

## **Bloodline 1641**

### Chapter 1641 A Close Blood Relative

"This is it..."

She grabbed the core.

Her muscles trembled.

It resisted her.

She pushed harder.

Harder—

CRACK.

Silence~

Space inside the station shifted and untangled as the distortions dissolved.

She exhaled sharply.

"E.E... it's all up to you now."

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Back in Space, E.E felt the change instantly.

The distortions vanished.

Space stabilized.

His vortex abilities... worked properly again.

He forced himself upright and opened a vortex directly in front of him.

A stabilized one.

The destination was the vortex he forced the commander into.

Apparently, what E.E had done earlier was force the commander into a vortex that had no exit point. Since the distortions would ruin things, he just decided to let the commander kept getting pulled through the vortex until Angy deactivated the distortions.

Now he could go in to get him.

Falco and Aildris happened to just arrive on scene at thr last moment after desperately searching him.

"You guys are late..." E.E muttered before opening another vortex.

Falco squinted at the vortex. "Bro... is that...?"

E.E face turned greener. "Get in before I pass out."

Falco didn't need to be told twice. Aildris grabbed his arm and they jumped through. They both materialized within the 42nd commander's chamber on the last floor.

Meanwhile, E.E proceeded to jump into the other vortex he conjured before Aildris and Falco's arrival.

He appeared directly behind the flailing 42nd commander, who was still disoriented inside the chaotic vortex-space E.E had created earlier.

E.E didn't waste even half a second.

He grabbed the alien's throat.

And opened another vortex.

A big stabilized one.

The familiar glow engulfed both of them—

FWOOOOSH

They slammed into the 42nd commander's chamber floor.

E.E landed on his back, groaning.

The 42nd commander thrashed violently.

E.E forced himself onto his knees, then onto his feet.

He grabbed the alien's second head by the mandibles and smashed him against the floor.

Once.

Twice.

THIRD TIME.

The floor cracked.

Energy sputtered from the alien's veins.

E.E tightened his hand.

"Stay... DOWN!"

WHAM!!

Silence.

The 42nd commander stopped moving.

E.E staggered while panting heavily.

Now all four stood together again, in the dimly lit chamber of the 42nd commander.

Angy who had been waiting was leaning against the far wall with arms crossed. A relieved sigh escaped her as she stared at all three of them.

"About damn time," she muttered while pushing forward.

"Dude where were you? I thought you died..." Falco voiced from the side while closing in on the unconscious 42nd commander.

E.E dropped to one knee, breathing heavily. "To be fair, I thought I died too. Twice."

But they were here.

And their target lay unconscious at the center of the room, sprawled like a collapsed mountain.

Aildris raised a hand.

Seven colors burst from his fingertips; red, blue, violet, amber, emerald, silver, and white, all twining around one another like sentient ribbons. They lengthened, hardened, and twisted into a prism-shaped construct that glowed with shifting light.

It descended over the unconscious commander like a cage forged by the aurora itself.

"This should hold him," Aildris said calmly.

Falco whistled. "Man... every time you do that, I'm reminded how unnecessarily cool your abilities look."

The prism solidified just in time.

Because a few seconds later, the 42nd commander jerked awake.

Both heads snapped upward as its twin sets of slit-pupiled eyes glared outward. His four arms rose instantly, punching at the walls of the prism.

BOOM.

BOOM.

BOOM.

The colors didn't even ripple.

The commander let out a roar. "Let me out this instant!"

Aldris stepped forward with a calm expression.

"No."

The 42nd commander's breathing grew ragged as he realized he wasn't leaving that prism anytime soon. The colors stirred with a subtle pressure that crushed the energy whenever he tried gathering his strength.

Aildris stood closest to the cage.

Falco leaned on a table that Angy had reassembled earlier with his arms crossed.

E.E wiped blood from his chin, planting himself beside Aildris.

Angy stayed near the door, senses tracking movement outside the chamber to ensure no one approached unexpectedly.

"Let's not waste time," Aildris stated with a low tone. "We want to know where the two main leaders are located."

The commander laughed bitterly.

"You will gain nothing. The leaders... cannot be found."

Aildris gave him a calm, almost pitying look.

"We know. Believe me—we've interrogated enough of you commanders to see the pattern."

Falco sighed.

"Yeah. You guys are like employees whose boss refuses to give out his home address. Low-key tragic."

E.E snapped his fingers. "But Aildris checked your memories the moment he trapped you in that prism. So you can spare us the dramatic denial."

The commander stiffened.

Aildris nodded slowly.

"You don't know where the leaders are. You never knew. The moment you attend a meeting, your memory is wiped. You're given coordinates, but the location cleans itself out of your minds afterward."

The commander didn't answer. His silence was confirmation enough.

Angy approached with focused eyes.

"We need the leaders. We don't have months to wait for the next meeting to happen."

"We need a shortcut—preferably one that doesn't involve us beating down 41 more commanders," Falco muttered.

Aildris finally stepped back as his eyes emitted a multicolored glow.

"That's why I dug deeper."

The commander reacted first.

"You... probed further?"

Aildris said nothing.

"That is wrong—"

Falco rolled his eyes. "Bro, you were trying to kill E.E five minutes ago. Let's not act like you're suddenly concerned with morals."

Aildris extended a hand.

A holographic strand of prismatic memory hovered above his palm, extracted earlier.

"I didn't find the leaders' location," he admitted. "But I did find a person."

E.E straightened slightly.

"A name?"

Aildris nodded.

"The 16th Commander."

The 42nd commander growled and turned his heads away.

Angy frowned.

"What about her?"

Aildris continued:

"She is much closer to the Gustavo Alliance leaders than any of the other commanders."

Falco's interest peaked.

"Closer how?"

Aldris's expression darkened slightly.

"Blood."

E.E blinked.

"Blood?"

Aldris: "She's related to one of the leaders. A close blood relative."

A cold silence fell.

Falco let out a slow whistle.

"Well damn. That complicates a lot."

Angy's brows furrowed with concern.

"Or... simplifies it?"

Aldris nodded. "She is the only commander with a direct family tie to the leadership. So if anyone has access to anything—if anyone can point us in the right direction—it's her."

The 42nd commander hissed.

"She will not betray her blood."

E.E leaned forward with a smirk.

"Who said anything about betrayal?"

Falco raised two fingers.

"We just need information. Not her loyalty."

Aldris flicked his wrist.

The prism around the 42nd commander constricted by a few centimeters. The alien gasped as the light pressed into him.

"And you will not be leaving this prison. Not until our mission is complete," Aldris voiced authoritatively.

The commander snarled helplessly.

They gathered around the floating projection Aldris had conjured.

The hologram shifted from abstract colors into concrete images: a three-dimensional rotating bust of a woman.

She had alien feminine features mixed with a humanoid form. Long silvery hair reaching her waist. Light-blue scales running down the left side of her face and neck. Two pupil-less eyes that glowed faintly. She was tall with a slender build and commanding posture.

Falco nodded slowly.

"Well, damn. She looks like she doesn't smile. Ever."

Angy studied the image carefully.

"She looks dangerous."

Aldris expanded the hologram to a full body.

Her armor was unique with luminescent patterns that spiraled across her form in symmetrical lines. A badge on her chest glowed differently from other commanders', marked with a symbol resembling a coiled helix.

Then came the station layout.

It was a metallic structure floating above a red-brown planet.

Its exterior was entirely mechanical with no windows, no organic growth, no breathable areas.

Aldris zoomed into the inside.

Corridors filled with security droids. Automated turrets. Sensor webs. Surveillance eyes in every corner. Rooms with integrated AI networks.

Not a single Gustavo Alliance member.

Not one.

Angy took a step back as she folded her arms thoughtfully.

"She runs her station entirely with machines... Why?"

E.E shook his head.

"To avoid being stabbed in the back. If she's related to the leaders, the Alliance probably protects her—but she probably knows too many would want her position."

Falco snapped his fingers.

"Or she just hates company. Honestly, same."

Aildris highlighted a time-distance readout.

"If we move quickly, we can reach her location in four days."

E.E rubbed his palms together.

"Four days is nothing. We've traveled further for less."

But Aildris zoomed the map out further.

A swirling red zone blinked around the station.

"Unfortunately... infiltration will be significantly harder."

Falco groaned.

"Why is every station we visit always more difficult than the last?"

"Because they're higher in the chain of command?" Angy voiced from the side.

Aildris gave a faint smile.

"It would have been less difficult than this station but the issue is, without organic life on the station, any intruder becomes impossible to hide. There are no people—only droids. And those droids don't get tired, don't blink, don't look away. Every corner is monitored and as soon as organic life is noticed, it is bound to raise an alarm."

Chapter 1642 UNREGISTERED HIGH-LEVEL BEING DETECTED

E.E scratched his cheek.

"And then the whole station goes into full lockdown."

Falco slumped.

"This is gonna be a pain."

Angy paced slowly.

"Not necessarily. If we can get in quietly, we only need to reach her."

Aldris nodded.

"True. But someone needs to stay behind."

All eyes turned toward the trapped 42nd commander and the room around them.

Falco groaned louder.

"Right... this place."

Aldris dismissed the hologram.

"This station must remain functional. If anyone realizes the commander is missing, a system-wide alarm will be triggered—and not just the 16th commander, but every Gustavo alliance official will definitely be notified."

E.E sighed.

"Meaning one of us stays here to pretend everything is normal."

Falco looked between the others.

"Rock-paper-scissors?"

Angy didn't laugh.

E.E took a step toward the prism.

"I'll stay."

Aildris's brows rose.

"No."

E.E frowned.

"Aildris, don't start. You saw how bad things got out there. You need to lead. Falco needs to be there to increase team strength. Angy—"

Angy cut him off quietly.

"And you need to be with them."

E.E blinked.

Aildris placed a hand on E.E's shoulder.

"Your bloodline is the only one among us with innate spatial properties. We need you on this."

Falco nodded.

"Yeah bro... you're the cheat code."

E.E opened his mouth to argue—

Angy stepped forward, placing her palm against his chest and pushing him gently back.

"I'll stay," she voiced with a gaze of resolve.

E.E froze.

"Angy..."

"I'm the only one with the speed to run this whole station without being noticed. If something breaks, if someone tries to reach this floor, if a patrol shows up—I can handle all of it. And no one will see me," Angy stated.

She straightened her back.

"You three need to go. I'll keep this place alive."

Falco sucked in a breath.

"She's right, man."

E.E clenched his fists but he couldn't argue with logic.

Aildris extended his hand to Angy.

She took it.

Aldris: "We'll finish this quickly. I promise."

Angy nodded once.

E.E looked at her for a long moment before finally exhaling.

"Fine. But the moment anything looks bad, you call us."

