

Bloodline 1631

Chapter 1631: I Lost

Gustav heart pounded with desperation as Angy blade approached at a speed quicker than he could activate his dimensional bracelet.

[Lightning Blitz Has Been Activated]

As he triggered the Lightning Blitz, his form dissolved into a streak of lightning, racing away from her. He reappeared over a thousand miles away in an instant, basking in the change of scenery.

Experience tales at ReadNovelFull.com.Côm

Before he could even process his next move, a sharp pain erupted in his chest.

Angy's blade, dark and malevolent, had followed him through space and time, stabbing deep into his heart.

His eyes widened in disbelief as he looked down at the blade protruding from his chest. Dark, corrosive energy spread rapidly from the point of infiltration, coursing through his veins and seeping into his very being.

"No... Angy..." he whispered, feeling the life force draining from him.

He dropped to the ground with his body convulsing as the dark energy continued to spread, snuffing out the light within him.

Angy stood a short distance away, her blade still connected to him through a thin, almost imperceptible thread of darkness. Her eyes were blank, devoid of the warmth and life that had once defined her.

In the depths of her mind, a voice whispered, "Good human... You have destroyed the Outworldly."

Suddenly, Angy's eyes flickered with recognition. The haze clouding her mind began to lift, and she stared in horror at Gustav's lifeless form.

Tears welled up in her eyes, streaming down her cheeks as she fell to her knees beside him.

"Gustav?" Her voice broke with emotion.

The voice in her head persisted, cold and unyielding. "Now, kill yourself as well."

Angy clutched her head, "What have I done?"

"Kill yourself!"

She raised the blade towards her neck in the next instant.

Meanwhile, in the void of darkness that was now Gustav's consciousness, he floated aimlessly. The system's voice echoed around him.

("You have died, Gustav. The darkness from the blade is interfering with your regeneration and reincarnation abilities.")

"Does that mean, I can't come back to life?" Gustav questioned.

("If your reincarnation bloodline doesn't kick in... You won't.")

"No no, this can't be the end. There must be something that can be done."

The system responded, its tone almost apologetic. ("I do not know of any solution. The dark energy is too powerful.")

Images from the system's feedback flashed before Gustav, showing Angy kneeling by his corpse, her form racked with sobs. She held the blade to her neck, her resolve faltering as the voice urged her to end her life.

"No, Angy, don't!" Gustav shouted into the void, but his voice reached no ears.

He thought of E.E., Falco, Endric, and Aildris, who were on their way to the alliance. He thought of all the battles they had fought together, the sacrifices they had made. This couldn't be the end. It couldn't.

Angy's tearful eyes met the blade as she prepared to decapitate herself. "I'm sorry, Gustav... I'm so sorry..."

Desperation clawed at Gustav's soul. "There has to be a way," he thought, his mind frantically searching for any glimmer of hope.

In the midst of his despair, a golden light began to glow in the void. It started as a faint flicker but grew brighter with each passing moment. Gustav reached out, his fingers brushing against the light. To his surprise, it felt warm and familiar.

("The Ancient Hourglass,") the system's voice noted with a hint of surprise.

The hourglass appeared above Gustav's corpse, its sands shimmering with an ethereal glow. As it turned upside down, the golden sand within began to flow in reverse. Time itself started to rewind.

Gustav felt a pull as his consciousness was drawn back to the light. The dark energy receded and the wound in his chest closing as if it had never been there.

The blade poised at Angy's neck, suddenly froze. Her eyes widened as she watched the events around her unfold in reverse.

The golden light enveloped both Gustav and Angy, reversing the damage done by their brutal fight.

The buildings they had destroyed reformed, the earth healed, and the very fabric of reality stitched itself back together. The pain and agony that had consumed them both dissipated.

Gustav found himself suspended in the vast, timeless void as the universe rewound. Watching events unfold in reverse, he saw Jack's body reassemble, Angy's deadly blade retreat from his heart, and everything gradually resetting. His consciousness floated above it all, detached from the temporal currents.

He devised a plan to trap and isolate Angy, ensuring her dark influence would no longer pose a threat.

When the universe's timeline reached the point of Angy's initial appearance, Gustav seized the Ancient Hourglass, stopping the reversal. Time halted, and he re-entered his body.

Gustav bolted toward the icy region where Jack and Angy were about to clash.

Arriving just in time, he stood between them. Jack, sensing the shift in time and retaining his memories from the other timeline, immediately lunged to strike Angy down. Gustav intercepted him, shouting, "Stop, Jack! There's another way!"

Jack's expression twisted in confusion and anger. "Gustav, you can't protect her! She's too dangerous!"

Ignoring Jack's protests, Gustav turned to Angy and embraced her tightly. "I will end your torment," he whispered.

Activating assimilation, he began to absorb her body into his own.

Angy struggled as the process began. Her black-and-white form twisted and writhed, trying to escape the pull.

"Krrruuhhh!" she screamed in a tone filled with both rage and agony.

The assimilation was excruciating, each second stretching into an eternity. Gustav felt every ounce of her pain, the darkness within her fighting against him.

The air around them shimmered with energy, the ground beneath them cracking and heaving under the immense pressure.

Jack watched while clenching his fists in frustration. He wanted to intervene, but something in Gustav's resolve held him back. "Gustav, if this goes wrong, I will have no other choice but to end you alongside with her."

Gustav gritted his teeth, his voice strained. "You won't have to..."

The process continued for nearly an hour, the struggle evident on both their faces. Slowly, Angy's dark form began to meld with Gustav's, her features blending into his own. His skin took on a pale hue, and dark tendrils of energy swirled around him.

Finally, with a final, agonizing surge of power, Gustav completed the assimilation. His body now bore a mixture of his and Angy's features, a stark contrast of light and dark. He gasped for breath, feeling the surging darkness within him.

Without hesitation, Gustav plunged his hand into his chest, gritting his teeth against the searing pain.

His fingers wrapped around something solid, and with a fierce tug, he pulled out an entirely human Angy.

She emerged from his body, collapsing to the ground, unconscious but free from the dark influence that had consumed her.

Gustav, now bearing the full brunt of the darkness, fought to contain it. The black energy roiled within him, threatening to overwhelm his senses. His vision blurred, and he felt himself slipping into unconsciousness.

~ "Kill! Destroy! Kill! Destroy! Retrieve the dark angel! Cause catastrophe! Kill the strongest!" ~

His mind raced with all sorts of thoughts that sought to consume him.

Jack rushed forward, catching Gustav before he hit the ground. "Gustav! Stay with me!" he shouted.

Gustav's eyes fluttered open for a moment, his voice barely a whisper. "Jack... Take care of her... She's free now... I have to put myself to sleep... Or the voices will overwhelm me... Help them..."

With that, Gustav's body went limp, the darkness still churning within him.

Jack carefully laid him down beside Angy, both of them unconscious but alive. .

As the wind howled around them, Jack took a deep breath. His thoughts were a whirlwind of confusion and disbelief. "This kid, you truly are something else," he muttered.

'But what did he mean by help them?' Jack wondered internally.

Inside Gustav's spacecraft, E.E., Aildris, Falco, and Endric were gathered around the central control panel.

The ship AI's voice echoed through the cabin, informing them that their journey would take approximately three days, after passing through designated wormholes.

"Three days," E.E. said, tapping the console thoughtfully. "That gives us enough time to review our plans and ensure we're ready for anything."

Aildris nodded, his eyes shimmering with determination. "We've gone over it countless times, but we need to be absolutely certain. There's no room for error."

Falco leaned back in his seat as dark energy swirled subtly around his fingers. "I just hope there won't be any mishaps. Ria is counting on us."

Endric, sitting slightly apart from the others, felt a gnawing unease that he couldn't shake.

He didn't want to alarm the group, so he kept his concerns to himself. As the conversation continued around him, he excused himself quietly and made his way to one of the private spaces in the ship.

The room was dimly lit, providing a quiet retreat from the bustling activity outside. Endric took a deep breath and communicated with Husarius.

A glowing green dot appeared on his forehead, pulsating gently.

"Husarius," Endric called softly, his voice echoing in the small chamber. "I need your guidance."

The familiar, calming presence of Husarius filled his mind. "Endric, what troubles you?"

"There's something... off," Endric admitted.

Chapter 1632: Don't Threaten Me

The scene outside the courthouse was heartwarming as the crowd increased, ranging from people Gustav had helped in the past to reporters and other media outlets.

It seemed like it would never end till Aildris brought his hover car over and revved the engine up to get the group's attention.

Gustav and the others pushed through the crowd to get into the luxuriously built red hover car.

Sighs of relief could be heard within the car as they sped off.

Falco turned to the group with a thoughtful expression. "So, about that vacation we were talking about," he said. "Where should we go?"

Matilda's eyes lit up with interest. "A vacation sounds wonderful. I'm in."

Angy nodded in agreement while her fingers and Gustav's were locked. "Let's go somewhere peaceful, where we can all relax and enjoy each other's company."

E.E. grinned. "I hear the beaches at Elysium Prime City are amazing this time of year. Crystal clear waters, white sandy beaches, and no cosmic battles in sight."

Aldris nodded thoughtfully. "Elysium Prime sounds perfect. We could use some sunshine and relaxation."

Gustav looked around and chuckled. "Elysium Prime it is, then."

Empress Dahria, who had been quietly observing, smiled softly. "Can you participate in this Elysium prime vacation as well?"

"Of course, you're very welcome to," Angy held her hand cheerfully.

"It's nice to finally meet you. Matilda mentioned you in the past," she added.

"Thank you, Angy," Empress Dahria smiled while responding.

They were surprised that Dahria was interested in joining them since she was an Empress and had an entire planet to run but none of them were against the idea.

As the saying went; the more... The merrier.

...

For the next couple of days, the news of Gustav's innocence spread like wildfire across the planet.

Every media outlet, news channel, and social media platform was buzzing with updates and analysis. Headlines blared from every screen: "Gustav Cleared of All Charges!" "World Government Deception Exposed!" "Protests Erupt Over Misconduct!"

The streets of major cities were alive with the sound of voices raised in anger and solidarity.

People gathered in droves, holding signs and chanting slogans, demanding justice for Gustav and accountability for those who had wronged him. The atmosphere was electric, charged with the fervor of a population that felt betrayed.

