

Started on march 1st. Its april 28th. I genuinely dont remember the last time i worked on this

“Howdy. Hey. How’s it goin’ everybody?”

Doctor Gordon Freeman, twenty-seven year old theoretical physicist, was late for his first day at the Black Mesa research facility; assigned work in the “Sector C: Anomalous Materials” test labs. He waved at a security guard as he passed, trying to save face. Armored boots *thunked* on the scuffed, off-white tile floor.

He turned a rounded-off corner of the facility’s blue panel walls, stopping just before a large metal door with a sign that said “SECURITY CLEARANCE: LEVEL 03” above it, lit up in large, red letters. A retinal scanner was attached to the right wall adjacent to the doors, and next to that stood another security guard named Jefferem.

“Go right on through, sir,” he said, moving in front of the scanner, “Looks like you’re in the barrel today.”

Gordon took a small step towards the open door.

“Hey,” a voice from behind drowned out whatever else the guard had to say.

“Huh?” Gordon turned in the direction of the voice, “What’s wr- what’s wrong, sir?”

It was the guard that Gordon had passed just moments ago, now approaching him.

He looked like every other security guard in the facility; blue button up, black tie, bullet-proof chest plate armor, shiny helmet, gun strapped to baggy pants tucked into combat boots. However, he was noticeably shorter than the rest, and seemed almost sickly. His features looked sunken in, casting shadows on odd parts of his face. Gordon noticed that there was no name badge on his uniform.

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Tired eyes, flat voice, and his plate armor nearly slipping off his shoulders, the unnamed guard sluggishly walked over to Gordon and stared him dead in the eyes. “Can I see your,” he paused, “... passport?”

“My *passport*?” Gordon out of habit began to pat himself down in the Hazard Suit he was wearing. “Why do I need a- why do I- what do you mean a *passport*?” He cocked a brow. “You mean like a company I.D.?”

The unnamed guard walked over to Jefferem, who had his face still pressed to the scanner. The former scooted over to the latter’s side whilst the doors slid open, and craned his neck up to whisper into his ear, “*He doesn’t have his passport.*”

Jefferem turned his head to look at the other guard, before moving his attention to Gordon. A moment of silence passed. The unnamed guard spoke up again. “Yeah, he’s tellin’ me that you’re not allowed in here,” he deadpanned.

Gordon chuckled in disbelief, “I don’t- I don’t have a *passport*! I have my...” He looked down again at the metal suit he was wearing and patted himself down again. “I have my Black Mesa I.D.-”

“Look at how upset he’s getting- Look at his fists. They’re *balled*,” said the unnamed guard flicking a hand towards Jefferem, whom of which had resumed his place next to the retinal scanner. “He wants to beat you up so bad.”

Gordon wheezed out a nervous laugh and looked at Jefferem’s fists. “*He’s clenching.*” The physicist took a deep breath, “I- *dude-*”

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“I’m gonna have to protect you,” the unnamed guard stepped between Gordon and the other security officer, “I’m gonna have to protect you from him.”

“Okay?”

“I’m gonna have to follow you around,” a laugh escaped, “and protect you from him.”

“Listen, I’m not-” Gordon put up his hands in defense as the unnamed guard took a step towards him. He laughed, taking a step back, “I’m not any danger to *him*, or a-”

“I’m gonna give you-” the unnamed guard, chuckling, looked back and forth between Gordon and the other guard behind him, “I’m gonna give you- He’s *so* upset right now.” He stood face-to-face with Jefferem and began rambling.

“I’m in the- I’m *in* the H.E.V. Suit-” Gordon motioned down to the suit he was wearing, “I’m *in* the fucking... *company suit*.”

“Uh, hold on, I need to-”

“I’m in my uniform...” Gordon continued idly.

“I need to soothe him. I’m gonna calm him down.”

A single note, a simple “Aoh~” accompanied by some sort of pulsing, blue aura, emanated from the unnamed guard’s mouth and into Jefferem's face. He was unbothered.

The unnamed guard began babbling again.

“What was *that*?” Gordon wheezed.

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“I’m gonna-”

“*Whatthefuckw*- what was that?”

“That’s just how we calm each other down. That’s the-” the unnamed guard stepped to the side, now facing Gordon again. “That’s the Black Mesa...” he searched for the right words, “*Sweet Voice*.”

“You blow balls in his mouth?” Gordon sputtered.

Jefferem glared at him.

“Okay, uh,” Gordon moved away from the security officers and pointed behind him, “so, I gotta go to the test chamber, am I being held up here? Like am I not allowed to go do my *job*?”

Gordon kept his eyes locked on the unnamed guard, who had begun meandering aimlessly within the small stretch of hallway.

