's waiting arms.

Efi quickly established a wired connection with the little bot and began to install the upgrades she'd been perfecting.

There came a burst of blinding light; the west wall exploded in a spray of concrete and glass. Efi dived, thrust by the force of the explosion. Her data pad flew out of her hand as she landed behind the counter. A large shard of glass came whistling through the air, shattering on the floor where her hand had been mere seconds ago.

Groaning, she pushed herself to her knees. The world spun. There was a loud ringing in her ears, and for a moment she couldn't hear anything. So she remained perfectly still, crouched

***“YOU COME INTO MY CITY, MY SHOP.
YOU DESTROY EVERYTHING. YOU’RE NOT WELCOME HERE.
IF YOU WANT TO THREATEN MY NEIGHBORHOOD,”
HE GROWLED, “YOU’LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME.”***

behind the counter as she tried to regain her balance. The lights flickered on and off, and she could hardly make out anyone else through the cloud of dust and plaster that filled the shop. But she saw the warbots, red eyes winking through the smoke, blasters glowing, as they climbed through the hole in the wall and seized the nearest omnic.

“No!” he yelled, struggling. “No! Let me go—”

Two Null Sector units held his arms, pinning him to the wall, while a third one—a floating, jellyfish-like thing—produced a contraption that it fixed on the omnic’s head.

The omnic went limp, as lifeless as a rag doll.

“What did you . . . what did you do to him?” cried another omnic, whom Efi recognized as Ishara. She ran a hairdressing salon not far from Efi’s home.

The Null Sector jellyfish bot who had forced the contraption on the omnic’s head stepped back, red eyes burning like coals. From the holoscreen came the spliced broadcast, repeating: *“My fellow omnics, do not be afraid. This is not war. This is liberation.*

“We welcome you into the Iris.”

The dust was starting to settle, and Efi could make out the people in the shop, scattered about and lying in varying states of injury. Some were just now groaning back into consciousness.

Ishara turned to the rest of them. “Run,” she said. “I’ll hold them off—”

“I’ll join you,” said another omnic.

A tense moment passed; somewhere on the street, someone’s scream was abruptly cut short—

“No,” said Mr. Faruq, his voice firm. He stepped forward, brandishing a coffee maker at the warbots. “You come into my city, my shop. You destroy everything. You’re not welcome here. If you want to threaten my neighborhood,” he growled, “you’ll have to go through me.”

Madam Coker stepped forward, waving her bag threateningly. “And me.”

“And me.” It echoed through the shop.

Within moments all the humans in the shop linked arms, forming a shield around the omnics.

The warbots raised their arms in unison, powering up their blasters.

"Upload complete," chirped the Junie. "Defense systems online."

Efi scrambled over to it and disconnected her data pad. "Neutralize the threats!" she screamed. "The warbots!"

The Junie sprang into action. It leapt, cartwheeling through the air, and landed in front of the humans just as the warbots fired. A blue energy shield shimmered into existence, absorbing their fire. The crowd stood where they'd gathered, frozen in surprise.

"GO!" Efi yelled at them, scrambling over the counter. "GO! GO! GO!"

They poured out of the shop. Efi helped Madam Coker, who couldn't find her walking stick.

"I've got this," said Mr. Faruq, sweeping the woman into his arms. "Find Orisa."

Efi nodded, turned to sprint.

"And be careful!"

Efi raced down the street, dodging Null Sector units and pointing civilians to safety. Many people were opening their homes to those fleeing the violence, and it made Efi's heart swell to see people helping one another. This was why she loved this city. This was why she would do anything to protect its citizens, humans and omnic alike. She hadn't failed them yet, and she wasn't about to.

As she ran into the tram station, Efi realized that the tram lines were no longer running; the terminal was mostly empty. She would have to make it home to her lab on foot, and that was at least fifteen minutes of nonstop running. She wheeled about to exit the station, then stopped dead in her tracks. Huddled in the departure lounge was an omnic and a young boy, not much older than Efi. They hugged each other as a warbot aimed its blaster.

"Please don't hurt him," the omnic was saying. "Leonel, run!"

