

# Chapter 01//ORIGINS

## << Research Station Intrepid, Planet Sauria >>

“Good morning, Dr Adger.” The young vixen said as she passed a middle-aged badger in the hallway. The older man nodded his head and continued on his way as the teenager passed him by. She was dressing more like her older colleagues these days with her khaki slacks and comfortable shoes. She liked how the color orange complemented her fur, the teen was blue after all, so she always wore an orange blouse under the white vest she’d been given as a member of the research team. The vixen had only recently enjoyed her 18th birthday and was now experiencing the start of her adult life on the far away world of Sauria.

Located within the Lylat System, Sauria was a primitive planet, but had long been known for its many ancient structures that carbon dating revealed were some of the oldest structures in all Lylat. The tribes of Sauria, all of which were still a primitive people, believed the ruins to be built by a race of beings known as the Krazoa with many of the tribes even worshipping them as Gods.

All the studies of the ruins of Sauria pointed to the Krazoa being an extinct species of people whose only remains were the ruins themselves. Despite being made almost entirely of stone, the ruins hid within them metal construction that no primitive race could have ever built on their own, and there was evidence of there once being a power grid on the planet, but all of that was deeply hidden within planet like a secret, and the researchers on Sauria lacked the funding to go digging many miles deep into the planet, nor did they have the heart to destroy so much of the environment just to see if there was something down there.

But everyone here was going to tease those secrets out regardless of funding even if it took a lifetime.

She reached her destination, and the door slid open to reveal a large laboratory filled with the many mingling minds that had journeyed here to study the ruins in what her father believed may have been a large city at one point in time.

Intrepid Station had been brought in by starship and assembled on site so they could have a proper research facility on a primitive world that lacked all forms of modern convenience and necessity. They’d been given a sturdy series of interconnected buildings that sat on stilts with the doorways and hallways all made with tubelike walkways that offered protection from the elements but were easy to install once unloaded from a starship. The University of Corneria might not have been willing to pay for a journey to the center of the planet, but they could afford to purchase them all a little home away from home.

Their large team hailed from all across Lylat with her family having come from the very edge of the Lylat System, from a planet called Cerinia, while many of the others came from Corneria, Fachina, and even the distant Papatoon.

The vixen scanned the room and saw some ten or so of her colleagues present at their desks working or in discussion with one another. The room was full of tables and workstations each set up for a researcher's particular needs. She spotted her mother in a heated debate over a metallic slate they'd uncovered weeks earlier at Dig 04, and then saw her father on the other side of the room. When he noticed her, he waved her to come over. She did pass a small greeting to her mother as she made her way to her father's table where he did a lot of his studies.

"Good morning, Krystal." He told her and leaned in to embrace her, leaving a kiss on her temple that made her cringe. She was an adult now! His fur was like her own, but so cold a color it was almost gray, and belied his actual age. He wasn't even older than her mother, and her fur was as bright a blue as her own! It was not uncommon for Cerinian foxes to be a pretty shade of blue.

"Dad." She groaned, but he paid her no mind and directed her to the item he'd been studying.

"I think I might have it figured out." He told her, lifting a metal item off the table to rotate it in his hands to show it off from all angles.

She'd seen this item before after they'd uncovered it from Dig 08. It was a heavy metallic item that looked gold in appearance but was made from some other kind of metal whose identity they'd not yet determined. Whenever they scanned it with a tool that's supposed to know this sort of thing, they got nothing useful in reply. Only by manually inspecting it the old-fashioned way were they able to confirm that it was in fact made from some kind of metal.

Shaped like a garden spade, it was only about a foot long and looked like it was meant to be held in the middle with the spade on one end and a smaller spade on the opposite end. It wasn't the only intact object they'd recovered from a dig site, but it was in such good condition after they'd cleaned it that it was difficult to believe it'd been buried in the soil of Sauria for hundreds of years, maybe even thousands. It was even attractive, with the metal having grooves and trenches carved into its surface with some kind of resilient blue paint filling in the gaps that hadn't worn off with the passage of time.

