

Nestra let the car drive her back towards her house because District Fifteen was in the same direction anyway.

Was this a coincidence? It was probably a coincidence. Kaiju attacks happened. The last had been two years ago so it was completely normal, and Shinran would just fly out with the elites and turn it to paste, right? Her heart beat frantically in her chest. She was exhausted, emotionally, mentally, and physically. What now? What now?

Right, right. She was a cop. When she was part of MaxSec, her duties had been to control a crossroad near a shelter in case something got through. No idea what the rat squad was supposed to do. Maybe get into a shelter and stay there?

Her car slowed down when she reached the highway. There were military convoys on the road, APCs and others. A drone flew overhead and scanned her vehicle, which was when she remembered using the highway was forbidden to civvies during emergencies. Fortunately, it merely flew away.

Right.

Nestra searched her orders for emergency clauses and found nothing. In despair, she left a message with Kim even though she ought to be extra busy.

There was no reply.

What to do, what to do? Nestra placed her head against the glass and watched the wall approach as they got closer. Over a hundred meters tall, the Kaiju wall was a constant presence in Threshold, the one that kept not just the larger monsters at bay but also silent predators and roving bands of devouring beasts. It was a leftover from the old days when the city was only an enclave on a new, mysterious new landmass, but since then it had been constantly improved. It was a symbol. It was merely delaying the inevitable. It was the breath the baseline needed for their children to prosper. It was humanity's defiance, the human choice not to give up the technology it had been forced to develop. It was a prison. It was...

BEEP

Nestra snorted herself awake. She was in her garage. At home.

"Damn, did I really fall asleep so easily?"

BEEP BEEP.

A call on her visor. Kim.

"Yes?"

"Palladian. Thank Riel. You have to get to Fifteen as soon as you can. Please."

Please?

“Hmm sure, what’s going on?”

“It’s Shinoda. He left his hospital room.”

“WHAT?”

“The old fool. He is, well, he should be fine but concussions are always a tricky thing. GPS signals indicate he is already in Fifteen at your assigned hab block, probably organizing shelter activities. Palladian, I am telling you this in confidence. The Kaiju is accelerating.”

“I’m on my way but... let me guess, it’s accelerating towards Fifteen?”

“Unfortunately, yes. Today at 5:30 PM and as part of an agreement with the city to avoid in-depth criminal investigations into Gidung’s activities, Gidung personnel activated the ‘Dragon Vein Reclamation Array’ under our supervision.”

“Let me guess, it makes mana stones out of thin air?”

“No, that would be inefficient. Instead, mana is directly... extracted from the vein to be used in circuits. and various constructs. This is not important, Palladian. Listen to me. Seismic activities were detected in the Pacific Ocean only two minutes later.”

“Ok so it was not a coincidence,” Nestra whispered to herself with amazement tinged with annoyance.

“No. Shortly after, GSN detected a disturbance off the continent’s east coast. I am telling you this so you understand. The Kaiju is heading straight towards you, not any other section of the wall.”

Nestra’s car sped up the ramp to the highway. It would be fine. She only had to help with pushing people into the shelters. Easy.

“it’s ok, it won’t breach.”

“Palladian, it has a horde with it... and Shinran is raiding.”

Oh.

Oooooooh.

Oh, ok, that was a shit timing.

“Worse, the city will not concentrate troops near you because it would be an admission that they knew it was going there. And an admission of guilt. As far as the administration is concerned, there is no link between the activation of the device and the presence of a Kaiju. Hong Wang’s guild will guard the wall but there is a distinct and real risk of breach, however minor.”

“What the hell...”

It took a moment for her to realize that she'd sworn in front of a rather uptight superior but Kim didn't care.

“I'm trying to get to the mayor. Kim sijang-nim must have ways to help.”

“Yeah, like actually telling everyone to gather on Fifteen's wall?”

“... I am sorry, miss Palladian. I am working with what I have. There is no real proof that the Kaiju reacted to the activation unless the effect can be replicated. The city will not hesitate to sacrifice the district if it means unrestricted access to dragon vein research. This might be the world's first occurrence. A natural mana powerplant? The safety of the people of Fifteen does not even begin to compare,” the civil servant said.

She didn't sound too pleased. Nestra frowned, but she was in the same situation. What could she even do? At least, the research would hypothetically benefit the city rather than a single corp. Nestra took the ramp off towards Fifteen's main entrance, the district being partially blocked off which wouldn't help. The streets were empty at this time which was for the best.