“No,” the guard said, “I’ll follow you just in case he tries to... come and beat you up.” he walked up to Gordon, “I also want your passport?”

Gordon laughed and shook his head, confused. “I don’t have-”

“Please?”

Gordon huffed, “**LOOK** at my chest!”

The door behind him closed with a hiss and a clunk.

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“*Look* at me!” he continued, “I’m- I’m suited t- like, literally every scientist in the fucking building is *rushing* me into the room. I- I’m going to **GO**.”

Seemingly unnoticed, the unnamed guard crouched down and adjusted something on Gordon’s suit.

“Are you- So you’re coming wi- You’re coming with me?” Gordon, irritated, lowered his hands.

“... I have to come with you. I’m sorry but I need your-” the guard seemed to be intentionally invading his personal space. “I need to get your passport.”

Gordon stepped backwards in an attempt to regain *some* of his personal bubble. “I- We’ll- We’ll find it, okay? There’ll be a passport somewhere around here. I’m sure we can find *something* that’ll make you happy, and make *him* happy...” He pointed at Jefferem and tilted his head, grimacing. “Kinda s- Kinda scared of him...”

“Yeah, well you know what? He’s never happy, but I’m- hold on.” The unnamed guard paused to walk over to Jefferem and performed the Black Mesa Sweet Voice again. He held the note longer this time for good measure.

Gordon jogged down the hallway past the break room “I gotta go put on my H.E.V. Suit! Even though I’m already in it...” he trailed off.

“*Hello?*” a scientist called out to Gordon from behind him, “*HELLO?*”

“... Hello?”

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The scientist was a bit older than Gordon, around his late thirties. He had black, slicked back hair that showed off a prominent widow's peak. He wore a powder red tee-shirt and gray slacks. His standard Black Mesa issue lab coat looked yellowed in the light of the hallway.

"My name's Tommy!" he smiled. He spoke very cheerfully.

"... *Tommy*? Okay, where a- What department are you in?" Gordon was getting annoyed at these interruptions. "Where're you supposed to be right now? You headed to the break room?"

"...Yeah! I like to read the billboards there."

"In the- The *bill-boards* in the break room?" Gordon sputtered, "They- Are they puttin' ads-"

"Yeah, follow me!"

Tommy ran inside the break room. Gordon followed shortly after. The small room was almost completely illuminated by the vending machines on the right. A small microwave on the counter behind them hummed.

"... The *billboards*?" Gordon squinted at the blurry papers on the cork board.

"Yeah!" Tommy exclaimed, "Tell me what it says!"

Gordon chortled under his breath. "I can't read it either, dude! Listen," he waved a hand dismissively at Tommy, "I'm gonna- I'll s- You gonna stay here?"

Tommy paused to look at Gordon. "Yeah, I'm on lunch break!"

"Okay," Gordon chuckled, "We'll see- I'll s- I'll catch ya later, Tommy!"

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Gordon left the break room and started back down the hallway. He could faintly hear Tommy yell from the growing distance: “*I drink soda for lunch!*”

He pulled a face as he kept walking. “Apparently he drinks soda for lunch, okay- what a- what a... what a *freak*. What the *fuck* was that? What the **hell** was that?”

He waved his hand in front of the door to the locker room as he muttered to himself. It slid open with a whir. The lockers were aged and yellowing, some of the bolts holding the name tags on were starting to rust off of the metal doors. Three benches were bolted to the light brown tile floor, the benches themselves were made of a hard, black plastic. A bathroom area sat off to the right-back of the space. To the back left was a platform leading down to an area with three containers that could house one H.E.V. Suit each. There was only one left.

Gordon approached a scientist who was crouched down at his locker near the door, and gave a halfhearted wave. “Hey, Mr. Coomer.”

Doctor Coomer was a much older scientist; shorter, stockier. His Einstein-style hair and mustache was a blanched gray. He wore a light blue polo shirt with a black and maroon striped tie. His shirt was tucked into his white dress pants, which matched the shade of his lab coat.

“Ah,” Dr. Coomer stood up and turned to face him, “hello, Gordon!” He spoke with a matter-of-fact tone of voice like many other scientists, but he was more goofy and lighthearted.

Gordon nodded. “How’re you doin’ today?”

“Another day, another dollar! Am I right?” The doctor gave a hearty chuckle.

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“‘Another day, another dollar,’ that’s what we always say... here at Black Mesa...”
Gordon glanced at another coworker as he started complaining about the dress code. “I- Alright. I’ll be- I gotta- I gotta head to the test chamber, I gotta big day today, right? Y’know... y’know, crystals?”

“Good luck in the chamber!”

“G- chamber? Yeah, yeah, all that... all that.”

