

Bloodline 1451

Chapter 1451 Hail Gustavo Alliance!

As the spacecraft continued its journey through the cosmos, the atmosphere inside was a mixture of relief and tension. The recent victory over the gargantuan hand was still fresh, yet Falco's words lingered in the air, casting a shadow over the celebration.

"I don't feel like I did much," Falco remarked, his voice tinged with a hint of resignation.

"Estroel is just too powerful."

His statement hung in the air, puzzling the crew. Ria, always quick to probe deeper into matters, turned towards Falco as his brow furrowed in confusion.

"Estroel? Who is that?" He asked sounding perplexed.

Falco looked around realizing that they still hadn't grasped what laid beyond.

"Estroel is the second most powerful among the Ancient Executioners," he explained, his voice steady, trying to provide clarity yet aware of the enormity of the information he was disclosing.

His revelation did not alleviate the confusion; if anything, it deepened it. All except Gustav and Endric seemed lost in the web of confusion.

Endric, sensing the growing bewilderment, decided to elucidate.

"By now, you all should know that the premonitions are not mere anomalies. They are, in fact, manifestations—body parts, of the five Ancient Executioners," he said, his voice firm, trying to instill some sense of understanding.

The room fell into a heavy silence as the crew digested the information. Gustav, who had been silent, finally spoke, turning to Falco with a serious expression.

"What more do you know, Falco?"

Falco took a deep breath, the weight of his heritage and knowledge evident in his demeanor.

"The reason my father made me... its beyond just wanting to have another offspring," he began, his voice low.

Gustav felt he was finally about to hear what the system had been hiding from him the entire time.

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[Earth]

The once vibrant cityscape of Neo-kyo had transformed into a battleground, its architecture marred by the ravages of conflict.

Neon lights flickered erratically, casting eerie shadows across streets littered with debris. Hovercars lay overturned, their sleek designs punctuated by bolts of energy, while digital billboards streamed chaotic scenes of the ongoing battle below. The air was thick with the smell of ionized energy and smoke.

In the midst of the urban chaos, two groups clashed with devastating ferocity.

One group, donned in MBO uniforms, wielded their bloodline abilities, manifesting glowing weapons, firing waves of kinetic energy, and causing explosions based on their specific bloodlines.

They faced opponents clad in weird robe-like uniforms, complete with masks that gave them an almost ritualistic appearance. The adversaries were not mere fighters; they wielded supernatural abilities that seemed to warp the fabric of reality around them.

The battle was intense, with the MBO officers finding themselves increasingly pressed. Their numbers dwindled under the relentless assault of the robed figures, whose mysterious powers allowed them to manipulate elemental forces, casting bolts of lightning and summoning ethereal fire from the air.

The MBO officers, despite their training and powerful abilities, were being overwhelmed and pushed back by the frightening intensity of their foes.

As the situation grew dire, the last standing MBO officer, a young man named Lieutenant Haruto, found himself cornered. The remnants of his squad lay scattered around him, and he braced for a final stand.

Just as the robed figures closed in, preparing to deliver the coup de grace, a dramatic shift occurred.

From the sky descended a figure like a meteor, her arrival heralded by a purplish beam of energy that erupted from the large eyeball on her forehead.

The beam swept across the battlefield with devastating force, creating a shockwave that sent the robed assailants flying, their forms tumbling through the air like leaves in a storm.

The battlefield fell silent for a moment, all eyes turning to the new arrival. She landed gracefully amid the ruins, her azure hair flowing in pigtail waves.

Her face, marked by pale red lips and a strikingly beautiful visage, bore an expression of calm determination. The purplish energy that surrounded her caused the air around them to thrum with power, an aura of might that seemed to stabilize the chaotic energies around her.

"Young miss Elevora!" Haruto exclaimed, relief flooding his voice as hope was rekindled in his eyes.

He recognized her immediately—not only as a fellow officer of the MBO but as a prodigy within their ranks, famed for her formidable powers.

Elevora nodded at him, her gaze sweeping the area with tactical precision.

"Help people get to safety, Haruto," she commanded, her voice resonant and authoritative. "I'll handle them."

Haruto hesitated for a moment, torn between his duty and the instinct to fight alongside her. But recognizing the disparity in their power—and the strategic sense in her command—he nodded, sprinting away to find cover and rally any other survivors.

As Elevora stepped forward, the remaining robed figures regrouped, their supernatural abilities flaring up once more. They unleashed a barrage of ethereal assaults towards her, from spectral flames to shards of ice conjured from thin air.

Elevora responded with a display of her own power. The eyeball on her forehead glowed with an intense purplish light, amplifying the energy around her.

With a swift motion, she drew the energy into a condensed orb, then released it in a spectacular explosion of light and power, neutralizing the incoming attacks with precision.

As the robed figures regrouped and launched a renewed assault, Elevora's azure eyes narrowed, and the large eyeball on her forehead began to glow ominously. The air around her crackled with energy, the atmosphere thick with the scent of ozone and the sharp tang of fear emanating from her foes.

The first to strike were two who combined their mystical forces, hurling a volley of dark energy spears toward her.

With a slight tilt of her head, Elevora focused her gaze through the third eye, and beams of light shot forth, intersecting the spears. Under her manipulative gaze, the spears shrank into harmless dust that fluttered to the ground like ash.

Emboldened by her display of power, Elevora advanced. Her movements were a blur like a specter of vengeance in the night. Another assailant attempted to ensnare her with glowing chains conjured from thin air, designed to bind and strangle its targets.

Elevora, with a flick of her wrist, directed a beam from her forehead, the chains not only halted but reversed in size, becoming so small they were rendered ineffective, clattering uselessly to the ground.

The battle escalated quickly as Elevora tapped into the darker aspects of her power. Her third eye glowed with a deep, malevolent purple, and with a piercing gaze, she unleashed a devastating dark beam.

This beam, a concentrated burst of destructive energy, cut through the battlefield like a scythe through wheat. Buildings, vehicles, and unfortunate assailants in its path were reduced to atoms, obliterated without a trace, leaving behind a swath of destruction.

As she wove through her enemies, her physical prowess was undeniable. She moved with an otherworldly grace, delivering precise and ruthless strikes.

Bam! Bam!

Each motion was fluid, yet each impact was brutally effective, rendering her foes incapacitated or lifeless in mere moments. Blood spattered across the dented pavements as her fist pierced through the chest of another assailant, causing his innards to spill like soggy noodles.

The robed figures, though numerous and armed with supernatural abilities, found themselves outmatched by Elevora's ferocity and raw power.

One by one, they fell, their numbers dwindling rapidly under her relentless assault.

"Yeah I'm in one now."

"Don't worry I'm almost done with them."

"I couldn't miss your call E... no you're not distracting me."

She seemed to be in a call as she took off the head of yet another masked robbed assailant.

"Come on... you know I... don't hang up."

"Alright then. You can call me later. I'll tidy things up here in a bit."

The air was filled with the sounds of battle—the clash of energies and the cries of the fallen but Elevora seemed to be in her own world as she dealt with them without breaking much of a sweat.

As the dust settled, only one of the robed assailants remained. The survivor, bloodied and battered, stood trembling before Elevora, who approached with slow, deliberate steps. Her third eye ceased its glow, the battlefield around her eerily quiet except for the soft whir of distant sirens and the crackling of fires that consumed what remained of the surrounding structures.

Elevora paused before the last assailant, her expression inscrutable.

"Tell me... who are you guys? Who sent you lots?" She inquired.

The assailant shaking in fear tried to stab herself with her sinuous limbs while yelling with a crazed look; " Hail Gustavo Alliance!"

Elevora caught her before she could kill herself.

"You're coming with me," She grabbed her and instantly flew off into the distance.

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"My father, the Lord of the Dark Plane, needed a way to puncture even the tiniest hole in a seal—a cosmic seal that binds an ancient power we can scarcely comprehend. That seal is in place to protect weaker planes like ours."

Everyone listened as Falco narrated.

"The seal was so strong, so impenetrable, that not even the might of the Ancient Executioners could break it on their own. My birth—my very existence—was the key to creating the first breach..."

Chapter 1452 Change In Primary Objective

"The seal was so strong, so impenetrable, that not even the might of the Ancient Executioners could break it on their own. My birth—my very existence—was the key to creating the first breach."

Ria, always quick to grasp the implications, leaned forward.

"So, your existence alone weakened the seal? But how does that relate to the premonitions we've been encountering?"

Falco sighed, the weight of his destiny apparent in his posture.

"The premonitions... they are not random cosmic events. They are rituals, each carefully planned and executed to weaken the seal further. And when the fifth premonition appears, the seal will be completely destroyed."

Aldris who was starting to understand the situation, interjected, "You're saying that the appearances of these Ancient Executioners' body parts during the premonitions are sacrifices?"

Falco nodded grimly.

"Exactly. Each part of the Executioners that manifests and is then sacrificed contributes to the weakening of the seal. Those are body parts, that will be lost to them forever but that is a testament to the seal's strength, considering that the Ancient Executioners are among the second most powerful beings within my father's realm."

The silence within the spacecraft was palpable, but it only lasted for a few seconds as Falco cut through the silence with the remaining part of his tale.

"So much so that they haven't been conscious in hundreds of thousands of years because they serve only one purpose..."

The revelation stirred a mix of horror and fascination among the crew. The notion that such powerful entities were being used as mere tools in a larger scheme was unsettling.

Ria, trying to understand the broader implications, asked, "What happens if the seal is broken completely? What does your father hope to achieve?"

Falco looked at each of them, his gaze lingering as if measuring the impact of his next words.

"If the seal breaks, it will release something bound since the dawn of this universe's memory. Something my father believes should not have been sealed away or should I say someone."

He turned to face Gustav, "Someone you specifically sealed away."

"What?"

"Gustav? How could Gustav have sealed someone away from so long ago?"

Ria and Aildris voiced out their confusion.

"Because he was there... He is the Outworldly. I finally understand what the Outworldly is... what the title entails. Gustav, do you even know who you are?"