"What did you figure out?" She asked him and asked if she could touch it. Gently, her father handed her the item, and she felt its weight in her hand. For something made of metal it wasn't as heavy as she'd have thought it'd be.

"Turn it over, look there." Her father instructed. "See that diamond shaped indentation?"

She nodded that she did. The indentation was in the larger end of the item, looking like an empty socket with a piece missing.

“Dr Tappa and I believe we know what’s supposed to go there. Likely a battery of some kind, and Dr Tappa may have the key to that, but he’s still working out the kinks.” He explained.

“We’re not sure yet what this device was intended to be, but I’ve the hunch that it’s not just a paperweight. The indentation is clearly a receptacle of some sort for a diamond shaped object, and we’ve uncovered a few items that appear like they’d fit, but all were cracked or broken into smaller pieces. The only intact one we’ve found is in Dr Tappa’s office.”

“Will you try to turn it on? If it even turns on.” She asked.

“I don’t know what would happen if we tried. We will need to empty out one of the examination rooms and use a robot to remotely embed the crystal in the device and see what happens from a safe distance.” He replied

Krystal rotated the object in her hand. The device was weird to hold in her delicate hands, and it didn’t feel like it was even meant to be used for anything. Even though it was shaped like a spade on both ends, it wasn’t concave like a shovel. It was just chubby shapes with a narrow handle in the middle. You could whack someone in the head with it maybe, but why would you make a weapon out of gold and paint it all pretty with blue?

“Well, if that doesn’t work maybe you can call it an ancient dumbbell.” She smiled and lifted the object up and gestured like she was lifting a weight. Her father chuckled and reached out to take the device back and she returned it to him gently.

“I’d be very disappointed if that’s all this turned out to be, dear.” He said before returning the item to the worktable where the rest of his tools were located. A mixture of brushes, cleaning chemicals, toothpicks, compressed air canisters, and the like littered his workspace. The tools of an archeologist weren’t always high tech.

“When do you think you’ll be ready to do the test?” She asked.

“That depends on Dr. Tappa! If you’re bored, you can go down and bother him. He should be working if he didn’t sleep in again.” He replied and she leaned in to give him a peck on the cheek like he’d done to her.

“I’ll go ask him when he thinks he’ll be ready.”

“Thank you, dear.” He replied, and she pivoted on her heel and made off to the Dr’s office to pester him.

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“Dr Tappa!” Krystal knocked loudly on the office door. This section of the facility was one giant room that had been partitioned into several smaller rooms so individuals could have their own spaces. When there wasn’t a reply, she beat on it again even harder until the door slid open with a hiss to reveal a disheveled and portly tapir in his late 50’s.

“Yes!” He said gruffy before seeing the young girl standing on his doorstep.

“Oh, it’s you. Yes?” He said with a sigh.

“I was just talking with dad about the metal thing he’s been working on. He wants to know when you’ll be ready with the diamond thing. He wants to get a room ready to test to see if it works.”

The tapir grunted and turned his back to her to return to his office. His office was also his personal living quarters, and it was in a state of chaos. It was very messy with food wrappers and balled up wads of paper strewn about his workspace with an unmade cot in the corner. On the left side of the room was his living space and, on the right, he had a work bench covered in different kinds of electrical tools.

As soon as it had been revealed that the Krazoa had developed advanced technology the University had enlisted the help of several more scientists, one of which was Dr Tappa. He was an expert in modern electrical engineering with additional background in the older ‘historical’ methods of producing and transporting power. His research was mainly aimed at trying to understand how the Krazoa might have powered their cities and attempted to verify if there was an actual power grid somewhere inside Sauria.

She took a step inside his office, then stopped as the tapir rummaged through his desk until he turned back to her with a blue gem in his hand. He shuffled to her and beckoned her to extend her hand. She did and he dropped the gem in her palm. It was heavy and cerulean blue in color almost like her own fur. She rolled it between her fingers and thought that it looked pretty enough to be jewelry.