No, they weren't hugging each other; the boy was *clinging* to the omnic, tears in his eyes. Efi realized he would not let his omnic friend sacrifice himself. With a jolt of horror, Efi saw how this was going to end.

"Hey!" she screamed, voice echoing in the deserted station. "Hey, you!"

The Null Sector warbot turned to her, and she flung a trash can at it. It bounced off its legs, skittering across the tiles before coming to rest next to the information desk. But it was enough of a distraction that the boy and the omnic took flight, dashing out of the station. The warbot fired after them, but it missed.

It turned to Efi, red eye glowing.

"Uh-oh—"

She fled as it let loose a barrage and hid behind a couple of benches. It didn't stop firing, and Efi could hear the telltale *clunk* of machinery as it marched toward her. Panicked, Efi covered her

***“THESE THINGS ARE VERY DUMB,” SAID ORISA.
“IT DID NOT SEE ME COMING.”***

head, glancing at the exit as she contemplated making a run for it. Except . . . there was nothing but open space before her, and there would be no dodging the warbot’s fire—

Silence. Had it stopped to reload? It didn’t matter. This was her chance. Just as Efi stood up to bolt, something dropped in front of her with a *clang*: the warbot, a gaping hole blown into the back of its head.

She looked up, confused, to find Orisa striding toward her.

“These things are very dumb,” said Orisa. “It did not see me coming.”

“Orisa!” Efi cried, flooded with relief. She leapt to her feet and threw herself at Orisa, wrapping her in a hug. “I didn’t know if I was going to make it out of here! Where have you been? I tried to reach you—”

“I have been exterminating these Null Sector insects,” said Orisa. “But there are too many of them.”

“Exactly! I tried bringing the Junies’ defense systems online, and . . .” Efi realized that Orisa was likely still sensitive about the Junies and tried to backpedal. “You know, um, to help. I figured the more forces we have defending Numbani, the better. But Null Sector has control of every network in the city, and—”

“Right. What do we do next?”

Efi paused. “You’re not—you’re not mad . . . about the Junies?”

Orisa shrugged. “My mission is to defend Numbani. So far as I can do that, I don’t mind the occasional . . . help.”

Efi tried not to smile. It was not quite the same thing; if the Junies could defend Numbani, then Orisa would not be needed here, and she would be free to broaden their efforts. But it was progress enough. Besides, they didn’t have much time to go over the details. They had work to do, and little time in which to do it. They could argue later.

“We need to get back to the lab. From there, I should be able to remotely bypass whatever jamming program Null Sector is using and activate the defense systems simultaneously.”

Orisa nodded. “Let’s go.”

Efi kept close to Orisa as they jogged through the city. The streets around the tram station were deserted, which meant the fighting was closer to the city center. Sure enough, they soon came upon Null Sector units firing at a group of omnic who huddled behind the ruin of a car.

Orisa charged, bounding at them in two great leaps. She landed smack in the middle of their formation and spun her energy javelin, pushing them back. Confusion spread through the Null Sector bots as they turned to face Orisa.

The omnic still remained behind the car, and Efi wondered why they weren't making a run for it now that Null Sector was otherwise occupied. The reason became apparent as she raced toward them: an omnic was lying half-buried beneath rubble. The rubble in question was a particularly large chunk of concrete with a metal bar sticking out of it.

"She's trapped," said another omnic, who looked to be her husband. "Please, help us!"

Together they grabbed the metal bar and began to pull, but the block was heavy, and all their straining didn't move it even an inch.

A shadow fell over them as Orisa appeared. She peeled away the bar as though it were nothing but paper, and the omnic crawled into the arms of her husband.

"Get home!" Efi told them. "And stay indoors."

They continued through the city, Efi directing civilians to safety, Orisa laying waste to the Null Sector forces they encountered. Their progress was painfully slow. Twenty minutes, forty minutes, an hour ticked by. They came across groups of civic defense locked in battle with Null Sector, who hailed down Orisa for help. Their forces were engaged all over the city, but they were spread too thin. Efi assured them that more help was on the way. She needed to get back to her lab, to execute an instant citywide upgrade of the Junies, but Orisa couldn't turn away from those who needed her help.

