

The observatory stood on the edge of a forgotten coast, half-swallowed by rust and wind. Its great dish faced the sky like an open wound, blackened with age and salt. Beneath the dying stars, the air trembled with something that was not weather.

Mai's boots echoed on the metal grating as she climbed the access stairs, the disruptor humming at her side. "Signal strength's wrong," she said. "It's climbing when it should fade. The readings show interference from a source above the ionosphere—something eating the frequencies as they're sent."

Ace followed in silence, eyes lifted toward the void. The wind tangled her dark hair, her twin katanas pulsing faintly with green light. Her shadow, always a little too alive, moved against the metal like oil under glass. "Three technicians vanished here," she murmured. "They reported the stars bending before the feed cut."

Mai stopped at the top of the stairwell and turned. "Bending?"

"Like they were being drawn in."

The dish loomed before them—vast, cracked, its surface trembling. The steel ribs shivered, catching fragments of light that had no source. Mai's disruptor clicked as it charged. "No electromagnetic reason for this," she said. "Unless the stars themselves—"

"They're dimming," Ace said quietly. "Not clouds. Not haze. Something's taking them away."

Then the world groaned.

The sky folded inward, forming a hollow bowl above the dish. From its heart bled a radiance that was wrong—light that devoured rather than shone. Something immense turned within it, limbs writhing like roots of a dying sun. Every motion dragged sparks and arcs of lightning through the night.

Ammutseba had come.

Mai swallowed. "So it's real."

"It's hungry," Ace said. "Don't let it notice you thinking."

The first limb struck the dish, a wet, muscular lash that dented the metal. The air filled with static, then screams—voices shredded into frequencies. Ace moved first. Her katanas flared, slicing through the tendril; the wound hissed, edges knitting back together almost instantly.

Mai raised the disruptor, adjusted the runic dial, and fired. A beam of pale blue light lanced upward, striking the radiant mouth. The creature shuddered, the light dimming for a heartbeat before swelling brighter than before.

"It's feeding on the energy," Mai said. "But it reacts—"

"Then make it choke."

They moved together. Ace carved sigils of green fire along the dish's rim, forming a circle that crackled with geometry older than language. Mai tuned the disruptor into a harmonic shriek, letting the beam tremble at the threshold of instability. Every note stripped color from the air.

The monster's limbs lashed against invisible walls, desperate, furious. The sky around it twisted—stars drawn toward its mouth, then stopped mid-fall as the circle tightened. The radiance at its center flickered, revealing a mass of eyes, thousands of them, all fixed on Ace.

She felt the gaze inside her skull, as if her thoughts were being tasted. Shadows bled from her boots, curling upward, answering instinctively to the intrusion. “Mai!” she shouted. “Close the circuit!”

Mai sprinted across the trembling steel, planted three frequency anchors, and fired into the circle’s center. The cross of energy met the mouth of Ammutseba—and the universe screamed.

The sound wasn’t air or vibration. It was subtraction. Every memory, every light, every reflection in the dish vanished for a single second. Then the night came back, bruised but breathing.

Ammutseba convulsed. Its limbs writhed toward the light, desperate to hold the shape it no longer owned. Ace’s katanas carved the final line—a cross through the circle’s heart—and Mai fired again, a harmonic pulse that split the air into shards of frost.

The creature imploded. Its radiance folded inward until it was no larger than a candle flame, then blinked out. The stars returned, uncertain but real.

Only the wind remained, rattling through the ribs of the dish.

Mai stood panting, disruptor dim in her hand. “Residual readings falling. Whatever it was, it’s gone—or sleeping.”

Ace sheathed her blades, their glow fading to soft embers. “We didn’t kill it. You don’t kill what eats light. You starve it until it moves on.”

Mai brushed dust from her coat. “Then we make sure it stays hungry.”

They descended the stairs together, the metal sighing beneath their boots. Above them, the sky looked whole again. But where Ammutseba had been, the stars still shivered faintly, as though remembering fear.

At the base of the hill, Ace looked back. The dish sat dark and silent, its center smoldering with a faint, ember-like glow—the seal they had made, holding the void at bay.

“Do you think it can come back?” Mai asked.

Ace’s eyes lingered on the sky. “Everything hungry finds its way home.”

Mai smiled without warmth. “Then we’ll be here when it does.”

They walked toward the horizon, their silhouettes framed by the reborn stars. Behind them, the wind carried a whisper through the steel—something between a sigh and a promise.

The stars did not answer. But somewhere in the endless dark between them, something stirred. —

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