"I can take a wild guess from everything you've mentioned but even I don't believe it myself," Gustav shook his head slightly.

"He is telling the truth though. That is why you play a key part in stopping this," Endric voiced from the side.

"So what exactly happens when the seal is gone?" Ria questioned again.

"The Overseer will return. All beings of the higher planes will have a foothold in ours again and believe me... It isn't a sight you wanna live to see," Falco shook his head.

"Then we must make sure the final premonition doesn't happen. We can't allow this seal to break." Gustav responded.

Falco's expression softened, appreciating Gustav's resolve.

"I thought you might say that, and I'm with you. While I was born to facilitate my father's plans, my journey with you all... it has shown me a different path. One that I choose to follow, standing against the darkness my father seeks to unleash."

Aildris, moved by Falco's declaration, placed a supportive hand on his shoulder.

"Then it's settled. We'll stand together, as we always have. And Falco, we're not just fighting beside you out of duty but out of belief in you, in the choice you've made to defy what was written for you."

The group's resolve hardened, fortified by the bonds they had formed through countless battles and shared burdens.

"But how do we do that? We couldn't stop the premonitions before, how are we gonna stop them now?" Ria's question broke the silence.

"We'll come up with something... I need to complete two quests first," Gustav responded while a system panel appeared before him.

[Quests]

<Locate Dimension six on planet Humbad>

[Duration]

<Five years>

[Progress]

<59/100%>

[Time Elapsed]

<4 Years>

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<Become The Most Powerful Mixedblood On Earth>

[Duration]

<Five years>

[Progress]

<94/100%>

[Time Elapsed]

<4 Years>

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'I wonder how the system calculates the difference between power,' Gustav thought about how he could use Cohilia to swallow anything up and how he also had Cosmic Superiority as another leverage over anyone, no matter how powerful.

Remembering his special abilities made him wonder the aspect of strength the System calculated.

("What does it matter? You've made much progress,") The system chipped in.

'Whatever... from the looks of things, I would probably be able to close in that 6% in less than a year's time. The real issue is Dimension six in Planet Humbad,' Gustav thought internally with a look of perplexity.

"We have to find Planet Humbad," Gustav announced.

The statement dropped like a meteor in the midst of the group, eliciting a mix of shock and confusion.

Ria, as always, was the first to respond.

"Gustav, Planet Humbad was destroyed thousands of years ago. How are we supposed to find something that doesn't exist?"

Aldris and Falco were just as confused except Endric, whose expression remained unfazed.

"That's where you're wrong," Endric interjected, his voice steady and sure.

"The destruction of Humbad is a widely accepted fact, but it's a facade, a cover-up for much deeper truths hidden by the Slarkovs themselves."

Gustav nodded at Endric's clarification, appreciating the support.

"Exactly. And within Humbad, in what is known as Dimension Six, lies something crucial for handling our current predicament with the seal. We must locate it."

The revelation that Humbad still existed, possibly holding the keys to the answers they desperately needed, was beyond their comprehension.

The story of planet Humbad was one that had been told since forever to the masses on Earth. They had grown up with it and so had their fathers and their father's fathers.

It was hard to swallow that it had been a generational lie, but it slowly began to sink in.

"But what about Angy? She's still trapped within the dark plane. Do we give up on rescuing her?" Ria questioned with a mix of worry and frustration.

"I haven't forgotten about Angy. I more than anyone want to rescue her. But consider this—if they've kept her alive all this time, they must still need her. That means she's relatively safe for now. Our main focus must shift to finding Humbad. It might be our best chance to save her and everyone else."

Falco, absorbing the strategy laid out by Gustav, added his perspective.

"Gustav is right. Angy has some kind of usefulness to my father and that is more so now than ever since he can't control me. If Gustav's says finding Humbad could help us then I trust his judgement."

Aldris chimed in at that moment, "The question remains—how do we find a planet that seemed to have vanished from existence? Where do we even begin?"

Gustav responded by initiating a projection that filled the room with data—a visual symphony of numbers, symbols, and cryptic words, interspersed with images showing an ashy trail streaking across space.

"The key to finding Humbad lies in deciphering this," Gustav explained, his finger tracing the lines of data as they floated holographically in mid-air.

He paused at two recurring terms that seemed to anchor the chaos of information: "Stagnant Siterus Void" and "Premonition."

Gustav continued. "The Stagnant Siterus Void is where I believe Planet Humbad is... the problem is that according to what I know it also is a place that doesn't exist in any known location within the universe."

"So what of the premonition? Are they linked with the five premonitions?" Aildris inquired.

"I don't think so. I think this premonition represents something else. Representation for the location or key to accessing the Stagnant Siterus void..."

Meanwhile, back on Earth, in a facility orbiting high above the planet's surface, a different scene unfolded.

A floating prison, specifically designed for holding aliens, was a marvel of modern technology.

Its exterior was a composite of dark metals and energy fields, rotating slowly with the Earth's orbit, its presence a silent sentinel in the cold vacuum of space.

Inside, the environment was starkly minimalist, functional to its core. The cells were designed not with bars, but with energy fields humming with a low, almost imperceptible buzz.

At the center of one such cell floated a being, its form nebulous and shifting, contained by the force of the high-tech restraints.

Elevora stood outside the energy field, her figure bathed in the soft blue light that emanated from the cell's containment system.

Her hair fluttered as her commanding presence contrasted sharply with the dim, utilitarian surroundings.

"Who is the leader of the Gustavo Alliance? And where is their base located?" Elevora asked, her voice firm and devoid of any warmth. It was a question she had posed several times, each iteration as pointed as the last.

The being inside the cell, its form coalescing into a more humanoid appearance, replied with a tone that was both weary and defiant.

"The answer remains the same as it has. It's Gustav. He leads, and they follow."

Elevora's eyes narrowed slightly, a flicker of irritation passing over her features.

"I know that Gustav has nothing to do with this... tell me the truth, who pulls the strings?" she countered smoothly.

Chapter 1453 You're Delusional

"Everything that happens is the will of our Lord God Gustav. Don't be a misguided sapiens, join the cause of our Lord," The being voiced once more like a fanatic.

"If you spit one more bullshit again... I will obliterate you," Elevora threatened.

The being's form shimmered, its fear palpable even through the containment field.

"You think you are powerful, but your abilities are nothing but mere flickers of shadows compared to our God, Gustav, the shield behind which the true powers convene."

Elevora stepped closer to the field, her presence imposing. "Your cooperation is your only path to lesser confinement. Help us, and we can help you. Who is behind this?"

"Our Lord Gustav," the being sounded like a brainwashed fanatic.

Elevora fixed her intense gaze upon the nebulous form of the imprisoned being.

"This is getting repetitive... Tell me the truth, who is behind the Gustavo Alliance?" she demanded, her voice echoing slightly off the smooth walls, imbued with an authority that brooked no defiance.

The being inside the cell, its form shimmering with a yellow light, replied with a fervor that bordered on fanaticism.

"Lord Gustav is our God, our personal savior. There is no 'behind,' for he is the forefront, the guiding light of our mission."

Elevora's eyes narrowed, her patience wearing thin.

"Spare me your zealotry. I need names and structures. Who orchestrates the moves? Does Gustav even know of the existence of you lots?"

The being seemed to curl within itself, a flicker of hesitation passing through its ethereal form.

"You seek shadows in a well-lit room. Gustav is the epitome, the culmination of our faith and actions. We are his to command, his to deploy as he sees fit on the chessboard of this universe."

Unsatisfied with the circular answers, Elevora shifted tactics.

"Then tell me about your aims for attacking Earth. What was the objective?"

"We were to bring Earth under our dominion, as we have done with other planets," the being responded, its voice a mixture of pride and regret.

"But we underestimated Earth's strength. Our unit thought ourselves too mighty even though we were warned. It matters not. Where we have failed others will succeed. They shall carry out the grand design."

Elevora pressed on, her tone sharpening like a blade.

"And what is this grand design? What is the endgame of your so-called Gustavo alliance?"

The room tensed as the being paused, its brightness dimming as if drawing in energy for a significant revelation.

"The endgame," it began, its voice now a hollow echo of its former vigor, "is to support our Lord and Savior Gustav in his ultimate mission—to bring an end to the existence of the universe."

The words hung heavy in the air, charged with the magnitude of their implications. Elevora felt a chill run down her spine as Gustav's face flashed in her mind.

"To...end the universe?" she repeated, disbelief threading through her words.

'Gustav would never do that... these fools must have higher-ups that pursue such a goal.'

"Such madness!" Elevora spat.

"It is not madness but enlightenment," the being insisted.

"To end is to begin anew. Our Lord Gustav sees the flaws in the fabric of reality, the errors in the cosmos's code. He wishes to reset it, to create something purer, free from the chaos that currently defines it."

'Doesn't sound like him at all so now I'm assured that these fools are acting on their own. I need to tell E.'

Elevora's mind pieced together the information with makeshift scenarios.

"You speak of apocalypse as if it's a renewal," she countered sharply.

"That's destruction on an unimaginable scale. Lives, planets, entire galaxies—erased? For what? A chance for your little group to play god?"

She knew Gustav wasn't responsible for what they had in mind but she was nonetheless bothered because they clearly had plans set in motion.

"What are beings but brief sparks in the eternal darkness? Gustav offers a return to the singularity from whence all arose. A noble sacrifice, a return to purity."

Elevora felt a surge of anger and helplessness, her fists clenching at her sides. There was no mere terrorist organization or a tyrannical regime seeking dominion. They were dealing with a cult with existential destruction as their creed.

"You're delusional but your beliefs are your own," Elevora finally said, her voice cold as the void outside.

"But know this—when the real Gustav eventually sets his sights on you fools, everything will come to an end. Pray you don't make a stupid decision before then because erasure would be the least of your concerns."

With those final words, Elevora turned sharply on her heel and exited the containment area.

Her steps were measured, but inside, her thoughts were a maelstrom.