And many, many people needed their help.

Efi still hadn't heard from her parents, her cousins, her friends. In every desperate face they passed she thought of those she loved, was hit with a fresh wave of urgency to get home.

She was trying to be strong, to focus on the task at hand, but in truth she was worried. Her parents should be home, hopefully, safely tucked away. Today was their day off, after all; that was why her mom had sent her to get groceries. Naade and Hassana were meant to join her family for dinner tonight—

"Oh no," Efi breathed as they turned onto Satellite Boulevard. "No, no, no, no, no."

The remains of a collapsed building lay smoldering in the street, blocking the way. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of citizens milled about, pulling people out of the wreckage. Many were horribly injured, with more able-bodied citizens carting them away to safety. Efi was discouraged

***THE CITY IS COMING TO A TIPPING POINT—I KNOW
YOU CAN HEAR THE CIVIC DEFENSE CHANNELS, ORISA.
AND WE MET SOME OF THEM. YOU KNOW THEY’RE
OVERWHELMED . . . I’M OVERWHELMED.”***

to see very few omnics among the crowd. On the massive, ruined holoscreen to her left, Null Sector’s message flickered on and off, the gravelly voice stuttering through the air as the mystery omnic delivered his propaganda speech.

“We can go through Ikeja,” said Orisa.

“That will take an hour. We won’t get there fast enough.”

“What if I carry you? I can run faster; I have four feet.”

“We don’t have time!” Efi yelled, giving in to a sudden burst of anger. “You’ll still have to fight through hundreds of warbots to get home . . . there’s just too many of them for us. At this rate, the city will be overrun in an hour, maybe less . . . Every second we’re not in the lab is one where more omnics are captured, where more humans die . . . The city is coming to a tipping point—I *know* you can hear the civic defense channels, Orisa. And we met some of them. You know they’re overwhelmed . . . *I’m* overwhelmed.”

Efi sank to her knees, taking in the carnage before her. And for the first time in a long time, she felt utterly helpless. Tears stung her eyes. She saw in the chaos a reflection of Doomfist’s attack on the Numbani airport. She had felt energized then, even in her terror. She could fix it. She knew she could. But looking around now . . . overhead, multiple command ships cast swaths of darkness across the city. A titan in the distance swiped at a building with its massive robotic arm. And closer, just yards away, was a child covered in concrete dust, weeping and alone. The desperation in her voice sent a knife of anguish through Efi’s heart. Why was Null Sector here? *Why?* The omnics here were happy, were equal. There was no fight for Null Sector in Numbani, no wrongs to right. They were setting the city on its side . . . for what? They had coordinated this attack with precision, outwitted even her. What could their goal be?

Orisa placed a hand on her shoulder. “Efi,” she said. “What do we do?”

An explosion rocked the street as a car went up in flames.

“I don’t know.” It was an admission of defeat.

"You are Efi Oladele," said Orisa. "The Hero of Numbani. Our mission is to protect this city. No one can do it better than us."

Efi gave a singular bark of dry laughter. "No, Orisa. I *built* a hero to protect Numbani. Without my lab, my technology, I can't stop villains, killers. Useless. Totally useless."

"No," said Orisa, gently but firmly. "You are the furthest thing from useless. You are smart. You made me. You defeated Doomfist. I have not seen a problem too big for you to tackle. So think, Efi. *Think.*"

Efi looked into Orisa's eyes, managing a sad smile. If this was the end of their road, she was glad to have her friend by her side. She thought back to how she had made Orisa, the endless months of programming and debugging to make her so wonderful. Strong, smart, curious, tough, resistant to hacking, unlike the—

"Junies!" she cried, leaping to her feet. "A virus! I can make a virus to infect the Junies!"

Orisa cocked her head. "I am . . . not sure I understand."

"You remember when the Junies contracted malware, a couple weeks after Unity Day? And I had to recall the orders to debug them? I can reconfigure the defense upgrades to act as viruses, so every upgraded Junie that comes close with another Junie automatically overrides the firmware and spreads the upgrade!" She frowned. "But . . . they would have to be on the same network."

