

An Epic Battle

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Where a historian and an AI meet

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Chapter 1.

Oneshot

August 5th

“Amaranth right?” called a voice, startling her.

“Yes! And you’re... Glax?” she said, turning to face the newcomer.

“Glix. They/Them, you?” the voice, Glix, said, chuckling, their voice was high and clear, contrasting with their masculine leaning appearance, with so many piercings it made her heart skip a beat.

“She/her, thanks,” Amaranth smiled, she was taller than her opponent, she would estimate their height at around one hundred and seventy centimetres, or around five feet, seven inches, as some people here in California still use.

Here in California. She thought. She shook her head as she remembered she was just in a VR environment made to look like California. With the state of her legs, it was the only way for her to play her favourite sport, tennis.

“Earth to Amaranth?” that same high voice called, giggling, once again startling her, she jumped and let out a little EEP!.

“Yes! I’m here, where’s our referee?” she asked, still flustered by the person (enby?) in front of her, their avatar was beautiful, if a bit androgynous. Their hair was multicoloured, it looked like it sparkled in the sun. Their face was angular with soft cheeks and not a hint of facial hair. She was trying to keep her bisexual ass from falling in love five minutes after meeting them.

“I am here,” called a second voice, “Galem, Zir/Zem, Welcome to my court!” zir announced.

First set: 4-3, 40-30, Amaranth serves. Read the holographic panel beside the referee. It was just a match for a VR amateur tournament, it was not important; however, it didn’t matter to Amaranth, she was as focused on her opponent as it is possible. They look very laid-back she thought, looking at Glix, as beads of sweat dropped on the polymer of the field.

She breathed, slipped back in the zone, and served a fastball, right in front of them, the ball zoomed past Glix, whose smile dropped for a second.

“Game, Amaranth.” announced the referee, allowing her to breathe once again. It was a hard match, her opponent looked easy-going, but the exchanges were long and tiring. And they made very few mistakes.

Some of their errors, though, looked weird, as if they purposely sent the ball slightly out of the court. “Hey! Glix!” Amaranth called, for the first time in the match. “What’s your deal, you’re not playing at your best I can see that you know!” she finished, frustrated.

Glix smirked, “Sorry Amaranth, but I can’t play with the best of my abilities right now, if I let myself lose I would obliterate you before you’d have time to realise it,”

Amy blinked, “What? Why! Are you a pro?”

The enby frowned for a second before giving a sly smile, “No, I just can increase the speed of my reflexes and reaction.”

The tall blond girl sighed, “You’re one of them right? The new AIs the news are talking about? What are you doing playing tennis instead of breaking the stock exchange!”

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At that, her opponent laughed, “You do know the stock exchange hasn’t existed in a century right? Are you a history nerd? How cute!”

Amaranth blushed, “I’m a PhD student in history yes, specialised in pre-union history, and older AIs make my job as a historian a nightmare! Do you have any idea how hard studying the early twenty-first century is when they had that weird phase with Generative AIs? It was two decades of slop! Y’all make my job, so, so, difficult.”

The enby was still laughing, ignoring the attempt by the referee of forcing them to start their serve, and the game. “Please don’t compare me to these honey! I’m completely different, and ya know, actually sentient. You should poke a comp sci student about it.” they finished, grinning widely.

She rolled her eyes, “Whatever, serve! I’m going to win this match fair and square.”

Galem sighed, finally.

First set: 3-5, 15-40, set point; Glix serves

Amaranth let out the highest pitched noise she could as she sent the ball back to Glix. The exchange for the set point had been more than hard, and she could feel the lactic acid filling her muscle, at least the simulated lactic acid. Glix was as laid back as ever, they even kept trying to banter, only to be met by utter silence. She was focused, she was going to win. It was all that mattered, she couldn’t do it IRL, so she would do it here, and she would burn those funny feelings about her opponent, they were an AI! She couldn’t catch feelings for an AI!

Glix pulled a short ball falling just on her side of the net, a shot of adrenaline entered her bloodstream and she jumped to intercept

the ball before it stopped. She managed to send another fastball right behind them, that was it, the set was hers!

Against all odds Glix jumped and sent the ball back her way, it was a perfect recovery and Amy couldn't help but being impressed by their talents. They might be an AI, but they were legitimately good at tennis.

“That was a good one babe,” Glix smiled, one more attempt to banter to destabilise her. She wouldn't let them! She smashed the ball as hard as she could right into their blind spot. Amy looked at the ball as if it were in slow motion, her opponent did try to react, but it was too late, the ball touched the polymer right on the line. There, set.