Gordon and the unnamed guard entered a white circular hallway, with a blue room in the middle that housed an elevator shaft.

“So you know where we’re goin’?” Gordon turned back towards the guard as he stepped through the second set of doors. “Y’know, you should probably be suited up for this- like, this is gonna be like... *radiation ‘n shit*?”

The guard looked him up and down, and walked past him.

Gordon, watching him, continued, “Are you... good?”

“It’s okay, I’m- I’m-” the guard broke into a light jog as he ran ahead of Gordon. “I’m not human. Let’s go.”

Gordon nodded, not wanting to pursue the argument, and agreed.

They followed the wrap-around hallway, passing two trivision billboards embedded into the wall, until reaching an elevator at the back of the back of the corridor. “Alright, so,” Gordon

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pressed a button on the wall, “down the elevator.. The- I think we’re heading like... thhhree levels down? So... that was um...”

The elevator doors opened.

“How long have you worked here?” Gordon asked.

The guard zipped towards Freeman, forcing the physicist’s back to the wall, insisting that Gordon didn’t know where he was going.

“Where do we need to go if not down the elevator?” Gordon shimmied to his right to put some distance between them.

“Is that why you don’t have a passport?”

“I-”

“Why are you-”

The doors close.

“I’ve never- I’ve worked here... for... many years,” Gordon lied, “I have never had to bring my passport to work. I’ve never had a guard *ask* me for my passport. I’m a little bit suspicious of *you*-”

“Why are you shaking?”

Gordon looked down at his hand, he *did* seem a little jittery. “I don’t know why I’m shaking,” he forced a laugh, “I don’t *know* why I’m shaking! I think you’re pushing me into the-”

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“Are you nervous?”

“I’m not nervous,” he shook his head, “I’m *perfectly* okay. I’m perfectly healthy, and *smart*,” he spat.

“You wouldn’t be shaking if you had your passport.”

“I need you to *move out of the way*,” Gordon argued, motioning as if he were pushing the guard to the side, “so that we can *go*... to the *test chamber*.”

The guard shifted his focus to the wall behind Freeman momentarily, seemingly to take in details as though he’d never been here before. “Why are you yelling at me?”

Gordon fumbled his words and held a hand up to the side of his head. “*Listen*,” he tried to push past the guard again, “I’m gonna press the button-”

The guard stepped behind him. “I have to follow you, sir.”

“You can fo- okay! I’ve accepted that! I’ve come to terms with that! I’ve come to terms with the fact that you’ve just- you’re just gonna... *baby-sit* me today!”

Gordon stepped through the doors after they had opened, and the guard swiftly blocked his way again. They stood toe to toe on a dimly lit narrow platform, stories above the bottom of the elevator shaft.

“Do you have I.D.?” the guard asked calmly, taking a step back just far enough into the elevator to leave Gordon on the ledge of the platform.

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Gordon choked on his words for a moment. “I have as much I.D. as I’m ever going to have! Listen, man, I’m not good at squeezing past people. I’m a big guy.” He in vain again tried left and right to dart past the guard, but it was no use. The officer stood stalwart and sturdy.

“I can’t... get past you... when you stand right there,” Gordon hissed.

“But the thing is, there’s a lot of people here that are afraid of you,” the guard’s words were met with a snort. “And I need your I.D....’Cuz your I.D. says if you’re nice or not.”

Gordon spoke over him, amused, “Who is *afraid* of me?” He asked the question again once the guard had finished talking.

“There’s like five people-” the guard started.

“Is that why the scientists wouldn’t talk to me?”

“...Probably?”

“Okay- Well-” Gordon and the guard blathered over one another behind the now closed glass doors of the stationary platform, *both* failing to get a word in edgewise.

“Did you meet Tommy? He likes mean people,” the guard asked, an accusatory tone creeping into his voice.

Gordon threw his hands into the air, frustrated. “WE WILL FIGURE THIS ALL! OUT! WE ARE RUNNING-”

“That’s why he talked to you,” the guard retorted, stunning the physicist into silence for a brief moment. He watched Gordon’s face scrunch up.

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“***WHAT?! What did you just say?!?***”

“Tommy likes mean people.”

Gordon, scowling, pushed past the guard and pressed the button on the elevator wall, initiating their descent. He began to say something, but the guard interrupted him again.

“If you jump down, it’ll be faster,” the guard said plainly, peering over the open ledge out onto the metal platform several feet below them.

“I... don’t think that’s...” Gordon shifted his weight from one foot to the other, nervous. “I mean, that is *true*. I don’t think that’s... very *safe*... for our *bodies*.” He watched as the guard inched closer to the ledge. “I think you should probably save your legs the trouble and just wait... five seconds? Are you tryin’a get me killed?”

