

# Chapter 184: Uneasy

Shooting rang out as our defenders tried to deter our assailants from advancing on our position.

I watched from the Nyes how both parties were blindly firing into the gaps in our bulkhead doors. It was only wide enough to fit two people side by side. A whole arsenal was soon exchanged, and not just bullets. Grenades of all types were employed, which came with varying effects. Both sides were equipped with energy shields, so the casualties were low.

I was just about to offer my help by providing the feed to my Nyes when the fight took a turn. I watched as one of the bridge officers pulled up the video feed of our enemies just outside. They tried deploying the defensive turrets to no avail. Instead, they shared their feed with their men.

Since my company had the same capability, I was sure they had the same technology to link their visuals together. Whatever the camera saw, they would now see the same thing, even through the walls.

With the enemy positions revealed, our allies proceeded to throw another round of grenades. They were stun grenades of some sort and were especially effective against those who had failed to take cover. Catching the moment when most of them were disoriented, several of our guards rushed outside with vibro blades.

They only received a few shots from the ones who weren't stunned before they dove into the enemy like a wolf into a flock of sheep. Just as the surviving enemy was recovering, reinforcements came from the other direction. Having them pinched in, they quickly made short work of them.

"I guess they have it under control," I muttered.

"Yeah. As I said, we're severely out-gearred against players at this level," Thorne replied.

When the teams outside managed to clear away the threat, they finally fixed the issue and completely closed our bulkhead doors. They then moved to clear the rest of the ship, but the crew went straight back to overseeing the entire battle.

We silently took our seats next to the captain and were careful not to distract her. We could only get glimpses of what was happening from the main screen being projected.

After a while, Captain Diaz finally turned to me.

"Mr. Halls, I believe you put in a request to take these former test subjects with us. Is that correct?"

"Yes ma'am. There's no reason to let them go and allow Nova Tech to get their subjects back."

“Very, well. I will have to place them in the brig. I hope you understand.”

“...Of course. You’re in charge.”

I couldn’t exactly complain about better treatment for Polina’s group. As large as this ship was, I didn’t even know if they had extra accommodations for a hundred people. It was good enough for them to take them in. After all, they already suffered enough on my behalf.

“So I take it you guys have them secured? May I ask how many were rescued?”

“I’m not sure yet. I’ve received reports of the fighting dying down, but they haven’t completely secured that ship yet.”

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### **Polina Burges - Former Test Subject**

“Aaron, are you sure you can fly this thing?” Polina asked as she watched her pilot fumble about.

“We already are, aren’t we? Quiet down and let me focus!”

“Well, it’s not reassuring when you have to refer to the manual every two seconds. We can’t fail here only after having escaped from the corpos.”

The spacecraft carrying almost a hundred civilians steadily distances itself from the Nova Tech base. Everyone on board was carefully paying attention to the exterior cameras. They waited for bated breaths, waiting for the moment the dreaded facility that had locked them up would disappear.

As the ship was steering out of the asteroid belt, alarms suddenly rang out in the cockpit.

“What is going on Aaron!?! These blaring alarms can’t be good!” Polina shouted out with wide eyes.

“Something is on course to collide with us, and it isn’t small!” the pilot frantically glanced around to make sense of the readings. “They’re missiles!”

Aaron’s warning had come too late. A moment later, their entire ship rattled at the impact of the missiles.

“What is going on?!” Polina yelled while holding onto the empty seat beside Aaron.

“We’re hit! I’m losing control!”

The lights on their ship flashed on and off as the power on the ship was disrupted. Within a few minutes, the main lights shut off. Then, the reserve power kicked in, and dull lights blinked on.

“God damn it, Aaron! Give us more warning. I almost hit my head.”

“I’m trying! That thing came at us too fast!”

Seeing this situation, Polina dragged herself out of the cockpit and into the halls to check on her companions. She found many of them sprawled over on the ground. Many of them were injured. Their lack of protection from purpose-made spacesuits had come to be their undoing. With nothing to kill the impact, many unfortunate passengers had sustained wounds of varying levels.

However, their trials had yet to end there. A moment later, Aaron’s voice rang out from the intercom.

“We’ve got more things headed our way. They’re not missiles, but they’re a lot bigger. They should be boarding vessels! They’re going to collide with us in thirty seconds!”

As foretold, another impact shook the ship as streams of hostile personnel flooded the ship.

The occupants of the ship were soon horrified upon witnessing the invaders. The injured civilians were quickly restrained. Any who showed the slightest sign of resisting were shot dead on the spot.

*No! It can’t end like this. We were so close!*

As Polina was thrown onto the ground, a gun was pressed against the back of her head. Her assailants didn’t like how she didn’t comply with their demands to get down immediately.

Polina prayed to whatever existence out there that could save her so she could reunite with her daughter. She was afraid of her daughter falling astray and she wouldn’t be there to correct her. To her surprise, her prayers were answered.

Before her attackers could pull the trigger, the ship violently shook once more. The invaders regained balance, but after listening to some chatter on their comms, their demeanor drastically turned for the worse.

“All of you, stay still and don’t move out of this room. If we see any of you walking around, we’ll shoot!”

