

It was early morning in the town of Angel Bay, New South Wales, Australia, just up the coast from Sydney. It was still fairly dark, with only a little bit of light creeping over the horizon. Two maintenance workers, Derek and Paul, were busy doing routine checks on a cellular tower near Angel Bay University, which was the town's only university.

They were both weary and eager to just get this done, and were drinking a lot of coffee. It wasn't great coffee, however, and apparently this particular coffee pot didn't agree with either of them.

"I'm never letting you get coffee for us ever again," Paul grumbled as he worked on examining the electronics.

"Eh, it's alright, just makin' me feel kinda weird. Almost like it's booze," Derek said, sitting down on the lawn.

"You'd wish it was booze. But it's the middle of the week, not Friday," Paul noted, as he continued to work.

There was half a minute of silence before Derek changed the topic.

"Hey, Paul, you heard about those people goin' missing recently?" Derek said.

"Oh, no, no, it's not like it's not all over the bloody news," Paul grumbled. "Dozens of people reported missing over the course of a month, and the police suspect there might be even more."

"You think it's some terrorist plot or somethin'?" Derek said, glancing at his colleague. "Mass kidnapping for a ransom from the government?"

"If it was it's sure as hell a ballsy idea, there's never been a terrorist attack in Australia. At least, not that I can think of," Paul shrugged. "The feds are usually on it like flies on shit, if this is a mass kidnapping I'm just surprised the culprits haven't been caught yet."

The sounds of metal being sheared echoed through the air. Paul was much quicker to react, and shone his flashlight in the direction of the sound. "Hey, what the hell is going on over there?"

"Huh?" Derek blinked, also turning awkwardly in the same direction, fumbling with his flashlight. The two of them could see three figures having somehow ripped large holes in the nearby chain link fence. "what the hell are you doing? You're damaging private property and trespassing, get outta here before I call the cops!"

The figures stepped through, not answering. They seemed to have skin as black as night, with glowing red eyes and light armour over what looked like normal clothes, complete with helmets. Their expressions were blank, eyes wide.

“Hey, Derek, these guys look super creepy,” Paul noted to his colleague, his hand gripping the flashlight tighter, “why are their eyes glowing like tha-”

“Oh, it’s a prank!” Derek laughed, clapping as he stepped towards the trio, his caffeine-fuelled mind coming to a premature conclusion on what was happening. “Nice job with the paint, fellas, but the costumes really need some work. You almost had me there for a second, I’ll give you that.”

The three figures just stared at Derek, not even making a sound.

Paul began moving towards Derek, intending to pull him back as he stretched out an arm. “Derek, mate, you should step back, I don’t like this at all.”

“What? They ain’t got weapons or anythin’-” Derek was interrupted by his arms being seized by two of the figures, whose free hands suddenly transformed into nasty-looking blades that were held to his throat. “Hey, what’re you doing?!”

Paul almost stopped in his tracks, as he watched the third figure suddenly form some kind of black spherical substance from his body, which floated in mid-air, moving towards Derek. He had a wrench on his belt, but he didn’t know if it was a decent weapon against someone with a helmet. The notion of fleeing entered his mind, if but a moment.

He tried to attack anyway, grabbing the wrench and rushing one of the armoured figures, slamming it into his head. The figure actually stumbled back, the helmet cracked and his face was clearly damaged, but it seemed to just stare at him unblinking, and it wasn’t bleeding, just cracked like a porcelain doll.

Paul swung again. The armoured figure just blocked the strike with its arm, not even flinching from the blow.

The sphere suddenly shot at Derek, sticking to his torso in a splatter of black mass. The man gawked down at it, bewildered. “What the... This stuff is kinda-” Then the black substance began to expand outwards across his clothes. “H-Hey, what’s it doing?!”

The two figures restraining him suddenly let go. Paul wondered why, until it became apparent that, despite Derek’s best efforts, he could not tear the black mass free from his body.

“Get it off me! Paul, help!” Derek screamed in panic as the mass spread, covering most of his torso and spreading to his limbs, beginning to pull his entire body together. He was rapidly silenced as the mass spread over his neck and mouth, with only muffled screams to be heard.