“I was up late trying to figure out why I keep getting different readings. It keeps producing a stronger reading, but there isn’t a pattern to the growth. It just reads stronger every time I hook it up to test.” He explained. She looked down at the gem and wondered if it was something safe to be holding.

“If it’s a battery then doesn’t that mean it might explode? Or something like that?” She asked, thinking if she should hand the gem back. He only laughed instead.

“No, I doubt that. The readings are increasing, but I’m not picking enough anything strong enough to make me worried. If your father wants to do his test then the crystal is ready, but I can’t determine if the energy inside it is enough to register in the device. Assuming, of course, that our hypothesis is correct.”

“So, I can just take this to dad, then?”

“Yes, now let me get back to sleep.” He told her while shoos her back out of his office with his door quickly hissing shut. Standing alone outside his office she rolled the crystal across her palm and let it drop into her other hand. Staring into the gemstone it almost looked like it was shimmering deep inside, but it was too weak to tell. There’d be microscopes in the lab if she wanted to look closer. She turned and made her way back to the labs where her parents worked.

When she arrived not much had changed in the lab, but her mother and a few others were gone. Her father was still at his desk working to clean more artifacts for future study. When he saw her approaching, he noticed the small crystal in her hand and his eyes lit up.

“Oh! I take it there was good news from Dr Tappa?”

“He said there was energy in it, and that it’s been growing stronger every time he checks it, but also that he doesn’t know why. He doesn’t think it has enough power to do anything and I don’t think he knows how to give it more power if it doesn’t work.” She replied and handed the diamond to her father.

He took it and rotated in his own hand with a thoughtful look.

“Well, not as helpful as I’d have liked him to be. So much for being ‘The Best Engineer’ in all of Corneria.” He replied and gently sat the diamond down on the table next to the device.

“It’s still worth a shot to try.” She encouraged him, and to that he smiled and agreed with her.

“Go down to the exam rooms. I think we can clear out Room 05 to run the test. Can you start that for me?”

“Am I just moving stuff to the side or taking it out of the room?”

“If it looks expensive move it to the storeroom, the rest can just be pushed aside. We’ll need a clear table to set up the camera feed and the robotics for the remote test.” He told her, and she said she’d get right on it and excused herself, feeling good now that she had something important to do for once.

When she found the exam room it was a mess with boxes of supplies stacked in all four corners and up against the walls. She ran her hand along the top of the exam table and caught a layer of dust on her paw before wiping it off on her pant leg. The table would do, but she needed to wipe it down first. With everything else in boxes she’d need to check each one to see what she needed to take to the storeroom. Groaning at that she’d now gotten herself into, she looked

again at the many boxes she'd have to search through and realized that this was going to take a while...

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### << E.B.S. Grand Gambit, In Orbit around Planet Sauria. >>

Several men in dark red uniforms were at their posts. From the window on the bridge, they had a clear view of the planet Sauria. While its many colorful landmasses were a sight to behold, they were not in orbit around the planet just so they could admire its ancient beauty.

"Our scouting party is reporting an all clear, Admiral. They're expecting minimal opposition and have notified the acquisition team to be ready to advance. They're awaiting your orders, Sir." A uniformed primate spoke up from Comms, with his hand pressed to his headset as he monitored the fleet's communications.

"Good." A large reptile standing at the front of the bridge replied. His enormous silhouette was set before the thick glass of the window where he stood to gaze down at the planet below, and at his waiting prize. With both hands clasped behind his back he did not appear on edge despite what was now at stake for him and his crew.

Eight years had passed since Venom, along with its master, had fallen. The Admiral was the last of Imperial High Command with everyone else now dead or in a prison cell on Corneria. It took nearly a decade to rebuild his fleet, its contents now a cobbled together mass of ships new and old, all acquired through hard worked and deceit.