Angy smirked.

"Wow, now that the distortions are gone you're confident again?"

E.E responded with a tired grin.

"Shut up."

Within the hour, Aildris restored the commander's vital readings to match the expected patterns in the station's life-monitoring systems. Falco checked the surveillance loops. E.E sealed the chamber with layered vortex barriers disguised as regular field-locks.

Angy blurred through the station so fast she could track every patrol, every bot, every alert.

Everything was stable.

Everything was silent.

Everything was ready.

Finally, the trio stood in front of the circular platform that would take them to their ship.

Angy stood behind them with her arms folded.

Aildris spoke first.

"In four days, we reach the 16th commander."

Falco twirled a dark blade.

"And hopefully live long enough to interrogate her."

E.E cracked his knuckles.

"Let's go get answers."

Angy nodded slowly.

"Go."

The platform lit up beneath them.

A vortex appeared up ahead and the three stepped into it before vanishing.

Leaving Angy alone in the massive, silent command chamber with a beaten commander trapped in a prism of colors...

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Falco, Aildris, and E.E sped through the interstellar currents inside an efficient oblong craft they had stolen earlier.

It was one of the standard long-range Gustavo vessels with its logos removed.

The ship glided through the cosmic rivers like a silver needle threading between glowing nebula veils. Their destination was none other than the station of the 16th commander... a journey that would take at least four days at maximum output.

Angy who was behind at the station, shrunk into distant specks of starlight as she remained in the 42nd commander's chamber to maintain the illusion that everything was normal.

Without her, they felt the team dynamic shift, but they kept their focus fixed on the mission.

Aildris sat at the helm, calibrating the cosmic path and aligning the ship's systems to avoid cosmic storms and dimensional fractures.

Falco sat back, feet up, chewing on a small piece of blue dried meat he had found in the ship's storage.

"Man... four days of this?" He groaned. "Why couldn't this 16th commander be closer?"

E.E shrugged. "Be thankful it's not weeks. And better her station is isolated... less nonsense to deal with."

Aildris leaned back, crossing his arms. "Isolated means fewer variables, yes... but also no one to blend in with. For infiltration, that's a nightmare."

They all knew it.

A station run by no organic beings, only droids. That meant everything followed strict logic, security patterns, and automated threat assessments. No bribing. No persuasion. No disguises. No manipulation. No Falco tricks. No Aildris illusions.

They would need perfection.

And they would need E.E's spatial abilities.

By the time they hit the end of the second day, their energy cores were running low. The ship needed a refuel.

Their best option was Tirsium-8, a desert planet studded with giant crystalline pillars, used mostly as a refuel station and trade stop.

Falco groaned loudly the moment they stepped out into the blazing blue sands.

"Why is it always a desert? Is there a rule? Are we cursed?"

E.E slapped the back of his head lightly. "Stop whining. Let's get this done quickly."

They walked toward the tall silver refueling citadel.

Inside, the clerks were mostly humanoid with long necks, gleaming scales, and bright yellow eyes. They greeted the trio without suspicion. The process was straightforward. Pay. Refuel. Leave.

But as always, trouble seemed to follow them.

Just when Aildris transferred the energy units for the fuel purchase, alarms began to blare in the station.

Red lights flickered on as the trade clerks jerked back in alarm.

Multiple laser pointers landed instantly on Falco's chest.

A metallic voice boomed overhead:

> "UNREGISTERED HIGH-LEVEL BEING DETECTED.

THREAT LEVEL: PLANETARY-PLUS.

ALLIANCE OFFICERS EN ROUTE."

Falco blinked.

"Ah. Right. This again."

Seconds later, six armored Alliance Enforcement Officers surrounded them.

This time, it was the actual Alliance, not Gustavo affiliation. Their armor was marked with the emblem of the United Alliance of Galaxies.

One stepped forward.

"Identification. Now."

Aldris sighed calmly while lifting his hands. "We can explain."

Falco muttered under his breath, "I told you I should've suppressed my presence."

E.E rolled his eyes. "You're overflowing with power constantly. Hard to hide that."

The officers moved fast, extending strange spherical restraints that wrapped around Falco swiftly. He didn't resist. He could've broken free instantly but that would have caused more conflict.

They were escorted to an underground facility beneath the refueling station, hovering inside a containment field designed to hold cosmic beasts and high-tier criminals.

E.E whispered, "Okay... let's not panic."

Falco raised a brow. "I'm not panicking. I'm annoyed."

Aildris looked around calmly. "They're doing their job. They don't know who we are."

Moments later, an officer approached the barrier.

"You three exceed the permissible cosmic strength limit for free travel across Alliance territories without clearance. State your affiliations immediately."

Apparently, beings beyond a particular level of power were not allowed to move freely across the cosmic without being registered as a non dangerous figure by the Alliance.

Falco already passed planetary level strength which was why they were currently in this situation.

Aildris nodded politely.

"We're from Earth. Mixed Blood Organisation."

The officers looked at each other.

"Proof?"

E.E opened a small compartment on his wristband, revealing the engraved MBO insignia and encrypted mission approval granted by Earth's Alliance-recognized divisions.

Aldris added holograph recordings showing them fighting alongside Gustav in previous cosmic operations.

But the true moment of disbelief came when Falco displayed a hologram photo of him and Gustav sitting casually on top of a mountain, eating roasted cave-beast tail.

The officers froze.

One whispered, "They know Gustav Crimson...?"

Another muttered, "If they're tied to that guy... we may have made a mistake."

The sounds of armored boots clicking against the metallic floor soon rang out as a superior officer arrived moments later. She scanned the data twice, then thrice, before snapping into a respectful salute.

"Friends of Gustav Crimson are friends of the United Alliance.

You are cleared for unrestricted travel."

They were released instantly, but not without multiple apologies.

Aildris simply nodded calmly. "No harm done."

E.E smirked. "Guess being Gustav's friend has perks."

Falco puffed out his chest proudly. "Damn right it does."

They finished refueling, boarded their ship, and blasted off the planet, thankfully without further delays.

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The rest of the trip was smoother. No more incidents. No more unexpected alarms. Just the endless cosmic ocean and the ship's steady vibrations as they approached a region isolated from typical travel routes.

Aildris constantly cross-checked the coordinates.

E.E remained alert, tapping the armrest rhythmically.

"That 16th commander... someone in the bloodline of the leaders. This is the closest we've come to a real lead."

Falco leaned back with arms behind his head.

"She better talk. I'm tired of chasing commanders who know nothing."

Aildris gave him a sideways glance.

"She's known to be powerful. Stronger than the 42nd."

Falco grinned. "Good. A good fight wakes the blood."

E.E elbowed him. "We're not fighting her unless we're forced to."

Falco shrugged. "Yeah, yeah. Diplomacy first."

Though none of them truly believed diplomacy would work.

## Chapter 1643 The 16th Commander

(( Close To The Universe Center ))

The celestial platform glowed beneath Gustav like a breathing star.

Strange cosmic veins pulsed across it as the ritual continued with the five sacred items connected by threads of glowing light.

Gustav hung suspended, unconscious, floating in a state between time and reality. His body glowed with golden-white cracks as universe-level information funneled into him endlessly.

Sersi sat cross-legged beside Ria, while Endric sat a few meters away, monitoring the symbols.

Sersi exhaled slowly. "It's already been nearly two weeks... how far do you think he has gone?"

Endric didn't look away from the floating sigils.

"The ritual isn't even halfway done."

Ria's eyes widened slightly. "Halfway? It feels like he's been up there for ages."

Endric's expression tightened.

"Gustav is reliving everything... every memory of his Outworldly days. Every step of his power. Every moment where he wasn't himself. He is reconciling fragments of who he was—pieces that were lost, buried, or altered."

Sersi frowned softly. "That sounds painful."

"It is," Endric answered. "But necessary. Only after accepting all parts of himself can he reclaim his full outworldly strength."

Ria hugged his knees lightly.

"You said... it could take three weeks?"

"At least." Endric corrected gently. "Four weeks at most."

Sersi leaned back, gazing at the swirling cosmic expanse around them.

"He's doing all that... while we're just sitting here."

Endric finally turned to them.

"We're not just sitting here. We're holding guard over the most important ritual in the universe right now.

If anything interrupts this, everything collapses."

Ria nodded softly.

Sersi sighed. "I know. I just... I miss him."

Endric gave a rare faint smile.

"We all do."

They turned their eyes upward again to Gustav who was glowing, floating and merging deeper into the universe itself.

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On the fifth day, a small ship drifted silently toward the speck of steel floating at the edge of a distant star system.

A lone station shaped like a ring and completely mechanical, stood out.

Unlike the other Gustavo Alliance stations they had infiltrated, this one emitted no biological signature. No heartbeats. No breathing forms. No fluctuating biometrics. It was a graveyard of machines commanded by a single living being.

The domain of the 16th Commander, blood relative of one of the Gustavo Alliance leaders.

Inside the ship, Falco, E.E, and Aildris watched through the transparent screen as the station grew bigger with every passing second.

Aildris finally exhaled.

"There it is."

E.E nodded slowly.

"The only station run entirely by droids. No staff. No guards with flesh. Just metal, sensors, automated turrets and..." he paused.

Falco raised a brow.

"And a woman who probably knows more about the leaders than anyone else below them."

"Yeah," E.E replied. "Her being related by blood is our best shot."

Falco leaned back.

"We get her fast. Quiet. No alarms. If one thing goes wrong here, this entire station could broadcast an alert across galaxies."

Aildris closed his eyes for a moment and inhaled.

"Angy is holding things down at the 42nd station. We can't afford mistakes. We finish this mission, and the leaders of the Gustavo Alliance are next."

The three nodded to each other with unspoken resolve.

They were ready.

The ship wasn't allowed to dock. The station had automated scanners that verified DNA, authorization codes, and robotic signatures. Everything organic was detected instantly.

So instead, they floated toward the station in heavy, metallic space suits, crafted to mimic the structure of the combat droids used within the 16th commander's station.

The suits had black exterior plating, mechanical joints, no visible eyes, Reinforced torso. It was built not for simulating mechanical posture and movement.

Aildris tested the arm movement.

"Feels stiff."

"It's supposed to," E.E replied. "These things move with minimal fluidity. Too smooth and we'll stand out."

Falco kicked at the magnetic boots and muttered, "I hate pretending to be a robot."

"Well," E.E shrugged, "we can't walk in as ourselves. This place is too monitored."

Falco's gaze remained set on the bright circle of the station ahead. "Let's move."

They pushed away from the ship, drifting in silence. Their suits absorbed the freezing void of space. Gravity-less, weightless, silent.

The massive station floated before them like a fortress carved from the bones of dead stars.

And then—

BEEP-BEEP-BEEP—

Aildris stiffened.

