

Collect On Delivery

Eleazar and Bellatrix crawl out of the wrecked space freighter and race across the rocky plain to the cargo bay at the rear of the ship.

Eleazar drags out a large, rugged case as big as a coffin. “Bella, you have to tell me what’s in this thing and why are they trying to kill us to get it?”

She begins to shout back more of the same excuses she’s peddled over the last two days of increasingly dangerous mayhem. But the battleship that’s been pursuing them lands just 50 meters away, enveloping them in a roar of wind and dust.

As a small band of thugs piles out of the spacecraft, Eleazar tosses the lid open to find that the heavy case is mostly full of fluffy fibrous material, like the stuff used to insulate walls. In the center rests a glassy sphere about the size of a man’s head, pulsating with intense yellow and orange light.

Captain Alaric struts up, followed by his gang of slack-jawed mercenaries.

“This treasure is heavily padded.” Eleazar kicks the crate, jiggling the prize inside. “So I’m guessing it’s pretty fragile.”

“Be careful with that!” Alaric growls.

“What? Afraid I’ll scratch your precious gem?” Eleazar snatches the orb with one hand. “You killed a lot of people to get at this trinket. What’s it worth to you?”

“You idiot. It’s not just some expensive decoration. It’s the key to a new type of weaponry. There is enough power in that ball to blow you into the stratosphere. So carefully hand it over, and you two can go back to your boring lives.”

“We won’t have lives to return to,” Bellatrix quips back. “Alaric’s planning to use his new weapon to take over the colony – to wipe out our people.”

“It’s not a colony!” Alaric spews. “You’re people are just squatters on this planet.” He turns his attention back to Eleazar. “You’re in way over your head, delivery boy. So just hand the Singularitron over to me, and be on your way, back to ... wherever you came from.”

“The Singularitron? That’s a pretty ominous name for a child’s night light.” Eleazar juggles the sphere from one hand to the other, gives Bellatrix an overly casual wink, then looks back at Alaric. “Well, you destroyed my ship, you tanked the delivery-speed rating on my courier profile, and now you’re plotting the destruction of a community I’m growing rather fond of. So I’m not much in the mood to give you what you want.”

Alaric flinches at the sight of the cargo being handled so carelessly, then nods at one of his soldiers who quickly raises his rifle. "Maybe we'll kill your new girlfriend."

"Lazar ..." Bellatrix shoots Eleazar a look that is almost brave enough to be convincing. "Run for it. I'll hold them off."

"I know how this is going to end." Eleazar squeezes the orb between both hands, angry orange light, shining out between his fingers. "You'll kill us either way."

"You're right." Alaric shrugs with a heartless chuckle, stepping closer to the pair. As soon as we're done here, I'm gonna give you both a quick blast to the head. But if you delay any longer —" He lunges forward, pulling a knife from his belt and grabbing Bellatrix in a headlock. "I'll kill her slowly, peeling her skin off bit by bit!"

"Let her go!" Eleazar palms the orb in one hand facing the ground. "Or I'll smash it!"

"If you do, it will explode, killing everyone, including her." Alaric slowly begins to slice along her jawline as she wails in terror.

"No!" Eleazar flings the orb high into the air, sending everyone's gaze upward. In the next moment, his fist meets Alaric's face, stunning the brute just long enough for Eleazar to grab Bellatrix and throw her into the case.

"Lazar, what are you doing?" she cries out as he slams the lid shut — the orb falling toward the ground just behind the goons.

There is a deafening blast, accompanied by a blinding flash of light and a shockwave that sends everyone flying.

(To be continued)