Paul finally found the nerve to flee, dashing away from them with immediate haste, grabbing his phone and hurriedly attempting to call emergency services, something he should've done from the start.

“No, we can't have that,” spoke a distorted, masculine voice from the shadows, as a bolt of energy came into Paul's vision, striking the phone and shattering it in his hands.

Paul continued to flee regardless, but before he could even reach the fence as he fumbled for the gate key, he slammed right into something that at first he thought was invisible. It took a moment for him to register that the obstacle in front of him was a translucent blue energy field. He tried to slam his shoulder against it, eyes widening as he tried to figure out where it stopped. “What... What's going on now?!”

“A simple combination of runes, ‘Barrier’ and ‘Creature’, to create a field that keeps living creatures from leaving its confines. I also enacted a non-solid barrier with the ‘Sound’ rune to ensure no sounds escape,” remarked the distorted voice, coming from behind. “Of course, I doubt you understand what I'm talking about, you pathetic little thing that knows nothing of magic.”

Paul spun around, scanning the scene that had been right behind him as he fell down on his ass, slumping back against the barrier. “Barrier? Magic? What?!”

Firstly, the black mass that was on Derek had formed a cocoon around him. And something was growing from it - a humanoid figure that resembled the silent figures, but had a face that Paul realised was identical to Derek's, and was wearing his outfit under the armour.

Secondly, striding over towards him was a taller figure akin to the others, but one that wore grander, more impressive armour and helmet covering his entire body, along with a regal-looking cloak. Paul swore for a moment that above and behind the imposing figure there had been an indistinct black spectral form with glowing red eyes, gone as quickly as it had appeared.

The regal figure stopped in front of Paul, glaring down at him. The stare was enough to freeze the man to the spot as he trembled. The figure spoke, “I've found myself rather enjoying the looks of terror on the faces of weaklings like you.”

“So you’re... You’re some crazy supervillain or something?” Paul said, trying to feign any kind of courage. “I guess you’re behind all the people going missing, then. Well, once the government figures out what’s happening, they’ll just send in the army, and you’ll be-”

Suddenly, the figure’s gauntlet-covered hand shot forward, grabbing Paul by the throat and lifting him up with inhuman ease. Paul briefly choked, registering that the grip was just enough to only lightly constrict his breathing. He tried to strike the hand and arm with his flashlight multiple times, but neither budged. Their eyes met, and Paul realised that what little of his attacker’s face he could see past the helmet looked surprisingly youthful in complexion. How old was he?

“Your attempts at trying to look brave are lacklustre at best,” the regal figure said. “I’m tempted to indulge myself, but I’m on a deadline. Rejoice, you will be reborn as one of my servants, like your colleague was. I am the Tenebris Imperatoris, and the future ruler of this world.”

Paul had little opportunity to either register the name or properly respond as the ‘Tenebris Imperatoris’ started dragging him back over towards the minions, still holding him by the throat as Paul desperately struggled to try and loosen his grip, before tossing him to the ground fiercely.

Paul’s body was wracked with pain, as he tried to get back up onto his feet, but the Emperor’s boot slammed him back down, eliciting a scream of pain. He glanced upwards, to see the Emperor create another black orb, which shot down at Paul’s body.

Paul’s screams were swiftly silenced, only heard by his captors, with the town around him completely unaware of the threat in its midst.

Chapter One

Humankind does not particularly excel in a single field. Physically, they lack noteworthy traits, technologically they do not specialise in a specific field, and while they have a lot of experience fighting each other in often horrific warfare, they do not have the bloodlust of the Salvron. But they are still very capable in every field that they engage in, and they are capable of fascinating feats of innovation, and that includes warfare. They would contribute enormously to the galactic community once they finally leave their solar system, but heavens help us if they decide we need to be subjugated rather than befriended.

—Summary of a report to the High Commander of the Galactic Defense Force regarding the Human Species



Estella Kendrick eagerly stretched as she walked alongside her two sisters up the road towards the university. It was a rather pleasant late-autumn day. The sky was clear with few clouds to be seen, and the temperature was mildly on the slightly colder side of things.