"We're close enough for the proximity alarms to pick us up."

E.E raised an arm and whispered,

"Then we skip the alarms."

He snapped his fingers.

A vortex tore open in the vacuum of space and the three drifted into it just as the station's scanners activated.

They rematerialized inside the outer chamber of the station, bypassing the alarm trigger entirely.

E.E exhaled in relief.

"No spatial distortions here. Good."

Falco landed with a heavy metallic thud.

"So we're in."

Aldris scanned the mechanized corridors, conveyor belts transporting crates, drones flying overhead in neat, synchronized lines.

"All machines. Not a single organic presence. Just like the records said."

Now all they had to do was find her.

They took their time, moving with slow motion, mimicking droid behavior.

Every step had to match the pace and rhythm of the station bots.

Every turn of the head.

Every shift of the arm.

Every pause at a scanning beam.

Falco grumbled internally the entire time.

He could break the station in half if he wanted to.

Being forced to move like a defective toaster pissed him off.

But they endured, navigating deeper into the station.

Rooms flashed by, storage units, power cores, workshop bays, charging hubs.

Everything run by machines.

"This is like a city for droids," E.E whispered.

"More like a kingdom," Aildris responded. "She commands everything here."

They reached an inner sector where doors were heavily reinforced and scanners thicker. The environment changed drastically...

"This is her area," Aildris said quietly.

E.E nodded. "Then let's finish this."

They approached the doors.

Their suits clanked softly as they stepped into a circular chamber leading to the commander's private quarters.

A holographic map Falco had memorized flickered in his mind.

"This is it. Behind that wall is her chamber."

Aldris pressed his glove to the metallic floor.

"Everything is still functioning normally. She hasn't noticed us."

E.E crouched slightly, preparing to strike.

"We hit hard and fast. Grab her before she realizes what's going on."

Falco nodded. "It's been smooth so far. Let's hope—"

But before he could finish...

Everything suddenly froze.

Their suits locked in place.

Their limbs stopped obeying their commands.

A strange pressure crushed their muscles.

Their consciousness wavered as an unseen force bound them in place like invisible chains.

A woman's voice echoed behind them.

"I've been expecting you three."

The air rippled as the metal wall behind them became transparent, revealing the silhouette of a tall woman in white armor adorned with neon lines.

Her hair flowed like liquid silver and her eyes which were like calm gold pools, stared into the back of their robot suits.

Then she stepped inside the corridor, moving very silently on the metal floor.

With a gentle wave of her hand, the fake robotic suits shattered into metallic fragments, stripping the trio down to their normal forms.

E.E staggered free, gasping.

Aildris coughed as his body regained sensation.

Falco broke the bind partially through sheer force, cracking the invisible pressure around him.

The woman tilted her head at him.

"Fascinating. You truly are the son of the Shadow Deity."

Falco's eyes narrowed.

She moved closer unhurried, like she was walking through a garden rather than facing three intruders who could destroy planets.

"Aildris," she said softly.

"E.E."

"And the mighty Falco..."

Her silver eyes shimmered.

"...I have looked into your futures countless times."

E.E's heart skipped.

"Precognition. That's how you—"

"Yes," she said, not letting him finish. "It is how I sensed your presence before your ship even crossed my star system. I saw every step you would take once you arrived. I saw you mimic machines. I saw you infiltrate my station. I saw the exact moment you planned to strike."

Her voice dropped lower.

"And I have seen what comes after."

Falco, forcefully freed himself and lunged forward but she raised a single finger.

"Stop."

Falco froze mid-step as his body locked in place.

Aildris snapped sharply,

"Let him go!"

She smiled faintly.

"You misunderstand me. I am not trying to fight you."

She walked right past Falco, gently touching his shoulder as though calming a beast.

"I know what you seek. And I know why you have come."

E.E swallowed harshly.

"Then you know this ends one of two ways. You help us... or we make you."

Her expression softened to an almost sorrowful look.

"You still aren't listening."

She raised both hands in surrender.

"I am not your enemy."

Chapter 1644 We're Desperate

The chamber she had trapped the trio in didn't look anything like the rest of the mechanized space station.

Outside the metallic corridors, conveyor belts, and cold whirring servos of autonomous droids, this particular room was rounded and minimalist, almost ceremonial.

Blue light beamed from the floor in timed intervals, like the heartbeat of the station itself.

The 16th Commander was seated in the center calmly as she released the force used in immobilising.

Falco who was still recovering from the invisible force she'd used on them moments ago, stood upright with guarded eyes. Aildris slightly leaned forward with a tense expression, while E.E kept his hands at his sides, fingers twitching occasionally, ready to open a dimensional fold at the slightest sign of danger.

The 16th Commander smiled faintly.

"Sit," she demanded while gesturing to the circular cushions that rose from the ground as if responding to her presence.

None of the three moved.

"I said sit," she repeated with a gentle but authoritative voice that didn't come from rank, but from certainty.

A force pressed their shoulders, not harshly, but insistent. Enough that resisting would require effort, enough that pushing back would signal hostility. So, slowly, reluctantly, the three lowered themselves onto the cushions facing her.

Falco's voice broke the silence first.

"You said you're not our enemy," he growled. "Start explaining. Because the last time someone said that to me, they tried to trap me in a dimension of screaming shadows."

Her brows lifted. "I don't use shadow-type abilities. That is your father's specialty, not mine."

Falco's fists tightened.

Aldris leaned forward. "You said you're here to help us. That doesn't just come out of nowhere. Start from the beginning."

Her lips curved faintly... this was a question she had expected.

"Well," she said softly. "It makes sense to begin with the truth you came here looking for. The identity of the Gustavo Alliance's supreme leaders... and their plans."

The room fell cold.

E.E cleared his throat. "So you really do know where they are."

She nodded. "Of course. One of them... is my father."

That statement alone hit the group harder than any attack could have.

Aldris blinked. "Wait—your father is one of the two most powerful men in the Gustavo alliance?"

"Correct."

Falco leaned forward sharply. "Then why help us? You're literally related to them."

"Precisely," she replied. "Which is exactly why I must."

The trio exchanged confused glances.

She continued.

"Because if someone doesn't stop them... the universe will be reshaped in ways that none of you, not even Gustav, can understand. In ways that will spell doom for every world you've ever known."

A heavy silence fell.

Falco's gazed at her deeply. "You're talking about the ritual, aren't you?"

A surprised flicker crossed her eyes. "Ah. So you know about the ritual."

"What ritual?" Aildris questioned.

It seemed as though Falco was the only one who was aware of this.

She inhaled deeply.

"Let me tell you something only two supreme leaders and I know."

The lights dimmed around them. On the floor between them, a projection appeared, displaying an enormous depiction of the universe, threaded with cosmic streams, spirals of energy, and a massive black rift nearly invisible at its center.

Falco stiffened instantly.

The 16th Commander pointed at it.

"The Seal of Yh'Monthel. The lock that keeps the dark dimension separated from ours."

"Impossible," Aildris muttered. "It shouldn't be visible until after the fifth—"

"Premonition, right? You all believe that it could only break under specific circumstances? After the first, second, third, fourth and finally only appearing during the fifth premonition? After the chain of cosmic catastrophes?" she interrupted. "Yes. That was what everyone believed."

Aildris spoke in a low tone. "Then how is it visible? And seemingly starting to take root in our universe?"

"That," she said, "is where the Gustavo Alliance comes in."

The projection shifted, showing silhouettes of alliance ships, armories, battalions, energy collectors, vaults of resources.

"Every member of the Gustavo Alliance... even the commanders... even the ones you interrogated... all believed they were gathering resources for Gustav's use. For the day he would regain his full power as the Outworldly and they would render assistance to their god."

Her voice grew soft.

"But the truth is... those resources were being redirected. Repurposed. Refined."

E.E narrowed his eyes. "For what?"

"For this," she said while tapping the projection.

The rift in the center glowed brighter.

"For a ritual capable of bypassing the laws of dimensional prophecy. A ritual strong enough to brute-force the seal open."

Falco felt his heart split for a moment. He knew of the existence of a ritual since he had heard this in passing when he was in the dark dimension but he didn't think anyone was stupid enough to actually go through with it in their universe.

The resources needed were astronomical... as were the sacrifices... it should have been impossible for any one to successfully pull it off... unfortunately, the Gustavo Alliance wasn't just anyone.

"No... Nocturnis can't be freed yet. It's too soon. If he enters the universe now—"

"He won't wait," she replied. "He won't balance himself with cosmic law. He will consume. Until nothing remains but eternal shadow."

Falco swallowed hard.

The deity of shadows... was the most repulsive existence in the universe and no one knew how much disaster his return would wreak.

E.E rubbed his forehead. "So the supreme leaders have devoted the entire Alliance to freeing a bunch of dark dimension monsters and letting them roam free?"

"More than that," she said. "My father believes that the universe does not belong to mortals or mixed bloods or deities like Gustav. He believes the First Deities—the original primordial forces—should reclaim their throne."

"And the other supreme leader?" Aildris asked.

She hesitated. "Even I do not know who they were before they became... what they are now. But they are equally determined."

Falco clenched his fist. "Then tell me. Why do you want to help us? What do you gain by betraying your own father?"

Her expression softened to something unexpectedly human.

"Because my mother died at his hands."

She looked down at her hands.

"The Gustavo alliance did not just come into existence. It had existence long before Gustav was reborn. And in its earlier days, my father tried to sacrifice me to the dark dimension when I was very young. My mother... stopped him. She died resisting him, and he cast me out. Only centuries later did he bring me back when he realized I could be useful as a commander."

Aildris exhaled slowly. "So you've been playing along all this time."

"Waiting," she corrected. "Waiting for someone strong enough... connected enough... determined enough to stop him."

Falco, Aildris, and E.E exchanged looks.

"We're not here because we're strong," E.E muttered. "We're here because we're desperate."

She chuckled. "Desperation is often a better fuel than power."

Falco leaned forward. "Then we need to know where your father is. Where the other supreme leader is. Where the ritual is being carried out."

But she shook her head gently.

"Understand that the ritual is not being carried out by the Alliance... It's only being carried out by those two. The alliance knows nothing of it."

"So they were merely puppets in the grand scheme of things," Aildris muttered.

"Yes," the 16th commander nodded.

Falco pressed. "And the supreme leaders location?"

Her expression turned grave.

"They are on Oblivion-39-A. A rogue star cluster... hidden behind a cosmic veil accessible only through forbidden coordinates known to very few."

E.E frowned. "Coordinates?"

She flicked her fingers and a hexagonal crystal materialized between them.

"These coordinates."

Aldris reached for it, but she closed her hand and the crystal disappeared.