Nearly a quarter of his army were just mercenaries that had to be hired in secret, whose mouths had to be bribed well to keep their silence. Every penny came from the war chest the Emperor had amassed and had cleverly made sure would not fall into Cornerian hands.

Had he more time he would have waited, exercised more patience, but the hourglass was running out. The Emperor, Lord Andross', war had been waged across all of Lylat and the scars of his many victories, and many defeats, were everywhere. Scales would have preferred to take the time to build his fleet up to an even larger size, to equip it with more ships, better weapons! There were still soldiers out there loyal to the Empire, but they were in hiding or in their prison cells.

It would take too much time to find every survivor and enlist them back under the Imperial banner, and Corneria was far too close to discovering what secrets were hidden behind the beauty of this primitive world.

Admiral Rex Tyrannous Scales lifted a hand and pressed the tip of a claw to the glass. He watched as the planet slowly rotated behind his hand, and sliding out from behind his fingertip

was the location he'd long sought to visit, and now he finally could. It would soon be his, this "Force Point Temple." It, and what waited there for him.

"Begin the operation." Scales commanded his men, and his communications officer began relaying his order, and the rest of the bridge sprung to action issuing commands to troops both on the ground and in orbit.

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### << Research Station Intrepid, Planet Sauria >>

After moving her fourteenth box to the storeroom Krystal was regretting being so helpful and eager to see an experiment. Most of what was in the exam room was valuable, and if the crystal or the metal thing it plugged into were to explode or do anything else that was bad, then a lot of expensive things would get broken. So, it all had to move, and she was running out of space in the storeroom to put it all.

As she lifted her fifteenth box for the day there was a sudden jolt that shook the whole building, causing her to drop the box as she stumbled to catch herself on the table so to keep from falling. No sooner than the room had shook there was a loud explosion as the sound caught up with the shockwave.

Red emergency lights activated in the corners of the room and a siren began to sound from outside the building while the speaker system indoors began its robotic call for the staff to evacuate.

"Please evacuate to the nearest shelter. Please evacuate to th-" The speaker died before it could repeat itself any further, and the siren outside quickly fell silent, too.

"What's going on?" She said to herself and hurried out of the room to see the entire facility was still lit up in the red glow of the emergency lights. There was shouting in the distance with other researchers exiting their rooms and looking around in a panic.

"Has something happened?" A pelican shouted down the hall to anyone who would answer him.

"I don't know, what happened to the alarms?" Another male voice asked.

"We should go to the shelter, I think." A female voice suggested with worry.

Another shockwave hit the building; this time strong enough to knock everyone off their feet as the roar of an explosion echoed through the walls. There was screaming and shouting as Krystal picked herself up onto her hands and knees before being knocked flat again by a third shockwave that kept everyone to the floor as an explosion violently ripped through something in

the distance as the sound of metal being rent asunder filled the air with the roof of the facility being peppered with what the noise of heavy objects landing on it.

She scrambled back to her feet and started to sprint down the hall, passing everyone she came across. Everyone she ran past was either curled up defensively on the floor or trying to crawl their way back up to their feet just as she had. All she could think of was where her parents were.

The relief of seeing both her parents in the same room was cut short when she saw her mother had a bloody wound over her left eye.

“Mom!” She cried out to her.

“I’m ok sweetheart, I just hit the table when I fell.” She said while pulling her daughter in for a hug. Her father was by her side and pulled them both in. Both adults were upright and in one piece, as were a few other members of the facility that were in the lab with them.

“We need to leave the building, everyone!” Her father shouted, and another man immediately started pulling at his colleagues to urge them toward the back exit of the labs.

“Those were explosions!” Her mother said to her father, and both foxes looked to each other with worry.

“Yes, we need to leave!” He replied and pulled both mother and daughter with him towards the exit. Standing in their way was an armed soldier in red combat fatigues, aiming a rifle at the other members of the research team who’d gotten to the door before them.

“Hands up! Show ‘em!” The primate snarled as everyone shot their hands up in the air. More soldiers entered the room from both doorways and started rounding everyone up.

