

Fight To The Finish

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“I’ve disengaged Daniel’s earpiece,” Harry said. “I want Michael to win.”

Good thing, seeing as how it was our mission to make sure Mystic won.

“Let’s make this look good,” David commented as he came through the archway.

I didn’t bother looking at the Combat Thrash Program. There really was no point. They both knew who had to win. But Chapling and I pretended to be doing our jobs in case Harry was watching.

Mystic came out next with a couple of butterfly bandages on his swollen eye. Strolling across the floor, he stopped here and there to shake hands with people and exchange slaps on the back—anything to give him a glance into their eyes.

“This is what I recommend,” Bruiser began. “Take no more than a minute. We don’t want to wear Mystic out. Give the audience a little show with some shadow moves, pulling the force before complete execution. David needs an injury, something to the face. And do a throw or two to make things look authentic.”

“And *don’t* tell each other what you’re going to do,” Bruiser warned. “Whether you’d mean to or not, you’ll react before you should and give yourselves away.”

Good advice.

“Oh, and break open Mystic’s cut again,” she commented on a side thought.

Now, that’s not very good advice.

Harry introduced David first, then Mystic. The hard rock music faded, the horn sounded, and both guys cautiously came toward each other. Slowly, they circled, fists up, sizing the other one. They threw a few sparring punches, like Bruiser had suggested.

Fight To The Finish

Then David grabbed both sides of Mystic's head and brought it down as he rammed his knee up.

Chapling and I both sucked in a breath.

"Nice," I heard Bruiser say.

Blood trickled down Mystic's face, and I realized David had broken Mystic's cut back open. Again, just like Bruiser had instructed.

Mystic swung his leg forward up between David's legs and swept to the left, knocking David to the ground. Before David had time to react, Mystic scrambled on top and pressed his forearm into David's throat.

With strained faces the two guys glared at each other as Mystic continued choking David. I watched David's face grow more and more red and thought maybe Mystic was doing a little *too* good of a job at the choking thing.

"O-kay," David wheezed.

"Sorry," Mystic mumbled.

Wedging his hands between their bodies, David dug his fingers into Mystic's sides and shoved him up, following with his knee. Mystic went flying over David's head and thunked onto his back.

Both guys quickly shot to their feet.

"Go ahead," David encouraged. "Make it look good."

Mystic came at David, throwing a series of punches to his face, succeeding at bloodying him up.

Cringing, I watched yuck gush from David's nose and hoped Mystic hadn't accidentally broken it.

Fight To The Finish

“Okay, let’s end this thing,” Bruiser instructed. “Harry liked when you did pressure points. Do David and reset him without Harry knowing. David, you stay down. Let the club workers drag you off.”

Mystic whipped behind David and poked his finger into his lower back, sending David crashing face first to the matt.

I gritted my teeth praying *that* didn’t do even more damage to poor David’s face.

The crowd roared in excitement, and I kept my gaze glued to David’s lifeless form. Mystic made a show of walking around David in victory, jabbing him with his bare toes. I knew he was resetting his meridian points. And in just a few minutes David would be back to normal.

Mystic jogged from the octagon, and the club workers climbed up for David. They drug his body across the floor and back through the PRIVATE archway.

I listened closely, waiting for David to speak, but heard only silence. What if something had gone wrong? What if Mystic had hit the incorrect pressure point? What if he hadn’t reset things properly?

Harry went through the motion of introducing more fighters. But I didn’t hear a single word as I ducked my head and pressed my mole ear piece, listening for signs of David.

Thank God for Chapling who expertly handled things because my focus was shot.

More minutes ticked by, and I couldn’t take it anymore. I muted our Harry communication and asked, “David?”

“He’s okay,” Jonathan reported in.

I breathed out and looked over at Chapling. “He’s okay.”

Chapling smiled. “I heard.”

The fight started and ended within thirty seconds with a knock out.

Fight To The Finish

“I’m good,” David finally notified all of us as the unconscious fighter was being dragged away.

“This is it,” Chapling told me. “Mystic versus Utotiz.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Harry announced into his mike, “the fight you have been waiting for. If you haven’t placed your bets, now is the time. Ten. Million. Dollars. The biggest purse yet.”

I scanned the crowd to see men signaling the club workers. I assumed they were placing and taking bets.

Harry pointed at Mystic still standing on the fighting area. “You’ve seen Michael in action tonight. You know what he’s capable of. This is a fight to the finish. A fight to the death. Someone will not make it out alive.”

The crowd roared with a rush of primal adrenaline, and Chapling and I exchanged a glance.

Mystic will make it out alive, Chapling mouthed.

I gave one affirmative nod. Mystic would indeed make it out alive. Utotiz was going down.