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The silence of space was absolute, broken only by the muffled sound of the spacecraft's engines and the soft beeps of its operating systems that only echoed within an enclosed bubble.

Gustav and the others gathered around the control room before a console.

A holographic display cast a blue glow across their faces as an intergalactic transmission with E.E played out.

"Gustav, we've just repelled another attack by the Gustavo Alliance. They're becoming increasingly troublesome," he voiced, sounding disturbed.

Gustav's brows furrowed in confusion as he responded, "The Gustavo Alliance? I've never even come across a single one of them but I've heard of some weird groups using my name."

E.E. sighed, his face weary from the burdens of what had transpired on earth.

"Did you know that they've also been conquering planets in your name? They're spreading the belief across the universe that you are their leader, their so-called god."

Gustav's confusion deepened into concern.

"In my name? That's absurd. I have no connection to this so-called alliance. Right now, we are deep into deciphering data related to finding Planet Humbad. We have enough on our plate."

E.E. nodded, understanding the complexity of Gustav's predicament.

"I get it man, but you need to know—your reputation is taking a hit. Every planet they take over in your name makes it worse. The intergalactic alliance will have more of a reason to condemn you."

Gustav leaned back, rubbing his temples in frustration. "That's a reputation I'll have to endure for now," he said resignedly.

"Until we resolve the current situation."

"Maybe you could consider going after them?" E.E suggested.

~sigh~

"I don't know. We really don't have much time left," Gustav answered.

The transmission continued, the weight of the universe's eyes on them growing heavier by the moment.

E.E. shifted his attention to Falco, who had been quiet in the background.

"And Falco," E.E. added, his tone softening, "your Earthly father misses you. Any plans of coming to say hi soon?"

E.E. seemed to have already been briefed on everything that had transpired as he spoke with a knowing tone.

"I miss him too but..." Falco replied, his voice tinged with a mix of nostalgia and determination.

"This takes priority at the moment. Maybe you could help me send a message. Tell him, I'm fine," he added.

E.E. smiled slightly, a brief respite from the dire news he had delivered.

"I will. Stay safe, all of you. I will try my best to stabilize things over here."

The holographic image flickered as the transmission prepared to end.

"Keep us updated, E.E.," Gustav said firmly.

E.E nodded before the transmission ended.

After the transmission ended, Gustav went back to facing the display of data relating to the warp demolator and Stagnant Siterus void.

Endric turned to Gustav with a look of earnest inquiry.

"You've been poring over this data in the last few days. What have you uncovered? Any insights that could help us navigate to Humbad?"

The rest leaned in, anticipation hanging palpable in the air. They all respected Gustav's intellect, which had proven on countless occasions to be second to none.

His ability to discern patterns and meanings where others saw only chaos was almost legendary.

Gustav, who had been staring intently at the holographic symbols and equations, finally turned to face them. His expression was one of cautious intrigue, hinting at the depth of his discoveries.

"I have a multitude of theories," he began slowly, his voice measured, "but there is one that resonates the most, perhaps the most radical."

The crew shifted, their interest piqued as they prepared to delve into one of Gustav's quintessential revelations.

Gustav continued, "Remember I mentioned that the Stagnant Siterus void is not any known place within the universe? But what if it doesn't exist yet?"

A murmur of surprise and skepticism ran through the group, with Falco furrowing his brows in confusion. "Doesn't exist yet? How?"

Gustav replied by pointing back to the display where the symbol for 'Premonition' floated next to the term 'Stagnant Siterus Void.'

"We've been interpreting 'premonition' as a warning or a vision of impending events. But what if in this context, it doesn't just mean foresight? What if it's actually a clue indicating the future?"

Aldris, trying to keep up, chimed in, "Are you saying that the Stagnant Siterus Void is a place that doesn't exist yet but will exist in the future?"

Chapter 1454 Time Travel?

Gustav nodded, his eyes alight with the thrill of theoretical discovery.

"Exactly. This data isn't just spatial; it's temporal. The Stagnant Siterus Void isn't a location that's hidden or difficult to locate—it has not been formed yet. We haven't gotten to the timeline in which an event... a phenomenon will create the Stagnant Siterus void."

Endric leaned forward with an apprehensive tone.

"So, we are essentially chasing a shadow from the future."

"How do we even begin to approach this?" Falco voiced in confusion.

Gustav rubbed his chin thoughtfully, contemplating the complexities of their mission.

"If my theory holds, then our path isn't through space but through time... Understanding the conditions under which the void will come to exist and finding a way to either witness or interact with its formation."

Aildris asked the inevitable question; "How do we know what time it is? What if it is to come into existence after the fifth premonition?"

"That's the problem," Gustav voiced in response.

"The only other method would be time travel," Endric pointed out.

"But how do we navigate time? Are we to find some sort of temporal gateway or device?" Ria questioned.

"Time travel is a true myth. No one can really do it and it is forbidden to conduct research related to such if I recall clearly," Aildris mumbled with a slightly distressed look.

"Then what do we do?" Ria questioned while everyone turned to face Gustav once more.

"There's only one chance I think we have at getting to the Stagnant Siterus Void... or rather I. Since I don't intend to put you all in harm's way."

The weight of Gustav's words hung heavily as the holographic projector displayed the swirling, ashy energy trail.

"If I can predict where it will appear next, I can use it to get there.... actually shouldn't be much of a challenge because I've done it before."

Endric and Aildris exchanged a look of skepticism, both well aware of the dangers such a plan entailed.

"Are you certain about this, big brother?" Endric asked, his tone laced with concern.

"Even if you do pinpoint the next emergence of the warp demolator, do you know if your body can withstand such a powerful temporal wave? We're talking about forces that could potentially rip you to shreds or disintegrate you completely."

Aldris nodded in agreement, his expression grim.

"It's extremely dangerous, Gustav. The Slarkovs must have fled because they somehow predicted the coming of the warp demolator and knew they wouldn't survive. Is your body as sturdy as an entire planet? Even if it is, Planet Humbad can't be 100% intact. There's no precedent for this kind of physical exposure."

Gustav met their worried looks with a resolute gaze.

"I understand the risks," he acknowledged. "But I believe it's the only way to reach Humbad."

"You can't be serious, Rival!" Ria exclaimed, stepping forward.

"Going alone is madness. Even if you manage to arrive at Humbad intact, how do you plan to return?"

"Gustav, think this through. There has to be another way that doesn't involve such a suicidal risk," Falco chipped in.

Gustav raised a hand, signaling for calm. "I've considered every possible angle," he insisted.

"The risks are significant, but reaching Dimension Six and a chance to prevent the fifth premonition—are too great to ignore. If there's a chance this could work, I have to take it."

They fell silent while internally wrestling with the gravity of Gustav's decision. After a moment, Aildris spoke up, his voice thoughtful.

"If you're set on this, let's at least devise some contingencies. We need a plan for extraction, a way to pull you back if things go sideways."

Gustav nodded, appreciative of Aildris's mindset. "That's a good suggestion."

A plan appeared in Gustav's mind and he immediately got to work with something.

Endric on the other hand turned away and moved towards one of the rooms within the spacecraft.

His forehead beamed with a green light, "Do you think the armor can help?" He asked Husarius.

"I think the armor is his best bet at surviving if he's trying something as dangerous as this."

Husarius's voice resonated, clear, and compelling.

"The armor will not only protect him physically but will anchor his essence across the temporal fluctuations."

Endric frowned, considering the implications. "Is he strong enough to wield it? I remember he is supposed to be a fully-fledged Alpha ranked first."

"Gustav's current strength isn't far off the required point. It isn't impossible for him, merely... challenging," Husarius replied, the green glow pulsing slightly as if emphasizing its point.

Armed with the new insight, Endric made up his mind. "Then I must retrieve the Armor and hand it to him before Gustav embarks on this mission. We cannot afford to have him leave unprotected."

Leaving his quarters, Endric hurried back to the control room where Gustav and the rest of the crew were engrossed in their preparations.

The room was abuzz with activity, screens flickering with data streams and calculations as they tried to pinpoint the next appearance of the warp demolator.

"Gustav," Endric called out as he entered, drawing the attention of the others, "How long until we determine the location for the warp demolator's next appearance?"

Gustav, who was poring over a series of complex astro-navigation charts, looked up, "I estimate within a day or two."

Endric nodded, relief mingling with resolve. "Good. You'll wear the armor before leaving."

Gustav's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "The first sacred item?"

"I've consulted with Husarius," Endric explained.

"He agrees that the armor is essential for your survival through the demolator. It will protect you from the worst of the temporal distortions and enhance your physical capabilities."

Gustav and Endric delved into a crucial discussion about the Sacred Armor's capabilities and limitations.

Gustav, arms crossed, addressed Endric with a mix of concern and curiosity, "Endric, remember, the Sacred Armor is renowned for its physical defense capabilities. We're talking about riding the warp demolator—a phenomenon that transcends mere physicality."

"I know the lore suggests that the armor is impervious to physical damage, and that's true—it offers unparalleled physical protection. However, it's not just a suit of armor. It's imbued with ancient

energies, capable of warding off forces of physicality. You would have known if you could touch it at the moment since you're becoming unbound."

Gustav raised an eyebrow, skeptical yet intrigued by Endric's confidence.

"So, you're saying it has other protective measures?"

Endric tapped on the hologram, bringing up layers of arcane symbols and protective wards that lined the interior of the armor.

"See here," he pointed, "these inscriptions aren't just for show. Each one is crafted to absorb and dissipate a range of energies. Indeed, its efficacy against non-physical threats isn't 100%, but it's designed to adapt to its wearer's needs, especially against mystical and temporal threats."

Gustav, his expression softening from skepticism to consideration, continued to probe, "And you're sure this adaptation will extend to something as volatile as the warp demolator?"

"There's an inherent risk, yes, but the armor is our best bet. Your body will have to handle the rest. You were going to do it without the armor before anyways," Endric rubbed his temple in frustration.

Gustav paused, processing the information, then nodded slowly. "Alright, then I'll use it."