Just a foot above the landing platform, the guard clumsily stepped down out of the elevator causing the doors to open prematurely. He turned around just as the elevator settled.

“Damn,” Gordon said with mock astonishment, “you wait for nobody, huh?”

The guard walked ahead of Gordon off down the hall, cackling. The latter snickered in response.

It was a short hallway lined with vents and large encased wires. On the floor to the right-back of the room leading off of two wires half-way embedded into the ground sat a small turbine generator, pulsating with electricity.

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Gordon caught up with the guard. “You were sayin’ people-” he gestured to two scientists who were standing nearby. “They don’t seem scared of me. They don’t- they’re not even *looking* at me. They’re *ignoring* me-”

The guard turned to face Freeman, “Yeah, they’re too afraid to look at you.”

“Why are- Why would they be- What reason would they have to be to be afraid?” The words unceremoniously tumbled from Gordon’s mouth.

“...Show your I.D.?” the guard belabored.

Gordon spluttered in exasperation and spun on his heel towards the doors to the right and resumed his journey to the test chamber.

The corridor he entered was more like a tunnel, with walls made of old, off-white sheets of metal bolted to concrete. Along the bottom of the walls were vents that spanned the entire length; the same kind of vents were in every room in Sector C. The left wall was painted with four colored stripes leading to their specified rooms down the hall; CONTROL ROOM, TEST LAB ACCESS, PLASMA CELLS, and IONIZATION CHAMBERS. Not too far down, the hall took a right turn. The right side of this hall was lined with two, large, white, stainless-steel tubes, labeled with the words “*CAUTION: LASER.*” The left side was cluttered with large, towering machines, covered in dials and blinking lights.

Gordon announced his speedy arrival, sprinting down the hall to another security manned door. There was one guard on either side.

“**Let me in.** Let me in, we’re running late,” Gordon pleaded.

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The guard on the right gave him a strange look as the door opened by itself.

“*Thank you. See?*” Gordon turned around to look back at the unnamed guard. “These guys aren’t asking for my I.D.! You have some... *fucked up vendetta* against me,” he bargained, “an’ my fuckin’ *passport*.” Gordon trudged backwards through the door. “They were no problem!”

The guard followed him though. “They don’t care.”

“Why don’t they ca-” Gordon stuttered, “You think they don’t care about your job? Yer jus’ gonna- You’re just gonna *say that* in fron’na them?”

“They’re thinkin’ ‘bout... Fruit Loops all day.”

“***Fruit Loops!?***” Gordon clamped a hand down on one of the unnamed guard’s shoulders.

“... Fruit Loops.” The guard said again.

“*Fruit loo-* They didn’t have breakfast? Everybody got be- *breakfast. They had their fuckin’ breakfast.* What the *fuck* are you talking about?” Gordon was interrupted by a scientist who had yelled from the far side of the room.

“Sir, excuse me!”

He was about Dr. Coomer’s age, if not older. He had gray hair that stuck off the sides of his balding head and black glasses with thick lenses. He wore a green button up and denim jeans. There was a single red pen in the chest pocket of his lab coat.

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“Sir! You can’t be- you can’t be down here,” the scientist said, striding over from a small terminal embedded in a wall on the opposite end of the small hallway.

Gordon was relieved. “*Jesus Christ*. Can you show him out of here?!” He pointed at the guard, moving out of the way so that the scientist could speak to the security officer.

“You can’t be down here, you don’t have a ‘Hazard Suit’,” the scientist told the guard.

Gordon was now back to yelling at the guard, “You’re not wearing the fucking radiation gear! You’re gonna *die*.” He stretched out the last word with a peeved whisper in his voice.

The guard tapped his own pockets. “I have my- I have my I.D.”

“He does have a...” Gordon trailed off.

“Oh, alright.” The scientist walked away without another word, leaving Gordon dumbstruck.

The guard, barely managing to hold back his laughter, shuffled up to Gordon. “See what happens when you bring your I.D. and your passport?”

Gordon doubled over, wheezing.

The scientist spoke from his spot near the terminal, “Does he not have his passport?”

“I *don’t* have my passport!” Gordon responded.

“Where’s your passport?!”

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“DO YOU *HAVE* YOUR FUCKING PASSPORT?! WHAT DOES THAT EVEN *MEAN*?!”

“YES! Of *course* I have my passport!”

Gordon angrily clamped his mouth shut and made his way down the hall.

He entered another room with more wires and vents. A large computer partially hidden in a wide alcove on the far left side of the room ejected an entire panel of buttons. Smoke poured out of the hole. The two scientists who were overlooking the plasma tubes on the opposite side of the room rushed over, griping about something going critical.