"Not yet," she said. "I will give it to you—but you must understand something first."

They held still.

"My father is aware that someone has been hunting the commanders. Despite how much you all tried to do this under the radar, he suspects an infiltration attempt. If you go after him without a plan... you will die."

Falco narrowed his eyes.

"So give us a plan."

Her voice dropped to a whisper.

"Very well. But it starts with a condition."

The air thickened.

"You will not kill my father."

Falco exploded to his feet.

"ARE YOU INSANE?! He wants to release the dark dimension! He wants to unleash Nocturnis into the universe!"

"I know," she said calmly. "But killing him will trigger a failsafe he installed. If you want to doom the universe, then feel free to kill him."

Falco stopped cold.

"Oh I see... looks like he tied the breaking of the seal to his death," E.E whispered.

She nodded.

"If he dies, everything you fear will happen instantly. You must neutralize him—yes. But not kill him. That doesn't mean the ritual will be averted by neutralising him alone but it does reduce the risk factors."

Aldris breathed deeply. "That complicates everything."

"It always does," she replied. "Now... sit. I will explain the plan."

Falco sat down slowly, reluctantly.

"When we're done here," she said softly, "I will come with you."

"What?" Aldris blinked. "You'll what?"

Chapter 1645 Oblivion-39-A

"What?" Aldris blinked. "You'll what?"

"You'll need me to get close. You'll need me to bypass the internal defenses of Oblivion-39-A. And most importantly... you'll need me to confront my father."

Falco stared at her.

"You're willing to fight him?"

She nodded.

"Yes. Because if he succeeds... there won't be a universe left to argue about."

The room fell silent.

A heavy, resolve-filled silence that marked the true beginning of their war.

The 16th Commander leaned back slightly and closed her eyes.

"Ask the questions you need to ask. After that... we move."

...

...

After divulging the location of the supreme leaders, the 16th commander was ready to take them there.

E.E's eyebrows shot up. "So you're really committing treason against your own father."

She exhaled, folding her arms. "It stopped being treason the day he decided the universe was expendable."

Aldris nodded with grim acceptance. "Then we need to leave immediately."

"There is no time to waste," she agreed. "The preparations for the seal-breaking ritual are nearly complete. And the ritual Gustav is undergoing—while crucial—will not finish fast enough to counter what my father and step-mother are planning."

Falco tightened his gloves as dark wings flickered out from his back for a moment before retracting. "Then let's move. Every moment wasted is another moment closer to that seal shattering."

She led them out through an auxiliary shaft bypassing the mechanized patrol routes. With several flicks of her fingers, she shut down entire clusters of security nodes, manipulated false readings into their logs, and blocked every outgoing alert to the station's higher systems.

Within minutes, they were back aboard their ship with one extra passenger.

As soon as the ship's hatch sealed, she transmitted several encrypted coordinates into the navigation system. A holographic projection appeared in front of the pilot seat, displaying a blurry mass of cosmic distortions.

Falco blinked. "That's not a star system."

"No," she said, taking the co-pilot seat. "It's a space-fold pocket. A dimension carved between two gravitational sheets, almost impossible to navigate without the correct sequence."

"How did they hide an entire planet in something like that?" E.E questioned with intense disbelief.

"Very carefully," she answered. "Oblivion-39-A doesn't exist on any star charts, Alliance or otherwise. Only two living beings know its exact signature."

Falco's eyes narrowed. "Your father and step-mother."

"And now you." She flipped a switch, initiating the hyper-drive. "You will not get a second chance if something goes wrong. That pocket rejects foreign entities with a force strong enough to tear lesser ships apart."

E.E chuckled nervously. "Great. A hidden death pocket. Just what we needed."

Aildris shot him a sharp look. "Focus."

The ship lurched, shaking slightly before stabilizing as streaks of white and gold blurred into lines outside the viewport. The hyper-drive roared like a wounded beast.

The commander leaned back. "This journey will take a week even at full hyper-light acceleration. Overusing the hyper-drive risks overheating, hull tearing, and dimensional backlash. But we have no other option."

Falco folded his arms. "We've been through worse."

E.E raised a hand. "Actually, I don't think we have."

Aldris nodded in agreement. "He's right."

Falco rolled his eyes. "You two are killing the mood."

Once the ship stabilized, the 16th commander began explaining everything they needed to know. Aldris recorded every detail in a hidden micro-core storage device.

"First," she voiced while projecting a hologram of a tall, silver-skinned being with elongated facial features and burning violet eyes. "This is Xyrath Val'Quorin, my father. The First Supreme Leader of the Gustavo Alliance."

Falco studied the hologram carefully. He felt a cold, instinctive fury just looking at the silhouette.

It reminded him too much of Nocturnis... the way the shadows reacted to him, the unnatural calm in his expression.

"He is an Elyndran Void-Born," the commander continued. "A species born in close proximity to the void oceans of the upper dimensions. Their bodies can naturally bend cosmic energy."

"And his abilities?" Aildris asked.

She typed several commands, bringing up multiple layers of data.

"He is a master of:

— Spatial Pressure

— Cosmic Pulse Manipulation

— Void-Will Projection

— And emotional precognition."

Falco tensed. "Emotional precognition?"

"Yes. He doesn't read minds... he reads intentions. If you decide to attack him, he will know before you act."

Falco growled. "Then I'll avoid making decisions."

E.E blinked. "Falco, that's not how fighting works."

But the commander smiled. "Actually, for beings like Xyrath, uncertainty works against them. If your mind is constantly shifting, never fully settling on a plan, their ability falters."

Falco leaned back. "Good. I fight on instinct anyway."

"Which is why," she added, "you are the best person to face him. Your power has no fixed form. Your shadow abilities change based on circumstance. He cannot predict the unpredictable."

Falco's nodded. "I'll handle him."

Aildris and E.E exchanged a look.

She pulled up a second projection and this time, it was of a female.

She was tall and armored in organic crystalline plates with her hair flowing like burning plasma.

"This is Seraphine Vortera, my step-mother and Second Supreme Leader."

Aldris studied her. E.E looked terrified.

"She looks... intense," E.E muttered.

"She is," the commander replied. "Her race is the Aetherion Ascendants—a species formed from condensed stellar plasma. Pure energy beings given physical shape."

Falco shook his head. "And she married him?"

"Power attracts power," the commander replied. "They share the belief that it is only right the primordial deities return. They consider life in this universe flawed and weak... a mistake that needs correction."

Aldris frowned. "Her abilities?"

The projection shifted, highlighting glowing nodes throughout Seraphine's body.

"She controls:

— Stellar plasma

— Aether-fire

— Molecular ignition

— And quantum heat compression"

E.E blinked slowly. "She's... literally a walking supernova."

The commander nodded. "And she cannot be fought alone. Her attacks cover too vast a radius. She will annihilate anyone who tries to face her individually."

Aldris turned to E.E. "That means us."

E.E groaned. "Why do we always end up fighting the unstable one?"

"Because you two complement each other," she said. "Aildris can bend color and heat spectrums... and E.E can redirect unstable energy into dimensional pockets or vortex chambers."

They both looked at each other.

Aildris smiled.

E.E sighed.

"Fine. We'll fight the intergalactic sun-lady."

The commander nodded in approval.

By the fifth day, the ship felt impossibly hot at times, cooled only by emergency systems kicking in whenever the hyper-drive almost melted through its own casing.

Still, they pressed on.

In the dim glow of the control room, the 16th commander outlined the final plan on a holographic map.

"We arrive on Oblivion-39-A," she began. "The planet is small—barely the size of Earth's moon. But it contains three things:

1. The ritual core.

2. The two supreme leaders.

3. The failsafe."

Falco frowned. "Failsafe... your father..."

She nodded. "A mechanism tied to my father's life-force. If he dies, the seal to the dark dimension will be destroyed."

Aldris inhaled sharply. "Falco, remember to hold back."

Falco gritted his teeth. "Then I'll break every bone in his body without killing him."

"You will need to," she said calmly. "He must be neutralized, contained, or subdued—but not killed."

Falco nodded again.

"Meanwhile," she continued, "Aildris and E.E will face Seraphine. She will not hold back. She is the aggressive one between the two. She fights like a star on the verge of bursting."

E.E swallowed. "Wonderful."

"And what about you?" Aildris asked.

The commander grew quiet.

"My job... is the most important."

The hologram shifted, revealing a complex structure at the center of the planet which happened to a massive crystalline monolithic structure suspended above a circular altar made of void-metal.

"That is the ritual core. This is will tear open the Seal of Yh'Monthel."

Falco's blood ran cold as the commander continued.

"My task is to sabotage the ritual. I must remove or corrupt at least two of the items within needed to complete the ritual. Even one might suffice, but two guarantees a shutdown."

"And you're sure you can pull it off?" Aildris asked.

She nodded once. "If I have the time."

Falco gave her a firm look. "Then we'll give you that time."

The ship groaned as the hyper-drive reached its final stretch on the seventh day. Space outside twisted violently as folds of reality overlapped like ripples on water.

"We're approaching the pocket boundary," the commander announced while tapping speedily on the control panels. "Hold steady."

A violent tremor shook the ship.

E.E grabbed the armrest. "We're gonna die, we're gonna die, we're gonna—"

Aildris slapped his arm. "Focus!"

Falco stood resolute with his eyes locked ahead.

"Almost through," the commander whispered.

The ship stretched, becoming rubber like as the fold tried to tear it sideways.

Lights flickered and a console exploded behind them.

Then—

FWOOOOM

The distortions suddenly vanished and before them lay a tiny, gleaming world hovering between sheets of glittering space, like a jewel trapped between panes of glass.

Oblivion-39-A~

The commander exhaled slowly.

"We're here."

Dark wings sprouted out of Falco's back, expanding slowly and charged with crimson-black energy.

Aldris stood, rolling his shoulders as color destabilized around him.

Chapter 1646 TRAITOR

E.E cracked his knuckles while the 16th commander stood with a look of resolve.

"This is our only chance," she said quietly. "If we fail... the universe will be at risk."

Falco smirked slightly.

"Then let's not fail."

And then, the ship descended toward the hidden world.

The 16th commander was well aware that together, Xyrath and Seraphine were unstoppable. No army could siege a planet defended by them. No assassins could approach without being dissolved by their abilities.

They were Perfect partners... Perfect opposites.

And that was why she needed them to be separated because there were lesser chances of things going wrong with them apart.

E.E palms crackled faintly with dark vortex energy. "I'll separate them before they even know we're here."

Aldris tightened a strap on his gauntlet. "And I'll hit her with everything before she stabilizes."

The other part of the plan belonged to Serayna alone.

While the three of them fought, she would infiltrate the monolith-like structure where the ritual was being conducted. She knew its layout. She knew the sigils. She knew the objects needed. Destroying even one of them would collapse the entire process.