“Ok, nevermind, I'm almost there. I'll group up with Shinoda—”

The connection cut abruptly.

“What?”

[IMPACT IMMINENT]

Nestra had less than a second to react to the screeching red signal on her windshield. Only her enhanced reflexes allowed her to turn the wheel, the car drifting with the scream of tires into the curb. Wheels bounce.

Something crashed on the right side of her engine. Something big, white. Drone.

Impact.

Weightlessness.

Nestra's seatbelt bit into her shoulder. Her head bounced against the airbag, her mind reeling from the surprise. A drone? Suicide drone? No, it would have exploded. What the FUCK was going on?

Her car slammed against something then came to a stop. Nestra's world was white expanded airbag. She hit the emergency release on her belt. The door popped off and she stumbled to her feet.

Her car was totaled. The drone's mangled wreck waited a few meters away, white paint shredded but she recognized the model. Gidung.

Those vengeful motherfuckers.

"You're so dead," she grumbled.

"Are we, now?" a voice said, mocking.

Nestra recognized it.

Her mind clicked. Now, she knew exactly what was going on.

Could not stay here. Had to find a secluded place.

She ran. There was an alley between two low buildings, away from the wreck and the voice. She raced across it, past dumpsters and wrappings, deeper into a maze of back offices and small warehouses. There were footsteps behind her. A burning fury smoldered in her heart, now that her focus on the Kaiju was gone. Her brother's condescending dismissal, her mother's lost pain, her sister's unguided fury, her father's unwitting callousness, her own guilt and her resentment, all of it bubbled like a cauldron and it was done. It was over.

She didn't even want to resist demon Nestra's instincts anymore.

For tonight, it was finished. She gave up.

Nestra moved into an empty warehouse with its gate open. Discarded wrappings and open cans showed this might have been a squat at some point. It was out of the way. The footsteps showed she'd been herded there or close to there anyway.

Nestra turned towards the entrance where a man approached, casually, hands in his pockets.

"Well well well, fancy seeing you there, Palladian," the police loser gleam said.

It was the leader of the group and the rest of the trio soon came, their smugs displaying a feral satisfaction. Nestra's fury went cold. It lodged herself into her chest like a dead star. Just wait for it, the last of her control whispered. Just got to make sure. Wait. And then we can go and not stop.

"Yes," she replied with gritted teeth, "very fancy. You must be out of your mind."

The Korean guy twirled his ridiculous mustache, then he shrugged. The backlight reflected strangely in his messy hair. The lanky anglo snickered as he leaned against the entrance. As for the heavysset guy, he was keeping an eye out for... something.

“Nah, we’re just here to get paid and have some fun. You must have pissed off someone really important for us to get contacted but... seeing as you’re a complete bitch, it doesn’t really surprise me.”

“There’s a reason why I can do that. Guess you don’t mind getting pulped then.”

“Ooooooh the PALLADIAN family,” the leader said.

He knocked on his temple as if just figuring it out. The other two chuckled.

“How could I have forgotten. Unfortunately for you, I guess they’ll just have to be sad and bury you under the petunias along with the other birth defects.”

Nestra’s fury flared. They couldn’t know about her mother’s health, it was merely a cheap jab, but it had landed and it was all Nestra could do to keep herself calm.

“Ooooh, angry, are we? That’s my favorite part.”

The leader took a few steps forward, flanked by the lanky asshole. Heavysset was staying by the door as a lookout.

“One more person who thinks she’s better than us, one more to break from her pedestal. You thought you had the police at your back? The weight of your piddling dynasty? Here, there is no one. Just you, me, and that little jammer our friends from Gidung got us.”

Heavysset was carrying a case. Probably it.

“So you’re really that confident no one will interrupt us?” she asked, voice flat.

“Absolutely... Certain...” Mustache said with a triumphant sneer.

“Oh good. GOOD.”

Nestra breathed out and smiled.

The mask cracked open.

“Greaaaaaat. **ETZIA NEZHRA.**”

“What the FUCK!”

Free.