“*WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON!?*” Gordon exclaimed, pointing at the accident, “Your c- Your- The *computers* ‘re j’st blowing up!”

“I *told* you!” The guard ran over to survey the damage.

“Are we really fit to do the test?!”

“You’re the one...” the guard trailed off.

“...Huh?”

Gordon walked over to the small group of coworkers that were standing around the broken computer and turned his head to face the guard. “Do you-?”

“I found the bug!” someone exclaimed through the missing panel in the computer, “I found what broke our computers!”

“... What?” Gordon yelled back.

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“I’m gonna need a wrench in here...”

“*Huh???*”

Gordon peered through the hole in the computer and looked inside, it was the scientist from earlier! He was tangled in wires, practically tied to the floor of the interior.

“How did you get *in* there?!” Gordon yelled, “I don-”

“Shut the fuck-” the scientist uncoiled himself from the mess of wires and stuck his head out of the opening. His face was partially illuminated by the blinking blue lights inside of the hollowed out space “What is your problem?” he said, and immediately resumed his task.

Gordon, dumbfounded, spun about-face and walked to the next elevator, the guard still following him.

The elevator descended in a counterclockwise rotation and arrived at its other assigned floor. A large red stripe with the words “TEST LAB” were painted on the wall to the right.

The guard stormed off without Gordon. “I can’t FUCKING believe it.”

Gordon sniffed, “Yeah, that’s what I should be sayin’, huh?” He watched the guard wander into a short, dead end hallway to the left. “Yeah, you stay- okay. You stay over *there*...”

“Don’t FUCKING talk to me.”

Gordon cackled under his breath and made his way down the hall in the other direction, stopping at another large metal door decorated with black and yellow warning tape. To the right shone a red, back-lit sign labeling it as “TEST LAB: C-33/a”.

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“Can we open this up?” exasperated, he rested his hand on the cold metal. The heavy steel plates split apart. He thanked no one.

The room inside was plated with thick metal, and closed off from the test chamber with even thicker blast doors. Two scientists stood in front of the doors, waiting patiently. On the walls adjacent to the door there were two retinal scanners, one for each of them.

Gordon turned around to see that the guard had decided to meet up with him again. He stepped up onto the bottom lip of the door frame and used himself as a blockade, and attempted to warn the guard not to follow him any further. “*This is the fucking test chamber,*” he pled, “This is where you g- you *die* if you go in here.”

The guard looked up at him blankly.

“Are th- You get it? *You get it???*” Gordon asked him.

The guard kept pushing. “There are no- there are no... *predetermined deaths.*”

“I- Y’know what, man?” Gordon shook his head and bent down to meet the guards height. “I guess you’re right,” he said, condescendingly, “There- Ye- There i- There’s no guara-”

The guard sang some Sweet Voice to Gordon, stopping him in his tracks.

Gordon was taken aback. “... What did you just do to me?”

“Calm down,” the guard said.

Gordon stepped the rest of the way into the room and spun around to face the scientists, who were trying to brief him on the day’s task.

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“*DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT GUY???*” he shrieked.

The scientists were unfazed. “Yes-”

“The fuckin’ security guard jus’ wan’ed to *walk in here* and get *IRRADIATED* and fuckin’ *drop DEAD.*”

The scientists kept talking.

Gordon tried to fill the awkward moment left behind by being supposedly ignored. “I love this guy...” he motioned towards the man on the left.

“Gordon,” the man on the right said, “we have complete confidence in you.”

Gordon’s face lit up and he placed a hand on the man’s shoulder. “Yes, yes! That’s what I’m fucking-”

He pulled away.

“Let’s let him in now,” the one on the left said. Both scientists walked to their respective retinal scanners.

Gordon stepped back, dejected. “Okay... Apparently no one here knows how to socialize and... y’know...” he crossed his arms, “be a friendly... *coworker*... an’ just...”

With a beep and a click, the blast doors pulled open to reveal a large, octagonal space with white lights and orange steel walls. On the left side of the chamber was a topless cage set at the beginning of a path that led straight to the center of the room. On the wall behind it was a window built as a vantage point from the chamber’s control room. On the opposite side of the

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chamber was a raised platform with a *barely* protective, wire-thin, stainless steel railing. There was a ladder leading up to an even higher fenced-in steel platform that held a small terminal. In the middle of the area standing tall was a monolith of magnets, tubes, and wires: the Anti-Mass Spectrometer. A great, hulking machine, painted the same shade of orange as the walls. Large metal arms rose from the ground, protecting the small pit within its center that was lined with detectors. A massive magnet held in line by arms similar to that of those below hanged from an unreachable ceiling, surrounded by three large, barrel-shaped, overhead capacitors.