Endric, relieved to have Gustav's buy-in, added a crucial detail, "I'll keep the armor secured in the dimension where Husarius and I have sealed it until you're ready to embark. Taking it out prematurely would put a massive target on our backs—every intergalactic marauder and treasure hunter would come after us."

Gustav's nod was grave and understanding. "Makes sense. Until the last possible moment then."

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On Earth, shrouded in a perpetual veil of thick, silver fog, lay an isolated island, inaccessible to most Earthlings.

The island, with its tall infrastructures, rose starkly against the view of a restless sea that guarded its mysteries well.

The architecture was a seamless blend of nature and technology; towering structures with reflective surfaces standing alongside verdant, genetically engineered gardens that climbed skywards.

Neon lights cut through the fog, casting a surreal glow that reflected off the hyper-modern buildings.

The crown jewel of the urban marvel was a vast, imposing structure known as the Citadel. It was not only the largest and most luxurious building on the island but also the center of power for its ruling dynasty.

The Citadel, with its sweeping arcs and towering spires, exuded lavishness. Its walls, lined with energy-efficient panels, illuminated the interiors, bathing expansive halls in a gentle, ambient light that highlighted intricate designs inspired by both past civilizations and speculative futures.

Inside the Citadel, in the grandest hall, a young man is seated on a throne that seems as much a piece of art as a seat of power.

The throne, crafted from rare metals and hover-stone, floated slightly above the ground.

The young man had the poised bearing of a seasoned leader despite his youth. His black dreadlocks were tied back neatly, accentuating sharp, tanned features that carried the weight of his responsibilities.

Chapter 1455 Space Wreckage

The young man had the poised bearing of a seasoned leader despite his youth. His black dreadlocks were tied back neatly, accentuating sharp, tanned features that carried the weight of his responsibilities.

He was clad in a simple yet elegant robe that did not overshadow the three-headed dragon emblem embroidered in silver thread on his chest—a symbol of his family's heraldry and their fierce protectiveness over their domain.

Around him, guards in pristine white robes stand at attention. Their own robes bear the same three-headed dragon on the back, a symbol that is both a promise and a warning to all who might dare to challenge their family's rule.

At this moment, a figure dressed in the muted grays of a civilian administrator stands before Stark, delivering a report with a digital tablet in hand. The hall echoes softly with the rhythmic, unobtrusive sound of his voice.

"Family Head Stark, the trade negotiations with the Sled Central have concluded successfully. Additionally, the new energy harnessing project has surpassed all projected efficiency metrics."

Stark nods appreciatively, his eyes scanning a live data feed that plays out across a holographic display beside the throne. "Excellent. Ensure that the surplus energy is redirected into expanding our agricultural domes. We'll need the extra provisions if we're to support our growing population."

Before the advisor could respond, another figure entered the hall. This man, older and with the distinguished air of someone born to power, approaches the throne with a respectful bow. "Family Head Stark," he greets with a warmth that belies the formality of the setting.

Stark recognizes him instantly as one of his uncles, a trusted member of the council. "Uncle Matthias, what brings you here at this hour?" Stark inquires, his tone mixing familial warmth with the crispness of his official role.

Matthias's face is grave, his eyes holding a flicker of urgency as he straightens to address Stark. "The time has arrived," he says cryptically, his voice low but firm.

Stark's expression shifts subtly, a flicker of understanding passing through his sharp gaze. "You're sure?"

"Yes, the signs have aligned just as the prophecy foretold. We must prepare to use it now," Matthias responds, his tone now laced with an intensity that draws a deeper, more serious line to Stark's already commanding presence.

Stark stood to his feet, his figure casting a long shadow across the marble floors, embellished with the etchings of their ancestral lineage.

"Gather the council, and call back our envoys from the mainland. If what you say is true, we'll need to perform the ritual now."

"As you command, Family head," Matthias replied, bowing once more before turning to carry out the orders.

Upon Matthias departure, Stark's gazes into the sprawling cityscape. He can see the entirety of the island from his position despite being inside of this building.

"Gustav... you will have to forgive me," Stark mumbled before returning to his seat.

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As their spacecraft thrummed through the cosmic void, its course set towards a location predicted to be the next appearance of the warp demolator, the atmosphere among them had settled into a routine of anticipation mixed with diligent preparation.

The control room, usually a hub of activity, now operated with a quiet efficiency, the vast stretches of space offering a display of tranquil stars and nebulae that seemed almost static in their slow drift past the viewports.

Gustav had found himself a quiet corner in the observation deck, a space with a panoramic view of the star-studded blackness. Here, he sat cross-legged, his eyes closed and his breathing measured. The meditation was deep, aimed at channelling his bloodline.

Aildris, checking on the navigational charts, walked over to where Endric was. He stood for a moment, observing before speaking; "How are you feeling about the warp demolator? Any concerns about the approach?"

"Not really but why do you ask?" Endric voiced in slight confusion.

"Gustav has mentioned on multiple occasions that you are the time candidate... I don't exactly know what that means but I just get the feeling you'll be able to tell if things weren't right," Aildris answered with a concerned tone.

"You're half right... It doesn't exactly work the way you think. If I truly wanted to know if something could go wrong, I would consult the fates. The last time I did that... hmm..." A flashback of destruction played in Endric's mind as his face scrunched in guilt.

"It didn't go so well. But I believe we'll be fine... preparations are being made. We have a solid month before the demolator makes its appearance. We'll reach the predicted location in two weeks, which gives us another two to prepare or... consider other options if needed."

"Two weeks to get there, two more to wait. It's ample time to ensure we're not walking into this blindly," Aildris agreed with Endric's thoughts.

As Aildris and Endric poured over the intricacies of their route to intercept the warp demolator, a sudden series of urgent beeps resonated through the spacecraft's control room, slicing through their discussion like a sharp blade.

The red flashing lights of the proximity alert bathed the room in an ominous glow, reflecting off the metallic surfaces and illuminating the concerned faces of the crew.

"What's happening?" Aildris exclaimed, rushing to the main console to scan the data rapidly scrolling across the screen.

Endric, equally alarmed, joined him, his eyes narrowing as he assessed the readouts. "Proximity alerts aren't supposed to go off like this unless—"

His words trailed off as Gustav emerged from his meditation chamber, drawn by the commotion. His expression was one of calm control, but the urgency of the situation was not lost on him. "What have we encountered?" he asked, his voice steady, cutting through the tension.

Endric manipulated the controls, bringing up an external visual feed on the main display.

The sight that greeted them was both macabre and startling. "It's not what, but who," he said grimly.

The screen showed a cluster of objects floating in space ahead of them—objects that, upon closer inspection, resolved into humanoid and alien shapes.

Corpses, dozens of them, drifted lifelessly through the void, their faces frozen in expressions of terror and despair. Each wore a black and white uniform, now torn and soiled with the marks of violent deaths.

The crew stared in horrified silence, the reality of the scene before them sinking in slowly. As the spacecraft edged closer, another structure came into view—a battered space structure, pockmarked with holes and floating listlessly. It was clear from its damaged state that it had suffered a catastrophic event.

Gustav's sharp eyes caught the finer details of the structure. "That's not just any spacecraft," he observed quietly, his mind racing to piece together the clues. "It's a prison. A floating penitentiary, perhaps. These people were prisoners."

Endric squinted at the display, absorbing the implications. "A prison riot, or an attack?" he wondered aloud, trying to make sense of the tragedy.

"Let's not jump to conclusions without more information," Gustav cautioned.

He approached the console and initiated a more detailed scan of the area.

Gustav fingers flew over the controls as he fine-tuned the sensors to analyze the wreckage and the bodies more closely.

The enhanced scans revealed more details: the uniforms bore the insignia of a known intergalactic security firm, one that specialized in the most dangerous of criminals.

"This was a high-security transport vessel, then," Aildris deduced, piecing together the visual evidence with their database of ship designs and insignias. "They must have been transporting some extremely dangerous individuals."

Gustav leaned forward, his gaze intense as he studied the floating bodies and the wrecked structure. "The damage pattern isn't consistent with just a riot or a breakout attempt," he noted. "It looks like they were attacked, from both inside and out. Something or someone wanted what was on this ship very badly."

The revelation hung heavily in the room. The possibility of stumbling upon a space prison break was one in a lifetime. What were the chances?

"We need to be cautious," Gustav decided. "We'll maneuver to avoid the debris field and continue on our path, but keep the sensors at maximum sensitivity. I don't want any more surprises."

Endric looked back at the screen, his expression pensive. "Should we check it out?"

"Is it really any of our business?" Gustav threw this question back.

"What if it does become our business... at least we could try to make sure of the fact that this wouldn't affect us in any way," Endric pointed out.

"I doubt a bunch of very dangerous alien criminals would have anything to do with us," Gustav wasn't really interested.

"Let's just make sure. We will still have two weeks of free time anyways. No point in rushing," Aildris chipped in.

Gustav considered this for a moment, before finally agreeing, "Sure."

With this, Endric navigated their ship towards the wreckage up ahead.

The space transport vessel was thrice as large as their spacecraft so they were able to fly in through one of the large holes left on it.

Endric was the first to get off the instant they got into the wreckage.

"What the hell?"

Chapter 1456 Nereus Sector

The interior was a grisly display, the walls and ceilings charred black, the metal warped from intense heat. It was clear that whatever had occurred here had unleashed catastrophic energies, far beyond normal weaponry.

The corridors of the space transport vessel were narrow and claustrophobic, designed for functionality over comfort, typical of military-grade transports. As they advanced, scorch marks scored the walls, and in some areas, half-burnt corpses were melded grotesquely with the ship's superstructure, their faces locked in expressions of agony, their skin blackened to the bone.

"Some of these burns suggest an explosion of immense heat from the inside," Aildris observed, his voice echoing slightly in the hollow space. "Look at the blast patterns; they radiate outward from the ship's core."

Endric nodded in agreement. "The internal defenses would have contained any external attack. This was something else, something from within."