Efi groaned. She had built that fail-safe after the Junies contracted the first virus, to prevent such a thing from happening in the future. Even if a Junie got infected, it couldn't pass the infection on to other Junies unless they were sharing the same network. Now that very fail-safe was going to hamper her.

"Of course it's not that easy," she muttered.

"What?" said Orisa as she laid waste to another warbot; it went flying, parts scattering in the wind.

"Nothing," said Efi, rubbing her hands together. "I know what to do."

She went to work, extracting the old virus the Junies had contracted and splicing useful bits of code with the defensive upgrades, simultaneously running several processes to turn her data pad into a temporary network provider.

"Are you going to be long?" asked Orisa after she engaged her fusion driver and decimated an approaching flank of warbots. "We can't stay here—"

"Done!" said Efi.

There were nearly three hundred Junies in range now, marked as red dots on her screen. As she clicked Activate, the Junie nearest her got infected. It had been herding its owner out of the line of fire, but now it froze, then dropped into combat stance as it produced an energy shield.

“EVERYONE WHO HAS A JUNIE! BRING THEM CLOSE!” SAID EFI. “I’VE UPGRADED THEM SO THEY CAN FIGHT, SO THEY CAN DEFEND YOU, DEFEND US!”

“James Junior?” the owner asked.

“Everyone!” yelled Efi, climbing onto the hood of a car. “Hey!”

“It’s her!” someone shouted.

“It’s Efi Oladele!”

“Everyone who has a Junie! Bring them close!” said Efi. “I’ve upgraded them so they can fight, so they can defend you, defend us!”

A ripple of excitement, no—*hope*—passed through the crowd. As more Junies connected to the network, the upgrades spread faster and faster like, well, a virus. And when Efi glanced down at her screen a second time, it burned green.

She smiled.

“GIVE THE ORDER,” she screamed. “TELL YOUR JUNIES TO FIGHT! FIGHT FOR NUMBANI!”

All around her, the citizens of Numbani gave a chorus of orders, and then the Junies were charging at Null Sector, attacking the warbots in overwhelming numbers. It reminded Efi of the time she forgot her sandwich on the kitchen counter, returning later to see an army of ants swarming it, breaking it into little pieces. Orisa gave a whoop of joy as she seized a warbot by the feet and then proceeded to use it as a bludgeon, sweeping the streets of other warbots and sending them flying. Efi ducked as an errant blast of energy whistled past her ear, and when she turned, she saw a Junie launch itself at the offending warbot, arms a blur as it dismantled it to bits.

A great cheer went up, and Efi turned to see civic defense pouring into the street. Satellite Boulevard had become the crux of the invasion. Energized, she returned to evacuating as many civilians as she could.

The battle wore on and on, but eventually the warbots had been cleared, dismantled into so much machinery. Orisa led the Junies as they worked with civic defense forces to expand their perimeter as well as the number of Junies fighting for the city.

“Numbani!” someone cried. “NUMBANI!”

One by one, the survivors took up the chant. Efi, sweaty, exhausted, but thrilled, joined in,

screaming at the top of her lungs until her voice grew hoarse. Then she settled on a large piece of rubble, watching the crowd.

Orisa returned to her sometime later. "What?" she asked, seeing the look on Efi's face.

"Nothing," she said. "It's just—there are no . . . reinforcements? Have we really defeated Null Sector?"

Orisa moved her huge shoulders as she shrugged. "Do you want reinforcements?"

"I don't. No, of course I don't."

"I mean, I don't mind." Orisa was still clutching the severed arm of a warbot. "I was made to protect, and I will. But this is a victory, Efi. We won. Numbani won. Don't look a gift machine in the mouth."

"I think you mean a gift *horse*, Orisa."

Efi plumped up her pillows for the umpteenth time, then collapsed back onto them. She tossed, searching for a comfortable position. She pulled up the covers, then threw them off, sitting up in frustration. There would be no sleep for her this night, so why fight it?