None of this mattered to Gordon, because the unnamed guard had somehow found his way in and was standing right in front of him.

Again.

“**HOW THE *FUCK*,**” Gordon shouted, walking towards him, “DID YOU... MANAGE- DID YOU GO THROUGH THE *WINDOW*?!” He jabbed in the direction of the window to the control room; high up on the left.

As if on cue, someone called from the window.

“Hello?”

Exhaustion painted Gordon’s face. “Oh my god, now Tommy’s up there...” He made a strained noise and put his head in his hands.

The guard whirled around to face the window, “TOMMY.”

“Gordon?” Tommy yelled back down.

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Gordon irritably lifted his head from his hands and looked over to the guard. “You know him? You know Tommy?”

“Tommy, do you know this man?” The scientist that was trapped inside the computer earlier was now up in the control room as well.

“TOMMY,” the guard shouted again.

Gordon looked between the guard and the window, laughing. “What?”

“Hi,” responded Tommy.

Another new voice rang out from the window, it was Dr. Coomer. “You know, he didn’t bring his passport!”

The guard let out a mid-high pitched Sweet Voice in response.

Tommy hollered out from the window again, “I heard you don’t have your passport!”

Gordon tuned him out and put out a hand on the guard’s shoulder. “Listen, dude, dude, you can *live*. You can *survive*. You’re gonna be *fine*. You just have to go back in the airlock with the other guys.” He motioned with his free hand towards the room beyond the blast doors.

The guard took one look at the room and swiveled his head back to Gordon. “You’re not getting rid of me that easy.”

Gordon lifted up his hands and clenched them into fists. “I don’t even know how the *fuck* you managed to get in here! That’s not even supposed to be *OPEN*!” He pointed at the window.

“I know your tricks,” the guard continued, “you steal stuff by telling people to go away.”

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Gordon's arm fell to his side with a *clang!* He muttered to himself as he made his way to the platform on the right side of the chamber.

"Gordon, are you not hearing me?" A different scientist from the window spoke out now, using the chamber's intercom. "Climb up and start the rotors, *please.*"

Gordon cursed himself, knowing that he had taken too long. "I am hearing you *loud and clear!*" He slowly pulled himself up a ladder. "We're gonna have a fucking *death* at the workplace today!" He stepped off of the ladder onto the creaky platform above. "*Jesus Christ,*" he hissed.

As he took careful steps along the platform towards the terminal on the other side, he heard the previously wire-imprisoned scientist shouting.

"Acceptable losses!"

Gordon looked through the fence at the window and shouted back. "How is- What do you mean 'acceptable losses'? We don't need two people in here!"

He looked down and watched the guard wander aimlessly near a cage on the opposite side of the chamber. "What is he *DOING?! WHERE* is he going?"

The guard stopped in front of the pit under the Anti-Mass Spectrometer, staring in what Gordon thought was contemplation.

Gordon stared in disbelief. "He's listening to me. He's gonna jump in... You're *actually* gonna jump in."

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“It’s standard procedure, Gordon!” Dr. Coomer didn’t seem to be paying attention to Gordon’s current concerns.

Gordon bolted to the terminal. “I’m gonna- I’m gonna turn on the fuckin’... rotator! Spinning... device...” Gordon hovered his hand over a switch on the terminal. He could feel a headache start to form.

“WAIT,” the guard yelled from below.

“Wait for-? *No* he’s coming up... *Jesus, he’s so fast!*”

He dashed towards the ladder and began climbing. One hand after the other; the task was almost nothing to him. The guard was practically flinging himself up the ladder. He miraculously landed on the top rung.

Gordon stared in astonishment. “What ar- Okay.” He could hear the other scientist yelling about the rotors again. He flipped the switch. “I’m- I turned it on! I started the fuckin’ gear! We’re goin’! *We’re goin’!*”

On the large drum holding the machine to the ceiling of the chamber, dim, orange lights switched on. The arms at the top of the Anti-Mass Spectrometer started to rotate around the magnet. The machine hissed, blowing smoke out from behind a panel near the top of what was visible.

“Okay, there’s supposed to be- Th’s-” Gordon watched as it hissed again. “That- The smoke’s normal, right?” he shouted to the window.

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“Well, you’re not supposed to *smoke* in the test chamber, Gordon!” Dr. Coomer responded.

Gordon sighed, “No, we’re not *smoking*...”

The scientist on the intercom spoke again. He was barely audible above the increasing volume of the Anti-Mass Spectrometer.

“Could you...” Gordon belted across the orange chasm that was the test chamber, “Can you guys talk on the mic like that guy?! Like use the intercom! You have that for a reason!”