The three sisters lived in the small city of Angel Bay, New South Wales, Australia, just north of Sydney and Newcastle on the coastline. Their parents had settled down here apparently because it wasn't as busy as a big city, but not too quiet like the rural towns. And they picked a rather prime spot for real estate, because the girls were in walking distance of the local university, which was rather aptly named Angel Bay University. It was hardly the most distinguished university out there in Australia, but it had a fairly reasonable reputation regardless, which was good, because unless you were willing to move out of town, it was the only choice you had for tertiary education in the area.

She hummed a tune as she adjusted the orange band at the back of her slate blue hair. Angel Bay University was already in sight, and they'd be on campus in a few minutes. "Winter chill is starting to creep in."

"Not the only thing that's creeping around here," sighed her youngest sister, Natalia, the shortest of the trio, as she scratched her neck-length sapphire blue hair with some worry in her voice. She had opted for an orange sweater, and a cactus-green set of leggings. "More people are going missing in town."

"Well, good thing we agreed to walk to and from campus together when people started going missing," Estella said, fishing her phone from one of her grey jacket's arm-pockets, checking for

the latest news. Aside from her bag, her jacket had two buttoned arm pockets and another two on the chest, though considering her rather substantial chest size most people just called them 'boob-pockets'.

"Um, right... Also, why are you two at all okay with going out with those clothes in this weather? Aren't you both cold?!" Natalia asked incredulously, pointing to everything below Estella's waist - the dark blue leotard and long socks.

"Nat, it's not that bad, and a little chill isn't an excuse to not look good," Estella grinned, turning around. "And I'm pretty modest compared to Anja over here!"

"Eh. It's fine," Anja shrugged. She was the middle sister, and the tallest of the trio by head (and the bustiest). A pair of sunglasses adorned her long Persian blue hair, and she wore a sky blue backless top and a pair of denim shorts. She shared her turquoise eyes with her sisters. "Cold don't bother me any."

Estella frowned, noting Anja's lazy gait and how she was almost falling behind. Natalia obviously wanted to just get to campus quickly, but Anja was in one of her moods again. "Hey. Anj. You alright?"

It was only an hour ago when she had to shake Anja to get her out of bed. Not because she was lazy, it wasn't really her fault. Sometimes her sister simply lacked the emotional energy to get out of bed without assistance.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'll be perfectly fine by the time class starts," Anja simply nodded to her, making eye contact. Her spark had been slowly returning, thanks to emotional support and therapy, but Estella couldn't forget that terrible night when her lively, dramatic sister just... Shut down. But after what happened, who could blame her?

"Just take it easy, Anja, we're here for you," Natalia smiled softly.

"We do need to talk about *your* issues, Nat," Estella squinted at Natalia, who made a cute 'eep' sound. "You slept through your alarms again. You need to stop it with the late nights."

"But I was less late this time..." Natalia fidgeted, a blush forming on her face.

Estella sighed, turning back around. "I know you're working on your own projects, but you still need more sleep. Mum wouldn't let you get away with it if she wasn't out of the country."

"Which one?" Natalia asked. The sisters had two mothers - Ryana and Atsuko, the former being

Australian and the latter being Japanese.

“Both of them. Atti especially,” Estella said, bringing up a family photo on her phone. “I wish they wouldn’t spend so much time overseas... The house feels emptier without them.”

“It does, but... I just want them to come home and tell us the truth already,” Natalia replied bitterly. That was family drama that Estella did not wish to dredge back up.

“Let’s not bring that back up and change the subject, you’re still doing some pretty late nights,” Estella said, shaking her head, looking back over her shoulder.

“Yeah, I know,” Natalia admitted. “Though it’s not like you two don’t spend some late nights partying.”

“Eh, fair cop, though you’re going to less of them. I know you’re not as sociable as us, but it feels like you’ve become a bit more shut-in,” Anja interjected.

“Uni’s a different atmosphere than high school. You’re used to it already by being a year ahead, I’m not,” Natalia replied with a sigh and a shake of her head.

“You won’t get used to it if you just lock yourself in your room at every opportunity!” Estella remarked with a slight chuckle, “it’s okay to hang with friends, you know?”