“Set, Amaranth.” the referee announced calmly; prompting her to take a deep breath, half of the job done, she just needed to repeat this one more time.

“Good job, Amaranth.” Glix cheered in their annoyingly attractive high melodious voice. “Wanna talk while we drink? Gotta stay hydrated girl.”

Amaranth stared in fury, squeezing her electrolyte solution, as sweat slowly dropped to the floor. Her stare, however, was met by a charming smirk, and she blushed again, she put her bottle in her mouth to avoid embarrassing herself.

Glix put her hands up in defence. “I'm just trying to be friendly girl, just that I promise, it's not a plot to secretly throw you off or something.”

“It's not?”

Glix chuckled, “Did you miss the moment where I told you I could destroy you if I wanted to? I don't want to cheat, I don't need to, I just want to play tennis.”

“Oh.” Oh, indeed.

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The enby laughed again, they seem to do that a lot, “Come then, we have five minutes to exchange details about our lives before the second set.”

Amy shrugged, and followed them to the bench.

“So, a PhD student in pre-union history, huh?” Glix said between gulps.

Amy grinned, she loved talking about her work, it was her passion after all, and the AI seemed nice, she was still weary about talking to them, even if they did feel sentient. “Yes! I started last year, in the University of Southern California. Focusing on the first half of the twenty-first century.”

Glix smiled back, “I have a buddy who’s finishing his master’s degree in that uni, which campus are you in?”

Amy tilted her head, thinking, “An AI? Can’t you download the internet? Why would you need to go to university, isn’t that a bit... unfair to the other students?”

The enby laughed, “Girl, you can’t just download the internet, even if you could, it would be like learning everything by heart, your job is more than purely learning dates and stuff right?”

Amaranth seemed confused but continued, “I guess so,”

“He’s focusing on post-union history, from the early 40s onwards. He’s in the LA campus.” their voice adopting a valley girl kind of tone and a pleasant sing-song quality.

The tennis woman blushed, she could get used to that voice, “I’m also in LA. Though I live to the north of the city, thankfully when the world calmed the hell down they thought about developing the train network” she giggled.

“I like your giggle,” Glix said with a sparkle in their eyes, their eyes were beautiful.

“And I like your voice,” Amy said in a dreamy tone, before coughing as she realised how that sounded, “Anyway, how does it work, you created your voice? I don’t know how AIs work nowadays” she finished, blushing from embarrassment

“Your blush is adorable, Amaranth,” they added, with a little giggle, “And I don’t know how it works either? I’m not a computer scientist, I’m actually an English literature professor for high school students in New Paris.”

Amaranth was not only confused, she was also disarmed, she expected to not like them, but they ended up being charming. Amy shook her head trying to regain her composure, only for more feelings invading her head. She couldn’t help how fast she developed crushes, she would try to crush the feeling when she would crush them.

“It’s time,” the referee called.

Second Set, 5-3, 40-30, set point, Glix Serves.

Amaranth was breathing heavily, the AI was dominating in the second set, and she found herself defending against a set point. They had exchanged a lot of banter now that she knew it wasn’t a plot by her opponent to mess with her, it turned out they were lovely and genuinely funny. She was already fighting a crush on the enby.

Her strategy did not pay in the second set, she won the first set by exploiting her opponent’s laid back attitude to drop precise balls in their blind spots. Unfortunately for Amy, Glix was way more cautious in the second set, combined with her aggressive play, her opponent now had the upper hand, and it looked like she would lose the second set.

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She took a big breath and focused, just in time to send back the ball into Glix's court with a grunt. The long and hard exchanges were beginning to tire Amy out.

“What love, starting to get tired?” Glix smirked, she returned the smirk but did not bother to answer, she was too focused on the ball. Their attitude still laid back, even if they were paying attention to avoid errors.

“Hah!” Amaranth screamed as she barely sent the smash ball right to her opponent. Unfortunately for her, they were already at the net to send a short ball just barely in her side of the court.

She tried to run and run to pick out the ball, the moment again started to show up in slow motion, the ball was falling, Amy tried to push her muscles — virtual as they were — to the maximum. In what felt like an hour, but more likely was a few seconds, the ball slowly dropped until it collided with the polymer of the court and bounced.

Amaranth smiled, it was high enough for her to smash the ball as hard as she could, to end up... Right into the net. A tear slowly dripped from her eyes, mixing with the sweat, before finishing on the ground. She had lost the set. They were equals now.

“Set! Glix!” The referee — she forgot zir name — yelled.