The beam had turned on, granting more light in the chamber.

The other scientist stuck his head through the right side of the window and glared at Gordon. “He’s *hogging* it! He won’t let us use it!”

Gordon cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, “*I can’t hear you!*”

Dr. Coomer peeked out from the left side of the opening. “They only gave us enough budget for one microphone, Gordon!”

Gordon gritted his teeth and pointed at the guard next to him. “And appare- We only have enough budget for one fucking... *TEST SUBJECT!!!*” he snapped. He pushed past the officer with a huff and climbed down the ladder.

Gordon landed on the platform below with a clank. He began to turn around to walk away when he heard the guard, who was somehow standing right behind him, speak again.

“Don’t steal anything.”

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Gordon flinched. He spun around slowly, locking eyes with the guard, and pointed at the orange, barren walls of the test chamber. “WHAT COULD I STEAL?!”

Gordon didn’t wait for an answer and started walking towards the cage on the window-side of the chamber.

Tommy called from the opening, “Gordon?”

“What?” Gordon grumbled, looking up. “Is that y-?”

“Did you see the next step?”

“Th- Yes, I do! The...” Gordon pointed at the cage, which was now lowering into the floor. “We gotta push the- We gotta push the test sample into the... laser, right?”

“...Yes.”

“Okay.” Gordon nodded.

The other scientist butted in. “Do it *very carefully!*”

“Yeah, carefully,” Gordon breathed as he watched the test sample cart arrive on a small, elevated platform.

It was a short, steel, one-handle push cart, with arms extending from the front, holding a large, bright orange-yellow crystal.

“Right, very carefully... Slower... than molasses... drips... off a spoon,” Tommy said blithely, forcing a wheeze from Gordon.

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Gordon made his stood behind the cart and put both hands on the handle; the scientist on the intercom gave him the go-ahead. Right as he started pushing, the guard started yelling at him.

“I *told* you not to touch anything,” the guard shouted from the raised platform on the other side of the chamber.

“This is my *job*, dude!” Gordon’s hands left the handles to gesture angrily at the guard. “This is what I’m here to- **paid** to do! You’re here to *guard* the *door*? Or *something*?”

“What are you doing with that?”

“You’re- You’re here- You’re *SUPPOSED* to be- You’re lookin’ for *passports*,” Gordon took a deep breath, “you’re worried abo- WE’RE-” Gordon’ hands resumed clenching the handle again and he stared straight ahead, stone faced. “I’m gonna put it in there.”

“Why are you moving that?”

The guard’s questions had seemed genuine, much to Gordon’s annoyance.

“*Because that is the next step.*”

The scientist on the intercom urged Gordon to continue on with the next step. He tore his attention away from the beam and looked to the window behind him. He stuttered out not even a word when he saw a small flash and heard a click. Was someone taking a *picture*?

“If you didn’t want it,” the guard prodded, “why would you be touching it?”

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Gordon spat out incomplete words and phrases in frustration. “We are... *so far behind schedule... my MIND...* is about to FUCKING-” He made the gesture of his head exploding and swore under his breath.

“If you don’t hurry up and put that in there, I’m going to fucking explode,” the other scientist barked.

“*ALRIGHT!* I’m not- **Listen**. There’s two- TWO, people in the test chamber!” Gordon put up his hands in frustration. “NOT supposed to be that way! NOT what they taught me at MIT!” His hands clamped down on the handle again. “I’m just- I’m doin’ it!”

“It’s fine! Nothing will go wrong! Just do it!-”

“***NOTHING WILL GO WRONG!***” Gordon pushed the cart towards the beam. “***YEAH. NOTHIN’LL- YEAH, OKAY!***”

Sparks flew from the crystal as it entered the beam. Bolts of green lighting shot out and struck the arms surrounding the pit. The crystal was melting!

Small explosions went off like fireworks. The lights went out. Everyone began to panic.

“WHAT DID YOU DO?!” the other scientist shrieked.

Gordon looked back at the window. “What the f- You were the-”

“OH NO.” Tommy yelled, “YOU DID IT TOO FAST!”

Dr. Coomer joined in the cacophony “You should have brought your passport, Gordon!”

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“What is this?!” Gordon pointed at the explosion, ignoring that the guard had now perched on the platform to the right.

The scientist on the intercom tried to reassure everyone that the machine could be shut down. It was evident that he was failing.

The other scientist, Gordon could see, had climbed through the window.

Gordon yelled in protest.

The scientist fell to the floor, screaming in confusion. He was soon struck with one of the bolts of lightning and fell limp.

Gordon stared at the slow-motion implosion.

It was green.