"Hold the government accountable!" a protester shouted through a megaphone in the heart of Atrihea city which was buzzing with thousands of demonstrators. "We demand the accusers be held accountable! No more lies!"

Another protester, a woman with fiery eyes and a resolute expression, held a sign that read, "Scientists to Court!" She turned to the person beside her. "They wanted to turn him into a lab rat! They should be the ones standing trial now!"

The media scrambled to cover the escalating situation. Reporters stood on the frontlines of the protests, their faces tense as they delivered live updates.

"This is Jane Roberts reporting from the center of Atrihea," a reporter said, her voice barely audible over the chants. "The public outcry has reached a boiling point. Citizens are demanding that the government and the scientists who conspired against Gustav be held accountable."

Inside news studios, heated debates were taking place. Pundits and analysts argued over the implications of the recent revelations.

"It's clear that the government has a lot to answer for," one analyst said, gesturing passionately. "They deceived us all, and they need to be held responsible for their actions."

"But let's not forget the bigger picture here," another countered. "Gustav's display of power raises questions about the true extent of his abilities. Is he really the world's strongest Mixedblood? More powerful than Jack?"

The debates raged on, both in the media and on the streets. Some believed the stories of Gustav's unparalleled strength, citing his recent feats as undeniable proof. Others were skeptical, insisting that the media was exaggerating his abilities.

Meanwhile, the corridors of power were in turmoil. Government officials and alliance leaders were scrambling to address the growing crisis. In a high-level meeting room, a group of them sat around a large table, their faces etched with worry.

"We need to contain this situation," one official said, his voice urgent. "The public is calling for our heads. We have to show that we're taking action."

"The scientists involved are already on the run," another added. "We need to find them and bring them to justice before things get completely out of hand."

MBO officers were dispatched to hunt down the scientists that were shown in the footage displayed by SJ. Their mission was clear: apprehend those who had conspired against Gustav and bring them to court. The officers moved cautiously knowing that the eyes of the world were upon them.

They had to make it look like they were truly rooting out the bad ones so many had to be sacrificed.

In a quiet, dimly lit apartment, one of the fugitive scientists, Dr. Malcolm Voss, paced nervously. His once-respected career was in ruins, and he knew that he couldn't stay hidden forever. A news report on the TV caught his attention, and he listened intently.

"The MBO has issued arrest warrants for several scientists, MBO officers and government dignitaries," the anchor said. "Authorities are urging these individuals to turn themselves in peacefully."

Dr. Voss sighed, running a hand through his disheveled hair. "This is a nightmare," he muttered to himself. "I never wanted it to come to this."

Just then, a knock on the door startled him. He froze, his heart pounding. The knock came again, more insistent this time.

"Dr. Voss, we know you're in there," a voice called out. "This is the MBO. Open the door and come out with your hands up."

Dr. Voss mind raced as he thought about how to get out of this situation.

He turned to the balcony and grabbed a jacket to cover himself before jumping out.

The moment he activated his bloodline to turn himself weightless, a figure in MBO uniform leapt from below and grabbed onto him.

Other MBO officers in the surroundings, sprang into action as well.

Energy binding nets were shot upwards and the scientist got covered up instantly, causing his bloodline energy to immediately dissipate.

He fell from the air alongside the other MBO officer

They were both caught and the officer got freed.

Stay tuned to ReadNovelFull.com.Côm

"Dr. Malcolm Voss, you're under arrest," one of the officers said while stepping forward to place him in energy cuffs. "You have the right to remain silent..."

This wasn't the only place where such an occurrence was taking place. The other scientists were being hunted as well.

Commander Xanatus did well to wittle out the corrupt MBO officers as well and added to the list. The officers who were being hunted were the hardest to scrap up but they were slowly making progress.

As the protests continued and the search for the fugitive scientists intensified, the world watched with bated breath. The story of Gustav's innocence and the subsequent fallout had captivated everyone, sparking a global conversation about justice, power, and the responsibilities of those who wield it.

The days passed, the protests showed no signs of abating. Crowds gathered outside government buildings, demanding transparency and accountability. Signs bearing slogans like "Justice for Gustav" and "End Government Corruption" filled the streets.

One evening, a group of protest leaders managed to secure a meeting with high-ranking government officials. The atmosphere in the room was tense as the two sides faced each other.

A protest leader, a young woman with a fiery gaze, spoke first. "We represent the voices of the people. We demand that the government take full responsibility for its actions and hold those responsible accountable."

A government official, his face lined with stress, responded. "We understand the anger and frustration of the public. We are taking steps to address the situation and ensure that justice is served."

The young woman leaned forward, her voice steady but fierce. "Words are not enough. We need concrete actions. The scientists who conspired against Gustav must be brought to justice, and the government must implement reforms to prevent such abuses of power in the future."

The official nodded, recognizing the gravity of the situation. "We will do everything in our power to make things right. The people deserve the truth, and we are committed to providing it."

...

...

...

Elysium Prime was a paradise on Earth, a perfect escape from the chaos that had gripped the planet. The city beach, with its pristine white sands and crystal-clear waters, was the epitome of serenity and beauty. The sun hung high in the sky, casting a golden glow over everything it touched.

Angy, Empress Dahria, Vera, and Matilda were all dressed in vibrant swimsuits that accentuated their figures.

Angy's suit was a playful, floral print that matched her sunny personality. Empress Dahria's was an elegant, deep blue that complemented her regal bearing. Vera chose a fiery red number that was the opposite of her damp spirit, and Matilda's swimsuit was a smooth black, understated yet stunning.

They laughed and chatted as they relaxed on the beach, enjoying the feel of the warm sun on their skin and the gentle breeze that carried the scent of the ocean.

Chapter 1633 PASSWORD

E.E whistled. "Damn. If I didn't know better, I'd say that's the real slimy bastard."

Elevora exhaled softly. "I'll manage his shift reports and communication patterns. But you must hurry."

"According to the memories, the 42nd commander is known for unpredictability. He changes his protocols every few cycles," Aildris stated.

Angy's horns flickered. "Good. We'll handle him."

Aildris placed his hands on the ground, releasing a stream of color that expanded across the station floor. "The phasic lock is set. No one enters this chamber without permission. And if they try... they'll find themselves looping the same hallway until they give up."

Falco grinned. "Handy."

"Alright. Let's move. The sooner we leave this place, the sooner we stop the next target," E.E stated while turning around.

As they prepared to depart, Elevora glanced at them one last time. "Don't take too long. And be careful."

Angy gave her a faint smirk. "You too."

The ship detached from the station two minutes later, drifting into the glittering expanse of open space. Elevora's illusion stood at the command deck window of the station, silently watching them leave.

...

...

The vast dark nebula ahead swallowed the ship as the stars stretched into long lines of light from the acceleration.

The transition into hyper-drift rattled the metallic frame before stabilizing.

Inside the ship's med-bay corridor, Angy adjusted her gloves with a sharp exhale. "We're cutting it close. We can't afford week-long travels between commanders if we want to find the leaders."

Aildris sat cross-legged near the pilot seat, recalibrating trajectory charts. "Unfortunately, even though his memories held location of others, the 42nd is the closest. The others are scattered across cosmic sectors."

E.E leaned back in his chair. "Man... this is like running through a chain of bosses with no save points."

Falco chuckled. "Except these bosses are uglier than anything in games."

Angy leaned against the wall near the viewport, watching the crystalline dust clouds drift by. "Elevora's a good actress. But she has to pretend to be that thing for days."

Aildris folded his arms with a calm look. "She'll manage. Her emotional presence is stable. And she knows the stakes."

They remained quiet for a few moments before Aildris continued. "But we need to talk about strategy. According to the database from 62nd ship, the 42nd commander isn't like the others. He is... inventive."

Falco raised a brow. "Inventive how?"

Aildris tapped the console, bringing up a floating holographic display of the commander's profile. It was an elongated alien being with translucent plates over its limbs and a set of spines along its skull.

"His station is known for experimental security systems," Aildris explained. "Living defenses. Autonomous traps. Rotational gravity corridors. You name it."

E.E. sighed. "Of course. Why make things easy?"

"Our objective remains the same," Angy reminded them. "We capture him, extract information, then replace him."

E.E tilted his head. "You think Elevora can keep handling multiple stations at once?"

Falco shrugged. "She's tough. But we should hope we don't reach that point."

Their journey through the cosmic drift continued for hours before the engines entered cruising mode, filling the cockpit with an ambient buzz. The lights dimmed to a soft blue.

...

...

((Six Days Later))

The closer they drew to the coordinates the 62nd commander had reluctantly handed over, the more the ship trembled. At first it was small, like a gentle ripple rolling through the metallic frame, nothing the vessel couldn't handle.

But as time passed, the turbulence escalated into violent convulsions that made the entire body of the ship shudder like an animal sensing a predator.

E.E braced one hand against the vibrating wall. "Uhh... this is new."

Falco's feathers bristled as his talons scraped the floor for balance. "This isn't environmental. Something's doing this."

Aldris sat calmly but his eyes narrowed as colors shifted within his pupils. "It's intentional."

Angy simply lifted her head without saying a word at first.

She sniffed the air as though she could smell the turbulence, and frowned. Her instincts felt... wrong. Like something was out there, tampering with the fabric of the space around them.

The ship lurched sideways again, sending them sliding across the floor. E.E cursed as he slammed into a control console. "Whoa whoa whoa—what the hell is this?!"

"Cosmic storms shouldn't reach this intensity," Aildris muttered. "Not even near a collapsing star."

Falco fluttered up onto a higher rail to steady himself. "I don't like this. I really don't—"

The ship jerked so violently that alarms blared causing lights to flash across the cockpit.

Angy was already at the main console. "The readings are going crazy. The spatial density is... fluctuating like someone's squeezing space itself."

E.E swallowed. "That sounds bad."

"It is," Angy replied flatly.

Their customised ship normally endured everything. Not even cosmic hurricanes, gravity spikes and spatial distortions had ever shaken it this much. But now every alarm in the system blared red and error warnings flashed across the screens.

"We need to pull back," Falco warned. "Whatever this is, it's not natural."