The group of boarders quickly retreated outside the main lobby area, and into the narrow corridors of the ship. They began blockading rooms to fortify their position. This was because they knew of the incoming enemies. They had no way to retreat, so their only chance was to either neutralize all threats or wait until their allies resolved their fighting.

However, a few of them showed up again a few moments later and began dragging several people with them. Polina was one of them.

“What do you want with us? We surrendered already!” Polina cried, to no avail.

She watched as they set up a defensive position in one of the quarters. One of the men was still holding her by the arm, with a gun pressed against her.

Polina soon found out the reason for their presence. Gunshots rang out in the distance, and pandemonium descended on the ship. It didn't take long for Polina herself to lay eyes on the newcomers. She had no idea who they were, and only that they were fighting with her captives.

Her heart lurched again when her captors shoved her upfront like she was a shield. Before she could register what was happening, something was thrown into the room that emitted a high-pitched frequency, making her groan in pain.

Struggling to lift her head, she managed to spot the leading enemy charging in and firing without hesitation.

*It's over...I'm sorry Lanie.*

After a few moments, to her surprise, none of the bullets had hit her. Bodies lay all around her, and the newcomers closed the distance within a split second. They quickly inspected each downed body before even bothering to turn to her.

"Stay in this room and don't move."

Polina could only blankly nod at their instructions.

The doors were closed once more, leaving her kneeling in a pool of blood and corpses.

She began crying.

Not even she knew the exact reason. It was partly because she was grateful for surviving the experience. Partly the shock of everything that went down. Or partly because she was reminiscing about her misfortunes. Either way, she let her tears fall as she vented her emotions with a hearty cry.

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"Forty-five were recovered? That's not even half of them..." I muttered.

Captain Diaz nodded solemnly at her words.

"That's right. Twenty-four died from the impacts of their ship being hit. They didn't have any suits to break the impact, so it was unavoidable. They have even more with various injuries. The rest, the enemy had gunned down."

"...I see. At least we saved some of them. I am grateful. Please relay my thanks to your boarding team."

"They are only doing their duty, but I'll let them know."

“Then...will I be talking with your superior now that we're in the clear?”

“Not immediately. Our employer is aware of our status. They are the one who choose when to talk to us, not the other way around.”

“In that case, I'm off to see the rescued test subjects.”

Seeing the captain wordlessly nod, I exited from the bridge. Thorne and Andrew followed along, and we quickly navigated through the ship. Some remnants of the battle could still be seen as we traversed the hallway.

With the ship pinging me the route I needed to reach my destination, we managed to arrive after a ten-minute trip. It was so fast thanks to the handles that ran along the hallways, pulling me along like moving walkways,

At the entrance stood two armed guards, standing watch. They only spared us a glance as we approached.

It was a given they were informed of our presence, so they didn't bother us as we passed through the doors. I instantly found myself face-to-face with rows of jail cells.

Instead of metal bars, each cell had an energy shield enclosing it. It allowed me to see the person on the other end clearly. The lone guard inside came to greet me as we entered.

“Sir, we've been told to accommodate you.”

I nodded to the guy before resuming my search for my partner in crime. They had put at least four people in the same cell to save space. At least they added an extra bunk bed from somewhere, giving each of them a place to sleep.

After scanning through a dozen cells, I finally spotted the face of the woman who had been my accomplice.

The guard guiding us seemed to take the hint and immediately disabled the energy shield of her cell.

I awkwardly approached as I didn't know what expression to take on. I was glad she was alive, but that wasn't true for many of her companions.

“Who are you?” she asked upon seeing my approach.

“Hi, Polina. You haven't seen me before, but we've talked for some time now.”

“You...you're the guy who's been talking to me through my SAID?!”

I nodded.

Her eyes went wide as she lunged at me. However, she didn't hit me. Instead, she pulled me into her embrace. I felt a little stupid for thinking I'd get punched or something.

*I should've known.... Thorne didn't even bat an eye at her sudden movements.*

"Thank you. Thank you so much," she leaked out between cries.

"No. I should be apologizing to you instead. It was my plan that got half of you killed."

"We knew the risks. If we remained in the facility, all of us would've just died a slow, painful death instead."

"But—"

"It was our decision to go through with it. You don't get to take the blame to make yourself feel better."

"...We'll be dropping you off at Aegis. You'll have to find your own way back home."

Not even I could afford to pay the shuttle fee for all these people out of goodwill. It would affect our company's cash flow too much. They would either have to tap into their own savings or do odd jobs at Aegis to afford the shuttle back.

I stayed and chatted with Polina some more, and exchanged contact details. Then I returned to the bridge after we'd said everything we wanted to.

"You sure you don't want to recruit them or something? Isn't that what you usually do?" Thorne whispered as sat ourselves next to the captain.

"Nah, I'm good this time. We're expanding, but we have to become more picky with who we hire if we want to keep progressing up the ladder quickly."

Before he could answer, the captain directed her attention toward us.

"Mr. Halls. My patron would like to speak with you now. Please head to the adjacent meeting room. And alone, please."

I took a deep breath at her words.

It was finally time to talk with my guardian angel. I would be lying if I said I wasn't feeling uneasy right about now.