“Easy for you to say, you’re the town’s serial Juliet,” Natalia grumbled.

Anja snorted, glancing at Estella. “She’s got you there. I know you’ve slowed down on the dating, but back in high school, you had how many boyfriends and girlfriends...?”

Estella pouted, looking back ahead, unable to provide a proper retort for several seconds. “I can’t help that I have terrible luck with dates.”

It was at this point where they finally arrived on campus, and Estella was able to drop the subject in a hurry, eagerly mingling with students also arriving that morning.

The university had a large and open campus. A large chunk of the campus grounds had a lot of greenery, including a few creeks and a small lake, where one could see plenty of waterfowl - it was not uncommon to see ducks wandering near the waterways. Being the only university in town, there were a large variety of facilities, and it wasn’t uncommon for some people to walk some distance cross-campus to get to their classes.

“Hey, Janet, we still on for the party this weekend?” Estella called out to a student she

immediately recognised.

“Hell yeah, we are!” Janet said, passing by with a wave, which Estella reciprocated.

“Lookin’ fine today, Es! Isn’t it kinda chilly, though?” Brett asked as he passed by.

“I can deal, no worries,” Estella grinned, exchanging a fist bump with him.

“Hey, Estella, we can study a bit together sometime today or tomorrow? There’s a few things about the last few lectures that kinda confused me,” spoke Steven as he caught up to her.

Estella briefly thought about this before replying, “maybe, if it doesn’t conflict with my job hours. We’ll see. We’ll talk later, alright?” She then put an arm around his shoulder, speaking in a hushed tone, “and maybe I can teach you some lessons on how you can please Connie in bed~”

“Oh my God, sis,” Natalia groaned, burying her head in her hands.

“You really get to get your mind out of the gutter... But I wouldn’t mind that, I guess. Later,” Steven said, blushing profusely as he hurried away.

“ESTELLA! PLEASE DATE ME AGAIN!”

Estella immediately did a double-take as she stopped in her tracks, as one of her ex-boyfriends, Brendan, was standing right there and on one knee. “Excuse me what.”

“HEY! I saw her first, you loser!” June suddenly rushed up, falling to one knee right beside Brendan, “ignore him, he had his chance, please go out with me again, Estella!”

“Oh for fuck’s sake, Es, this is why you need to get your love life in order,” Natalia grumbled.

“You say this like this happens regularly?!” Estella said to her sister with some exasperation, before becoming aware that this was starting to make a scene, and she sighed, speaking to her two exes, “sorry, I’m not interested in going out with either of you two again right now. I’m-”

“You’re single again, everyone knows you broke off with Jay!” June said.

“How would you possibly know that?” Estella blinked.

“Kinda obvious, sis, you haven’t been nearly so lovey-dovey around him lately,” Anja said dryly.

“What she said!” Brendan said.

“Okay, look, both of you are good folks, and I enjoyed dating you both, but you gotta move on,” Estella said. She moved to grab Natalia’s shoulders before her youngest sister could flee the scene. “Natalia’s free! She’s cute, has just as nice a body as me, and she *really* needs a date.”

“Please don’t drag me into this, sis,” Natalia said, her face now beet red as she covered her face with her hands again. The topic of dating always flustered Natalia to no end.

Brendan seemed to consider it, but he had a question. “Why aren’t you suggesting both of your sisters? Anja’s got bigger boobs than either of you, and-”

“DUDE! Don’t you know what happened in high school?!” June hissed, pulling Brendan close and whispering in his ear.

Brendan’s eyes widened. “OH. Oh. I’m so sorry, Anja, I didn’t-”

“Nah, it’s alright, it’s cool, not everyone knows,” Anja shrugged.

“Sorry, I’m not getting involved in this anymore! BYE!” Natalia said, shaking off Estella and fleeing for the engineering labs.

“Yeah, you’re on your own, sis, seeya,” Anja waved idly as she headed for biology.

Estella sighed. It took an embarrassingly long amount of time for her to talk Brendan and June into leaving her alone before she was able to finally get going and start heading for class.

The weather should have been an omen of a fairly normal and boring day. Unfortunately for everyone there, they had no idea how decidedly *not* boring the day would become that afternoon.