Gloriously free, and gloriously mad with a black anger that pumped liquid magma through her veins. Energy sizzling along her skin. So liberating. Pounce. Grab the anglo’s face. Dislocate the jaw. Crush the eyes like ripe cherries. It screams. It struggles. She breaks the body like a cheap toy and its terror is so sweet. It strikes her ribs with a mana fist but it is weak, weak and pathetic and so not a challenge but it does not matter.

This time, it was personal.

She shivered when energy filled her, which the others saw as an opening. Mustache attacked her with two daggers and a scream. She smiled. She deflected one blade with the flat of her hand, without moving anything else, the infused surface failing to pierce her skin. Slow. Meek. Sloppy. She got into its guard and stopped at the edge of its face with her needle teeth bared so it knew, it knew in its heart that it could have been already dead. Ten little fingers on the arm. Ten little void blades flaring from her nails. She pulled back and raked.

Ten grooves seeping blood. A lot of blood. It screamed and it dropped the weapons. She used momentum to duck under a quarterstaff attack from Heavysset.

“What?”

Charge from behind Mustache, from the blind spot. Push them together. They smacked against the wall like puppets. They looked up in terror. She wanted them to be more afraid, to fear her more than they feared death. She wanted them to pay for what they chose to be, when they had cores and a future and she didn't, when they decided to take on the weaker ones as weaklings themselves. Something shifted in her throat as new instincts awoke, and her voice sounded strange to even her ears. It was deeper, masculine. She leaned forward so they could look at the abyss in her eyes and find no glimmer of hope there.

“Oh, feisty,” she said in the voice of the dead anglo.

“What? Ayden?— “

“Real shame you can't play nice since, you know, we're supposed to be your overwatch.”

Those were the first words anglo had said to her a long time ago, in the garage underneath the precinct. Back then, they'd been the bullies. Now, they were dead.

“No. No! Nononononono!”

Momentum. She slammed Mustache's head against the concrete, again, and again. Even shitty gleams were unusually resilient.

“We just wanted to get acquainted,” anglo's voice mocks.

Heavysset screamed and ran. Nestra whaled on the dying mustache for a second. So good. She manifested a knife-sized void blade above her fist and rammed it into its skull to finish it off. Another burst of delicious power filled her veins. Humans. Truly, they always remained fresh and interesting... and Heavysset's fleeing footsteps were just so tempting. She ran after it. It was slow. It was going through an alley back towards the main street. Fleeing. Futile but fun. She walked through a warehouse wall to cut it off.

She found it really fun to slide, grinning face first through the wall in front of it. It babbled something incoherent when it fell backward with a hand raised in front of it like a pathetic barrier. A warrior, defeated with just fear, a fear of her. So delicious.

“This place was hard to find, Ajumma,” she mocked in Mustache’s voice.

“Noooooooo PLEASE.”

“Noooooooo PLEASE hah hah hah hah.”

Grab its head. Pull it back. Expose the dark neck covered in stubble. Time to find out.

Nestra bit down. Juicy blood spayed her mouth and chin. Her teeth sheared through sinew, muscles, bones. So much blood.

She pulled back and let the choking corpse fall. The pool of ichor lapped at her feet but she didn’t move.

It tasted...

Really really meh. Basically unseasoned tartare but worse. Unremarkable. She spat out the gore with a sigh of relief.

“You know,” she told it in her human voice, “I was really worried I might be anthropophagic, buuuuuut it looks like I still got to search more for what those teeth are meant to bite after all.”

Heavysset died. More power filled her.

Nestra looked up. No drones directly overhead, luckily. It wouldn’t last.

She looked at the very dead gleam and the large blood spill under him, then back towards the fuming wreck of her personal and easily identifiable car. In the distance, lockdown alarms for District Fifteen heralded the raising of the containment wall.

“Fuck.”

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What to do?

The lockdown alarm meant the wall was rising. The city was going to quarantine Fifteen for the second time this month. She had to decide if she wanted to go in now or risk... no, actually she could probably go through it without problems but that wasn’t the issue. Right now, she had two options she could see.

Option 1: stay here and destroy the evidence if possible.

Option 2: stay here and change back to human and then clam up when asked uncomfortable questions.

Option 3: get in to try and help Shinoda.

Option 1 would be almost impossible, unless... She focused and bit her finger, letting some blood out. She waved it in the air while making sure not to let any of it spill, then she tried to see if she could instinctively shift into a portal world. She couldn't. There weren't any around.

"Sashimi? Sashimi!"