A single point of failure.

She repeated it all to them many times, until she felt her voice tremble and forced herself to calm down.

Her father.

Her step-mother.

The two people who raised her.

The two people she was sentencing to death.

And yet—

She saw the future.

And she had seen the countless worlds burned if the ritual succeeded.

She could not allow that future.

Not even for them.

"I'm ready," she told them.

They activated camouflage mode, erasing their ship signatures and muffling its presence across all detectable spectra.

They became invisible as they entered Oblivion-39-A upper atmosphere...

Or so it should have been.

The moment the ship dipped lower, Serayna's eyes widened.

"STOP—!"

Her warning came too late.

A shockwave of detection energy washed across the ship like a roaring tide. It wasn't technological. It wasn't magical.

It was a living sense.

"They sensed us?!" Falco shouted.

Before Aildris could respond, the first strike came.

A barrage of gravitational spheres condensed with the power of miniature collapsing points of mass, shot upward like black stars, slamming into the ship's underside.

Aildris jerked the controls, dodging most of them.

But for each sphere dodged, two more appeared.

"They're firing blind," E.E said. "They can't see us but they know something's here!"

A gravitational spear tore past the cockpit window, distorting vision for a moment.

Aildris cursed. "They're locking onto the displacement our cloaking field causes!"

Another barrage struck the right flank. The ship lurched violently.

Then Xyrath made another move.

A strange echo swept across the planet's surface, triggering a spatial trap.

Serayna felt her heart stop. She recognized that exact pattern.

She had seen this moment in a vision.

"ABANDON SHIP!" she screamed.

E.E didn't hesitate.

He ripped open a vortex behind them causing the air to swirl violently.

"GO! NOW!"

Without needing further instruction, Falco shoved Serayna through the vortex. Aildris followed, vaulting backward. E.E jumped in last.

The ship twisted, bent, then folded in on itself as Xyrath's trap consumed it.

It crashed into the surface, detonating in a silent implosion.

But they were already gone—

They emerged from the vortex into a harsh landscape of smooth stone and blistering skies. The planet was beautiful but unnatural, like a hand-crafted reality made only to be functional.

And utterly empty.

No animals.

No plants.

No structures except one.

The monolith.

A towering, natural-looking formation, though they knew it was anything but natural. Dark inscriptions spiraled up its surface, glowing with ritualistic power.

E.E didn't waste a second.

"Stick to the plan."

He stretched his arms outward; a vortex expanded from him like a ripple.

A sudden thunderous BOOM shook the ground.

Xyrath appeared first, materializing in front of Falco like a walking singularity, his presence alone making the air heavy.

Calistra appeared a second later, standing within a twisting cyclone of warped space with her exposed skin glowing red and her hair made of liquid fire.

Their gazes locked onto Serayna instantly.

"You," Seraphine snarled. "So that was the disturbance—"

"You betrayed us," Xyrath voice rumbled like shifting mountains.

Serayna didn't reply. She couldn't even look them in the eye, fearing she would change her mind

E.E slammed his palms together.

"Not today."

A vortex erupted beneath Seraphine feet.

She gasped in shock as the spatial fabric beneath her destabilized, sending her spiraling downward into another region of the world.

Aldris and E.E dove in after her.

Mass distorted around Xyrath as he prepared to interfere but Falco was already there, intercepting him with a shockwave of dark energy.

The ground cracked beneath them.

"Go!" Falco yelled without looking back. "We got this!"

Serayna didn't hesitate anymore. She proceeded to sprint toward the monolith.

...

...

The entrance to the monolith was small, but the inside expanded like a cathedral of shifting rocks.

Floating glyphs rotated around a central pillar, and beneath them lay the ritual objects:

A fractured starlight shard.

A gravity-core.

A spatial mirror.

A pulsating heartstone taken from an extinct cosmic beast and a bunch of fifteen other very rare minerals that the two supreme leaders had used the resources of the Gustavo Alliance to gather.

Destroying even one would collapse the ritual.

Serayna stepped forward—

"TRAITOR!"

A voice suddenly thundered through the chamber.

It was her father's.

Xyrath was not physically present, yet his projection materialized within the ritual circle, formed from mass particles and gravitational echoes.

His eyes blazed.

"You betray your lineage. Your blood. Your destiny."

Serayna's breaths trembled but her hands did not.

"I'm preventing a future you will regret."

"You see fragments. You always have."

His projection stepped forward. "But I see the whole."

"You see control," she snapped. "Not the consequences."

"You are still a child."

"I am your daughter," she said softly. "But I'm also a soldier. And... I'm sorry."

Xyrath's projection raised a hand causing gravitational force to swirl like a black storm.

"Then you leave me no choice."

Serayna activated her energy blade which split into sixteen different glowing fragments floating around her and then charged.

—

MEANWHILE — OUTSIDE

The real Xyrath towered over Falco with mass rippling around his body like waves. Each time he punched, the weight of his attack increased by thousands of tons.

Falco matched him blow for blow, shifting his density to absorb impacts.

The ground turned to dust beneath their feet.

"You're strong," Xyrath admitted. "But you are not enough."

Falco grinned through bloodied teeth.

"You'd be surprised."

Their clash sent shockwaves across the planet.

---

Meanwhile on a other part of the planet, Seraphine Vortera recovered from the vortex displacement almost instantly.

"You dare separate me from my beloved?" she hissed.

Aldris unleashed a storm of colorful strikes, bending energy around his limbs.

E.E combined vortex traps with time-bending distortions.

For a moment, Seraphine was forced on the defensive.

"You two worms."

Her figure blazed with supernova brightness as she tore space apart with her bare hands, sending ribbons of distorted reality snapping at them.

Aldris blocked while E.E countered as a powerful battle broke out.

---

Serayna fought her father's projection which sent gravitational wave chipping at her limbs.

She ducked, rolled, slashed, using her precognition to guide, seeing glimpses of danger.

Despite bending the fragments of blades around her and sweeping them at the projection, it was mostly futile.

Vaelkor's projection grabbed her mid-air, tightening a crushing pressure around her bones.

"Stop this madness," he said.

"The ritual will wreak havoc on billions!"

"It will save trillions!"

"You always justify terror as necessity!"

"And you justify weakness as morality!"

"I justify choice!" she screamed before flicking her fingers, causing a massive energy blade to speed in from the side which stabbed into the projection's face.

The projection shattered.

She collapsed to her knees, panting, trembling and crying.

But she forced herself up.

She staggered to the starlight shard.

Raised her blade.

And—

She brought it down.

A blinding flash consumed the chamber.

The ritual let out a piercing shriek as it fractured.

Outside, both Vaelkor and Calistra felt it.

Both leaders roared—

But it was too late.

The ritual was ruined.

With the starlight shard destroyed, the ritual was stopped and the universe was now safe.

The glyphs were flickering and dying.

And the monolith's runes slowly lost their glow like candles suffocating in the wind.

Serayna collapsed to one knee with her chest heaving. Sweat trickled down her jawline as her trembling hands still held the energy blade she used to break the ritual artifact.

Her father's projection was gone, dissolved with her final strike and now it was finally over.

Outside, Falco stood with his foot pressed into the chest of Xyrath, the First Supreme Leader. Dust and shattered stone surrounded them. Falco's body was wrapped in monstrous shadows, signs of the Nocturnis power.

Dark veins spread across his tattoo covered skin as his eyes glowed with pitch-black flames.

Chapter 1647 I Have Already Won This Battle

Xyrath struggled to stand but failed again. He wasn't used to losing. Even now, gravity itself bent around him defensively, but it was useless; Falco simply pushed through every distortion.

He was just too powerful.

"You're done. Your ritual is dead. Surrender," Falco stated with a confident tone.

Xyrath laughed in acceptance.

"Son of Nocturnis..." he whispered while coughing dark energy. "Of course I cannot best you in power."

Falco's eyes narrowed.

Xyrath smiled as blood trickled down the corner of his mouth.

"But unfortunately for you—"

His pupils dilated.

"—I have already won this battle."

At that same instant—

The ritual circle inside the monolith violently lit back to life.

Serayna froze as she felt something crack open inside her.

Her heart?

Her bones?

Her spirit?

She couldn't tell.

All she knew was that her skin suddenly blazed with radiant writings, forming symbols she had never seen before but somehow recognized.

They were etched into her soul like they had always been there.

Hidden...

Planted...

Prepared...

Her father's voice echoed faintly in her ears, even though he was nowhere near her.

"My daughter... you were always meant to be part of this."

"No..." Serayna whispered while stumbling backward. "No. No NO—!"

The monolith's glyphs ignited fully and began crawling across her body like glowing serpents. Her muscles locked up, her arms stiffened at her sides as she found herself unable to muster any form of energy.

She was immobilized.

A prisoner inside her own flesh.

Her precognition had never shown her this.

And then she understood why—

Because Xyrath had blocked it.

Because he planned this.

Because he used her life as a substitute catalyst.

Inside the monolith, the ritual soared to new heights with its sigils burning hotter than before. Even the broken artifact repaired themselves instantly, drawn back together as though time itself were reversing.

A massive purple rune formed at her feet.

Serayna screamed—

"FATHER—!"

Outside, Aildris and E.E had Seraphine cornered between collapsing towers of warped space.

Aildris's fists gleamed with condensed energy, and E.E's vortex network tightened like a noose.

But suddenly Seraphine stopped fighting.

She straightened and she smiled.

A cold, triumphant smile.

Her laughter erupted like a broken dam.

"Hehehehehe... hahahahaha—HAAAAHAHAHAHA!!!"

Both Aildris and E.E paused in confusion.

Seraphine raised her arms toward the sky as the planet trembled.

"It's too late!" she shrieked. "The substitute has been activated!"

"What?" Aildris muttered, taking a step back.

E.E's eyes widened with horror. "Serayna..."

Before they could act—

A purple beam shot from the top of the monolith straight into the heavens, ripping apart the sky.

The air spun in a circular motion around the beam, the ground roared and the sky bled.

A wave dark cosmic energy spread outward from the monolith like an invisible tsunami sweeping across the world, and then across the galaxy, and then—

Across thousands of galaxies.

Across countless star systems...

Across floating battle stations...

Across biodomes, warships, citadels, headquarters...

Across every planet...

Across every territory of the Gustavo Alliance...

Many members suddenly froze as their eyes rolled upward.

Their bodies convulsed.

And then—

They exploded.

Some combusted into pillars of violet flame.

Some burst into clouds of gore and bone.

Some fractured like glass struck by a hammer.

Some collapsed into themselves, turning inside out before vanishing.

Across the universe, over 500,000 Gustavo Alliance members died in less than a second.

Their comrades screamed in panic.