As they navigated through the debris-strewn hallways, the silence was oppressive, broken only by the soft crunch of their boots on fragments of metal and ash.

Suddenly, Ria paused, his sights settling on a figure slumped against the bulkhead. It was a guard, one of the ship's crew, by the look of his uniform. Despite the severe burns that charred his blue skin, a testament to his alien heritage, his chest rose and fell weakly, the barest hint of life.

"He's still alive," he exclaimed, rushing to his side. Ria carefully turned him over to assess his condition better.

The guard's uniform was a patchwork of charred fabric and melted synthetics, the emblem of the security firm barely distinguishable. His features, distinctly Thelmarian, were resilient yet clearly ravaged by the event. The Thelmarian species was known for their thick skin and robust physiques, characteristics that had possibly saved his life amid such devastation.

Gustav squatted beside Ria, examining the guard. "Can you hear me?" he asked, gently tapping the guard's face. The guard's eyes fluttered open, his gaze unfocused, pain flickering across his features.

"Rion..." the guard murmured hoarsely, the effort to speak seeming to drain his remaining strength, before his eyes rolled back, and he passed out again.

"Rion? What does that mean?" Aildris questioned, looking over to Gustav for theories.

"Could be a name, a place, or something else we're not aware of," Gustav mused, his mind racing through possibilities.

"We should get him back to our ship..." Endric suggested.

"Hmm... alright," Gustav agreed seeing as there was no other way this guard could be saved. He would die if they just left him here.

With the guard secured on Endric's shoulder, they made their way back to their ship. The damage to the vessel, the nature of the guard's injuries, and his cryptic last word before losing consciousness all pointed to a mystery that was deepening by the moment.

Endric checked for any survivors but they discovered that only the guard was alive. A lot of prisoners in cells were even burnt to a crisp as well.

"Whatever happened on that transport ship wasn't an accident. It was deliberate and powerful enough to bypass all their internal defenses," Gustav stated upon their arrival back in the ship.

"We need to figure out who or what 'Rion' is," Ria added.

"It isn't really our place to do that. But I am okay with helping the guard to recovery," Gustav voiced while placing some healing medication in the mouth of the guard.

"And we need to be on guard. If something on that ship could cause this much destruction, it's not something we want to encounter unprepared," Aildris chipped in.

"Which is why I believe we should find out what Rion is so we won't get thrown into the unexpected," Endric added.

Gustav also saw sense in this and agreed that they would ask the guard some questions when he came to.

For now, they needed to continue their journey.

After several hours of cruising away from the haunting wreckage, the tranquility of space enveloped their spacecraft.

Gustav had resolved to drop the injured guard off at the nearest habitable planet, believing that it would spare them any further complications. However, plans quickly changed when the guard regained consciousness sooner than expected.

Endric's voice cut through the ship's intercom, "He's awake!"

The group converged on the medical bay where the guard was hooked up to various monitors and IV lines, his burnt skin treated with regenerative gels. The relief of consciousness brought a flicker of urgency to his eyes as he scanned the room, registering the faces of his unexpected saviors.

Gustav approached the medical bed, his expression one of cautious concern. "You're awake. That's good. Can you tell us what happened on your ship?"

The guard's voice was weak but filled with a grave urgency. "Rion," he muttered again, the word resonant with dread.

Ria stepped forward. "You said that before. What is 'Rion'? Is it a person?"

The guard shook his head slowly, his breath laboring with each word. "Rion... it's not a place. It's a rare mineral. We were transporting it when one of the prisoners stole it."

Gustav's brow furrowed deeply. "A prisoner hijacked an entire vessel for a mineral? What's so special about this Rion?"

"It's not just any mineral," the guard continued, his voice gaining strength from his urgency. "Rion is an absorbant. It takes whatever it gets and magnifies it. It's incredibly valuable—and dangerous in the wrong hands. The prisoner who stole it... she planned her capture and transport just to get close to it."

Endric interjected, "Who is this prisoner? And where might she have taken the Rion now?"

The guard's eyes were haunted as he recalled the events. "Her name is Karis. She's a Zaltharian, known for her cunning and ruthlessness. She has ties to several outlaw factions across the quadrant."

Falco, leaning against a console, crossed his arms. "Zaltharians, huh? Slippery folks. Any idea where she might head with such a prize?"

The guard winced as he shifted slightly, pain flaring across his features. "She mentioned the Nereus Sector once. It's is where she grew up and she is said to despise its existence."

Endric instructed the ship's artificial intelligence. "AI, display every data available on the Nereus Sector."

The air above the console shimmered as a detailed holographic image materialized. The Nereus Sector spun slowly in front of them, a massive artificial orbital body, its architecture a patchwork of scavenged spaceship parts and makeshift habitats.

It looked like a pirate's haven floating in space, lit by neon glows from numerous sketchy establishments.

"This," Endric pointed out, "is not just any location. Nereus Sector serves as a nexus for black market exchanges. Crime rates are astronomical, around 90%, and it operates under a constant state of lawlessness."

The rotating model displayed sections of the sector, each a hub of various illicit activities. Markets brimming with stolen artifacts, underground fighting rings, and dens offering every imaginable vice painted a vivid picture of controlled chaos.

Gustav folded his arms, his gaze locked on the floating model. "A place like this might just tear itself apart without any outside help. Letting Karis wreak havoc there might seem like a self-solving problem."

As he voiced this thought, the injured guard, who had been silently observing, interjected weakly but with conviction. "I understand the temptation to look the other way, but you must consider—Nereus is also a ground for trafficking innocent children from across the universe. They're sold to the highest bidder, living lives of despair. If Karis unleashes that mineral's power there, those children will suffer most."

The room fell silent, the moral weight of the guard's words settling among them. Ria turned to look at Gustav with a troubled expression. "We can't just turn our backs on them."

Falco nodded in agreement; "We need to think this through. Although we could leave it to them to clean up their mess, there is no guarantee they'd get to her before the deed is done. Innocents, especially children, shouldn't pay the price for our indecision."

Gustav sighed, rubbing his temples as he contemplated their options.

"We have two choices: intervene and potentially save lives at great risk to ourselves, or stay our course and let Nereus deal with its own demons, including Karis."

"If we do decide to intervene, we'll need to do so now and fast so we can stay on course and get to the location before the warp demolator appears," Endric voiced.

"How long will it take us to get to Nereus Sector?" Gustav questioned their ship artificial intelligence.

< 4 Days Of Interstellar Travel >

"Technically we should be back on course in about a week," Endric pointed out.

"Are we doing this?" Aildris inquired.

They all turned to face Gustav.

"Alright sure sure... let's do it," Gustav stated before seating at his usual spot in the control room.

"Set a course for Nereus Sector."

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Back at the site of the recent devastating attack—a graveyard of twisted metal and frozen shadows—a remarkable change was unfolding. Amid the debris and the silence of dead space, a figure that had been motionless among the scattered remains of the destroyed prison transport began to stir.

The figure was enshrouded in a tattered uniform, the fabric scorched and torn from the violent events that had led to the vessel's demise.

Chapter 1457 Unbecoming Arrival

Slowly, almost painfully, the figure sat up, clutching at pieces of debris to stabilize itself. Its movements were sluggish, heavy with the weight of injury and the cold of space.

As the figure regained some semblance of composure, it looked around at the floating bodies and the ruins of what once was a secure transport vessel. There was no sound in the vacuum of space, but if there were, it would have been a symphony of eerie, mournful silence.

"That bitch!" The figure muttered underneath it's breath.

The figure's face, partially obscured by a damaged helmet, was scarred and worn. It reached up with a trembling hand to release the helmet's seal, pulling it off to reveal a visage that was both inhumane and haunting.

The figure had deep-set eyes that glowed with a faint bioluminescence, a common genetic modification among space-faring folk, designed to assist with vision in the varied light conditions of different worlds.

The figure's breath came in visible puffs. A portable life support system at its belt pulsed faintly, struggling to keep the atmosphere breathable.

He took a moment to gather strength, then began to propel himself through the zero-gravity environment towards a larger piece of wreckage that housed the remnants of the ship's communication array.

Reaching the console, the figure's hands moved with purpose, pulling out a compact toolkit from its belt and beginning to work on the damaged equipment.

Sparks flew as connections were jury-rigged, the display flickering to life intermittently under the skilled hands of the lone survivor.

With a final twist of wires and a soft thud of restored power, the console stabilized, the screen glowing steadily now.

The figure typed in a sequence of commands, a distress signal that would broadcast across the standard emergency channels used in this sector of space.

"Mayday, mayday. This is Officer Eyhrum from the High-Security Transport Vessel #0019468 Triton, requesting immediate assistance," the figure spoke into the communication device, his voice raspy but clear.

"We were attacked—prisoner uprising... external intervention 100% confirmed... coordinates attached. Require immediate extraction."

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As the spacecraft continued its steady course towards the Nereus Sector, Gustav and the others were gathered in the med bay.

The room was utilitarian, bathed in the soft glow of overhead panels, the stars streaking past visible through the panoramic windows, providing a vibrant display of moving constellations.

The guard, now somewhat recuperated, sat at the table with Gustav and the others arrayed around him. The air was filled with a mix of curiosity and urgency

"You've mentioned Karis and her notorious background briefly. Could you elaborate on how you came to know so much about her and her operations, particularly in the Nereus Sector?" Gustav questioned.

The guard adjusted his posture, his face reflecting the gravity of his experiences. "Certainly, Captain Gustav. My name is Officer Eyhrum. My involvement with Karis goes back several years. I was part of a transport team assigned to move interstellar criminals, and Karis emerged as a troublesome one who had to be moved multiple times because certain facilities couldn't hold her."

He paused, collecting his thoughts before continuing, "She was always a talk amongst my other colleagues which was how I came to know well of her escapades. Karis is not just a criminal; she's a tactician known for her ruthless efficiency and lack of empathy. Her operations are always well-planned, leaving little to chance."

Falco, leaning back in his chair, interjected, "What about the Nereus Sector? It's known as a haven for outlaws. How is Karis connected there?"