No reply. She couldn't even feel a presence. Bah, it was a long shot anyway. Nestra sucked on her blood to make sure none would spill while she considered her options.

The bodies would be found sooner or later. She had no way of disposing of them in such a manner that she could outsmart the local law. Besides, those were dead gleams. They might have health monitors. Maybe their deaths would be reported by their handler. The crime scene would also be irremediably linked to her between her car GPS, the accident report, the onboard camera... She was completely toast.

Option 2: sit down and wait. That felt stupid. Literally the worst possible outcome. Was there a way she could at least get plausible deniability?

Actually, there was.

Option 3 was looking to become pretty interesting. She ran towards District Fifteen then found another empty warehouse, shifting through the wall and putting her mask back on. Immediately, the night sky turned dark and unknown. Shadows crept everywhere and a world of smells and feelings disappeared from her perception as the limits of her human shape constrained her. It was necessary, she told herself. Just a return to normal. The idiot gleams had a scrambler, and there were probably no drones overhead. That meant that there were no recordings of her fleeing the car, running through the streets or fighting. She could claim she just ran towards the safety of the wall and... what would people do? There was nothing concrete linking her to the crime because she had left no DNA and the killings had been done using a different tool than usual. Run and deny and it would be fine, especially because it just made sense to leave a disabled vehicle after what could be perceived as an assassination attempt. And it was reasonable for her to be trying to complete her mission.

Nestra ran in human form, regretting her lack of weapons since she'd left them in the trunk of her car. And armor since she was still in her nice dress. She would absolutely have to fight in her true form if it came to that... In less than five minutes, she finally found the gate.

The district inner wall wasn't as sturdy as the outer one but it was still formidable, expected to resist all but the most sustained effort from C-class beasts. It raised level by level so she just waited for the next one to be stable before engaging the emergency lock on a section. Fortunately, her police ID gave her clearance. An instant later, she received a call on her visor. It was Kim.



She'd forgotten about the visor. It had fully rebooted now.

"Palladian, what the hell was that?"

"I think Gidung just tried to kill me. A drone crashed into my car and my coms were jammed."

"... Palladian, please repeat?"

"A Gidung drone totalled my fucking car. And my visor was dead."

"Aish... Unbelievable. Where are you now? Are you safe?"

"I used a safety override on the district gate. I'm in Fifteen now."

"Perhaps it was foolish to send you now. I will immediately talk to the commissioner, in the meanwhile, get to cover. Fifteen's assault is imminent. Gidung's Guild already engaged the kaiju near the wall but it's not stopping and there is a horde with it."

"I'll hurry."

What was a five minutes drive by car turned into a long slog as Nestra was forced to stick to cover. She crossed several empty hab blocks on the way, their similarities with the one she managed eerie and disturbing. It was like watching a parallel universe version of a place she knew down to the electric appliance stall being on the wrong side of the inner courtyard. Fortunately, all of those places were empty with evacuation almost completed. She only came across a couple of drugged out toughs who didn't even try to stop her because they were convinced she wasn't real. The darkness helped with the rest. It took her half an hour to reach her familiar hab block and by then, she was a, breathy, sweaty mess with aching feet. Sounds of battle could be heard in the distance.

Nestra stopped by the entrance. A red halo emerged from the top of the Kaiju wall near the center of the district, close, very close. Distant spells and weapons striated the night sky even as the lights of the district switched off one by one. She called Shinoda as she reached the parking lot where the remains of their patrol car still lingered.

"Palladian-san? Are you safe?"

"Just got into the hab block, making my way to the shelter. Status?"

There were yells in the background for him, though they were not hostile. Someone was giving orders.

"The evacuation is nearly complete. Our shelter should be nearly emptied of furniture. Flash assured me all the systems were functional."

"Furniture?"

“Yes. The shelter was partly used as a storage space. Miss Yadar took charge for the end of the process.”

Nestra remembered the old lady with a turban, the hab block’s richest denizen. Most likely the best choice.

“I have led the Red Wings to a nearby shelter after they called for help.”

Red wings, red wings... The local youth gang. The same who’d threatened her on the first day.

“Wait? You left?”

“Those people need help Palladian-san. Their shelter is not functional while ours can welcome many more people as it is intact. We will make our way back as soon as the convoy is ready.”

“Kim told me the Kaiju is accelerating.”