It was blinding.

Sirens were blaring; shrill and repetitive. Emergency lights switched on, revealing the damage that the accident had caused. Wires had been snapped, large exhaust pipes dangled precariously from the ceiling. The Anti-Mass Spectrometer had been destroyed. The body of the scientist who had jumped through the window was nowhere to be found.

Through Gordon’s pounding headache, his first priority was to clear himself of blame.

The halls were littered with corpses; burnt to a crisp, minced to bits, crushed under tall computer terminals. He apprehensively dragged his feet, back-tracking through the path he had taken, a trail of bloody footsteps marked his way.

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“Hey!”

A voice pulled him out of his thoughts. It was... the scientist who climbed through the window? *No, that can't be right.*

The scientist was sitting cross-legged on the floor of a hallway. “Are you that *motherfucker* that ***fucked up*** this whole experiment?”

Gordon scowled, his anger from earlier overriding his panic. “You think *I* fucked it up? ***YOU think I fucked it up??!***”

The scientist jumped to his feet. “I think *you* fucked it up,” he said bluntly.

“Did you- you-?” Gordon placed a hand on the scientist’s shoulder. “Listen, listen... *Where you the one that jumped in there?* You sur- I thought you *died*. I thought you died on the *impact*.”

“... No? The hell are you talking about?”

“Okay so that was a different guy...” Gordon signed in relief. “Alright, so I- Listen, I need t- We need to go over a report,” he attempted to explain, “for like the- for insurance reasons, of what went down in there. And also... for fucking...”

The scientist stopped listening and had looked past Gordon to instead listen to a different scientist walking by, who had started complaining about a loss of grant money. The other two agreed, and went back to talking.

Gordon had resumed his panicked state. “Fuckin’... everyone in this room is *dead*... What’s goin’ on upstairs, do you think?”

Gordon could see the wheels turn in the scientist’s brain.

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“Uh, I have no idea,” he said, “I came down here to try to stop things, and... shit... Shit went wrong...”

“Yeah?” Gordon took his hand off the scientist’s shoulder, sighing in doubt. “What were you gonna stop? This was out of our hands, so-”

“I’ll-” the scientist tilted his head, almost as a warning.

Gordon continued to argue, “**Listen, listen, listen.** A fuckin’-

“Stop your fuckin’ mouth.”

“**Listen.** I’m- I’m a little *stressed, buddy!*” Gordon inhaled deeply to calm himself down.

“Okay! So, a guard! A guard. There was a guard... *insisting*... that I had my passport...” He held out a hand to the scientist. “*Do you have your passport???*”

“You do have it though, right? Yes?”

Gordon let his melancholy move his face. “I don’t have my passport,” he said, weakly, “I don’t have my passport... I- This is- As far as I know, this is- this is company protocol as of **today.**”

The scientist looked around nervously. “It... That’s right-” He prepared to explain, but Gordon cut him off.

“It doesn’t- It doesn’t...” He held up his hands to shush the scientist. “It does *not* matter, but listen... A guard followed me-”

Out of the corner of his eye, he caught said guard walking down the hallway. “Hey!”

The scientist perked up instantly. “Oh, *there* he is!”

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The guard walked over, silently.

“You talkin’ ‘bout,” he gave Gordon a once over, “passport?”

Gordon balled his fists and threw his arms into the air. “WE’RE IN- Whatever the fuck happened here, *he* jumped in there,” he pointed at the guard, “*another guy* jumped in there... Three subjects, one sample, BOOM.” He made an explosion motion with his hands. “That’s all. That’s all that I know that happened.”

“Did I not tell you to... not touch that?”

“DID I NOT TELL *YOU*,” Gordon pushed the guard, “TO GET THE **FUCK** OUT OF THE TEST CHAMBER?!”

The guard only remarked with a quiet “dude...” as he was forced backwards into the side of one of the many toppled terminals. Gordon grumbled under his breath and continued to back-track his way through Black Mesa.

Stepping out of the twisting elevator into the room with the broken computer, he saw the two scientists who were in that room previously, cowering in the corner beside the wall of incapacitated capacitors.

Gordon rushed over. “Are you guys okay?! Jesus, you wouldn’t talk to me before...”

Tommy entered from the control room through a door down the hall. “Watch out!”

“Tommy? Tommy!”

“Watch out! There’s creatures!” He pointed to the ionization tubes on the other side of the room. Two of them broken, one intact. Something was inside of the glass tube, screeching.

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It was a leathery, four-legged creature with no eyes. Its front two legs were long, sharp claws, the back feet were short and stumpy with short talons of their own. It reared back and lunged at the wall of its glass prison, revealing a large, almost radula-like maw on the underside of its body.