Their leaders shouted orders.

Nobody understood what was happening.

Nobody could stop it.

Chaos rippled through galaxies.

But the ritual did not care.

The sacrifices were needed.

And now... the ritual was complete.

Falco felt the surge and stumbled backward.

Aldris nearly lost control of his energy.

E.E staggered, clutching his chest as though his heart were being pulled out.

Seraphine fell to one knee, laughing even harder through tears of victory.

Xyrath rose slowly, using gravity manipulation to stand despite his injuries with a serene expression settling across his bruised face.

Serayna who was still inside the monolith felt her consciousness drifting as the purple light devoured her sight.

She slowly turned into light particles as the ritual came to a completion.

All of a sudden, the entire monolith shuddered as the purple beam of light sent a dark, chilling and ancient darkness across the universe.

Falco, Aildris and E.E felt their bloodline quiver.

Falco shouted, "NO—WE CAN STILL DESTROY IT!"

He raised his hand causing black flames to spiral violently around his palm.

"ERADICATION BURST!!"

A cataclysmic blast of shadow-fire erupted from his arm, blasting into the monolith with enough force to vaporize moons.

But unfortunately, nothing happened.

The monolith didn't crack.

It didn't dent.

It didn't even heat up.

It simply absorbed the attack.

Aildris rushed forward next, slamming both palms into the ground as a wave of compressed energy exploded upward.

He tried to draw color from the monolith but it didn't work.

The ground split open for miles but the monolith didn't move.

E.E followed instantly, ripping open vortex after vortex, slamming them into the structure like collapsing realities.

He tried to open a vortex around the structure and close it to sever the monolith but the vortex suddenly turned Illusionary and vanished.

The monolith remained unchanged.

The three of them stood there, panting with disbelief flooding their faces.

Seraphine whispered joyfully, "You are too late. Too late. TOO LATE."

Xyrath closed his eyes in anticipation, accepting the inevitable.

And then, a loud ripping sound rang out...

Zrrrhhiipppkkk~

It was like the universe itself was being unzipped.

At first it was a thin, trembling crack in the sky and then it expanded...

Becoming bigger...

Wider...

Deeper...

Reality peeled apart like fragile paper, confirming that the seal to the dark dimension...

Was gone.

As the crack extended, the sky turned black, consumed light like a starving beast swallowing food.

This darkness then proceeded to spread across the universe at impossible speed... faster than hyperspace, faster than photons, faster than anything measurable.

Stars dimmed.

Nebulas withered.

Entire clusters fell silent.

And then—

From the very crack in space...

Something emerged.

A leg.

Just a leg.

Yet its appearance dwarfed the sky.

It dwarfed the horizon.

It dwarfed everything.

It was covered in smooth dark skin etched with molten crimson engravings that pulsed like veins carrying cosmic fire. The limb radiated an aura so heavy the small moon sized planet cracked under its mere presence.

That leg alone...

That one limb...

Was larger than ten planets combined.

And it was still only halfway through the tear.

And yet, Aildris fell to his knees, E.E trembled violently and Falco felt his dark lineage going haywire...

Seraphine and Xyrath knelt as if in worship.

Falco, held his panic down and stared at the limb of the entity slipping through.

"...Ancient Executioner."

The sky shattered as the being's weight tore through reality itself.

A shockwave of pure destruction erupted outward.

Entire landscapes evaporated. Mountains crumbled to dust. The planet fractured like brittle ice.

Falco felt the blast coming before the others even registered it.

"E.E! Aildris!" he roared.

Wings of living shadow burst from his back, unfurling like torn curtains of darkness as he lunged for them.

E.E was still frozen, staring in horror.

Aildris's body had gone rigid from the oppressive gravity.

Falco slammed into both of them, wrapping them in a shield of darkness and throwing his entire power into flight.

The planet beneath them inhabited only by the two supreme leaders, didn't stand a chance.

It instantly exploded.

A world-shattering burst radiated outward as the shockwave from the Executioner's emergence tore through it like wet paper.

Everything was eaten by void-light and obliterated.

Even the two supreme leaders, Xyrath and Seraphine were disintegrated instantly. Their triumph, their ritual, their centuries of schemes... all ended in a single breath.

Not even ash remained.

Falco held Aildris and E.E tightly as they flew through the void while debris flew past them like arrows. He poured every drop of shadow-power into movement.

"Hold on!" he growled.

But even with his speed, even with his bloodline, even with his instinct...

There was nowhere to run.

Because now that the seal was broken...

No place in the universe was far away.

---

The entity soon stepped fully into the universe.

It wasn't merely big.

"Big" didn't apply anymore.

This being dwarfed suns. Dwarfed solar systems. Its full height was impossible to comprehend because it stretched beyond the horizon of spacetime itself.

Its torso alone rippled with nebula-like organs glowing behind its skin. Its arms were like blackened superclusters, their bones made of condensed dark matter. Its head was a hollow skull filled with swirling galaxies.

An Ancient Executioner...

One of the Five.

Servants of Nocturnis.

Destroyers of civilizations.

Cleavers of reality.

When this one breathed, planets trembled millions of kilometers away.

Its voice was not a voice... it was an entropy vibration, a frequency that made the vacuum itself cry.

Falco knew exactly what this meant... no one in the universe would be able to stand a chance.

If the Ancient Executioner wanted them dead, they would vanish before they could even process pain.

Even Falco, the son of Nocturnis, could not take on one of these alone, let alone five.

As the Executioner straightened, space cracked like thin glass across his chest. Shadows leaked from the openings like smoke.

Then something else appeared atop its right shoulder.

A silhouette...

Chapter 1648 The Deity Of Shadows

Then something else appeared atop its right shoulder.

A silhouette...

He stood with a simple posture, arms crossed, head slightly tilted, eyes glowing like eclipsed stars. His body radiated a suffocating darkness deeper than the void around him.

He had no wings, yet space bent around him as if he commanded every particle.

This was none other than Nocturnis...

The one sealed away for tens of thousands of years.

His cloak fluttered in a wind that did not exist as he inhaled sharply.

"Oooohhh..."

His voice vibrated through galaxies.

"That is the freedom I remember."

Even the Executioner bowed slightly beneath him.

Nocturnis tilted his head to taste the air of the universe he once ruled.

Then...

He sniffed.

Sniffed again.

Exhaled in satisfaction.

"My son," his voice echoed across worlds as he called out. "Why do you flee?"

Falco heart frozd as he stopped mid-flight.

E.E clamped onto Falco's arm. "H-He sees us?!"

Aldris swallowed hard as sweat stung his eyes. "Falco... what do we do?!"

Falco didn't respond immediately. He couldn't.

Nocturnis wasn't merely powerful. He was reality-defining.

He was an eternal existence.

A primeval force.

One of the oldest beings to walk the first creation.

And now he was free again.

Nocturnis lifted a hand lazily, as if waving at an old friend.

"Come. My son. Come and greet your father."

The Ancient Executioner shook the cosmos with a single step forward and everything trembled.

Until suddenly, Nocturnis stopped.

His head tilted sharply, like a predator sensing prey.

Then the deity's expression changed as his smile disappeared.

The amusement faded.

His eyes narrowed dangerously.

He had sensed something.

Something far more important.

Something far more dangerous.

Something that terrified even him.

A whisper of power...

A spark...

A ripple of foreign cosmic energy awakened somewhere on the farthest edge of the universe... so distant no mortal map marked it.

But Nocturnis felt it instantly.

His face twisted in fury.

"...Impossible."

E.E's eyes widened. "What's happening?"

Falco instantly knew...

Because there was only one being whose awakening could wipe the smirk off Nocturnis's face.

Only one being he feared.

The Outworldly... Gustav.

The sams being who had once sealed Nocturnis himself in the Dark Dimension.

A being so powerful he wasn't bound to the laws of this universe.

He was regaining his strength.

Nocturnis didn't merely sense it... he recognized the energy signature instantly.

And he reacted like he'd been stabbed.

He snarled with genuine fear.

"No. No, no, NO..."

The Executioner froze at his master's distress.

Falco's blood chilled.

He had never seen fear on his father's face.

Not once.

Nocturnis clenched his fist causing shadows to writhe around him.

"He... the Outworldly..." he muttered in wrath. "He is waking up again."

The deity turned toward the distant part of the universe where the signature originated.

And then, he moved.

But the word "move" simply was enough to capture the moment...

He vanished, leaving behind a void so intense it sucked nearby debris into miniature black holes.

In a fraction of a second, he crossed galaxies.

Nocturnis ignored Falco completely.

Ignored the Executioner entirely.

Ignored everything except one mission:

Prevent Gustav from returning to his full power.

Because if the Outworldly regained his strength, he would seal the Dark Dimension once again.

Or perhaps this time...

Erase Nocturnis from existence altogether.

Falco watched his father vanish in a streak of cosmic shadow.

Falco's lungs heaved in and out in rapid succession as the last flicker of Nocturnis' cosmic presence vanished into the endless currents of space.

For the first time since the seal shattered, he could breathe. But the relief lasted no more than a heartbeat.

"No..." Falco muttered with a trembling tone. "No, no, no... this is bad."

Aildris who was still coughing from the shockwave.

"What's wrong now?"

Falco's expression hardened in a way they had never seen.

"My father isn't chasing us anymore..."

His voice cracked slightly. "He's going for Gustav."

E.E froze. "We have to warn them!" he barked, almost snarling from sheer panic. "Ria, Sersi, Endric—EVERYONE—they're sitting ducks! We need to reach them NOW!"

Falco slowly shook his head as dread settled deeper into his eyes.

"We won't get there in time."

The words shattered whatever hope the others had begun to gather.

"What do you mean?" Aildris demanded.

Falco clenched his fists so hard that cracks zig-zagged through the space around them. "This universe... this space we travel through? To deities, it's nothing. Distances that would take weeks or months even while traveling at light-speed—" He snapped his fingers. "—take them seconds."

E.E's face paled.

"And Nocturnis..." Falco continued, "...is far faster than any deity."

The silence that followed felt suffocating. Each second that passed could already be a second too late for Gustav.

"Then we go NOW!" E.E growled. "I refuse to sit here and do nothing while Gustav gets—"

A shadow moved causing a strange tremor to sweep through space.

Falco stiffened. "No..."

From the horizon of space, the massive, world-splintering silhouette of the ancient executioner shifted and then its entire cosmic bulk turned toward them.

The creature's single, burning eye refocused from the torn planet remains... to Falco.

The ancient executioner rumbled in its primordial tongue so deeply that it vibrated inside their bones.

The translation echoed directly in Falco's mind:

"Your father commands it.

I am to keep watch over you.

You are not leaving this place."

The executioner raised its hand which was larger than ten planets combined.

