Street Knight Squad

Chapter 1

Laura's new life was about to start. She could see it~~,~~ just a few~~,~~ agonizing steps in front of her. Of course, she had to crane her head to see around the fat ~~fan-boy~~fanboy blocking her view, but it was worth it to catch a glimpse of that all powerful, all new hunk of metal.

"So, like, what if the police catch us?" Tiffany asked~~, standing~~ from behind her.

They would be standing side-by-side, but unfortunately~~,~~. the crowd moderators were total Nazis. You had to stand single-file in the line. You could not leave the line. There would be no pushing, shoving~~,~~. or jostling while waiting in the line.

"Look, we're not the only teenagers out this late. That whole city~~-~~ curfew thing is mostly a joke," Laura responded, refolding her bony arms.

The line moved up one. One more step toward~~s~~ victory. One more step toward~~s~~ *Street Knight IV.*

"All right, Tif~~.,~~ ~~d~~Do you remember what I told you?"

"Umm…" Tiffany cocked her head to the side~~,~~ like a collie hearing her master's voice in the distance. She wore more mascara than a collie, but the resemblance was still striking. "Most of it. You'll probably have to tell me again~~,~~. though."

Laura ~~let out a deep~~ groan~~ed~~ in her throat. ~~Actually, it~~ It came out as~~was~~ more of a mild snarl.

"Fine. But *please* try to get through the registration as fast as possible. We only have until one."

Only until one. Weeks of begging and bargaining, and one was the latest her parents would let her stay out. And then she still had to go to school the next day.

"We have all tomorrow afternoon, don't we?" Tiffany asked, checking her cell phone. Even at the stroke of midnight, she was still getting texts.

"This is a launch party. You're supposed to stay up all night, and the day after, and maybe the night after that if you're really hardcore."

Laura was hardcore. As soon as *Street Knight IV* was announced, she'd started saving her money. Four hundred dollars (and a twenty dollar monthly subscription) was a lot to ask from a fifteen-year-old girl with no job. But she'd found ways. Recycling cans, mowing lawns, doing extra chores. All for this.

From up front came the blissful call.

"Next."

Yes! Laura was next! She was next! This was her turn, her chance to experience the game to end all games.

Breathe. You can't waste time passing out.

She stepped up to the counter of~~in that~~the dingy little game store, and surrendered her hard-earned money. After signing a few papers, rushing through the instructions, and registering in the database, the clerk handed ~~her~~ over her prize. It was ~~E~~eight inches long, metallic, and shaped like a gauntlet. ~~It was~~Though hard and cold to the touch, ~~but~~ it was still much lighter than she expected. ~~L~~like its own awesomeness buoyed it up.

Laura forced herself to exit the store calmly. Since this building was Marked, technically, the Bounder would work in here. But ~~B~~booting up inside a building, ~~though,~~ was

going against everything *Street Knight* was about. One does not play *Street Knight* indoors. Such is blasphemy.

So, like the rest of the nerds before her, Laura took her high-tech hunk to the blissful outdoors. Not bothering to wait for Tiffany, she slipped it on. Instantly, the glove tightened, matching itself to the shape of her hand. If anyone else wanted to use her glove, they'd have to hard-connect it to the main database, ~~and~~ reset it, and then go through a bunch of red tape. ~~However, she~~But she didn't plan on lending her Bounder up any time soon. It was all hers.

~~After~~When the Bounder finished the physical formatting, it jumped ~~in~~to the linking process. A tingle shot through her body. After it was done calibrating, the interface came up~~.~~, ~~t~~That gorgeous blue screen, floating in midair and awaiting her caress.

"Okay, so what do I do ~~k~~now?" Tiffany asked behind her. She had her Bounder on, and she was staring at it like a Neanderthal would stare at a Christmas tree. So familiar, and yet so strange.

"You are such a noob," Laura moaned, rolling her eyes. She didn't want to play the game alone, but she didn't want someone clinging to her the whole night. ~~I~~interrupting all those precious moments.

"I've played video games before," ~~Defended~~Tiffany defended, holding her head ~~up~~ high. She was still four inches shorter than Laura.

"~~Okay, j~~Just follow me and do what I do," Laura ordered. With her gloved hand, she tapped on the blue interface. ~~Of course, t~~To anyone walking by, it would look like she was tapping the air. Only other players could see the interface. The Bounder was the key to a whole new, magical, fantastical world. ~~R~~ built right on top of the old one. "You have to choose a username. Don't pick anything too stupid, okay? Other people will be able to see

it.”

“Right, right, I got that. I’m just a little confused about the whole classes thing.”

“Noob,” Laura teased. Her fingers itched to get this stupid registration done with~~,~~ so she could start playing. “Each ~~of the classes~~class has a different fighting style. Warriors are the tanks. They can deal a lot of damage, and they usually have a high level of health, but they also suffer from low magic defense and—”

“I thought you said you wanted to get through this quick,” Tiffany interrupted. ~~There was a~~A smirk stuck to the edge~~s~~ of her lips. No one knew better than Tiffany how much Laura loved to rant about her favorite video game.