“What is the meaning of this!” Her father shouted and was answered with the butt of a rifle clapping him on the cheek, making both mother and daughter cry out for him as he dropped to the floor. Her mother reached him first, and a reptile yanked Krystal back by the arm and cuffed her across the cheek. She staggered backwards against a nearby table.

The side of her hand brushed up against a soldering iron and instinct commanded her to grab it. She swung wide and stabbed the soldier in the arm as he stepped in to grab her. The arm she’d stabbed had been holding his rifle, forcing him to drop it as he staggered back clutching his wound.

“Grab her!” The primate from before shouted at his men with his finger aimed right at her.

A binder full of paperwork exploded into particles as a bullet whizzed past her head close enough to ruffle the fur of her cheek.



“GRAB HER! NOT SHOOT HER!” The primate shouted with her mother’s voice screaming from the floor as her father continued to lay unconscious. Krystal ducked under the table and crawled away as the wounded soldier dropped to his knees to go for her ankles. He caught her, but she wriggled herself out of his grip and kicked, slamming her heel into his face, and sending a trail of blood spilling down his snout as her boot broke the skin.

“They are HOSTAGES!” The monkey in charge shouted again, ordering his men to round everyone up, to take them alive.

Krystal continued her crawling, passing a look back under the tables to her mother who was crying. Their eyes met.

“Baby, run!” She shouted and was quickly cuffed herself by another soldier who was descending on her parents. As Krystal continued to use the tables to avoid being grabbed, she could see in her periphery that both her parents were being dragged away towards the door.

The wounded soldier was running now, weaponless, around the tables trying to get her. She whacked her head on the next table, knocking something heavy onto the floor next to her. It was the metal device her dad had been studying.

“Come here!” The soldier was on her now, looming over her with his now bloodied hand grabbing her by the shoulder and yanking her backwards. Her hand grabbed the device and she swung it over her shoulder as she was hauled upright, and the momentum did the rest of the work. She slammed the object right where she’d kicked him, and he was sent spiraling backwards while clutching his face. He hit the corner of a worktable and fell backwards, tipping the table over and spilling its contents all across the floor.

Still clinging to the device as her only weapon, she ran for the other door, sliding under a table to avoid one soldier before popping back up on the other side to fall right back into a sprint. Back in the hallway there were more soldiers, all wearing the same outfits and body armor taking the members of the research team into custody.

“There’s another one!” A soldier down the hall shouted and pointed at her while soldiers in the lab were now chasing after her. Krystal sprinted again, narrowly dodging a surprised soldier as she rounded the nearest corner. He attempted to grab her, but she beamed him on the head with the device, sending him to the floor with blood spilling down the cheek.

Her first instinct to escape was to run towards the work shed, since they kept all their ATVs parked there for their trips to the dig sites. She found an exit out of the facility and spilled out onto the grass as she looked around. Soldiers were still pursuing her from behind, so she scrambled back to her feet and clutched the device to her chest as she ran across the grass. In the distance there was smoke and destruction and soldiers everywhere, dozens of them!

They already had a line of prisoners being filed out of buildings as everyone was being rounded up by whoever these people were!

She made it to the shed and was stopped by a soldier who'd been inspecting a parked ATV.

"Hey!" He shouted and ran to her, and she did all she knew to do, which was to lift the device up and swing it down. This time she missed, and the soldier took a step back and lifted his rifle to swing the butt of his gun at her. She tripped, helping him to miss her cheek, but only barely. Her pursuers were now exiting the facility from where she'd just come from and were now sprinting in their direction.

Someone in a white coat came up behind the soldier in front of her and swung a shovel at him. The spade of the shovel connected with the side of his head and sent him staggering to the side only for another swing of the shovel to send him sprawling out to the dirt unconscious.

"Krystal!" It was Dr Tappa, covered in dirt like he'd been crawling.

"Doctor!" She shouted back, but he grabbed her by the arm and yanked her into the shed and shoved her into the nearest ATV.