Amy was on the ground, gulping air with hunger, she tried to internalise she lost the set, and more importantly she would have to fight another long hard set to finish the match. She looked at her opponent who was also breathing heavily. They were about ten centimetres shorter, but their legs looked like they were the same length as theirs, which was probably normal. Even if she had an easy transition, her proportion were always slightly off by cis female standards.

Glix arrived at her side and smiled broadly, offering a hand. Amaranth took it and smiled too, they had about ten minutes to drink and talk again.

“Good set, Glix,” she smiled, offering a hand.

“Thanks, it was hard, you’re a formidable opponent.” Glix smirked shaking her hand.

They sat on the bench and started talking about everything but tennis, their conversation took them from history to mathematics, society, past and future, and the whole time Glix was flirting with her. She wasn’t dumb, she knew it was flirting, which meant her growing crush wasn’t one-sided.

She found herself flirting back, it was nice to receive attention from someone, she spent most of her childhood being bullied or picked on. And she was never exactly popular in high school and university, even if she had some partners who lasted a few months in the past five years of higher education. The attention was thus welcomed, and she found herself drowning in the sight of their hair. Or their face, or everything else, they definitely spent a lot of time carefully crafting their avatar – would Glix look like this in real life?

“You mentioned you were teaching, do you have a body out there?” she asked, after almost ten minutes of flirting back and forth.

Glix smiled, “No, my android body isn’t ready yet, I heard the hair is causing issues to the engineers,” they giggled. “I’m teaching by holograms, it works quite well.”

“Oh. You mean you’ll look like that IRL?” Amy asked nervously.

It was Glix’s turn to tilt their head, “Yeah of course, why?”

“It’s awfully distracting...” Amaranth blushed

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Glix smirked and resumed flirting with her, until the referee called, it was time for the third and final set.

Third Set, 5-3, 30-0, Amaranth serves

Amaranth was breathing heavily, it was hard, but she was smiling widely, her opponent was very charming, and smart, and she was starting to give up on fighting her crush. She sighed lightly as she sent the ball as hard as she could. Like almost every time Glix was there to send it back into Amy's court.

Contrary to the last set, she was playing more safely, less aggressively, and it was paying, she found herself dominating in the final set. Her opponent also was doing more errors as well, but she could tell it was by fatigue rather than deliberately. Amy wouldn't content herself with an easy win, she was there to fight.

They smiled and bantered together as they exchanged the ball, she was starting to plan, if she won—and it looked like she would—she would ask Glix on a date. She knew she was weary of them at first, but they grew up on her, and she definitely wanted to know them better in a more... Relaxed environment. So she sent the ball back, hard, and kept smiling. She would win, and win their heart as well.

At last, the ball bounced on the court and passed over Glix's shoulder, There, point.

“Point! Amaranth,”

“That was good Amaranth, match point now.” Glix smirked, which sent a flutter in Amy's simulated stomach.

“Thanks!” she grinned, just one more point and she'd win.

The following exchange was long, and tiring, each time Amy sent the ball, her opponent was there. She was purely focused on the

ball, not even listening to Glix's words. All her energy was on sending the ball back, sometimes a fastball, sometimes barely passing the net, at random, but Glix seemed to be able to predict her move, and for all she knew, they were.

After a few minutes, Amaranth sent a slow ball which bounced on the net, once again the moment seemed to last hours as Amy watched the ball. Would it pass on the other side — signifying her success — or would it drop on her side of the court?

The ball had enough momentum — if barely — to drop on the enby's side, she could see them try to smash it, they really did. And they managed it; but the ball spun in the sky and dropped again; on their side.

Amy sighed, she'd done it, she won.

“Game, Set, Match, Amaranth!” the referee called, as the holographic panel showed her name.

Amaranth collapsed, just in time for Glix to catch her. They pulled Amy in a hug and smiled. “Congratulations Amaranth! That was the best match ever! We totally need a rematch one of these days.”

Amy smiled and cuddled a bit to Glix's lean frame, she looked into their green eyes, and sighed happily, she glanced at the holographic window she had in front of her and grinned, just what she needed.

“Hey Glix! I won two tickets for Roland Garros next year!”

“Oh that's rad, VIP?” Glix smiled, looking into Amy's vast blue eyes and their hand in her blond hair.

“Yea!” They didn't get it she thought. “Wanna come with me?”

“Oh, sure! I should have an android body IRL before that.”

They still didn't get it. “I meant, as a date. I want to learn to know you better...” Amy blushed.

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Glix was suddenly blushing too “Sure! But it’s next year?”

“It is yes.” Amy said, cocking her head.

“Then would you go on a date with me next weekend? I know a great café.”

Amy turned crimson but nodded, “I would love to,”

The End