She had tried helping with the cleanup, putting the wounded in ambulances, but her parents had bundled her home—she was nearly thirteen now, yet they still treated her like a child. But she knew it was because they cared. Her mother had fought tears as she crushed her in a hug, and Efi knew that they had thought the worst.

Efi reached for the remote on her nightstand and flicked on the TV.

The headline **OVERWATCH SAVES RIO** scrolled at the bottom of the screen, a flaming Rio in the background. The next clip panned to a crew of familiar faces she recognized from the old cartoons, and one new face: Lúcio!

She screamed, leaping out of bed. "*They're back!*"

Her excitement was soon marred by an undercurrent of worry. The news could only mean one thing: the attack on Numbani hadn't been an isolated event. Null Sector posed a serious threat to the world—maybe the biggest one since the Omnic Crisis.

That would explain why there had been no reinforcements here in Numbani. Overwatch was keeping Null Sector distracted elsewhere.

***“LOOK WHAT THEY’VE DONE TO OUR HOME,”
EFI SAID. “YOU KNOW WE CAN’T STAY HERE.”***

“I should have known,” said Efi, climbing out her window and onto the roof. “Couldn’t sleep either?”

Orisa stood, gazing out at the city. “I don’t sleep. You know this.”

“I can update your programing. Grant you the ability to sleep.”

“The only upgrades I want from you, Efi Oladele, are more weapons of destruction. So I can eat Null Sector for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.”

Efi chuckled, lowering herself next to Orisa.

They settled into companionable silence, taking in the city below, filled with smoke and the wail of sirens. Civic defenses were on high alert, but now that the Junies had their upgrades, the people would rest safer. Most of the fires were out, but the morning would reveal the extent of the destruction and how much work would need to be done to put their city back in order.

“Look what they’ve done to our home,” Efi said. “You know we can’t stay here.”

Orisa remained mute, her thoughts unreadable.

Efi sighed, rubbed her eyes. “Overwatch is back. They saved Rio. I feel . . . we should join them.”

“They don’t need our help.”

Efi groaned. Why was she being so stubborn? “Do you remember when we went to visit Sojourn? After we defeated Doomfist? Do you remember what she told us?”

“Know your mission and never lose sight of it,” said Orisa. “And our mission is to defend Numbani. No one can do it better than us.”

“And we’ve done that,” said Efi. They’d had this argument so many times she was tired of it. But it was a matter they needed to settle once and for all. “We’ve protected Numbani wonderfully. But this is much bigger than you or me or even Numbani. The whole world is in danger. Null Sector is back, and they’re stronger than before. Today was a very close call. And this . . . new leader of theirs is terrifying, and smart, and it would be selfish of us to hide here, to protect only our city.”

Efi gestured at the giant holoivid, where Cape Town and Istanbul were engulfed in flames, still under Null Sector attack. “They’re helpless, and we have the ability to help. I think . . . maybe we’ve accomplished our mission here, for now.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said Orisa. She lifted her hands, struggling for words, then let them fall back to her side. “I just—”

Efi shuffled closer to her, placed a hand on her shoulder. "You're worried about Numbani, and I love that about you. But they will be safe. Every household has a Junie, and I built their defense systems out of information gleaned from your many battles. They are more than capable of defending the city in your absence."

"You mean those little clones of me?"

"You're incomparable, Orisa. You know that. Think of the Junies as your . . . soldiers, and you, their commander."

Orisa was silent a moment. "That I am," she said, amusement in her voice. "I am one of a kind."

Efi glanced at her.

"Not to mention," said Orisa, "they do not have my blistering wit."

Efi laughed. "Or your shining personality."

Orisa preened.

In the distance, the first rays of light split the horizon into bands of gold as the sun rose on a city that had survived Null Sector. Many were wounded, and Efi's heart ached to think of those whom she had failed to save. But this was only the beginning, and as long as she had breath in her, she would not stop fighting. Efi closed her eyes and turned her face up to the sky, breathing deep of the familiar smells of her home. When she opened her eyes, Orisa was staring expectantly at her.

"Well," said Efi, rising to her feet, "let's go."

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE HEROES . . . ARE YOU WITH US?



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