"Get in!" He shouted even as he already had her pressed into the passenger seat.

"Where are we going?" She asked and clutched the device to her. He looked at her briefly, saw what she was holding in her arms and cranked the engine as armed men began to enter the shed.

"Not here!" He said and slammed his foot on the accelerator. They sped out of the shed, nearly running over one soldier. A gunshot rang out, metal sparking as a bullet grazed the roll cage. The shooting stopped as shouting broke out over weapons fire. They weren't the only people in vehicles, either.

Now that they were speeding away from the facility Krystal could look back behind her. Intrepid Station had been nestled into a open plot of land the construction crew had made by clear cutting. The local terrain was very rocky and covered in trees, and this location was the only suitable area to put a building of that size. She could now see a large, armored looking shuttle craft parked on the grass and what looked like dozens upon dozens of soldiers with space fighters flying overhead.

Dr Tappa didn't let off the gas as he sped them away and into the forest paths that led towards the dig sites at the Graveyard.

"W-where are we going?" She asked, turning to him then back towards where they came. Surely, they'd come after them, wouldn't they?

“We- We need to get out a distress signal!” he stammered and grabbed the stick and changed gears as the ATV hit new terrain. They nearly sped out of control as the wheels hit loose gravel. Behind them Krystal thought she could hear another vehicle’s engine echoing through the trees.

“We have one of those?” She asked. The doctor looked panicked.

“I can make one!” He replied and they kept going.

The dig sites were spread apart, but they were all located in what the local tribes called ‘the Graveyard.’ It was named for the statues that were found there, sticking halfway out of the dirt. Massive figures that stood on two legs with bodies shrouded in a cloak while wearing strange masks, or helmets. Those were the ‘Krazoa’, or what everyone thought them to be.

It was the site of some kind of temple, and the digs were all over its grounds. It’s where her dad would have found the weird device, she currently gripped tight to her chest.

There was loud snapping of limbs and saplings in the distance behind them, and Krystal turned to look down the narrowing trail. She couldn’t see who was pursuing them, or how many there were, but she knew they were there. A rattling from the bed of the ATV caught her attention, and it was a portable communications relay, and alongside it was a toolbox and a hastily gathered box of electrical equipment. She knew what those relays were since she had to help carry one once on a trip to a new dig site. The size of a briefcase, a relay was used as a signal booster to help extend the coverage area for everyone’s radios.

Was this a part of Dr Tappa’s plan? She didn’t know anything about technology like this, only what it was supposed to do, but Dr Tappa was an engineer. If anyone could figure out how to get a signal out there for help, then maybe the Best Engineer on Corneria could! He would have to!

“D-Dr Tappa! Where do you need to go to build a distress signal?”

Still wild eyed in his desperation to escape he hesitated in his answer.

“It’ll take a couple of hours! Just need to hide somewhere, anywhere!”

She looked back ahead of them and knew where the trail would lead. The dig sites. They had equipment there, supplies, but there wasn’t anywhere for them to hide that would last them long enough to get out a call for help. The soldiers would find them too quickly!

“We can’t go there! They’ll find us before you can build it!”

“There’s nowhere else to go! The road only goes one way!”

Krystal looked ahead of them, then twisted around to look behind them. There was no sign of their pursuers, but the noise of their arrival still echoed through the trees. She hoped the narrow trail was slowing them down, then she looked back at Dr Tappa.

“You need to get off the ATV, Doctor!” She shouted at him, and he almost lost control of the vehicle when he looked at her like she was crazy.

“What!”

“They’ll catch us if we go to digs! Let me drive there so they can keep chasing me!” She said, and that made the tapir pause for a moment as he struggled to focus on the trail ahead.

“You’re a child, Krystal, I can’t let you do that!”

“I don’t know how to call for help, Doctor! You do!”

He kept his gaze ahead, but it looked like he was getting angry, until he took one hand off the wheel and started tugging at his white lab coat.