"That would be wise," Aildris responded, "but I don't think we're being allowed to."

As if proving him right, the storm intensified. Space rippled around them like boiling water and their vessel groaned due to the pressure.

Then Angy pointed forward. "There. Look."

E.E squinted through the cockpit glass... and his jaw dropped.

"Yo... that's a star, right? A literal star?"

A massive burning sun sat ahead, radiating blinding heat and cosmic energy. It filled their entire view, burning gold and white with plasma swirling across its surface like an ocean of fire.

All of a sudden, it moved.

The star twisted, folded, compressed, reshaped itself until its surface contorted into the shape of limbs.

Arms, legs, a torso, grew out of it. After a few seconds, it finally completed its transformation into a massive humanoid form whose head alone dwarfed their ship.

"Oh hell no," E.E whispered.

Falco squeaked, "No one said anything about fighting a whole damn star!"

Aldris leaned forward while assessing the situation. "This... is some sort of guardian."

The star-being bent down slightly as its face of fire formed rudimentary features while its eyes burned white-hot.

"PASSWORD..." its voice boomed like solar flares ripping through space.

Angy tensed. "The 62nd commander..."

E.E hissed, "That bastard! He sent us here without telling us we'd have to pass—this!"

Falco's feathers puffed nervously. "This looks like a setup."

"It is a setup," Aildris agreed calmly. "He mostly expected this to be the end of us which would in turn free him."

The star-being enormous molten hand rested beside their ship like a continent of fire as it leaned closer.

"PASSWORD..." it repeated.

Angy muttered, "Think. What did the commander tell us about the 42nd commander?"

E.E scratched his head. "Something about him being... strict? And weird."

Falco nodded quickly. "He kept... livestock? No, no—he collected something..."

Aildris added, "He was obsessed with... patterns? Or was it routine?"

They threw out their first guess.

"ORDER."

The star-being paused and for a moment, it seemed like the flames stilled...

"WRONG."

Its voice shook the ship like thunder and a beam of heat seared inches past them, vaporizing empty space.

"Try something else!" Angy barked.

E.E's eyes darted. "I remember Aildris said he liked—uh—control? Discipline?"

"REGULATION!" Falco yelled.

The star-being paused again.

The group had tensed looks as they waited for the verdict.

"...WRONG."

The being's core brightened as it leaned back.

"You now have ONE attempt left before incineration," it declared as energy gathered in its chest, forming a miniature sun.

Angy clenched her teeth. "One more try..."

They huddled close, thinking desperately.

"What else did he say? What else did he—"

Falco interrupted, "He mentioned food once. Something about how the 42nd liked to eat—"

E.E snapped his fingers. "Beef? No—he talked about raising—"

"Lifestock!" Falco corrected.

"Was it... cows?" E.E said uncertainly.

"Do space cows exist? Would aliens even call them cows?" Falco voiced with uncertainty.

Angy repeated the word softly. "Herd..."

Aldris frowned. "That seems too simple."

The being's chest glowed brighter, preparing to fire.

"We don't have much of a choice..."

They made the final guess.

"HERD!"

Silence...

Utter silence...

The star-being remained motionless... and then said:

"WRONG. The answer was cattle."

"What?!" E.E yelled. "That's—THAT'S CLOSE TO WHAT WE SAID!"

But the being didn't care.

The attack was already launched.

A sun-sized fist of nuclear fire crashed forward and hit the ship.

Everything exploded and light swallowed the entirety of this region in space.

The spacecraft shattered into a billion flaming fragments, melting metal instantly into floating bright droplets. Angy, E.E, Aildris and Falco were scattered like dust, flung outward by a cosmic shockwave.

Angy's body tumbled through space like a ragged projectile. Her skin tore along her arms, leaving streaks of blood drifting in zero-gravity. She coughed out more, struggling to get bearings as she landed on a chunk of their obliterated ship.

Airless and frozen silence pressed against her, but her body instinctively held its breath.

Space didn't scare her anymore.

What scared her was the star-being raising its hand again and this time, Aildris was directly in its line of attack.

A third horn suddenly erupted from her forehead, crackling with dark-red energy.

Chapter 1634 42nd Commander's Station

A third horn suddenly erupted from her forehead, crackling with dark-red energy.

Her heartbeat slowed...

Space slowed...

Time crawled...

Her body glowed with a violent white aura as she launched herself forward, bouncing between drifting ship fragments like stepping stones.

She moved so fast that the fabric of space bent around her, leaving ripples behind her motions. Her feet barely tapped each fragment before she had already left it, accelerating further.

The star-being's fist inched toward Aildris at the speed of dripping honey.

Angy reached him, circled around the titan again and again with her horn emitting a red blazing glow.

All of a sudden, time came to a standstill and began to crawl backward.

Reality rewound like a film playing in reverse...

The shattered fragments of their ship pulled back together.

Aildris, E.E, and Falco shot backward through space, back into their seats.

And the moment, Angy stopped running, she vanished and reappeared inside the ship at the exact moment before they had given the final answer.

Her whole body shook with exhaustion as blood rolled down her face.

She wiped blood off her upper lip and steadied her breathing.

The star-being rumbled:

"Wrong. You now have only one attempt left."

Angy didn't give the team time to panic. She inhaled sharply and yelled with absolute certainty:

"CATTLE!"

The others turned toward her. "What the hell Angy?"

Falco's eyes widened. "Wha—Angy, what if—"

"Trust me," she whispered with a trembling tone.

There was a long pause that slowly turned into a suffocating, drawn-out silence.

Then the star-being tilted its massive flaming head.

"Correct."

The storms calmed instantly. The turbulence stopped. Space smoothed out like glass as the star-being parted its fiery arms to let their ship pass.

E.E slumped backward. "Angy... what the hell did you just do?"

She wiped drying blood off her cheek, exhausted but composed. "Bought us the only future where we didn't die."

Aldris stared at her for a long moment. "Your power... it rewound spacetime."

Falco gulped. "And you still have blood on you... so it really happened."

Angy nodded once, quietly. "Let's not make a habit of it."

The ship eased forward past the titan as it dissolved slowly back into the shape of a star. Its body unfolded into nuclear waves until it returned to being nothing more than a distant celestial sun.

Their journey to the 42nd commander's station became unnervingly calm after the star sentinel incident.

Outerspace stretched endlessly around them, deceptive in its serenity. After nearly being obliterated by a sentient star the size of small galaxies, even the peaceful buzzing of the ship's thrusters felt suspicious.

Falco broke the silence first.

"Anyone else still hearing that thing saying 'Wrong!' in their head?"

Angy's eyebrow twitched. "If you want, I can rewind time and make you experience it again."

Falco quickly looked away. "...No thank you."

Aildris smirked. "Relax. We're past that nonsense. If another star asks for a password, Angy's paying."

"I literally saved everyone," she muttered.

E.E scoffed. "And we're grateful. Doesn't mean we won't tease you."

A faint grin appeared on her face. "I hate you guys."

For the next few hours, they settled into a steady pace through open space, scanning every direction. All of them were thinking the same thing but none voiced it: If the outer perimeter had a sentient star guarding it, then the 42nd commander's domain might be exponentially worse.

Still, they pressed on.

Sometime later, Angy leaned forward in her seat with her eyes narrowing.

"Guys... do you see that?"

Falco squinted at the viewport. "Looks like—no way. That's not a ship."

E.E leaned closer. "It's a structure... but it's huge. What are we even looking at?"

As they approached, the scale became clearer and more horrifying.

Floating in the void of nothingness was not a station, not a ship, but a monolithic building... a fortress easily the size of a mountain range.

Its architecture looked ancient yet advanced.

Pointy tipped dark metal twisted around crystalline tubes that glowed like captured nebulae. Giant metallic rings slowly rotated around the central mass, whirring with energy signatures they'd never seen before.

Beneath it rested a fractured moon that was split into three massive chunks but tethered together by glowing gravitational binders, like metal stitches holding a corpse.

Falco let out a low whistle. "This... this guy is not like the others."

Aldris nodded grimly. "The 42nd commander is said to never leave his post. Now I understand why. Whoever built this didn't intend for him to be disturbed."

E.E adjusted the ship's trajectory. "Well... too late for that."

As they drew closer, a new sound filled the cockpit.

Their ship slowed as a rotating ring of scanners, extending kilometers wide, activated and swept over them in vertical beams of golden light.

From the fractured moon below, massive cannons followed their movement.

Hundreds of mechanical drones the size of trucks hovered around, ready to vaporize anything that failed inspection.

A robotic voice boomed across their comms:

> "STATE YOUR DESIGNATION. ALL VESSELS ARE SUBJECT TO FULL VERIFICATION. ATTEMPTED EVASION WILL RESULT IN DISINTEGRATION."

The group exchanged looks.

Falco cleared his throat. "Are we sure disguising ourselves as transferred Gustavo members was enough?"

"We forged everything to perfection," Aildris reminded. "And the 62nd commander's authority codes are still active. Elevora is handling that part."

Angy took a deep breath. "Alright. Let's do this."

E.E activated the forged identification program. Their ship's signature flickered, then stabilized into a Gustavo Alliance cruiser profile.

> "TRANSMISSION RECEIVED. INITIATING LEVEL-SEVEN ENTRY PROTOCOLS. DO NOT MOVE."

The scanner beams intensified.

Moments turned into seconds and seconds into a full minute...

E.E muttered, "This is taking too long... something's suspicious."

Just when they were starting to get worried...

> "IDENTITY VERIFIED. PROCEED."

The beams vanished and the massive docking gates opened like the jaws of a cosmic beast.

Entering the station was like flying into an entire city suspended in endless night.

The scale was impossible to describe. They could see hangars that stretched for kilometers, thousands of soldiers in formation, transport trams shooting across energy bridges, powerful machinery grinding at work.

Everything was in strict order.

Security here was ten times anything they'd encountered before.

And the interior made no sense.

Falco's jaw dropped. "How... the hell is it bigger inside? The outside wasn't even a fraction of this."

"It's dimensional layering," Aildris whispered. "Pocket space folded into physical space."

E.E exhaled shakily. "Of course a ghost commander would use ghost architecture..."

They landed at their assigned platform where a massive alien superior with six arms and grey metallic skin waited.