Gustav folded his hands, his gaze intense. "And the mineral—Rion. How did that come into play? If you guys only transport criminals, why was such an important mineral present on the vessel?"

"We don't transport criminals alone. There are times we transport important items because we are known for being the most secure interstellar transporters. Quite ironic that Karis got the better of us," The guard shook his head in pity.

"As you just mentioned... Secure... Triton has always been known for that. So how did she manage to do that? How did she free herself?" Aildris chipped in questions on the minds of everyone.

"More importantly, how did she get the Rion?" Gustav added.

"I don't know. This has never happened before," Eyhrum voiced with a tone of cluelessness.

"The Rion must have helped in amplification which was why she managed to torch the vessel and it's inhabitants," He added.

"So there's a possibility that she had inside help then? Cos someone must have helped her lay hands on it first," Endric chimed in.

"That is possible but there was also interference from outside forces. I saw her being taken away in a spacecraft just before I lost consciousness," Eyhrum revealed.

As the conversation unfolded, the seriousness of their mission became even clearer to everyone in the room.

"Tell us more... I want to know the nature of her abilities," Gustav demanded while shooting a straight gaze at Eyhrum

Eyhrum met Gustav's gaze squarely. "I will assist in any way possible. My goal, like yours, is to see Karis stopped and the Rion secured."

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As the days slipped by with the monotony of space travel, they closed in the proximity between themselves and the Nereus Sector.

After three more days, the silhouette of the Nereus Sector began to emerge. The sector itself was not a natural celestial body but an enormous artificial structure, orbiting a desolate, unnamed planet like a colossal metallic parasite.

It was an amalgamation of countless ships, asteroids, and other space debris welded together over centuries into a sprawling mass of tunnels, platforms, and domes.

As they drew closer, the distinct shape of the sector became clearer. The structure was a bricolage of architectural styles, reflecting the anarchic spirit of its inhabitants.

Massive docking bays and shipyards jutted out at odd angles, and neon lights flickered from every surface, advertising everything from black market cybernetics to exotic creatures.

The sector rotated slowly, giving it artificial gravity, and its exterior was pocked with the scars of numerous skirmishes, a testament to its lawless reputation.

Gustav stood at the main viewport, observing the approach. "Looks more like an intergalactic pirate's nest than a hub of trade."

Beside him, Endric adjusted the scope of their long-range sensors. "Looks like there are a couple more ships on similar vectors."

The group's attention shifted to the external monitors, which displayed several other spacecraft converging on the Nereus Sector. Each ship was distinct—some bristled with weaponry, likely mercenaries or bounty hunters; others were sleek and shadowy, possibly smugglers or thieves.

Aildris, monitoring the communications channels, added, "There's a lot of chatter. Everything from trade negotiations to threats. It's busy out there."

As their ship slipped into the sector's outer orbit, a sense of foreboding settled over the group.

The sector's reputation for danger was not just storied but visible; the space around it was littered with the remains of ships that had met violent ends, their hulks serving as grim reminders of failed ventures and fatal encounters.

Gustav was confident in their capabilities but for reasons unknown, something didn't feel right to him.

An automated docking protocol activated as they neared a designated port. The voice that came over the comm was gritty, laced with static. "Vessel identified as Tarks craft from the Gohatark territory. Far from home eh? State your business or prepare to be boarded."

Gustav responded with calm authority, "We're here for trade and resupply." He glanced at Endric, who gave a subtle nod, confirming that their cloaking narrative was holding up.

The reply was terse. "Acknowledged. Dock at bay 94-A. No funny business, or you'll find yourself out an airlock."

As they maneuvered into the docking bay, the scale of the Nereus Sector's internal structure became apparent. It was a dizzying labyrinth of corridors and plazas, all built atop the remnants of older structures.

The air was thick with the smell of ionized particles and the sound of a thousand dialects spoken by species from across the galaxy.

The group disembarked, blending into the crowd. Gustav kept his eyes sharp for any sign of Karis or her minions, while Aildris, Ria and Falco gathered information.

The place was a melting pot of the galaxy's most desperate and dangerous; every alleyway could hold a deal or a doorway to death.

[Mental Transmission Has Been Activated]

'I'll Keep the transmission open. Let me know if you find anything,' Gustav's voice played in their minds as they split up.

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In the dimly lit conference room of another transport vessel, a tense air of urgency pervaded the space.

The room, stark and functional, was lined with digital displays and tactical screens, each casting a soft blue light across the faces of those gathered.

At the head of the metal table sat Captain Helena Voss, a seasoned officer known for her steely demeanor and strategic acumen. Beside her, her second-in-command, Commander Rajiv Malik, whose reputation for meticulousness was unmatched within the fleet.

"The prisoner, Karis, didn't act alone. Our investigations—prior to the incident—had hinted at potential corruption among the crew, but we lacked the evidence to convict. It appears that a few of our own guards conspired with her."

Chapter 1458 Eastern Docks

In the dimly lit conference room, a tense air of urgency pervaded the space. The room, stark and functional, was lined with digital displays and tactical screens, each casting a soft blue light across the faces of those gathered.

At the head of the sleek metal table sat Captain Helena Voss, a seasoned officer known for her steely demeanor and strategic acumen. Beside her, was her second-in-command, Commander Rajiv Malik, whose reputation for meticulousness was unmatched within Triton's intergalactic security agency.

The figure who had been rescued from the wreckage, now identified as Officer Eyhrum Arkwright, stood at the center of attention.

His uniform still bore the subtle signs of his recent ordeal—scorched edges and stiffness to the fabric that spoke of rapid decontamination.

"Officer Eyhrum Arkwright, report," Captain Voss commanded, her voice echoing slightly in the high-ceilinged room.

Arkwright nodded, clearing his throat before he began, his voice steady despite the gravity of his report.

"Thank you, Captain. As you're aware, the transport vessel was destroyed under circumstances that initially suggested an external attack. However, I am here to confirm that the devastation was indeed facilitated from within."

Commander Malik leaned forward, interjecting with a frown.

"Facilitated from within? Explain."

Officer Eyhrum Arkwright swallowed, then continued, "The prisoner, Karis, didn't act alone. Our investigations—before the incident—had hinted at potential corruption among the crew, but we lacked the evidence to convict. It appears that a few of our guards conspired with her."

"Conspired how, exactly?" Captain Voss asked, her expression tightening.

"The conspirators provided Karis with unauthorized access to the ship's critical systems. She gained control over the vessel's security protocols and used it to orchestrate her escape," Officer Eyhrum Arkwright explained, tapping on the data box retrieved from the wreckage to bring up a series of security logs on the screens around them.

The logs showed unauthorized access timestamps and security overrides that coincided with the guards' shifts.

Commander Malik's eyes narrowed at the data.

"And the Rion? How does it factor into this?"

Arkwright sighed, the weight of his next words heavy.

"Karis and her accomplices used the chaos to steal a containment unit housing Rion and through it, they were able to destroy from within that wrecked the entire vessel despite our lockdown protocols being effective."

The room was silent for a moment as the implications sank in. Captain Voss finally broke the silence, "The Rion—do we have any leads on where they might try to utilize it?"

"That remains unclear, Captain," Officer Eyhrum Arkwright admitted.

"However, given the nature of Rion and Karis's known associations, I can draw up possible locations... Ranging from the Darnis Forte to the Nereus sector," he added.

Commander Malik tapped on his console, pulling up star maps and potential trajectories to the locations Officer Eyhrum Arkwright mentioned.

"We'll need to mobilize a task force immediately. If Rion is as potent as our reports suggest, its misuse could result in catastrophic energy surges—potentially on a planetary scale."

Captain Voss nodded decisively.

"Prepare the fleet. I want interdiction cruisers and tactical squads ready to jump within the hour. We must retrieve the Rion and prisoner before things get out of hand."

Officer Eyhrum Arkwright stood firm, his resolve hardened by the near-death experience and the gravity of his duty. "I should join them, Captain. I have firsthand knowledge of Karis's tactics and the events leading up to the theft."

Captain Voss considered him for a moment, then nodded.

"Very well. You'll accompany the task force. Ensure the mission is successful."

As the meeting adjourned, the room buzzed with activity. Officers and aides moved briskly, executing Captain Voss's orders with precision.

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{ Nereus Sector }

The population was a patchwork of the galaxy's denizens—species of all shapes and sizes mingled in the crowded walkways, from the towering, crystalline Praxians to the diminutive, shadow-skirting Nelphim.

Gustav, flanked by Endric and Officer Eyhrum, navigated through the throng with a sense of urgency. Gustav held a small device projecting a holographic image of Karis—a striking figure with angular features and piercing eyes that seemed to challenge even from a mere image.

They approached a group of Xentarians, known for their network of information trading. The Xentarians were tall, with translucent skin that shimmered with a bioluminescent glow, casting a soft light in the dimly lit market.

"Excuse me," Gustav started, addressing the group with a polite nod.

"We're looking for this person. Seen her around?" He gestured to the holograph, which rotated slowly to give a full view of Karis.

One of the Xentarians, whose skin flickered with a dull orange light, leaned closer, eyes narrowing on the holograph.

"Hmm, might've seen her, might not have. Memory's a bit fuzzy," he said, his voice a low rumble.

Endric stepped forward, a small pouch of credits in hand.

"Perhaps this can clear up the fog," he suggested, offering the pouch with a slight sense of disdain for the necessity of the bribe.

The Xentarian's hand moved with surprising swiftness, taking the pouch and weighing it in his palm. After a moment, he shook his head.

"Apologies, travelers, but no—this face doesn't ring any bells. Best of luck to you."

"You little...! But you took the credit" Eyhrum stated with a tone of annoyance.

"Is there a problem here?" The other Xenetarians gathered around while their eyes glowed ominously.

It was obvious that a fight would break out if they continued.

"No problem at all," Gustav responded while gesturing for them to leave.

As they moved on, Eyhrum's frustration was palpable.

"It's always the same in places like this," he muttered.