“I am following the battle as it rages. You are correct, the situation is concerning. Forgive me, Palladian-san. The people always take priority.”

“Okay. I’ll hold the fort.”

“See you soon.”

He was following the battle? Nestra remembered the last attack and the news that followed. She’d been busy during the event but after, there were illegal recordings of the attack. Surely...

She turned on Wired, the world’s most popular streaming platform and sure enough, some asshole had rigged a long range recon drone with enough relays and high quality cameras to turn the Kaiju fight into a show. She half-listened to an excited commentary as she raced towards the shelter. There, the locals had turned piles of metal furniture into an improvised barricade system, a pretty good one. She had to crawl under an old bookcase to reach the entrance tunnel where she was stopped by the congee stand seller waving an old shotgun.

“Glad you could show up,” the woman told her.

“Don’t wave that thing in my face. Tell me the other side isn’t blocked?”

“Of course not, that’s our evac tunnel. If the beasts breach it, well, we’re supposed to move into the shelter anyway.”

“You should have already done that,” Nestra grumbled though her heart wasn’t into it.

A group of armed men waited in the corridor, watching the stream on a hastily mounted large screen with Flash setting up a sound system as well. The drone must have been high up in the air to capture the battle so vividly.

A titan strode through the forest around Threshold, a monster as tall as a skyscraper. It was vaguely humanoid, already a rarity, and that made its aspect even more horrifying. The creature walked on two thick stone pillars, its skin was green like an old emerald and its hair was kelp, thick and falling to its waist in tangled threads. Vestigial arms hung by its side like parodies of human limbs, but it was the face that really brought home this was a monster. A single yellow eye occupied most of its forehead, then there was only flat space where the nose ought to be. A mouth, or rather, a cavity began below that. Like a screaming mouth, it started with a circle but the jaw simply... wasn't there. The cavity expanded wider and wider down the throat, then most of the chest right down to the plexus. It was just a massive, shadow maw bordered by tentacles that writhed and grasped for victims. The speed at which it moved wasn't that impressive until Nestra remembered this thing was so massive it was practically moving as fast as a car.

The titan was fighting a flying hive of gleams while others attacked its flank, or fought off the squirming horde of lesser monsters following it. Nestra immediately realized that the number of gleams was far too low compared to what it should be. For one moment, she feared it might be due to massive casualties but zoomed footage showed flying support teams bearing the Gidung colors and doubt crept into her mind. That doubt was confirmed when she noticed the A-class gleam leading the charge. It was Hong Wang, Gidung's rising star.

To be fair, they seemed to be doing well. The titan was dangerous, and as she watched, the camera zoomed on a struggling gleam caught by the creature's, well, hair. The fighter hacked at the kelp-like appendage with a sword in vain, and even his allies failed to rescue him before he was shoved in the massive maw, and yet the titan was also wounded. Cracks filled the deep green shell, revealing pulsating pink flesh underneath. Long bubbling wounds exuded pus and boiled blood that dripped down its massive legs in foaming cascades. Countless strikes chipped what remained of its defenses but still it persisted. The walls were in view.

Nestra wondered why nobody attacked the massive eye, which would obviously be a weak point until a few errant spells missed the mouth. As soon as the projectiles neared the eyes, they appeared drawn by it, the fabric fizzling and devoured like a black hole stripping a star bare. It was a strange ability but Nestra didn't have the time to think about it too much. The battle was gaming in intensity as more flying gleams joined the fray and the assault reached a paroxysm. Squads flew, tossing weapons and spells at the colossus in a dazzling display of sound and color. Many of the colossus' tendrils were now either burnt or severed by determined assault. Like packs of piranhas, the gleams nibbled at their opponent until flesh cracked, skin shriveled and healthy green turned to dying brown. The beast moaned. It was a low sound as deep as an oceanic trench. Nestra noticed the dust shaking on a nearby chair and the people watching the monitor stopped talking. They were hearing it for real, not via speakers.

"It's... they're gonna stop it," someone said. "Right?"

Nestra was pretty sure they were going to stop it. Her demon instinct told her Hong Wang was holding back, but for what?

And then, the drone rotated to show the wall. That was it. The titan would breach it in a matter of seconds.