His eyes were suspicious. They looked exactly like the type that hated incompetence.

He growled the moment they stepped out.

"You four. State your designations."

E.E stepped forward confidently. "Transfer squad from Commander 62's sector. Orders authenticated."

The officer scanned their forged IDs.

Beep.

Beep.

Beep—

Accepted.

He lowered the device, unimpressed.

"Commander 42 does not tolerate inefficiency. Every step you take, every action you report, will go through me. You do not breathe without permission."

Falco mumbled under his breath, "Friendly."

The officer's six eyes narrowed. "What was that?"

"Nothing, sir," Falco said quickly.

The officer thrust a data pad into Angy's chest.

> "Your tasks will be assigned in cycles. You are not to leave your designated floor without explicit authorization. The upper levels are strictly restricted. The highest level is punishable by death even for looking at it."

Angy swallowed. "Understood."

He studied them, especially Angy.

Her tension.

Her presence.

Then he grunted.

> "Try not to die. It's inconvenient to clean."

He walked away.

As soon as he was gone, E.E whispered, "We are so screwed."

They rode a transport tram deeper into the structure, passing thousands of Gustavo alliance soldiers.

"What the hell is this place?" Falco whispered as he watched a battalion of armored beasts march in formation. "The 62nd commander didn't have half of this."

Aldris nodded. "Because the 42nd commander isn't just another commander. His station is practically a fortress of last defense."

Angy looked up. The highest floor was visible only when massive cables and energy fields shifted but otherwise, it was shrouded behind a shimmering barrier.

"That must be where he is," she whispered. "But how do we get up there?"

Falco spread his hands. "We can't. Not without tripping every alarm in this place and probably dying.... well I won't die but I can't say the same for you guys..."

E.E added, "And we can't just fight upward. There are literally tens of thousands of them. There will be too much casualties and someone will definitely raise an alarm that would ruin our whole operation."

There was a brief silence and then Aildris exhaled heavily.

"Then we need to think differently."

Angy glared. "How?"

He tapped the side of his head.

"Recon. Information. And patience."

He pointed upward.

"The 42nd commander is a ghost. No one sees him. No one talks to him. No one even knows what species he is."

Falco frowned. "Then how do we reach someone no one has access to?"

Aildris' tone turned dark.

"By going through the ranks... definitely, the higher you get, the better the chances are..."

Chapter 1635 Dark Object

The six-armed officer who was their assigned captain was the only one of the only few with direct authority to move about the place as they pleased.

If anyone knew how to get up there, it would be him.

But...

E.E whispered, "We can't interrogate him. If he disappears or acts weird, this whole place collapses on us."

Angy nodded. "We need access without suspicion. So whatever move we make..."

Her eyes hardened.

"Has to be clean."

Their first assigned task was simple: inventory scanning. Menial work. Boring work. Work that low-ranked soldiers normally handled.

Which was perfect, because it allowed them to move through multiple areas without suspicion.

The first few days inside the 42nd commander's station were a suffocating blur of protocols, restrictions, and silently ticking pressure.

Every hallway felt like a prison corridor lined with armored ghosts ready to pounce at the slightest mistake. The place was an impenetrable cage of order and the commander, they learned quickly, was the one who demanded it.

They weren't even allowed to sneeze without someone logging it.

But information? That they managed to gather.

Slowly.

Quietly.

Painstakingly.

Angy had been the first to notice the strange containers filled with massive slabs of meat hauled from across multiple star systems.

At first, they thought it was military rations.

But after overhearing two guards gossiping near the elevator one morning, the truth emerged.

> "Commander 42's cattle are acting up again."

"Maybe he should stop raising a whole herd up there. The upper floor stinks like death and barbecue."

The four nearly froze.

Falco elbowed E.E. "You hearing this?"

E.E nodded slowly. "Cattle... again."

Angy smirked, whispering, "The star sentinel's password makes more sense now."

Falco blinked. "So this guy seriously farms alien cows on the top floor?"

"Apparently," Aildris answered. "And he's obsessed with meat."

"Great." Falco threw up his hands. "We could've guessed anything that day, but the answer was cattle. Of course."

What mattered more, however, was what this revealed.

The commander never left his floor.

Everything he needed; food, water, communication, staff, was all automated or remotely delivered. No in-person meetings. No patrols. No inspections.

He was, in every sense of the word... a ghost.

A ghost with cattle.

Through observation duty, overheard conversations, and access to limited fragments of data, they began piecing together his daily routine.

Every day, precisely:

0400 hours: Systems check and internal monitoring (done entirely by machines).

0600 hours: Feeding time for the cattle herd.

0900 hours: Strategic reports reviewed.

1200 hours: Meat preparation—apparently he cooked his own meals.

1500 hours: Extended silent hours (no communication with anyone).

1800 hours: Herd inspection.

2200 hours: Universal lock-down.

He never slept, or if he did, the systems considered it "silent activity mode."

He never met his officers.

He never left the top floor.

He was an unseen ruler over a fortress of thousands.

And the fortress guarded him with layers of defense that made the 62nd commander look like an amateur.

Not only were the floors biometric-locked...

Not only was spatial warping rendered impossible...

But even time dilation was regulated.

Falco roared, unleashing a wave of dark energy from his hybrid form, launching several of the sticky masses backward.

Aldris floated behind, completely unbothered, distorting the colors around him and dispersing the incoming jellies before they touched him.

Every one of those things that got closed to him was drained of color.

Then the alarms changed.

"Warning: Intruders nearing Command Hub—Activating Slam Doors."

Several thick, black partitions dropped from the ceiling, slicing off corridors, sealing entryways, and redirecting the group into isolated pockets. Lights turned dark blue. The ground rumbled as if the station itself were preparing for metamorphosis.

"Dammit, he's sealing off every corridor!" E.E cursed.

But then... all motion slowed.

Not only was spatial warping rendered impossible...

But even time dilation was regulated. When Angy attempted to use her speed, she felt the backlash immediately. A shockwave of temporal stabilizers pushed back against her abilities.

She couldn't accelerate beyond the allowed limit here.

She couldn't accelerate beyond the allowed limit here.

And that would prevent her from speeding to the point where she turned impossible to spot.

Everything was safeguarded.

Everything.

They held a group meeting in the safe corner of their assigned quarters—tiny, square metallic rooms with matte grey walls and uncomfortable beds that buzzed with scanner fields.

Falco flopped onto a bed and groaned.

"This place is hell. I tried to sneeze earlier and the bed recorded the vibration frequency."

E.E shook his head. "We can't make a move. Not like this."

Angy paced. "We need the top floor. But every path is sealed."

Aldris tapped the schematics they'd memorized. "Even the waste disposal tunnels have surveillance and biometric gates. We can't warp, can't speed, can't break through, can't sneak."

Falco sighed dramatically. "So basically, we can't do anything except behave and pray?"

"No." Aildris' eyes gleamed. "We take the captain."

E.E blinked. "Aildris, did you hit your head on an energy grid? We can't kill the captain. The moment he goes missing—"

"We're not killing him," Aildris interrupted. "We're need to find a way to control him. Make him do our bidding."

"And how the hell are we supposed to do that?" E.E questioned while throwing his hands up.

Falco sat up. "I might have a way... a dark object..."

E.E froze. "...dark object?"

Falco nodded slowly.

"It's not mine technically. It's something from my father's dark dimension. I don't use it unless I need to. It attaches to someone's psyche—but only when they're already entertaining dark thoughts. And once that happens, I become capable of controlling them."

Aildris leaned forward. "If we want to impersonate him or use him for access, we need him compromised. Controlled. We need his thoughts leaning into darkness so Falco can use this dark object thing."

Angy frowned. "But he's a rigid, uptight, annoyingly disciplined officer. The guy looks like he bathes in rules. How are you supposed to make someone like that have dark thoughts?"

Falco cracked his knuckles.

"That's the hardest part. We need him to willingly consider..."

He shrugged.

"...his most primal impulses."

E.E stared at him. "So we need to... corrupt him?"

Angy shook her head. "Not corrupt. Just... loosen the screws."

Aildris sighed. "It'll take time. Days. Maybe weeks."

"Then we start now," E.E said firmly. "We don't have the luxury of failing."

Over the next few days, they executed the most morally confusing plan they had ever devised.

They needed to befriend the captain.

Convince him he liked them.

Make him comfortable enough to let his guard down.

And then steer his mind, patiently and carefully towards the shadows hidden inside him.

The captain, much to their surprise, wasn't entirely robotic. He was rigid, yes. Ruthless, yes. Loyal, absolutely. But beneath that armor of discipline, there were cracks.

Small ones.

And cracks could be widened.

They started by working flawlessly and completing tasks faster than any soldier. They exaggerated their strengths but never enough to appear suspicious.

The captain noticed.

One morning, he walked into their sector and nodded.

> "Your efficiency is above standard. I acknowledge it."

Falco whispered internally, Progress.

The next day, Angy brought up conversations about food, specifically meat.

"Sir, what's the best meat you've ever tasted?" she asked innocently.

He raised a brow.

> "Why does this concern you?"

"Because your commander loves meat," Falco joined. "We figured everyone here must have refined taste."

A strange pride flickered across the captain's face.

> "He is... unmatched in preparation."

The door cracked wider.

The next time, E.E approached carefully.

"Sir, do you think primal desires make people weak or normal?"

The captain paused.

> "Primal desires are distractions."

Falco replied quickly, "Or they are indicators of strength. Nature isn't weak."

Something shifted in the officer's expression as if the idea was new.

~ DAY 4 ~

They discussed internal conflicts, stress, anger.

Falco added subtle nudges.

"Everyone has thoughts they hide," he said. "Dark ones. But that's normal. Sometimes it means the mind is sharper."

The captain didn't respond, but he didn't shut it down either.

The seed had been planted.

They carefully pressed on:

They complained about unfair rules to get him to admit frustrations.

They made him laugh at subtle jokes.

They discovered he harbored resentment toward officers in lower sectors who slacked off.

They encouraged him to express it.

Every minor irritation was stoked into an ember.

Every ember nurtured into warmth.

Every warmth into heat.

Aldris quietly analyzed his reactions.

"He's starting to think aggressively," he reported.