"Oh crap... RUN!" E.E shouted.

Falco didn't need to be told twice. He grabbed both Aildris and E.E and sped backward at a velocity that shattered light-speed in multiple increments, weaving through spatial cracks and gravitational distortions.

Behind them, the executioner's hand tore through the void.

KRRRRRRRHHHHHHHH!!!

An entire star system collapsed into itself just from the force of its movement.

Aildris' eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

"Falco, it's catching up!"

"I KNOW!" Falco yelled with a strained voice.

He knew this executioner very well. The fourth ranked among the five ancient executioners. One of the weakest, yet still capable of erasing galaxies.

It had no emotions. No hesitation. No compassion.

Only obedience to Nocturnis.

Vast swirling wave of dark energy surrounded him and yet even with all his inherited power, even with the blood of shadows coursing through him... he knew the truth:

He couldn't defeat this being.

He couldn't even scratch it. He was Nocturnis son but his level of strength was still far from any of the Ancient Executioners.

"We can't beat it," Falco muttered through clenched teeth. "We can't outrun it either..."

"Then what do we do!?" E.E growled.

Falco didn't have an answer...

But far away... in another corner of the universe...

Nocturnis appeared without warning.

One moment the ritual location was empty except for the few who had been there these past couple of weeks...

The next moment the universe itself bent inward in his direction.

His arrival was so catastrophic that the planet beneath trembled violently, as if it were begging not to be crushed under the pressure of his presence.

A tremor of cosmic force exploded outward, swallowing everything in its path...

Mountains, plains, stone arches and everything from the other planets in the same orbit was greatly affected.

Fortunately, the force had greatly reduced when it reached the transparent like platform of the ritual. Nevertheless, it was still coming...

Ria reacted instantly, shielding Sersi with a burst of red-hot aura.

Sersi eyes widened in confoundment as the violet clouds overhead twisted into spirals from the shockwave.

"What... what is that!?" Sersi screamed.

But even before Ria could answer—

BOOOOOMMMM!!!

The force of Nocturnis' emergence rippled outward again, sending both of them flying like rag dolls.

Endric who seemed to have been taking a break after watching Gustav all this time suddenly snapped his head up as reality itself seemed to fold.

He realized what was happening too late when he saw a silhouette floating directly behind Gustav.

A silhouette with horns like spiraled voids.

A silhouette surrounded by liquid darkness.

A silhouette made of pure, cosmic malevolence.

Endric's lungs seized as every cell in his body vibrated in panic. His subconscious screamed for him to flee as danger alarms like he had never felt before, rang in his head.

Because this silhouette was none other than... The deity of shadows.

Nocturnis leaned forward slightly, examining Gustav's unconscious state with detached curiosity.

"Still recuperating, are we?" he murmured.

His voice was deep enough to shake atoms.

He could tell that Gustav hadn't regained his full Outworldly energy and this gave him a sense of relief.

"No..." Endric whispered as his eyes widened. "This cannot be—"

Ria tried to stand as blood rushed from his temple.

Sersi gasped for air as her chest trembled.

Despite every fiber in his body warning him not to move, Endric didn't think twice before charging forward the moment he saw that Gustav was in danger.

Telekinetic force exploded beneath his feet as he propelled himself toward Gustav with his arms outstretched.

He didn't know what he could do.

He didn't know if he could stop Nocturnis.

But he knew one thing:

He had to reach Gustav first.

Chapter 1649 Nocturnis VS Cosmic Projection

Nocturnis tilted his head slightly.

"...interesting."

Endric appeared before him in a burst of speed, teleporting himself mid-dash with hands emitting a psychic force so powerful that space buckled around him.

He thrust both palms toward Nocturnis' chest... only for Nocturnis to raise a single finger.

PING.

The sound was soft but the effect wasn't.

Endric exploded backward, crashing through three floating structures, pulverizing them as he slammed into the transparent surface of the ritual ground and slid across it for tens of feet.

His telekinetic field snapped instantly as blood splattered from his mouth.

"ENDRIC!" Ria screamed while stumbling toward him.

But Nocturnis didn't spare the boy another glance.

He had no need to.

He reached toward Gustav as shadowy claws forming at his fingertips.

"No time to waste. If the Outworldly fully awakens, he will make the same decision he did last time..."

The shadows coiled around his hand like hungry serpents.

"...and seal me again."

Ria shot forward with intensity, "STAY AWAY FROM HIM!"

Sersi followed as mist phased from her skin, forming dozens of spear-like shards.

Nocturnis didn't turn around.

He didn't need to.

He simply breathed.

The exhale was enough.

The ritual ground split open and the sky tore like fabric.

Ria and Sersi were flung back violently with blood splattering from their lips.

Still, they tried to rise again.

"No..." Ria muttered while channeling his bloodline. "I'm not letting you touch him..."

However, Ria suddenly vomited out another mouthful of blood, the moment he rose.

He felt to his knees as his vision spun... this was when he noticed that his left arm was twisted towards the back.

Just that one single casual breathe of Nocturnis had nearly ended his life... at this point, he realized that this was an enemy unlike any they had every encountered.

Sersi trembled, barely conscious, but raised her ice once more.

"Nocturnis..." she whispered. "You can't... not him..."

But Nocturnis had already phased through the defensive runes surrounding Gustav.

He raised his hand and a shadows fully extended, leaving his claws inches from Gustav's chest, ready to end the Outworldly once and for all.

The instant Nocturnis swung his clawed arm toward Gustav's chest, a hand suddenly caught it.

The clash echoed like a star imploding.

KRRRRAAAAAAAHHHMMMM!!!

A violent shockwave erupted outward, shredding the ritual ground and blasting apart what a huge chunk of the transparent planetary surface.

The shockwave didn't just crack the atmosphere, it tore localized holes in space itself. Floating rocks atomized. Mountainous segments of the terrain shattered into cosmic dust.

Endric didn't even have time to scream.

The force punched through his defenses, grabbing his entire body with ruthless momentum and throwing him violently backward.

"AAHHH!"

He spiraled through broken chunks of the ritual platform with debris slicing his skin as he tumbled in the direction of a cliff's edge—

But something brushed against him...

They were two bodies.

Ria and Sersi were also tumbling helplessly through the air, unconscious from earlier impacts.

Endric's instincts took over.

Even while spinning, even while bleeding, even while oxygen evaporated from his lungs—

He reached outward with telekinesis.

FWOOM!

A psychic bubble enveloped the three of them, stabilizing their fall and halting their motion just before they would have been flung into the open sky.

Endric gasped desperately, drawing in broken breaths.

"What... happened?"

Ria stirred, clutching his ribs as he regained consciousness.

"I—I don't know..." he whispered while wincing from pain.

Sersi arms trembled as she tried to sit upright. "What was... that?"

Endric didn't answer because below them, the ritual ground had transformed into an apocalyptic ruin.

Whitish particles spiraled upward in colossal columns. The ground was fractured in ten thousand places. Entire sections of the terrain had collapsed, leaving massive craters and melted plateaus.

The surrounding area of the ritual was now split into three rough pieces.

Everything was destroyed.

Everything except one untouched zone.

The ritual core... the exact spot where Gustav's unconscious body floated, remained pristine, like a divine oasis in an annihilated wasteland.

And standing in front of it was a humanoid silhouette.

As the swirling whitish particles began to settle, the figure became clearer.

Endric's eyes widened until they threatened to tear.

"No way..."

The hand that had stopped Nocturnis' lethal strike...

Was attached to another Gustav.

A duplicate... but not exactly.

Because this Gustav wasn't flesh at first.

He flickered at the edges like fragments of condensed cosmic energy, transparent in some areas and solidifying in others. Strands of glowing matter twisted around his limbs, repairing themselves, transforming his projection into flesh and bone.

His hair which glowed faint blue-white at the tips, swayed slightly from the leftover shockwave.

His eyes were white and bright, emitting unprecedented power and cosmic authority.

This was just so happened to be a clone from Gustav's original form which was still undergoing the trial.

It seemed as though Gustav was conscious of everything happening around him even though he was currently unconscious, so he had created this form at the last minute to protect his original body.

And this form just so happened to have the Outworldly power he had accumulated so far since the ritual began.

Nocturnis hovered several meters away, staring at the projection with a mixture of shock and anger.

"What trick... is this?" the deity of shadows growled.

The newly materialized Gustav tilted his head slightly, cracking his knuckles.

"Hello, Nocturnis."

His tone was cold, emotionless and challenging.

He took one step forward and space trembled beneath his feet.

"I may not have regained my full Outworldly power yet..."

His eyes flared brighter.

"...but fifty percent is enough to destroy you."

Nocturnis snarled causing shadows to twist around him. "You arrogant—"

He didn't get to finish, because the moment Gustav moved...

BOOOOOM!!!

A loud blast rang out as his fist blurred from existence and reappeared inches from Nocturnis' abdominal region.

Nocturnis tried to block but wasn't quick enough.

CRRRRRRRAAAAAAKKKKKK!!!

The punch landed with a volcanic detonation.

The deity of shadows was blasted backward at incomprehensible velocity. His body sliced through the clouds, through atmospheric layers, through thunderstorms, and out into space in half a second, leaving a violently ruptured corridor of vacuum pressure behind him.

The shockwave curved the stratosphere like a bending glass dome.

Endric's bubble rattled violently while Ria clutched his head.

Sersi gasped as her ears rang from the cosmic backlash.

"Oh my god..." Ria whispered. "He... he sent Nocturnis flying."

Endric swallowed.

"That wasn't even full force..."

Down below, the cloned Gustav breathed out slowly as his body stabilized fully into physical form.

He turned toward the unconscious Gustav still suspended in ritual light.

He raised both arms and spread his fingers and a perfectly spherical barrier formed around the body, layered in multiple strata of cosmic energy.

Each layer rotated in a different direction, creating a gyroscopic shield stronger than anything this universe had seen in millennia.

Energy rippled through it.

Symbols older than time appeared along its surface.

The barrier linked to Gustav's soul, protecting it from all harm.

"Recover at your pace," the clone whispered. "I'll hold him back."

Then he looked up at the sky.

His eyes sharpened.

His muscles tensed.

His aura swept out as he bent his knees—

—and leapt.

The leap shattered gravity.

Within an instant, he was outside the planet's atmospheric sphere, already closing in on Nocturnis' trajectory.

Nocturnis had regained his balance amidst the void, halting his backward flight by anchoring himself against the cosmic fabric.

The deity of shadows snarled as his face twisted.

"You dare, Outworldly!? Incomplete or not, you—"

Gustav's clone appeared in front of him without warning.

"Be quiet."

He launched another punch.

Nocturnis blocked with both arms this time.

The collision unleashed a second shockwave far stronger than the first.