Hong Wang smiled then as the cameras zoomed on his handsome face. The red in his eyes flashed mightily. He flew up until he was leveled with the titan's head and spoke, though the jury-rigged drone couldn't pick up what he was saying. Nestra stopped herself from cursing out loud. This was another piece of PR for Gidung's flagging image. The A-class gleam had sacrificed safety and a few lives for a perfect shot.

He spread his arms wide and closed his eyes. A massive circle of flames appeared behind him, then it gained in intensity as symbols and shimmering patterns erupted, turning the living canvas into a complex work of arcane knowledge. It grew. Nestra blinked at the might and complexity of the spell, she who struggled to cast a single bolt. Hong Wang stood there and he made it look easy, easy to wield the ancient power of fire. The flames turned white and wings expanded from the high gleam's back until they radiated like a small sun. A low rumble silenced even the constant jabbering of the excited streamer commenting on the battle. Hong Wang was turning into a phoenix. Hong Wang disappeared inside of the spell until there was nothing to be seen but this single fire bird hovering before the faltering titan, wings spread and so hot the distant grass under it spontaneously combusted. The other gleams pulled off. The horde stopped at a distance. Only the maddened titan kept going, smoking and wounded, towards the altered dragon veil.

Hong Wang cast the spell.

The phoenix took off. It flew up with a mighty screech and then it dove head first into the monster's maw, burning it to a crisp in an instant. Blackened flesh peeled off, bones cracked, skin combusted. A small sun had lodged itself into the titan's throat and it was killing it. An arm fell off, its connective tissue charred to a crisp. It stopped.

It was dead standing. In front of him, Hong Wang flew triumphant as a champion of mankind, his immaculate hair flowing in the inferno's updraft. The light of the fire illuminated his heroic shape and on the stream, the crowd went wild, but all Nestra could see was the eye, the still open eye now zeroed on Hong Wang's shape. She approached the tv to see it displayed on a side screen while most of the attention was dedicated to the victor. The eye drank the energy killing it in silence. It glowed in the already alit form of its failing body.

"Fuck," Nestra said.

She wasn't alone. A few gleams were already flying around and Hong Wang himself frowned, annoyed that his moment of glory could be ruined.

Suddenly, the screen went red.

A... laser-like beam linked the titan's eye, Hong Wang, and the wall beyond. The sound system sent back an error message but Nestra didn't need it. She heard with her own ears

the cataclysmic call of the attack. The tunnel shook and dust fell on her hair. Shocked silence filled the spectators. Even the streamer finally shut up.

When the drone's sensors recovered from the saturation, it shook from a massive shockwave but the cameras were good enough to pick up the important details.

Hong Wang was gone. There was nothing left of him.

A large gash now cut through the kaiju wall from top to bottom. Slowly, an entire pane collapsed inward. The ground shook again.

The colossus stumbled forward after having delivered its last attack. The dead one managed one last step, then its mountainous corps collapsed on the wall, finishing what the laser had started. The head flattened the last remaining intact part, near the base, then it finally stopped moving, and in its wake, the horde came. Some engaged the gleams barring their way, some died under the fire of automatic defenses. The rest of them flowed through the opening in a tide of flesh, claws, and fangs.

"Well, so much for that," Nestra grumbled. "You, get in and seal the bulkhead."

"What?" one of the guards asked. "Why?"

"Yeah, chill angmoh girl. We're still waiting for others!"

"You seal it because the wall is breached and if a single C-class beast slithers through that joke of a barricade, you'll all be dead before you even realize it was there."

Miss Yadar strode out of the shelter gate at that moment. Her brows furrowed under an imposing turban.

"The girl is right. Get in. We'll open the shelter again if... when Inspector Shinoda returns. Hurry in. You too, girl."

Nestra shook her head.

"Gotta help."

"It is suicide. You are wearing a cocktail dress and I see no weapons on you."

"I still have a few tricks up my sleeve," Nestra claimed though it was obvious Yadar didn't believe a word of it. In the end, the old woman merely shrugged.

"It is your funeral, warrior. You lot, in. Now."

The congee seller lobbed her shotgun at Nestra, who grabbed it. It was a pretty nice automatic piece with some ammo stuck to the side. It would certainly be effective against a dokkaebi. An ammo pouch followed.

“Thanks.”

“Try to bring it back. It’s real leather. A family heirloom.”

“I shall try.”

The blast door sealed with a clunk.

It was quiet here. For now.

Nestra swore, stretched her tired shoulders, then she was off.

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