Falco nodded. "Dark object works best when the mind has tasted the idea of wanting more."

E.E asked, "You mean greed?"

"No," Falco replied. "Control."

And then their opportunity finally arrived.

~ DAY 7 ~

The group was assisting the captain in reviewing troop discipline reports when he slammed his fist against the console.

> "INCOMPETENT FOOLS!"

The outburst shocked everyone, including himself.

He rarely raised his voice.

Angy immediately leaned in. "Sir? You okay?"

He growled.

> "These officers undermine my work. If I had my way... I'd—"

He stopped himself.

Falco's eyes sharpened.

"That's natural, Captain. Wanting to enforce order. Wanting weakness removed."

Chapter 1636 Hitting A Brick Wall

A long long silence ensued, followed by a deep breath.

> "...Yes."

"Wanting to get rid of them... not just from the post but snuffing out their existence completely..."

The captain's eyes narrowed as he gazed forward deeply while dark thoughts plagued his mind.

"Yes..." he whispered.

The moment he acknowledged this, the door became wide open.

Falco rubbed his fingers together and a thin tendril of shadow crawled across his palm like ink, swirling, condensing into a tiny black mote, barely the size of a grain.

Only Angy saw it.

Her eyes widened but she said nothing.

He mentally whispered, 'Hook.'

The mote vanished into the air.

It slid through space like a ghost, undetected and seeped toward the captain's thoughts.

Right now, he was weakly thinking:

> "If only I had full control... If only I could enforce my rules without restriction..."

And that was enough.

The dark object latched onto the thought like a parasite.

Angy saw Falco shudder.

E.E noticed. "You good?"

Falco exhaled shakily. "It's working. He's thinking. He's spiraling."

Aldris asked quietly, "How long until we get full control?"

Falco closed his eyes.

"A few more days of nudging his thoughts... and he'll be pliable. His mind will obey the command we plant. He won't even realize he's under control."

Angy nodded.

"We're close, then."

E.E looked up toward the top floor, hidden behind distance and distortion.

"The commander is right there... behind all those levels."

Aldris's eyes glowed faintly.

"And soon, we'll have the only key that can get us through all of them."

Falco opened his eyes fully.

"Then let's begin phase two."

Angy asked, "Which is?"

Falco answered with a coldly.

"Make him trust us so deeply... he believes helping us is his own idea."

With the Captain now under Falco's influence, everything changed.

Before this, their movements had been narrowed down to strict corridors, predetermined tasks, and a suffocating chain of command that left no room for exploration.

Every elevator required authorization, every door a specific clearance, and even conversations were cross-checked through the station's internal surveillance. It was an iron cage disguised as an operational facility.

But now... now the bars had loosened.

Falco's control wasn't absolute. His "Dark Object" ability didn't turn someone into a puppet. Instead, it wrapped itself around the target's darkest impulses, magnifying them, nudging them, steering them. It was subtle. Dangerous. Unpredictable if used carelessly. But perfect for what they needed.

The Captain, Draven Orik, had seemed like a stiff, by-the-book officer who valued discipline above anything else. But over the week they spent bonding with him, they learned he carried quiet envy. He hated that his peers on the upper floors lived better. He resented how promotions came slowly. He feared dying as a mid-tier Gustavo alliance officer forgotten in the belly of Floor 13. And most importantly, he fantasized about having more power than he currently possessed.

That was the trigger Falco needed.

The night Falco finally fully activated the Dark Object within Draven's mind. The alien man froze for only three seconds before blinking, clearing his throat, and carrying on as if nothing had happened.

His eyes now carried a new glaze... something like ambition laced with recklessness.

Just enough to make him cooperative.

And now, with this tiny crack in the structure of authority, their campaign to ascend began.

The very next morning, Draven summoned the four of them; Aildris, Falco, Angy, and E.E, to his private office. It was still early and the station's recycled air swept cold through the corridors.

They exchanged quick glances as they entered, aware but cautious. Draven sat behind the desk, tapping a digital holopad with a smug, almost arrogant expression.

"You four," he voiced while looking them over with uncharacteristic interest, "I've been reviewing your performance records."

"You four," he voiced while looking them over with uncharacteristic interest, "I've been reviewing your performance records."

Performance records that didn't exist before Falco's intervention, E.E thought dryly.

"You're all wasted down here," Draven continued, leaning forward. "Your skillsets belong on higher floors. Floor 10 at the very least."

The man slid four recommendation documents across the desk. Strong recommendations. Hand-signed. Stamped.

Angy blinked. "Sir... all at once?"

"Yes. Your teamwork is exemplary," Draven replied. "I want to see how far you rise."

Falco kept his face blank, but under the table, Aildris sensed his relief.

This was exactly what they needed.

With a polite salute, the four of them exited the office. Once outside and far from the nearest surveillance node, E.E whispered:

"Well damn... this is happening."

Angy folded her arms, still skeptical. "Let's not celebrate yet. We rise one floor, then another, then another. They monitor transfers heavily."

Falco shrugged, completely unfazed. "And? That's why we have the man upstairs thinking he's destined for greatness. Every time we rise, he rises. He'll approve anything that strokes his ego."

"And if his ego collapses?" Angy countered.

Aildris answered quietly, "Then we collapse it for him. But for now... this works."

And so the climb began.

The transfer process was surprisingly smooth. With the Captain's handwritten endorsements and Falco's slight mental tug keeping Draven confident, they were approved for reassignment within six hours.

They were moved to Floor 10.

And the difference was immediate.

The corridors were wider, polished with reflective plating. The lighting was softer, almost warm compared to the harsh white glare of the lower levels. There were lounges. Fresh air vents. Actual windows, not to the outside universe, but to enclosed gardens created as morale boosters. People walked less like overworked machinery and more like members of an elite institution.

"This is already better than the lower floors," E.E muttered under his breath.

"But not enough," Aildris replied.

Their work assignments changed too. They were no longer doing monotonous grunt tasks. Now they had access to logistical oversight, technical maintenance on higher-grade systems, and data terminals containing glimpses of operational details from the upper floors.

It was on Floor 10 that they uncovered more information about the 42nd Commander.

On their second day, while Angy was running data checks on the floor's subsystem logs.

"This guy really lives like a king on the roof of a kingdom that never sees him," Angy muttered while peeping information about the 42nd commander.

He rarely slept. Rarely left his quarters. Rarely interacted with the station at all.

"And people still fight for positions close to him?" E.E asked.

"Of course they do," Falco replied. "He decides which planets get liberated and which get burned. His favor can make anyone's career."

Aldris added quietly: "And his floor... the higher you go, the better the privileges. People spend a lot of time trying to climb."

And so the four of them continued their rise.

Floor 10 turned into Floor 12.

Then Floor 14.

Every floor gave them clearer glimpses of the command structure.

Every floor gave them new obstacles too.

Restrictions tightened the closer they got. Surveillance increased. Access points narrowed to fewer lifts and corridors. The air grew colder, more sterile. Personnel carried themselves with vigor, like everyone above Floor 15 had undergone some unspoken conditioning.

Their fake camaraderie with Captain Draven kept him signing authorizations whenever "his team" needed them.

Although, there was only so far that a captain's power could take them.

And the climb wasn't without close calls.

On Floor 15, a senior officer intercepted them during a shift change.

She wore black-trimmed armor and shot them a piercing gaze. "You four... you were on Floor 4 last week."

Angy stepped forward calmly. "Yes, Captain Orik transferred us personally."

The officer's eyes narrowed. "Rapid promotions... too rapid..."

Aldris bowed slightly. "We work efficiently, ma'am."

The officer blinked stared at them briefly before speaking.

"Fine. Move along."

As they passed her, E.E muttered under his breath, "One of these days, someone's gonna look too close."

"That's why we have to accelerate," Angy replied.

The more they rose, the more detailed the Commander's profile became.

By Floor 16, they had access to partial surveillance logs from the top floor, though heavily restricted. They saw only silhouettes through static. But they confirmed:

The Commander still couldn't be accessed by just anyone even up there.

His cattle ranch took up 30% of the highest floor.

He had a personal cooking unit staffed by elite chefs.

He strictly controlled access and only two people were ever allowed into his chamber.

Only one team per month could be assigned to the corridors.

"He's paranoid," Aildris concluded.

Falco nodded. "The kind of paranoia we can exploit once we reach him."

Transferring upward became harder with each floor. The command structure required more layers of approval. They needed to stay in top working reports. Behave. Stay invisible while being exceptional.

Draven was not so much as useful at this point. His clearance and recommendation letters no longer helped.

However, in a certain situation, he falsely inflated their contribution logs which helped a lot.

Thus they reached Floor 19.

Just one level below the access threshold that led to the elite elevator... the only one that went to the Commander's floor.

This was where their progress hit a wall.

Chapter 1637 Passing All Six Categories

This was where their progress hit a wall.

Access to Floor 20 required not only recommendation but a direct nomination by a high-ranking overseer. Someone above even Captain Draven.

"Now this," Angy voiced while staring at the document requirements, "is a problem."

Falco smirked. "Not really. We just need the right person."

"Then we need to dig," E.E said.

Aldris exhaled slowly. "We're this close."

Angy nodded. "One more push. We get to Floor 20... and then the Commander will be within our grasp."

...

...

Meanwhile, close to the center of the universe...

Gustav's body glowed brighter with light seeping into his skin, circulating through his veins like radiant rivers. Tiny crystalline patterns bloomed across his arms and chest like tattoos made from stars.

The five relics sent spindles of light straight into him. Each beam carried a different frequency, a different color, a different function. They didn't pierce him... they seemed to be melting instead.

"He's... merging with everything," Sersi whispered.

And she was right.

He was.

The flow of information into Gustav's mind was beyond comprehension. The universe was opening itself to him... every particle, every law, every ripple of existence.

He was becoming one with it again.

Endric's voice was steady as he stepped back.

"I'd say in about two weeks or a bit beyond that... the ritual should be completed..."

Sersi sighed. "And during this time, we have to make sure there is no interruption."

Ria glanced around nervously. "Can we even tell what's happening out there? Time feels strange here."

Endric nodded. "It might distort a little. We've only been here a few days but it might already be more in the outside world..."