"Information is just another commodity to be bought and sold, truth not included."

"It doesn't matter. He didn't get anything anyway," Gustav said while handing the pouch over to Endric.

"How did you...?" Eyhrum was utterly astonished.

Behind them the Xeneterian was checking himself in confusion, "I can't find the pouch."

"Better stop joking around and hand it here!" The others voiced without reason.

Gustav, Endric, and Eyhrum continued on their way unhindered.

They continued their inquiries, approaching a variety of species. Each interaction followed a similar pattern: expressions of vague recognition, a request for money, followed by denials or claims of ignorance. Hours passed with little to no progress.

The marketplace was a labyrinth of neon signs and holographic adverts, selling everything from rare metals to contraband biotech. Stalls were manned by vendors of all species, including a group of insectoid Arachnians, their chittering speech almost impossible for the untrained ear to follow.

Gustav approached a stall run by a hooded figure whose species was obscured by the shadows of the overhang.

"We're looking for this woman," he said, showing the holograph to the hooded vendor.

The vendor's eyes, glowing faintly from within the hood, flicked to the image and then back to Gustav. "Many faces pass through Nereus, few stick in the mind without good reason," the vendor replied cryptically.

Endric, less patient now, skipped the niceties of offering a bribe. "She's dangerous and likely looking to trade illegal goods. Any information could prevent serious trouble in your sector."

The vendor paused, "You're not from around here, are you? Every being within the Nereus Sector is dangerous. If you don't know that then you should never have come here."

"We understand but if you do have any information for us, we will be grateful," Eyhrum pleaded.

"Dangerous individuals often seek the quieter docks. Try the eastern docks during the graveyard shift. Fewer eyes, fewer questions," the vendor voiced out.

Thanking the vendor, they headed toward the eastern docks. The docks were less crowded, the lighting dimmer, and the atmosphere tenser. There, the air was thick with the electric buzz of potential danger, the shadows deeper and more enveloping.

As they made their way through the dimly lit docks, every shadow seemed to promise the appearance of Karis, yet she remained elusive, a ghost in the vast machine of Nereus.

As they moved deeper into the docks, a small, sobbing figure darted out from between two cargo containers. She was a young girl, no more than four feet tall, with luminous skin that shimmered with a soft blue light, characteristic of the Aquarii species.

Her large, teardrop-shaped eyes were filled with fear, and a gash on her arm glowed with phosphorescent blood that dripped to the metallic floor.

Ignoring and outright avoiding the child, the others around there continued with their tasks, indifferent to her plight.

The child, desperate and terrified, spotted Gustav and ran to him, her small hands clutching at the fabric of his jacket.

"Please, sir, help me! He's going to take me back!" she pleaded, her voice a mix of whimpers and gasps for air.

Before Gustav could respond, a large, imposing figure emerged from the shadows. The newcomer was an alien of the Krylorian species—tall and broad, with skin that looked like molten lava, bearing cracks of bright orange and red burning across a dark, rocky surface.

In his hand, he wielded a whip made of light that crackled with fiery energy, illuminating his stern, chiseled features.

"Child, return to me at once," he commanded in a booming voice, the fiery whip in his hand snapping sharply as he spoke.

Chapter 1459 He Is Cute

"Child, return to me at once," he commanded in a booming voice, the fiery whip in his hand snapping sharply as he spoke.

The girl cowered behind Gustav, her body trembling. "Please, don't let him take me! It hurts!" she cried out, her voice muffled against Gustav's leg.

They were both speaking different languages but with the translator working Gustav could understand them like they were both speaking English. Even if the translator wasn't in place, with Gustav becoming unbound, he would still be able to understand.

The Krylorian fixed his burning gaze on Gustav. "I see you have found my property. I will thank you after you hand her over and continue on your way."

Gustav, assessing the situation with a calm yet defiant stare, placed a protective arm around the child.

"And what if I don't?"

The Krylorian's eyes flared with anger, and the air around his whip crackled more intensely.

"Hand her over now, or face the consequences."

Around them, the usual hum of the docks seemed to quiet, other figures stepping back, giving the confrontation a wide berth.

It was clear that the Krylorian was well-known and feared in the area.

Eyhrum, who had been watching tensely, stepped slightly towards Gustav.

"We cannot cause any trouble here, especially with him. He has powerful backing," he whispered to Gustav.

The tension was palpable; the air seemed to buzz with the impending threat of violence. Gustav, keeping his voice steady, addressed the Krylorian, "There has to be a way to resolve this without conflict."

The Krylorian laughed, a sound like gravel scraping over metal. "This is the Nereus Sector, not your sanitized cities of law and order. Here, might make right. Now, last chance—hand her over, or you will face the wrath of Rylon."

Rylon expression contorted with disdain as he responded with a snarl.

"She is not for sale. She has already been purchased by the House of Fel on Planet Zurich. As an Aquarii, her value far exceeds what you could offer. They are cherished as... companions, once they come of age. Her kind is... preferred, across the universe."

As the tension mounted around them, Gustav stepped forward, seeking to diffuse the situation with a financial offer, his voice steady despite the crackling energy in the air.

"How much for the girl? Name your price, and we can resolve this without further issues."

Rylon expression contorted with disdain as he responded with a snarl.

"She is not for sale. She has already been purchased by the House of Fel on Planet Zurich. As an Aquarii, her value far exceeds what you could offer. They are cherished as... companions, once they come of age. Her kind is... preferred, across the universe."

Endric's face twisted in disgust at the implications. "That's abhorrent," he spat out, his voice laced with anger. "She is coming with us, and that's the end of this discussion."

Eyhrum leaned in, whispering urgently to both Gustav and Endric.

"This is a bad idea. Do you plan to challenge every atrocity in the Nereus Sector? We're in over our heads already. This will only draw more unwanted attention."

Ignoring Eyhrum's caution, Gustav draped his jacket over the trembling shoulders of the Aquarii girl, shielding her from the onlookers' prying eyes.

"She's not going anywhere with you," he declared firmly to Rylon.

Enraged, Rylon cracked his fiery whip in a swift, menacing arc towards Gustav. The air hissed as the weapon cut through it, aimed directly at him.

With a quick reflex, Gustav reached out and caught the glowing whip mid-air. His grasp was firm, unyielding, and, to the astonishment of Eyhrum and onlookers, he remained completely unscathed by the whip's searing heat.

Rylon, taken aback by Gustav's resilience and audacity, growled, "You'll pay for that, interloper!"

Gustav, now holding the whip, twisted it out of Rylon's grip and tossed it aside. He squared up to Rylon, his stance calm yet assertive.

"This would have gone in an entirely different direction if you had just named your price."

The battle that ensued was swift and fierce. Rylon, fueled by rage, lunged at Gustav with a series of brutal strikes intended to overpower him.

Each move was met with Gustav's precise and calculated defense.

Gustav ducked under a wild punch, pivoted, and landed a solid hit to Rylon's midsection, causing the Krylorian to get sent flying backward.

A trail of flames was left on the ground as Rylon slid across it.

Rylon recovered quickly, jumping back to his feet.

His skin seemed to crackle and brighten with his fury, enhancing his next attacks. He swung viciously, but Gustav anticipated and countered each blow effectively.

With a swift movement, Gustav caught Rylon's arm during an overextended swing, twisted it behind him, and pushed him forward, sending him crashing into a stack of cargo containers.

Bang! Bang!

It was a casual push, yet Rylon's body carved dents on the containers due to the intensity of the shove.

As Rylon struggled to regain his footing, Gustav turned to the girl, who was watching wide-eyed.

"You're safe now. Let's get you out of here," he reassured her, guiding her towards Endric.

Eyhrum and Endric quickly flanked their sides, scanning the area for more threats. The crowd, having witnessed the defeat of Rylon, murmured amongst themselves, their expressions a mix of shock and a newfound respect for the strangers who dared defy one of Nereus Sector's feared figures.

As they retreated, Endric kept a protective gaze on their surroundings, while Eyhrum muttered, "I hope you know what you're doing, Gustav. That was... impressive, but there might be repercussions."

Gustav nodded, aware of the potential troubles. "We'll deal with them as they come. For now..." He turned towards Endric.

"Get her to the ship. Eyhrum and I will continue further."

Endric nodded before grabbing the girl and blinking.

Twwhii~

Both of them instantly vanished.

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In the flickering haze of an intergalactic tavern nestled deep within the Nereus Sector, Aildris, Falco, and Ria found themselves seated across from a female whose knowledge seemed crucial to their quest.

The tavern was a dimly lit den of iniquity, its air thick with the smell of exotic spices and the sound of a dozen alien dialects blending into the background.

Stools and tables, carved from the hulls of decommissioned ships, were filled with a motley assortment of spacefarers and mercenaries, each with their story to tell.

The woman facing them was an Ixthian, known for their iridescent skin that shimmered in the tavern's neon lights, shifting colors with her emotions from a soothing blue to a wary green.

Her eyes were large and expressive, framed by a cascade of luminescent tendrils that served as her hair, reflecting her mood and thoughts.

Aildris leaned forward, his voice low and persuasive.

"You mentioned you've seen Karis before. Anything you can remember, no matter how small, could be crucial for us. Please, tell us everything you know."

The Ixthian woman sipped her drink, a viscous, glowing liquid, before responding. Her voice was melodious, almost musical, "It was many years ago, yes. Karis was not alone. She always moved with a man—Vlaid Zenith. He's not just anyone; he's a kingpin here, one of the most powerful figures in the Nereus Sector."

Falco's interest piqued, he interjected, "Vlaid Zenith? Where can we find him?"

She leaned back, her tendrils shifting to a cautious orange.

"Zenith is elusive, but he frequents the eastern docks. He has an office there, heavily guarded, under the guise of a shipping conglomerate. Be careful, though; he's dangerous and well-protected."

"Does Zenith have any known routines? Times he's less guarded?" Aildris inquired.

The Ixthian woman thought for a moment, her tendrils briefly flashing a thoughtful violet. "Zenith's routines are as cryptic as the man himself. However, he's rumored to personally oversee large transactions on the first cycle of each galactic standard month. If he's not there, his subordinates handle the day-to-day."