“Just pick the thief. They’re small and pesky, just like you.”

“I am *not* small,” Tiffany sniffed. However, she took Laura’s advice. After all, when it came to *Street Knight,* Laura was the leading authority.

“I’ll be a warrior. We won’t have a mage, but maybe we can pick up someone to join our party.”

“Maybe I can ask Bruno!” Tiffany squealed, like she’d just had an epiphany. Her hands stopped fluttering across the interface~~,~~ in order to clap together.

“No. And don’t stop. We only have forty-five minutes left.”

“I don’t know why you hate him so much,” Tiffany muttered, returning to her button-pressing. “He’s absolutely adorable. If I didn’t know better, I’d say— oh holy crap, that’s ~~that is~~awesome!”

Laura was thinking the same thing. Her registration complete, the Bounder was creating her avatar. Except, avatar wasn’t quite the ~~quite~~right word. She’d be directly playing the game~~, but she’d be doing it~~ in a costume. ~~A costume~~ made from the most amazing

Comment [J17]: This seems to come out of nowhere. One second she’s smirking, then she’s offended, and now she’s a squealing girl. It might be helpful to sit down and really decide who Tiffany is and what her typical mannerisms are.

Comment [J18]: This is worded rather awkwardly, especially since you’re using the more formal phrase “in order to.” It would be better if you restructured the sentence to avoid that.

Comment [J19]: You don’t have much variety in your dialogue structure. In almost every instance, you have: “Dialogue,” (character’s name) (how they said it). It really helps both with readability and reader interest if you shake things up and make it interesting. Don’t fall into a predictable pattern. If your structure is predictable, it can get boring, which is something to avoid.

Comment [J20]: Make sure your characters are consistent in either using contractions or not using them. Neither of your characters really seem like the formal-speaking types.

holographic technology ever. Light blossomed from her Bounder, spreading over her body and coating it in her game identity. She'd played *Street Knight III* (and *I* and *II*), but they were nothing compared to this. There ~~was~~ were some fancy light works, probably just for show, and an excellent whooshing sound, ~~and~~ then she watched as her body transformed.

~~Well, t~~There was no real transformation involved. It was just light and dust and a bunch of other technical stuff. But it looked *so real.*

"My life is officially complete," Laura breathed. Her pale skin was replaced with a dark tan. Overlaid ~~O~~over her own scrawny limbs were the limbs of someone who worked out quite a bit.

"Me next!" Tiffany squealed, pressing buttons rapidly on her interface. In a few moments, her registration was complete~~,~~ and the transformation took hold of her body, too.

"Why did you make yourself taller?" Laura asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"I've always wanted to be tall," Tiffany sniffed, putting her now perfect nose in the air.

"You do realize no one is going ~~to be able~~ to make eye contact with you. It'll always look like they're staring above your head."

"A small price to pay."

Laura would have pressed the point, but they didn't have time to waste.

"Come on. I want to ~~get~~ level up at least once before I have to go home."

"And how do we do that?"

"The same way you do it in every game. We go kill something."

Editor's Comments:

This is a great start to what sounds like a book I'd like to read someday. What really makes it work are your characters. They are vibrant and have a strong presence in your story, which means that they are what really push the plot and story along. I also like the quasi-asides you include that give the reader insight into Laura's life, mind, and interests. It's a great way to get to know her better and also keeps the tone fun and light, which I personally enjoy in any book I read. There is enough action in this first chapter to draw the reader in, but not enough information revealed so they want to keep reading. You've found that balance, which is a hard thing to do, and it really makes your story work.

I do have a few larger suggestions for improvement, however, to kind of sum up the comments I've already made in the margins. First, I would really suggest that you spend time thinking about the point-of-view of this book. You currently have it in third-person, which works just fine, but I think that this story really wants/needs to be told through first-person. Laura's voice keeps creeping into the narrative already, and she's such a vibrant character that she could easily carry the story with her comments and observations. That takes me to my second suggestion. Compared to Laura, Tiffany seems very flat and not very well-developed. She seems more like a writing device than a character, to be honest, because her only purpose seems to be so Laura can explain what's going on to the reader. She has great potential, though, so I feel that if you take the time to flesh her out and discover who she is as a person, you'll be able to use her much more effectively in your story. My last comment is that this really needs a lot more description overall. You have almost no character description and the setting is mentioned without any kind of imagery. You also hint that this is a futuristic earth setting, but you never explain or describe anything about it, which leaves readers feeling a bit disconnected from what's going on because they don't understand it and therefore can't relate to it as well. The first few chapters are where readers expect to get really grounded in the world, plot, and characters, so make sure you give them both what they need and expect. So, if you pack not just this chapter, but your entire story with vivid descriptions and imagery, your reader will be able to clearly visualize all of these new things within your universe, which will help them feel and become more involved in your story. Switching to first-person would actually help this. It's a lot easier to give description through a character's perspective and voice because it's less likely to sound dry or boring.

Overall, though, this was really good, and I hope that you keep working on this. It is an interesting world with interesting characters, and I, at least, would like to learn more about it.

Thanks for sharing!
~Jessica DeLand