"So we're blind," Ria concluded.

"Let's just stay vigilant," Sersi mumbled.

Gustav floated at the center of the formation, glowing brighter with every passing breath.

A sudden ripple spread outward in every direction like a circular shockwave through the ocean of space. They felt it like a tremor in their bones.

Ria grabbed his chest. "What... what was that?"

Endric's face turned pale.

"That," he whispered, "is the consequence."

The ripple spread instantly across star systems.

Every galaxy.

Every planet.

Every dimension within the known universe.

Even the beings sleeping in ancient voids jolted awake. Creatures who had slumbered since before light existed stirred. Civilizations across distant worlds looked up at their skies as constellations flickered. Energy storms broke out on distant nebulae.

Even the most primitive beasts felt it.

Every living being understood one thing:

Something was awakening...

Something old.

Something powerful.

Something that had once shaped reality itself.

Sersi held her head. "People will notice."

Ria nodded. "Everyone will notice."

Endric exhaled shakily. "A being reclaiming 100% outworldly power... the universe cannot hide that. The balance cannot hide that."

"Hopefully, it won't point enemies to our location..."

...

...

Back at the 42nd Commander station, some members of the Gustavo Alliance were gathered at a particular place.

Because today... was test day.

A day hundreds of officers had prepared months and even some, years for.

A day that would decide who got the privilege to ascend upward.

To the floors where the Commander's shadow itself fell.

The testing arena was a vast battleground enclosed by a giant dome shimmering with a translucent shield. Angy, E.E, Falco, and Aildris stood among five hundred Gustavo officers.

Some paced nervously. Some grinned with arrogance. Some prayed under their breaths.

The four disguised infiltrators stood perfectly calm, though each for painfully different reasons.

Angy's fingers twitched with impatient excitement.

Falco's eyes half-closed, reading the thoughts swirling around the room.

Aildris analyzed the metallic walls, already memorizing every reflective surface.

E.E stretched lazily, pretending disinterest though his mind raced.

Loudspeakers crackled.

"ASCENSION TEST—BEGIN."

The dome lit up, and the floor beneath everyone glowed up before transforming into a simulation grid. Holographic enemies, obstacles, traps, and energy fields materialized across the wide area.

But this was no ordinary simulation.

This was a full-grade evaluation.

There were six categories. Candidates had to pass at least five to be promoted.

First was the Combat Category...

A wave of mechanical beasts swept forward, each designed to replicate the strength of an Elite-class soldier.

Angy sped through them in seconds but she had to hold back due to the speed limitations.

Falco controlled shadows, letting them bite and bind.

Aldris manipulated his color spectrum to distort vision, confusing the simulation bots.

E.E simply dodged and countered, swiftly.

Dozens of Gustavo officers fell behind but the four passed smoothly.

The second was Tactical Maneuver Category

Gravity fluctuations shifted randomly. Everyone had to navigate through space-pockets, inverted gravity walls, and zero-G fields to reach a floating marker.

Angy burst through like she was born for it.

Falco's dark constructs created footholds.

Aldris surfed through each distortion by altering his own visual form, letting gravity slip.

E.E stumbled once on purpose, but cleared the field easily.

The third was Mental Fortitude Category

Illusionary hells. Sensory inversion. Fear-projection.

Falco nearly smirked... this was his home turf.

The fourth was Weapon Mastery Category

Rows of weapons appeared. Candidates had to cycle through each while being attacked.

The fifth was the Team Coordination Category

Random teams were formed. None of the four were placed together which made things trickier but nonetheless, they still put in their all.

Angy was placed with arrogant candidates who underestimated her, but she dominated the field so efficiently that her teammates followed instinctively.

Falco's team became puppets unknowingly, manipulating them secretly.

Aldris simply complemented everyone's strengths.

E.E carried his group quietly.

All four passed again.

The sixth happened to be Commander Proximity Protocol

The final and hardest test.

Candidates were placed in different simulated environments and tasked with "approaching" a virtual recreation of the Commander without being detected.

This test was legendary.

Even Gustavo elites had failed it repeatedly.

The simulated Commander avatar had extraordinary sensory detection, unpredictable teleportation bursts, and immediate kill protocols for intruders.

Candidates needed perfect stealth, perfect timing, and perfect strategy.

This was where most failed.

The simulation ended with a bright flash.

Holograms shut off.

Announcers walked forward mechanically.

"Final results compiled."

The entire dome fell silent.

One by one, candidates' names flashed red or blue on the giant screen.

Red — failure.

Blue — promoted.

Red, red, red.

Many top soldiers cursed.

Angy folded her arms, bored.

Falco exhaled slowly.

Aildris raised an eyebrow, unsurprised.

Then—

Blue.

Just one.

The name:

E.E

(Gustavo Alliance Personnel #77-B)

PASSED ALL SIX CATEGORIES.

Gasps filled the hall.

Some officers glared in envy.

Some respected him instantly.

Some whispered.

Angy, Falco, and Aildris, feigning alliance personas, masked their reactions.

The announcer continued:

"Candidate #77-B is authorized to ascend to the Top Floor Access Pathway."

Angy whispered through barely-moved lips,

"Damn it. Only one of us? That screws the entire plan."

Aldris nodded calmly. "Then he simply has to succeed in our place."

Falco watched E.E with narrowed eyes. "He can..."

E.E forced a grin and shrugged casually.

A smooth and metallic, floating ring descended from the ceiling, glowing purple along its edges.

Only E.E and the others who passed were allowed to step inside.

The guards surrounding the lift radiated hostility. Anyone else trying to approach would die.

Falco whispered from afar, "Stay calm. Remember the mission."

Angy added quietly, "We're counting on you."

Aldris gave him a stoic nod.

E.E stepped onto the lift with a straight face... but inside?

'Holy shit holy shit holy shit... why me?

Why am I the only one moving up?

Why couldn't Falco or Angy pass?

Damn it—and I can't rely on vortexes because of these spatial distortions...'

The lift rose slowly.

His heart pounded.

He was going alone into the lion's den.

The elevator stopped at a serene, unnervingly quiet hallway. The air felt heavier, like reality thickened here. Energy-packed walls whirled like living things. Everything was pristine. Every corner meticulously cleaned.

These floors were nothing like the chaotic middle sectors.

This was where privileged officers lived.

This was where rules tightened to suffocation.

This was where the Commander resided.

A soft voice echoed from speakers:

"Candidate #77-B, welcome to the Executive Living Quarters."

Doors opened on both sides of the hallway, revealing lush private rooms, lounges, training areas, and surveillance corridors. Officers here stood straighter, looked more composed, and walked with silent lethal confidence.

But they all looked stressed too.

Because being closer to the Commander meant being closer to punishment.

Being closer to danger.

Being closer to expectations.

E.E swallowed hard.

'Alright, man... don't fuck up. Don't trip. Don't draw attention. Just get to the Commander, knock him out, and let the others up here... simple, right?'

He gave himself a mental slap.

The moment he tried to subtly test a vortex portal in a corner...

The space around him bent unnaturally like heated glass.

His vortex flickered a bunch of times and when he put something in, they appeared in an entirely different location from what he wanted.

"Ssshhhii—STOP!"

He canceled the move instantly, stumbling forward.

Chapter 1638 The Anchor

"Ssshhhii—STOP!"

E.E. canceled the move instantly, stumbling forward.

He coughed, shaking out his trembling hands.

'Okay. No vortex. No instantaneous travels. This is hell...'

He straightened up as an officer passed by.

"Everything alright, 77-B?"

E.E forced a laugh. "Heh... new altitude. The air's thick."

The officer grunted approvingly. "It'll pass."

E.E kept walking.

This place is a death trap...

Over the next two hours, E.E played his part perfectly.

He blended in.

He studied patrol patterns.

He gathered intel:

The Commander never left the top floor but that was old news. In actuality, even on the top floor, the commander never left his chambers.

Meals were brought to him.

No one met him face-to-face except two most trusted captains.

Entry into the final room required two levels of biometric clearance and a rare authorization card that only those two possessed.

E.E muttered to himself as he leaned against a wall, pretending to take a break:

"If I'm getting in there, I need a clearance card... or I need to incapacitate someone who has one..."

But touching anyone here was dangerous.

These elites were tens of times stronger than standard officers.

Still not a problem for E.E individually but raising suspicion would bring consequences.

He needed subtlety.

One mistake or one suspicious movement and the entire mission would collapse around him faster than a collapsing wormhole.

This floor wasn't just heavily guarded, it was watched.

Everyone who worked on the 42nd commander's floor was ruthlessly disciplined. Here, mistakes weren't forgiven, they were erased.

And unlike the lower floors, where hundreds of guards patrolled wide hallways filled with noise and activity, this area was downright eerie.

Quiet.

Unnaturally quiet.

As if even sound feared offending the commander.

The corridors glowed with dim blue light, metallic walls polished so perfectly that E.E could see a distorted reflection of himself every time he passed by. Large sigils carved into the walls subtly rippled like molten metal, indicating the ever-present spatial distortions twisting through the station like invisible currents.

This remained his biggest problem.

If E.E tried to open a vortex anywhere on this floor, even within the same hallway, it would be thrown off-course. Instead of sending him where he wanted, it could spit him out on a lower floor... or in the vacuum outside... or inside a wall.

After a day, E.E received his new post:

Guard Duty — Corridor C-Alpha — Commander's Private Chamber Entrance

It sounded like an honor but in reality, it was punishment disguised as reward.

Standing guard outside the most feared being's personal chamber for twelve hours a day?

Most people hated it.

But E.E?

He was thrilled.

Standing here meant he might eventually find a way to get access.

It meant he could observe everything.

Observe... and take advantage.

Two days passed.

Two long, exhausting days.

And during that entire time, E.E only saw the commander three times and even then, it was only glimpses.

The 42nd commander never exited his chamber.

Only the slightest visual of a massive shadow shifting behind a massive meal table hinted at his presence. A faint silhouette with multiple limbs, hulking shoulders, and faint glowing stripes along the body.

Whenever he approached got up to approach anywhere, even from the inside, the ground vibrated faintly.

The 42nd commander was a big guy no doubt.

Unfortunately, E.E had finally confirmed the information he got, noting that only two people were ever allowed inside his chamber.