Harry directed everyone’s attention to the archway. “And now let me introduce Utotiz, the world title holder in mixed martial arts.”

The spotlight illuminated the archway and out stepped Utotiz. Seven foot one. Three hundred and thirty one pounds. Like many of the other competitors, he had a bald head. Unlike the other ones, he had no tattoos. I knew from my research that he’d never lost a fight. He looked different from the last film footage I’d seen of him. He seemed heavier, like he’d put a layer of fat on over his muscular frame.

Fight To The Finish

With the hard rock music blaring, Utotiz slowly made his way to the fighting area. No one slapped his back or tried to shake his hand. In fact, they gave him quite the wide berth. Truth be known, I would've, too. This guy did not look like someone to be messed with.

A hard expression on his face, he stepped up onto the octagon, and I swore I saw it vibrate.

Mystic knew everything there was to know about Utotiz, but I repeated anyway, "Utotiz has no known method. He'll get you standing up. He'll get you down. He's skilled in all areas of MMA."

"Hence the reason why he's the title holder," Bruiser added.

"Combat Thrash Program," I continued, "is recommending he make the first move and then predictions will be made from there."

"I agree," Bruiser added. "If he starts out with a strike, he'll likely try to take you down. If he starts with a kick, he'll try to fool you by keeping you up. He's a python. He'll snake his way around you and squeeze the life out of you. Be careful. And with his adrenaline pumping, he may be immune to meridian point strategy."

The horn sounded and both guys cautiously approached. They got within six feet of each other, and Mystic suddenly stopped. Utotiz took another step closer, and Mystic just stood there. Another step for Utotiz, and Mystic simply stared into his eyes.

"Mystic?" Bruiser hesitantly spoke.

Another step for Utotiz, and Mystic's face glazed over.

"Michael," Harry hissed. "What is your problem?"

Utotiz took another step, and Mystic's arms fell to his sides.

I watched in horror—what was Mystic doing?—and suddenly I realized . . .

Fight To The Finish

I muted Harry's mikes. "He's got an image of Zandra," I told my team.

With an evil smirk now, Utotiz closed the miniscule gap between them. Mystic's eyes slowly lowered and I immediately recognized that expression. He was hearing something. His mother? Zandra?

Utotiz reared back and slammed his fist into Mystic's jaw, sending him spinning to the ground.

"Michael!" Harry yelled. "Get up!"

Mystic just laid there, completely in a trance.

The crowd screamed and yelled for Utotiz to finish him.

"Mystic!" I hollered.

"Mystic," TL encouraged, "get up."

"What's going on?" David asked from back in the locker room.

Utotiz slowly, cockily climbed on top of Mystic. In a dominating stance, Utotiz straddled Mystic's thighs, reared back again, and slammed his fist into Mystic's jaw. Blood went flying through the air.

The crowd cheered.

Utotiz slammed his other fist down. Mystic's head flew to the left.

The crowd grew louder.

"Son of a—" Harry growled.

Another fist from Utotiz, and Mystic's head flew back the other way.

Frantically, I searched through the crowd for TL and saw him shoving his way through the people trying to get to the octagon.

Again and again Utotiz brought his fists down, slowly pulverizing Mystic.

Fight To The Finish

“Someone do something!” I screamed.

In my peripheral vision I caught sight of Bruiser’s red braid as she slipped through the front row and leapt onto the octagon. She flew across the matt, caught air, and landed a spinning kick to Utotiz’s head.

He went sailing off Mystic and landed a few feet away.

The entire club quieted.

Letting out an inhumane grunt, Utotiz got to his feet and slowly turned to face Bruiser.

She stood in her sweet little sundress with her long red braid down her back. Surprise flicked across Utotiz’s face at the sight of her. Her expression held focus, concentration, and a hint of cockiness that she knew exactly what she was capable of.

Seeing their size difference made me think back to the first couple of days we’d lived on the ranch. She’d gone up against Jonathan in a brief sparring match and had effectively kicked his butt. It had reminded me of David and Goliath.

Same thing applied here. Utotiz outweighed her by more than two hundred pounds. And he stood over two feet taller.

I’d seen Bruiser in action. I knew what she was capable of. But I had my doubts. She’d never gone up against someone of this caliber.

She reached back, unzipped her sundress, and stepped out of it. Pulling her shoulders back, she stood in a blue sports bra and tight-fitting, blue, boy cut shorts. She kicked her sundress to the side, making it more than obvious she wanted a fight with Utotiz.

I’d seen her body many times, but her incredible lean definition always amazed me. Every muscle on her tiny body stood out visible.