KAAAAA-THOOOOOOMMM!!!!

Galaxies millions of kilometers away noticed the disturbance.

Tidal energies tore apart nearby asteroids.

Two distant stars flickered.

The entire universe seemed to hold its breath.

Nocturnis skidded backward again but this time, he steadied mid-air, halting himself by digging shadowed claws into the vacuum, solidifying darkness into a foothold.

He bared his teeth.

"So you manifest a projection to protect your dormant body... clever..."

His eyes narrowed.

"But you cannot maintain that form forever."

Gustav rotated his wrist.

"You won't last long enough for that to matter."

Nocturnis' shadow exploded outward, forming thousands of tendrils that lashed toward Gustav. Each tendril carried enough force to pulverize moons.

Gustav flicked his fingers and the tendrils snapped like strings.

Nocturnis soared forward and Gustav countered.

Their fists collided, their auras collided, their wills collided—

Each clash ruptured space.

Each exchange formed nebula-like blossoms of energy.

Endric, from the distant ritual surface, watched with awe and terror.

"This isn't a battle," he whispered. "It's... it's like the universe itself is trying to hold together..."

Ria's face tightened.

"Nocturnis said he was trapped for over a hundred thousand years..."

Sersi hugged her knees inside the bubble.

"And Gustav... that's only fifty percent? That's not even his full power."

A moment of silence passed.

A silence filled with dread.

"If those two go all out," Endric murmured, "this entire region of space might... collapse."

Chapter 1650 Nocturnis VS Cosmic Projection 2

High above, Nocturnis spread his arms wide.

His shadow expanded, covering regions of the cosmos like a black curtain. Stars dimmed instantly. Moons cracked. The vacuum turned murky.

"You think fifty percent will be enough!? You underestimate ME!"

He thrust both palms forward.

A tidal wave of shadow ripped through space, massive enough to tear through several solar systems.

Gustav's projection raised one hand.

Just one.

"Shadow Genesis Sphere," Nocturnis roared.

Gustav calmly replied:

"Cancel."

The tidal wave shattered.

Nocturnis froze. "WHAT!?"

Gustav tilted his head.

"My authority over reality is higher than your manipulation of darkness."

He moved faster than thought.

BOOM!

A punch to Nocturnis' ribs.

BOOM!

A second to his face.

BOOM!!!

A kick to his abdomen that created a crater in the void.

Nocturnis staggered, coughing black ichor.

"You miserable brat—HOW ARE YOU THIS STRONG ALREADY!?"

Gustav's clone didn't answer.

His silence was louder than words.

The deity of shadows howled in rage.

"Fine! If I cannot break you with strength—"

His body dissolved, merging with the surrounding darkness.

"—I will devour the source of your existence instead!"

He vanished completely.

The universe went pitch-black.

Ria screamed.

Endric clenched his fists.

Sersi trembled.

"Where did he go!?" Ria shouted.

Endric could barely breathe.

"He's... he merged with darkness."

A chill crept into their bones.

Gustav's clone blinked once without emotion... without a shred of panic.

He knew exactly where Nocturnis was headed.

And he moved instantly.

A sonic boom of cosmic magnitude shattered the emptiness as he raced back toward the planet—toward his unconscious true body—toward the ritual-drenched sanctuary.

He crashed through several layers of cosmic debris without slowing.

Outerspace trembled, like a living creature realizing something far above its rank had stepped into its territory. The ripples of fear traveled through every atom when Gustav, shot through the darkness.

The darkness of space could no longer hide Nocturnis... they parted from him, exposing his position.

Ahead of him, thrashing through collapsing space-folds, was the Deity of Darkness and Death.

A god whose name even the other deities whispered cautiously.

A being who once feasted on collapsing suns as nourishment.

A being who ruled the Dark dimensions.

Yet now—

He was running.

His obsidian cloak of shadow whipped wildly behind him, bleeding darkness into the cosmos as he desperately tried to reform his arm... the arm Gustav had shattered moments ago with a single punch.

But Gustav was already upon him.

Nocturnis whirled around with eyes blazing like negative stars... darkness condensed so intensely they glowed.

"You dare—!"

Gustav appeared before him without traversing the space between them.

One instant he was kilometers away...

The next, he was right in front of Nocturnis, fist already fired.

The strike landed.

A thunderclap followed, echoing and ripping through spacetime and causing it to fold over itself. Entire light-years around them warped violently, bending like thick molten glass.

Nocturnis was thrown back at speeds that defied calculation.

His body tore through the crust of a drifting moon and out the other side in a spray of cosmic debris.

The moon shattered behind him, pulverized into a ring of glittering dust.

Gustav appeared again, without moving before the fragments even finished scattering.

"ENOUGH!"

For the first time, Nocturnis stopped running.

The darkness around him erupted outward, turning the void into a pitch-black ocean. Twelve shadow  
suns rose behind him, each burning cold, emitting anti-light that swallowed nearby starlight whole.

The temperature of space dropped to absolute zero instantly.

Even cosmic radiation vanished.

A wave of death radiated from Nocturnis—an aura that would have ended the existence of entire galaxies if Gustav wasn't there to stop it.

"You think shadows frighten me?" Gustav asked with an incredibly calm voice.

His barrier around his unconscious self, far away near the ritual site, did not flicker in the slightest.

Nocturnis thrust both hands forward.

"VOID NECROSIS!"

A pure and unfiltered beam of annihilation erupted from his palms, swallowing everything ahead of it.

This wasn't an energy attack.

It wasn't even destruction.

It was unexistence, the rule Nocturnis commanded:

to erase what should never have been.

The beam engulfed Gustav.

Sersi, Ria, and Endric, watching from a safe distance within a telekinetic sphere, flinched.

Ria whispered hoarsely, "Did... it hit him?"

Endric's lips trembled. "I don't know..."

For the first time, Endric couldn't see the outcome of this battle.

But as the death beam cleared, Gustav was standing there in space, completely unaffected.

His expression unchanged.

He lifted his hand and flicked a small, glowing marble of white light.

That tiny ball detonated into a reverse singularity, pulling Nocturnis' attack backward, sucking the darkness through itself, and compressing it into a point the size of a grain of sand before snuffing out completely.

Nocturnis staggered.

"That shouldn't be possible..."

"It's simple," Gustav replied. "I rewrote its attribute."

Nocturnis roared and condensed himself into pure shadow, losing physical form entirely. In that state, he could not be touched... no matter, no force could interact with him.

He rushed at Gustav only as an endless onslaught of tendrils, claws, blades, and shadow storms, capable of slicing through neutron stars like butter with each one.

Gustav lifted his hand.

Reality froze.

Not Nocturnis himself... but everything else.

The broken moon fragments.

The cosmic dust clouds.

The shockwaves radiating from their last clash.

Even the flow of local spacetime.

Only the deity remained unfrozen.

"What trickery is this?!"

Gustav answered by snapping his fingers.

"Matter Reformation..."

The stray energy around them reshaped itself instantly, forming colossal crystal pillars, thousands of kilometers tall, which shot toward Nocturnis like living spears.

The tip of each pillar emitted blinding lights that were a thousand times brighter than that of shooting star.

Nocturnis countered by re-manifesting his physical form and unleashing a wave of death energy, shattering the pillars into dust.

But Gustav was no longer there.

Behind Nocturnis...

Above him...

Beside him...

Within his blind spots...

The Outworldly appeared in eight positions simultaneously.

These were neither illusions nor clones.

Gustav just folded layers of existence like paper.

All eight threw a punch and the universe trembled.

Nocturnis was hurled across parsecs, smashing through asteroid belts and tearing through a dwarf star whose eruption painted the darkness with violent light. But Gustav caught up instantly, flying beside him as he rag-dolled through space.

He grabbed Nocturnis by the face and slammed him downward.

The deity smashed into the crust of a lifeless planet.

The entire world shattered.

Nocturnis rose from the debris, burning hot.

He opened both arms, and space behind him cracked open like breaking glass, revealing the Realm of Eternal Night, his dimension.

Billions of shadow souls screamed from within.

Massive, eldritch beasts made of pure darkness surged outward. Each one was a god-level entity in its own right.

"OUTWORLDLY!" Nocturnis thundered.

"I AM THE END OF ALL LIGHT!"

The shadow army rushed at him.

Gustav sighed softly.

"Annoying."

He extended his arm.

"Matter Reconstruction Burst..."

A dome of inverted energy expanded in a flash, touching nothing... but erasing everything.

The shadows evaporated instantly.

The eldritch beasts imploded.

Even the entrance to Nocturnis' realm shrank violently before collapsing into a void-point.

Nocturnis gasped.

"You destroyed the gate... to my dimension..."

"I removed its 'darkness' property," Gustav replied. "You can rebuild it later."

Then he kicked Nocturnis so hard his physical form distorted into ribbons of shadow.

Gustav couldn't seal the dark dimension away while fighting Nocturnis at the same time so this was the best he could do in the meantime.

He rushed forward again with his fists turning into miniature blackholes that spun rapidly.

Not destructive enough to ruin the universe, but easily potent enough to harm deities.

With each punch he sent hurling at Nocturnis, some of his godly essence was ripped out and consumed by the swirling singularities.

Nocturnis shrieked, backing away in sudden panic.

"You... you dare drain ME?!"

"I am draining your shadows," Gustav corrected casually. "You'll live... or not..."

Nocturnis lashed out, using Darkspace Freeze, an ability that locked the movement of anything within a ten-light-year radius.

But Gustav didn't even slow down.

He stepped out of the freeze like walking through fog.

Before Nocturnis could react, Gustav raised his hand—

This single gesture changed the surroundings entirely.

Space inverted.

Up became down.

Forward became inward.

The vacuum became dense matter.

The stars nearby rearranged their positions like chess pieces shuffled by a bored god.

Nocturnis blinked rapidly.

"STOP WARPING REALITY AROUND ME!"

"I like the aesthetic," Gustav replied.

Nocturnis pulled his power inward, compressing all of it into a single sphere of pure death.

A ball of swirling darkness, colder than the concept of cold, throbbed with the ability to end existence entirely.

"You force my hand... OUTWORLDLY!"

With a scream, he hurled it.

The Veil expanded, tearing through the layers of existence like ripping paper. Entire sections of spacetime collapsed into it.

Endric gasped while Ria's knees buckled.

Sersi whispered, "An attack that could erase us from existence even at this distance..."

But Gustav simply raised one finger.

He touched the incoming wave.

And...

It reversed.

The entire Entropy Veil imploded backward, collapsing the destruction into itself until it vanished.

"No," Nocturnis breathed.

"No, no, no—"

Gustav appeared before him.

"Relax. Like I said, I changed its attribute. It returns things instead of erasing them now."