“Help me get my coat off!” He ordered her, and she put the device down on the floorboard and started to help him pull his arm out of the first sleeve, then the other, narrowly avoiding a tree in the process. “Hang my coat around the back of your seat! Make it look like I’m still in the ATV!”

She quickly wrapped the coat around the back of the seat and started buttoning up the front to hold it in place.

“I’m gonna... I’m gonna go...” He was looking for somewhere to stop.

Krystal shoved her leg against his and pressed her foot onto the brake forcing the ATV to stop.

“Go!” She shouted and started pushing at the tapir until he tumbled out of the side of the ATV. He scrambled upright, but before he left the driver’s side he pointed to the device in the floorboard.

“That! Give it to me!” He demanded and she stopped. Krystal was halfway between the passengers and driver’s seat now, but she reached down and grabbed it. The tapir yanked it from her hands and ran around to the back of the ATV. The noise of at least one other vehicle was coming at them fast from down the trail, and the doctor grabbed the toolbox and threw it deep into the tree line along with the device before stacking the box of parts on top of the relay and heaving them both up at once before staggering towards the trees.

“Go, Krystal! Hurry!” He shouted and stumbled through the trees leaving her alone on the trail. She looked ahead and swallowed, finding her mouth was now dry, and hit the accelerator. She

felt herself sink into the seat as she sped off, her limited experience with driving showing itself as she struggled to stay on the trail while also maintaining the vehicle's top speed.

She couldn't escape the fear of crashing as she narrowly missed tree after tree with every strange object and marking on the trail sending her into a panic as she had no way of knowing what would prove to be a hazard and what was nothing to fear. The ATV hit a bump and the tires left the ground, sending her out of control with the back wheels fishtailing behind her, the side of the ATV scraping against a tree before breaking free and letting her continue.

Krystal saw she was nearing the end of the trail, and the harrowing obstacles it presented to her, and when she finally emerged into the open ground that began the Graveyard, she saw she had plenty of directions to go. She chose straight and drove ahead past the rock formations that made up the Graveyard's edge, and down the path that would take her to Dig 01. Mostly smooth terrain with rocks and ruins to all sides of her, she knew she had a straight shot for at least a few minutes.

A gunshot rang out, and metal sparked as a bullet collided with the ATV's roll cage, breaking the piping in two and leaving the cage to rattle noisily at her side. She screamed as they shot at her again, tears forming in her eyes, another bullet hitting the ATV somewhere behind her. The fear of crashing into something faded as the fear of being shot overwhelmed her, the bravery she had before felt so foolish to her now as she was sitting alone in an ATV being shot at. A third bullet hit the ATV, blowing out a rear tire and sending the vehicle into another fit of fishtailing.

She was fast approaching one of the large Krazoan statues, its might looming over her. She tried to avoid it, but she wasn't in control of the vehicle anymore. She tried to turn the wheel, but the back end kept swinging behind her with the ATV now spinning a donut into the soft grass and soil, before finally rolling over onto its side from the built up momentum.

Without her seatbelt fastened she could only shriek and cling to the straps with her bare hands as the ATV rolled several times before colliding with the foot of the statue. The dirt and grass she'd ripped loose from the soil began to pelt the underside of the upturned ATV.

Krystal unclipped her seatbelt, her body dropping hard on the ceiling of the broken roll cage, partially crushed now from the violent rolling and having already been weakened by the stray bullet from before. Her ears were ringing with the adrenaline rush began to wear off, leaving a tidal wave of pain in its wake.

Her pursuers were pulling up next to her as she crawled out from under the broken vehicle, rolling onto her back to see the empty gaze of the statue staring back down at her. She was hurt, she ached all over with her hands cut up from seatbelt straps digging into her hands as she'd clung to them.

"She alive?" A male voice shouted from another vehicle. A helmeted figure knelt down next to her, the silhouette of his face suddenly looming into view and obscuring the Krazoa behind him.

“For now.” The ape replied. The last thing she saw was the butt of his rifle knocking her unconscious.