Two trusted attendants.

Two faces no one dared question.

Two individuals responsible for delivering his food, drinks, documents, and anything else the commander required.

They moved in total silence and walked with mechanical demeanor.

These two were the only ones with legitimate access.

E.E watched them closely for those two days, memorizing their movements, their timing, their paths. Every time they entered the chamber, it was the same procedure: scan their identification sigils, push the cart of food or supplies forward, and step inside without hesitation.

And every time they exited, the door sealed instantly behind them.

"That's it," E.E murmured under his breath on the second night. "That's the pattern..."

He finally saw his opening.

An idea began to form.

It was risky and insane, but the only way to bypass the distortions without alerting the entire station.

He would find a way to anchor a vortex to something that ways gets taken into the commander's chamber everytime.

And the only thing that would definitely be taken inside every time was none other than his food.

The next cycle, E.E requested a break from his guard post. It was normal and would draw no suspicion. The guards rotated in pairs, and he only needed twenty minutes.

His destination?

The isolated food preparation chamber on this floor.

When he pushed open the heavy metallic door, hot steam blasted into his face along with a scent he could never mistake: roasted meat from giant beasts and cattle captured across various conquered territories.

Huge slabs of flesh with some glowing, some steaming and some still twitching. The meat were marinated, seasoned, and cooked using a combination of plasma heat and gravity pressure.

It was grotesque.

And apparently, the commander loved it.

Several staff members with reinforced exosuits to resist the heat were working hard slicing through pieces that weighed several tons.

E.E forced a pleasant smile.

"Smells incredible today," he said cheerfully.

One of the workers glanced back. "New guy from the guard rotation, right? The one assigned to Corridor C-Alpha?"

"Yeah," E.E chuckled. "Trying to get used to the smell."

That earned a laugh. It seemed harmless. He kept himself relaxed with hands loose at his sides.

He wasn't here to fight.

He couldn't arouse suspicion.

He wandered between the workers, nodding politely, pretending to admire the enormous chunks of meat being prepared.

Then he spotted a large slab designated for the commander's meal.

It was half the size of a shuttlecraft.

It was perfect.

While the staff were turned away, busy hauling another carcass, E.E slipped his fingers into his pocket and pulled out a tiny bead.

It was black, smooth, colorless and absolutely inconspicuous.

He had already imbued it with a spatial tethering sequence, turning it into an anchor.

He proceeded to simply placed the bead deep into a crack along the roasted flesh, letting the juices coat it and hide it perfectly.

Then he stepped back.

Just another guard on break.

"Whew," he exhaled casually, "smells good but I'm dying from the heat here."

"Get used to it," one worker laughed. "This is the warmest floor in the station."

E.E grinned and waved as he exited the preparation room.

E.E returned to the corridor like nothing happened.

Hours passed and then, there was finally movement.

He stiffened as he saw the attendants approaching the corridor, pushing the massive slab of prepared meat on a hovering reinforced trolley.

Everything about their presence demanded silence.

They didn't acknowledge E.E.

They didn't speak.

They didn't glance sideways.

They simply stopped at the towering metallic door of the commander's chamber.

The door scanned their identities.

Lights flickered.

Locks disengaged.

KCHK—VRMMMM—

The sealed entrance slid open.

The two attendants pushed the trolley in.

Then stepped out a few minutes later.

The massive door sealed behind them with a resonant metallic thud.

E.E didn't need to see inside to know—

The bead was now inside the commander's chamber.

His heart hammered.

"Alright," he whispered. "Time to gamble."

He positioned himself at the perfect angle in the corridor. Enough to avoid the attendants' line of sight, but close enough that he wouldn't have to move when the moment came.

He cracked his knuckles.

Stretched his fingers.

And waited.

'He better not eat it... wouldn't want to appear within and burst him open from the inside out...' E.E shuddered at the thought but he still had to wait for now.

Minutes after the attendants were gone, he snapped his fingers.

"This... better work."

E.E felt a jolt run through his arm and ripple across his entire body. The bead responded instantly since it was a direct anchor. It was like tying a rope between his ability and a fixed location.

Which meant that wherever he opened his vortex from, it would lead to only a singular position... where the anchor was location.

Technically a stable spatial coordinate inside the distorted zone but could only lead to one place.

He didn't have time to hesitate.

He clapped his hands together and pulled.

Space bent...

Folded...

Compressed into a swirling black-purple vortex right in front of him...

No alarms triggered...

No distortions lashed back...

No red lights flashed.

The tether stabilized the wormhole perfectly.

E.E didn't give himself time to think.

He jumped in and shot out on the other side—

The instant E.E's boots hit solid ground, the entire chamber trembled.

For a split second, neither he nor the monstrous alien seated before him moved.

Chapter 1639 The Unexpected Escape

The 42nd Commander who was an enormous, brute-bodied thing with four muscular arms, thick indigo skin, and two heads stacked atop each other, froze in place mid-bite. The hunk of meat in his grasp was nearly the size of a full-grown human with juices spraying as his jaws clamped down.

It was an absurd, grotesque, almost comical tableau.

But the shock lasted only an instant.

Fortunately, E.E reacted first.

His hand shot forward with lightning lightning speed.

Before the commander could even swallow, E.E clamped his fingers around the alien's thick, ridged throat and slammed him backward. The chair made from alloy that could stop low-grade plasma rounds groaned, then buckled under the sudden jolt.

E.E didn't give him breathing room.

He yanked the creature forward violently, then drove his elbow repeatedly into the alien's upper skull.

Once.

Twice.

Thrice.

The impacts echoed across the chamber with heavy thuds reverberating off metallic walls.

The commander's second head blinked in confusion. Its jaws hung open in delayed shock while the first head which was currently suffering the assault, gurgled violently, unable to force down the half-chewed meat clogging its throat.

"Go down, damn you!" E.E hissed, tightening his grip.

Up close, the creature was far worse than E.E had imagined from afar. It was nearly thrice as large as a full grown human with breath that smelled like fermented blood and rotting organs. Its skin radiated heat, and its muscles writhed beneath the surface like cables pulled by unseen machines.

The commander clawed desperately at E.E's wrist with two of his hands while the other two tried to pry the half-swallowed meat from his throat. The choking gurgles turned frantic, bubbling with saliva and half-chewed flesh.

E.E's elbow hammered the skull again.

And again.

But for all the force E.E applied, it was like elbowing a tank's armor while standing on a rollercoaster. The commander had two heads, and the second one which was now fully aware of the ambush, bared sharp, overlapping teeth and hissed out a warbled snarl.

Then suddenly—

Everything went wrong.

The lodged meat burst from the commander's throat as he violently vomited it back out. A thick, ropery mass of half-digested flesh slapped wetly onto the metallic floor.

And the very next instant...

His entire body ignited in a blinding blue glow.

"Oh hell—"

A compressed wave of force exploded outward.

Unlike a typical energy shockwave with heat and outward kinetic push, this one felt like someone had grabbed reality itself and wrung it like a wet cloth. The air folded, rippled, then slammed outward in an expanding ring.

The impact lifted E.E off his feet like he weighed nothing.

He crashed into the ceiling so hard the alloy dented inward. The pain shot through his back like a lightning rod had been driven straight down his spine. His vision blurred from the sudden collision before he dropped back down, hitting the floor with a sharp grunt.

"Dammit..."

As E.E tried to stabilize himself, the commander was already scrambling away with all four arms clawing across the metallic floor, leaving long, fresh scratches behind.

Thick, dark blood ran from the wounds E.E left on his skull.

Despite choking, vomiting, and getting slammed around, the commander moved with an urgency and panic E.E didn't expect from someone who maintained total authority on this floor.

His instinct was obvious:

Run.

He instantly shot straight for the chamber's reinforced door.

"Oh no you don't." E.E growled through clenched teeth.

He dashed forward with incredibly speed, ignoring the pain radiating up his spine from the earlier impact as he closed the distance.

Just a meter before the commander's hand could slap the emergency release panel—

E.E seized one of his massive arms.

With a grunt, he pivoted and heaved.

He flung the massive alien brute like a sack of refuse.

The commander sailed through the air with his huge frame spinning sideways before smashing into the metallic wall on the opposite end. The wall dented inward with a loud, thunderous KRANG!

The alien bounced off with a grotesque wobble and collapsed onto the massive pile of steaming, heavily seasoned meat the staff had delivered earlier.

Plates and metal trays clattered everywhere.

Still, the commander wasn't unconscious.

E.E sprinted again, determined to beat him senseless before the alien glowed up again.

The commander's large body shimmered violently with the same blue light from earlier.

"Oh crap—it's happening ag—"

E.E broke off his rush and dove to the right on pure instinct to evade the incoming attack.

A split second later, the alien's body detonated with the same spatial shockwave as before. The blast rippled outward, tearing through trays, smashing chunks of meat against the wall, and whipping the air into chaotic spirals.

But this time, there was an additional effect added to it.

The alien's body shrunk.

E.E blinked.

"Wait, what—?"

The commander compressed sharply, collapsing inward like he was being vacuum-sealed by invisible strings. His massive limbs pulled inward, torso tightened, and in a violent second—

He shrank down to quarter the size of a pinky finger.

A miniature, squeaking, bright-blue glowing version of the commander's alien body zipped through the air like a panicked mosquito.

"What the hell is that ability!?" E.E shouted.

The tiny commander darted straight toward the door. The entry scanner was not even designed to detect something so small.

He was going to slip through.

No way E.E could catch him physically at that size.

So E.E did the only thing he could.

He snapped his fingers.

A wide swirling vortex burst open in front of the door with powerful suction force, pulling the tiny 42nd commander directly into it.

E.E's chest loosened in relief. "Got you."

The commander's tiny form would emerge from the paired exit vortex inside this very chamber and E.E could grab him instantly.

But seconds passed.

Then more.

Nothing appeared.

E.E's brow furrowed.

Then his breath hitched.

Because he realized—

There was no exit vortex forming in the chamber.

It should have happened instantaneous, suck the commander in and shoot him out here but seconds had already gone by.

His heart plummeted.

That wasn't possible.

His portals always came in pairs. Always. Entry point and exit point. That was the foundation of his ability... two spatial windows linked by a stable anchor.