Fight To The Finish

Someone in the crowd yelled, showing his approval. He wanted to see David and Goliath, too. Then someone else, and someone else, until the entire club filled with cheering.

I searched through the crowd for Harry and found him standing off to the side, closely studying them.

TL stepped onto the octagon and went over to Mystic. He leaned down and grabbed him up in a fireman's hold. As TL carried Mystic off, he passed Bruiser and gave her a nod of approval for her to go ahead and fight. TL wouldn't have done that if he wasn't completely sure of her capabilities.

My gaze followed them as they disappeared through the archway. A trail of blood dripped from Mystic's face and it sent a pang straight to my heart. I hoped Bruiser annihilated this guy.

"Do you want to see these two fight?!" Harry yelled into his mike.

The crowd cheered even louder.

The horn went off, and Bruiser shot across the mat. She dove between Utotiz's legs, hooking her feet on his ankles, and sent him face first into the floor. She whipped around, grabbed his right ankle, and snaked her body around his lower leg. With every muscle standing out in striation, she twisted his ankle.

If it weren't for the earpieces we wore, I wouldn't have heard the ligament pop because the crowd was cheering so loud.

Arching his back, Utotiz swung his left arm and knocked Bruiser off of him. She rolled across the floor and boinged to her feet, using her hand to wipe a spot of blood from her mouth.

Wasting no time, she rushed him right as he was getting to his feet. She flipped up, wrapped her ankles around his neck, and corkscrewed her body down the front of him and

Fight To The Finish

around the back. Digging her fingers into his hips, she twisted hers and his body in opposite directions until another pop echoed through our earpieces.

Chapling cringed. “His neck?”

I kept my attention glued to the fight. “I think so.”

Utotiz sucker punched her in the kidney, and she released him and rolled away. I got the impression it wasn’t the kidney punch that made her release—I’d seen her take a lot worse. She was simply ready to move onto another maneuver.

Utotiz moved, favoring his good ankle, trying to hold his neck in place. Although he hid it well, I definitely saw traces of pain trail across his face.

Bruiser ran toward him. Utotiz threw a punch. Bruiser dodged it, grabbed his wrist, and swung her body behind him, taking his arm with her. She wove her legs around his bad ankle, bracing herself behind him, and twisted his lower arm. Utotiz stumbled forward, his arm and leg locked by her little body, and tried to shake her off.

Through my earpiece she grunted with exertion, and I glanced down at my laptop screen. According to the Combat Thrash Program she was trying to dislocate his shoulder, using his bad ankle for leverage.

“Raise his arm up twenty degrees,” I read the program’s recommendation, “and twist again.”

She did exactly what I said, and another pop echoed through my earpiece.

Bruiser released him and took a few steps away. “Thanks, girl.”

I smiled.

Utotiz turned to face her. His nostrils flared, and I saw anger, frustration, embarrassment, and irritation cross his expression. Favoring his good leg with his dislocated arm hanging at his

Fight To The Finish

side, he stood fuming at her. Bruiser walked a slow, wide circle around him, sizing him up. He tried to follow with his neck and body, but ended up just standing there while she strolled around him.

She's dislocating all of his major joints, I realized as I stared at Utotiz's disjointed limbs. What a brilliant strategy.

The longer Bruiser stood there looking at him, the louder the crowd cheered.

Bruiser walked straight up to Utotiz, stopping a foot away. She stared up into his eyes with a somewhat pleasant, yet curious, you're-so-going-down expression.

Utotiz held her stare for a good solid minute. Then with a sneer, he cleared his throat and spit right in her face.

Bruiser reached up, wiped the spit from her cheek, and flicked it back at him.

Quicker than I'd seen him move so far, Utotiz brought his good arm back and punched her in the face, sending her spinning away through the air. Wasting not a second to recuperate, Bruiser spun right back, landing the heel of her right foot square with the knee of his good leg.

Letting out a deep growl, Utotiz fell to the mat. I looked down at my computer and zoomed in on the image of them. She'd completely knocked his kneecap loose, leaving it floating on the side of his leg.

I swallowed.

With an ankle gone on one leg, knee on the other, dislocated shoulder, and a popped neck, Utotiz laid on his back with only a good arm left.

Bruiser walked over to him and braced one foot on each side of his hips. She stood there, looking down at him, while he struggled to sit up. Slowly, she lowered herself until she straddled him, copying the dominating position he'd done to Mystic.

Fight To The Finish

Using his good arm, Utotiz latched onto her neck and squeezed.

With a clenched jaw she looked at him. “This is what you get for beating up one of my best friends.”

She flailed into him, punching his face right, left, right, left, right, left . . .

The crowd roared and screamed and yelled.

Right, left, right, left . . .

And Utotiz slowly lost consciousness.