Aildris nodded, processing the information. "And Karis—how is she connected to Zenith now? Do you know if she's still in the sector?"

"She was always a ghost, even when seen beside Zenith," she replied, her skin flickering to a soft pink of nostalgia.

"Last I heard, Karis had struck out on her own. But such bonds—especially in crime—are not easily broken. She could well be in contact, or even partnering with him for whatever business they're into."

Falco looked at Aildris and Ria with a strategic gleam in his eye. "Looks like we're heading to the eastern docks."

The environment around them buzzed with the energy of covert dealings and whispered secrets. The tavern's patrons, a collection of the galaxy's most colorful and dangerous individuals, paid little heed to the four, focused as they were on their dark enterprises.

As they prepared to leave, Aildris thanked the Ixthian woman.

"Your help has been invaluable. How can we repay you?"

The woman smiled her skin now a calm shade of blue.

"Keep your credits. Information is currency but he's cute enough in my eyes."

She blew a kiss at Ria before getting up to leave.

Ria's eyes widened in disbelief, "Is she talking about me?"

"Looks like Ria has an admirer," Aildris and Falco chuckled after spotting the shades of red on Ria's cheeks.

"Shut up you two!"

After their separate forays into the shadowy corners of the Nereus Sector, Aildris, Falco, and Ria reconvened with Gustav in a nondescript room they had rented in the eastern docks—the heart of the sector's clandestine activities.

Chapter 1460 Haven't We Already Been Through This?

After their separate forays into the shadowy corners of the Nereus Sector, Aildris, Falco, and Ria reconvened with Gustav in a nondescript room they had rented in the eastern docks—the heart of the sector's clandestine activities.

The room was a small, stark space, minimally furnished with a durable metal table, four chairs, and a couple of dim overhead lights that gave the room a gritty, unwelcoming ambiance.

The windows were shielded with heavy drapes, ensuring their discussions remained private from the prying eyes common in that part of the sector.

Aildris spread out a digital map on the table, highlighting key areas with a laser pointer.

"Based on what we've learned, Vlaid Zenith frequents a complex here," he pointed to a heavily guarded compound on the map.

"He oversees his operations from this point, but getting to him directly has proven difficult."

Gustav, listening intently, nodded.

"Two days and still no sight of him. We need to be there when he returns. Timing is crucial."

Falco chimed in, "Sources say Vloid is due to return tomorrow. He's been off-sector, likely securing another one of his illicit deals. We should position ourselves around the compound early."

Aldris looked over the map, strategizing their next move.

"We'll split up and cover various points. I'll take the north side; it has fewer guards but more surveillance. We'll need to be discreet."

Gustav agreed with the plan.

"Once he arrives, we need to instantly get to him before he vanishes again."

With their strategy set for the next day, Gustav left to explore the streets.

The streets of the eastern docks were dimly lit, lined with derelict buildings and the occasional flickering signs. The air was thick with the stench of oil and damp metal, the ground littered with debris from daily commerce and less savory transactions.

Gustav crossed over a few corpses on the pathways with a straight expression.

It was normal to witness two or more crimes that involved death in the Nereus Sector so it wasn't a surprising view.

As they navigated through a narrow alley, a sudden clatter echoed behind them. Turning, they saw some figures emerging from the shadows—Rylon and a group of rugged individuals, each exuding menace and confidence.

Rylon stepped forward, the light glinting off his scarred, rugged face.

"I think it's time we settled our differences."

Gustav stopped and looked around, his posture defensive yet calm.

"Haven't we already been through this?"

Rylon smirked, cracking his knuckles audibly.

"This sector doesn't welcome heroes. Especially not those who interfere in its... commerce."

"Oh, believe me, I'm no hero. But for your sake, I'd advise you to let this go," Gustav cautioned coldly.

Rylon gestured to his crew, a motley collection of hardened criminals from various species, each more formidable than the last.

"You see, around here, power respects power. You took something of mine, and I intend to reclaim it."

The tension in the air was palpable, a spark away from erupting into conflict. Around them, the alley seemed to close in, the shadows deepening, the distant sounds of the sector's nightlife muffled by the impending showdown.

"You're getting nothing," Gustav stated.

Rylon laughed, a harsh sound that echoed off the metal walls.

"If it's a demonstration you require, then my friends here are more than capable of enlightening you."

Eyhrum leaned in close to Gustav, his voice tense with a warning.

"I told you there would be repercussions, Gustav. The people he's brought aren't just any thugs—they're some of the most dangerous mercenaries on the Nereus, each with powerful abilities."

Gustav, his expression stoic and unyielding, kept his focus on the looming figures before him.

Rylon, seeing the steadfastness in Gustav's stance, sneered, "Last chance, hand over the girl, or face the consequences. You're outmatched."

Gustav replied calmly, his voice resolute, "She's under my protection. I won't hand her over to anyone."

Rylon's grin faded, and he nodded to one of his companions, a hulking brute known across the sector for his ruthless strength.

"Gorath, show our friend here why that was the wrong choice."

The massive figure stepped forward with a menacing snarl and swung a massive fist toward Gustav. However, Gustav's response was swift and brutal.

He sidestepped the punch with surprising agility, grabbing Gorath's arm, and using his momentum to throw him against the metal wall with a resonant thud.

Bang!

A burst of wind spread in every direction as Gorath crumpled, unconscious. His strength had been turned against him.

The alley fell silent for a moment, the remaining members of Rylon's group taken aback by the display of raw power.

Then, without a word, they attacked in unison, their supernatural abilities coming to the fore.

One unleashed arcs of electricity from his fingertips, another morphed his arms into blades of pure energy, and a third's skin turned to stone, making him nearly impervious to physical attacks.

Eyhrum, standing back, muttered under his breath about each adversary.

"That's Voltor, he can manipulate electrical currents more powerful than thunderbolts. The one with blades, that's Krixxus, a metamorph. And the stone-skin is Tarn said to be indestructible."

As the attackers converged, Gustav's right arm began to morph, muscles bulging and skin shifting to a reddish hue that shimmered with a strange, inner light.

With a low growl, he charged forward, meeting the electric arcs with a swipe of his arm that sent a shockwave through the air, disrupting Voltor's focus and knocking him backward.

Krixxus lunged, his blade arms slashing in deadly arcs. However, Gustav ducked and weaved stealthily. After which, he responded with a precise and powerful blow that shattered the energy blades with his hardened arm, sending Krixxus reeling.

Tarn moved next, his stone form lumbering yet surprisingly quick. Gustav faced him head-on, the two forces colliding with a sound like thunder.

Tarn swung, his fists harder than boulders, but Gustav caught one, his grip iron-tight.

With a fierce pull, he unbalanced Tarn and delivered a devastating uppercut with his enhanced arm, the impact resonating through the alley.

Tarn's rocky exterior cracked, and he staggered, stunned by the ferocity of the blow.

With Tarn momentarily incapacitated, Gustav turned to face the final threat. Using his augmented speed, he dodged another flurry of electrical attacks from Voltor, closing the gap between them.

The surroundings were instantly fried as the arcs created deep flaming crevices.

In one swift move, Gustav grabbed Voltor by the collar and delivered a concussive punch straight through his defenses.

Fhrrroouhh~

Gustav's fist phased through his supposed impervious chest, causing blood to jet out like a fountain as Voltor fell to the ground.

The battle ended as quickly as it had begun, with Gustav standing amidst the defeated foes.

He had decided to end it quickly to minimize damage to the surroundings and not bring too much attention to himself.

His transformed arm slowly receded, returning to normal as he surveyed the damage.

Rylon, who had hung back during the fight turned around to flee. His confidence had been completely shattered.

In the shadowy recesses of the Nereus Sector, a figure watched from a distance, his eyes wide with disbelief as he witnessed the swift and brutal dismantling of Rylon's crew by Gustav.

The observer had never seen such a display of power. There was no doubt that the person ahead of him was no ordinary person.

He couldn't believe his luck—or misfortune—to have stumbled upon such a figure. His initial instinct was to turn and run, but curiosity and the potential for a lucrative tip-off compelled him to follow Gustav covertly.

Using the cluttered environment to his advantage, he moved from shadow to shadow, his light steps barely making a sound against the metallic floor.

As Gustav's arm transformed and he dispatched his foes with terrifying efficiency, his mind raced with recognition—this was Gustav Crimson, the universal fugitive whose exploits were legendary across galaxies.

He couldn't believe his luck—or misfortune—to have stumbled upon such a figure. His initial instinct was to turn and run, but curiosity and the potential for a lucrative tip-off compelled him to follow Gustav covertly.

Using the cluttered environment to his advantage, he moved from shadow to shadow, his light steps barely making a sound against the metallic floor.

The Nereus Sector was a labyrinth of narrow alleys, creating a maze of hiding spots. He utilized them to keep himself hidden as he tailed Gustav, who seemed to be heading towards a quieter part of the sector.

However, as Gustav suddenly paused and glanced back, he quickly ducked behind a rusty storage unit, his heart pounding.

He waited, scarcely breathing, until he thought it safe to peek out again. When he did, Gustav had vanished.

He let out a quiet sigh of relief, his body relaxing momentarily—until a voice from behind him shattered the silence.

"Why are you following me?" Gustav's voice was calm but carried an edge that spiked a surge of adrenaline through him.

Panicking, he attempted to flee, his feet slipping slightly on the slick metal floor. But before he could get far, Gustav's hand clamped around his neck, lifting him off the ground with effortless strength.

He clawed at Gustav's grip, his legs kicking as he struggled to draw breath.

Gustav repeated his question, his gaze piercing. "Why are you following me?"

As Sael gasped for air, his eyes wide with fear, Gustav's attention shifted slightly. He noticed the uniform the person was wearing—it was remarkably similar to the one Eyhrum had on when they had rescued him. The realization brought a slight pause to Gustav's actions.

"A Triton guard?"