In this case, the vortex entry he created in front of the door should have linked to the bead inside the chamber and created an exit vortex right here... the same bead he placed in the meat, the anchor he crafted to bypass the chaotic distortions of the station.

But the exit point wasn't forming here.

E.E scanned the chamber frantically and froze.

He spotted the small bead completely crushed, lying slightly under the pile of meat where the commander had fallen earlier.

It had been smashed and utterly flattened probably when the giant alien had slammed down into the food.

Since the bead, his anchor... was destroyed... this meant...

The exit vortex would no longer appear here.

It would no longer appear anywhere he intended.

It would open wherever the distortions forced it to.

E.E's stomach twisted.

He felt the "pull" of the second portal through his spatial sense and his internal compass locked onto the exit point's location.

His heart dropped into a pit.

At first, he prayed he sensed wrong but he didn't.

He felt it clearly.

He felt where the exit vortex had manifested.

His face drained of color.

"...you've got to be fucking kidding me."

The exit vortex wasn't inside the chamber. It wasn't elsewhere on the final floor. It wasn't within the station at all.

It was... outside the station.

In open space.

"Fuck!" E.E cursed again in frustration.

The tiny commander he'd just thrown into his own vortex...

Had been spat out into the vacuum of space.

Loose.

Alive.

And rapidly drifting.

E.E clenched his fists as annoyance stirred through his insides.

This was bad.

Very bad.

His anchor was gone. The vortex had thrown the commander outward, completely beyond the station's lockdown-controlled interior. The alien commander was likely already signalling for help or worse, escaping into the endless void.

E.E's pulse spiked.

If the 42nd commander remained out there for too long, he would find a way to send a signal.

He would warn others.

And the entire operation...

The infiltration...

His cover...

All of it could collapse.

E.E closed his eyes briefly...

This had spiraled into disaster faster than he expected.

He needed to act and he needed to act now.

He proceeded to deactivate a few things within the chamber and tap on a few more buttons to put some configuration into place but there wasn't time to do any more than this.

Without wasting any more time, he rushed towards the vortex which was still opened and jumped in.

Space swallowed E.E whole.

Chapter 1640 This Is It

The moment E.E exited the vortex, the cold silence struck him like a slab of iron.

Stars stretched endlessly across the void, drifting in warped patterns because of the station's spatial distortions bleeding outward. His boots touched nothing. Only weightless infinity.

He immediately shut the vortex behind him since he couldn't risk the 42nd commander slipping through again.

"Where the hell are you..." E.E muttered.

He spun around, scanning every angle. His senses stretched out as far as possible, but the distortions made everything flicker or shift irregularly.

Locating a target in normal space was one thing... locating a small, shrunk alien with unpredictable energy signatures out here was practically impossible.

He clicked on the secret comm device inside his ear.

"Angy, Aildris, Falco—bad news. The commander slipped out. The bead got crushed. I'm out in space."

Falco: "WHAT? Bro, tell me you're joking—"

E.E: "I'm going after him."

He didn't wait for more responses... he didn't have time.

He forced calm into his lungs and extended his perception again...but the result was the same.

Empty void.

Nothing.

Just when he was about to move and check a different angle... a shadow passed over him.

A massive shadow.

E.E looked up.

A sphere of throbbing and expanding flesh, descended from above like a living meteor. It slammed downwards in a brutal arc.

"Shi—!"

BOOOOOM!

The blow connected squarely with E.E's torso, sending him hurtling through space like a kicked pebble.

His body spun for hundreds of feet and eventually stabilized but before he could even think of counterattacking—

The 42nd commander was already behind him.

"Who... are you?"

The alien's dual voices echoed with both heads speaking in perfect sync.

A glowing blue aura burst from his form. His size had already reverted from the tiny pinky-form, becoming even larger than he was initially.

He was now a thirty feet tall beast with two thick necks, two elongated heads with serrated mandibles, and four long arms rippling with muscle. His skin looked like hammered stone, and veins glowed beneath.

E.E coughed, clutching his abdomen.

"Damn... you hit harder than your ugly face suggests..."

But the commander didn't let him finish.

"You sick ontruder."

He charged.

E.E barely raised his arms in time before the 42nd commander slammed into him again.

The impact caused a small detonation in space, sending spatial fractures rippling outward like shattered glass.

The commander swung again and again, creating shockwave after shockwave with each blow.

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

E.E couldn't catch a breath. His bones vibrated. His vision blurred. He tried opening a vortex, but the distortions twisted it sideways and nearly cut him in half.

He immediately canceled it.

The 42nd commander sneered.

"Spatial power? Useless trick."

The commander's next hit smashed E.E across the space, causing his back yo hit a drifting asteroid, breaking it into three chunks.

E.E gasped, then forced himself upright.

He wiped blood from his lip.

"Okay... okay. So that's how it's gonna be."

He cracked his neck.

"Round two."

The commander didn't waste words. He turned into a streak of blue, appearing directly in front of E.E with a raised fist.

E.E ducked.

Just barely.

The commander's punch obliterated the entire asteroid behind him.

E.E retaliated instantly, lashes out with a vortex flicker... not a full portal, just a micro-shift to appear behind the commander. But the distortions twisted it slightly, causing E.E to appear diagonally above instead.

Still, he used it.

He kicked downward, slamming his heel onto one of the alien's heads.

The commander jerked, losing balance for the first time.

E.E didn't hesitate.

He vanished again with another short flicker with very little distance to prevent the spatial distortions from messing with it too much.

He appeared right in the commander's blind spot.

His fist glowed as he punched the alien in the spine.

CRACK!

The commander roared with his four arms thrashing as a shockwave exploded from his body.

"GHH—!"

E.E was blown backward. His limbs rattled and his ears rang.

He was fighting a higher ranked commander alone and he could feel the difference. The alien wasn't sloppy like the 62nd commander, this one was disciplined, well-trained, and faster than he looked.

This was bad.

Really bad.

But turning back was not an option.

Back at the station, on a fractured moon, Angy sped through the floors without the initial restrictions.

Due to how quick she could move, not a single person spotted her and that was thanks to E.E getting rid of the speed restrictions from the commander's chamber.

He clenched his fists.

A few seconds later, Angy stood at the highest floor corridor, breathing slowly.

The room E.E had fought in with the 42nd commander was spotless. She'd cleaned every scrap of blood, every cracked tile in the wall, every collapsed table. Her speed made it possible, but her nerves were on edge.

If even one senior officer noticed anything suspicious...

Everything would collapse.

To make matters worse, if the spatial distortions weren't disabled soon, E.E would have no way of returning safely.

Unfortunately, even though E.E managed to deactivate a lot of the restrictions that affected their bloodline abilities, he didn't get to deactivate the spatial distortions.

This was due to the fact that, the control for that wasn't present in the 42nd commander's chamber.

Now it was up to Angy to deactivate it.

Her gaze hardened.

"Where do they keep the distortion cores...?"

She sprinted down one flight of stairs, across a security wing, stealing keycards, timing patrols and redirecting cameras. All of this was done in less than ten seconds.

While she worked, Aildris and Falco raced through the station's internal systems on lower floors, trying to find an exit route so they could leave to help E.E.

E.E dodged another swing, narrowly avoiding fingers that could easily crush a city.

The commander was relentless with his two heads snapping in alternating directions, tracking E.E's movements like duel predators.

"You smell... wrong," the commander hissed.

"Not Gustavo... not Alliance..."

E.E smirked bitterly.

"Wow. What gave it away? Me punching your head or me throwing you across your own room?"

The commander's four arms extended outward, glowing with blue veins.

"You should not have come."

A pulse formed.

A massive one.

E.E sensed it too late.

"SHIT—"

BBBBBBBOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!

The explosion was silent in space, but E.E felt all of it. A crushing wave flung him across the void like a rag doll. His body folded, tumbling helplessly, causing his vision to flicker.

All this time he had been holding his breathe but now he truly wished he could breathe.

The commander figure turned into a streak again and before E.E knew it, he was already behind him.

"You die now."

Two hands grabbed E.E by the skull.

Two more grabbed his arms.

And the last set prepared to twist.

E.E's eyes spun, stunned from the earlier blast.

Then, he remembered something.

Something stupid.

Something risky.

But his only chance.

His fingers twitched.

A mini vortex spark flickered behind the commander's second head.

The commander turned slightly and in that brief moment, E.E used the distortion to his advantage.

He kicked.

The partial vortex buckled and sent the commander's upper body twisting sideways instead like stepping on a glitching platform.

The grab loosened.

E.E tore himself away while his face turned green.

He floated backward with his arms trembling. He couldn't hold his breathe for much longer. This had to end as soon as possible.

The commander hissed, regaining balance.

"You play with broken space. Foolish."

E.E coughed blood.

"Foolish? Bro, I've been hanging out with Gustav for years. 'Foolish' is our middle name."

He raised both hands and began opening a very vortex despite the distortions.

One unstable enough to drag everything nearby into it.

The distortions made the portal wobble, crackle, and expand unpredictably.

The commander stared at it, confused for a moment—

Then his eyes widened.

"You wouldn't."

E.E grinned.

"I would."

The vortex began to suck intensely, pulling at them.

Both were dragged toward it violently with debris, meteors, and dust funneling into the unstable tear.

E.E fought to remain conscious.

The commander fought to resist but the suction grew stronger.

"Stop."

"Stop!"

His voice grew desperate.

E.E didn't.

He pushed harder, expanding the vortex even more.

His body shook violently due to the spatial feedback.

The commander's arms flailed as its four limbs dug into the void, trying to resist but the vortex was overwhelming.

It latched onto him.

Dragged him closer.

Closer.

Closer—

Until...

FWOOOOOOOOOOSH!!!

The 42nd commander was sucked into the swirling tear.

E.E let go of the vortex, collapsing forward.

He wheezed as blood dripped from his mouth.

He floated, barely able to keep his eyes open.

But he smiled.

"Got you."

Inside the Station, Angy finally found it.

A sealed chamber underneath the tenth floor had a Spatial Disruption Core.

She kicked the door open at supersonic speed, disabled three guards before their brains even processed sound, and launched herself at the massive pulsating device occupying the center of the room.

"This is it..."