

Chapter 06//PACIFICATION

<< Unknown Location, Planet Sauria >>

[Breaking Link. Current Signal Strength Requires Further Calibration.]

“What did I do!” Krystal panicked as she watched McCloud writhe on the ground, clutching his head in pain. Now distraught, she screamed at the voice to do something, “Make it stop!”

[Signal Strength Is Too High. Recalibrating. Signal Strength Reduced By 75%.]

“Why did it do that? You said this was how I could talk to him!”

[Direct Link Communication Is Designed To Be Used By Masters. Other Organisms Are Not Compatible. Errors Should Be Expected. Signal Strength Now Has Been Reduced. Further Communication Can Be Attempted.]

The voice explained, but she was still angry! She was afraid to talk to him now if that meant he'd be hurt. As she continued to watch the older fox pick himself up off the ground the voice reminded her that several gates were being breached, and she had to order the verification on each of them to be denied.

She watched as McCloud propped himself against a blackened piece of stone, resting himself and looking bewildered as to what had happened, furtively glancing in both directions like he was searching for something.

“I want to try talking to him again, but I don't want to hurt him!”

[Link Reestablished. You May Speak Freely.]

As the voice spoke Krystal felt a wave of something wash over her again, but it wasn't as disorienting as last time. Now it was gentler, and she didn't feel herself coming down with a migraine as she looked at McCloud on the screen.

“Mr. McCloud? Can you hear me?” She asked, hoping she wouldn't have to watch him double over in pain again.

As soon as the words left her, she saw him jump, then hug himself closer to the stone as he looked around himself. She would have been gnawing on her lip with anxiety if she still had lips.

It looked like he'd been spooked with how he was cradling his metal spear to his chest defensively.

"Mr. McCloud?" She asked again, unsure if he'd really heard her or if he was reacting to something else around him.

"Who wants to know?" She heard his voice crystal clear in her head even though it was obvious by the video feed that he was whispering. Suddenly, she felt elated! She could talk to him!

"We need your help! They're trying to break out of the Stronghold, but all I can do is slow them down!"

"You need to keep it down! Where are you, who are you?" He angrily whispered in reply, darting his head in both directions nervously.

"Can anyone else hear me?" She asked the voice.

[Only Target Fox McCloud Can Hear Your Communications, Interim Navigator Krystal. Request Target To Maintain His Own Silence.]

"No, no one can hear me but you! You can whisper and I'll still hear you!"

"And who are you?" He asked, bewildered.

"My name is Krystal, I came here with my parents to help at Intrepid Station. We were all captured by them- by the Empire!"

"Krystal? You're the missing girl then, but how are you talking to me without a radio?"

Missing girl? Did he already rescue her parents, everyone else!

"Oh! You must have found my parents, oh thank you, thank you!" She felt so much joy. Finally, a piece of good news after all she'd been through.

"Wait, hold on, you need to answer my questions! I'm in the middle of a crater and I've got a teenage girl talking to me like she's a ghost!"

Krystal wavered, but what could she say that didn't sound crazy? She was captured by the Empire, tortured by them, then forced naked into a machine thing that transported her to a weird blue void where an ancient alien AI talks to her with a disembodied voice. Well, at least the first two or three parts sounded believable.

"I escaped our camp with Dr Tappa, then we separated so he could escape and call for help while I distracted them. They caught me and caged us up. Somewhere really cold, then they took me back to the Stronghold to ask me where Dr Tappa went!"

"Wait, Tappa didn't mention he was with you."

"You've met him!"

"Yeah, he's with the EarthWalkers. He sent out the distress signal that got all this started. It's why we're here."

Krystal was overjoyed that he made it! Everything she'd gone through to get a call out for help hadn't been in vain, she so badly wanted to cry.

"I'm so glad, Mr. McCloud! Is he safe?"

"Yeah, he's safe in their village. Where are you? What is the 'stronghold' they took you to? Are you still there?"

"I don't know if I'm still there, but the stronghold is what..." she had to think. Did 'it' have a name? Central Command?

"The stronghold is what 'it' calls the Krazoa ruins, we called it the Graveyard. I don't know where you're at, Mr. McCloud, but it's where we were doing our excavations." She explained.

"That's where I'm at right now." He whispered in reply. Krystal was confused, since he was crouched low in a big smokey crater. She had no idea where a place like that would be, but it certainly wasn't the Graveyard.

[Target Fox McCloud Is Located 532 Feet Outside Stronghold Primea's West Access Gate.] The voice confirmed to her.

"Why is everything messed up? Where are the statues?"

"My best guess is that our Imperial friends tried to shoot their way into the Force Point Temple. There's nothing left out here that looks like an archeological dig. I'm sorry."

[7 Hours And 22 Minutes Ago An External Breach Attempt Was Detected. No Damage To Stronghold Primea Was Detected, So Central Command Did Not Provide A Report.]

"I would have liked to have known that!" She replied angrily.

"I didn't have a way to tell you?" The older fox replied, confused.

“No, not you! The voice! The stronghold’s computer is talking to me!”

“Wait, no, explain that. Who is talking to you? What is the stronghold?”

“This! This place, the Force Point Temple, the Graveyard. It calls it Stronghold Primea. I think the Krazoa called Sauria Primea when they lived here. It’s like a big military base underground and there are Imperial soldiers all in it!”

Two screens to her left began to attract her attention, and she had to deny verification on one gate, but missed the second. She was being too distracted by her conversation!

“I’m trying to keep them from opening more gates, but it’s hard. They’re trying to get out!”

“Ok, ok, so they’re inside the Temple. Are you with them, are you safe?”

“I... I don’t know where I’m at. I was with them and now I’m somewhere else. I’m like, I don’t know how to explain it, it’s like I’m here but I’m not. They shoved me into something and turned it on and now I’m like this.”

[Interim Navigator Krystal’s Physical Body Is Located Within Central Command’s Interface Chamber. There Are Twelve Imperial Insurgents Within The Chamber, But Your Body Is Secure.]

“It says I’m in a central command chamber, and that there are twelve soldiers here with me, but my body is safe. I think I’m inside something.”

“Ok.” McCloud replied. She watched him rub the spot above his muzzle and between his eyes. “Start from the beginning and tell me exactly what’s going on, please.”

<< Force Point Temple, Planet Sauria >>

“That’s all they have to report for now, Sir.”

The Admiral nodded to the Lieutenant. About an hour ago their forward progress had been stalled. They’d been making swift progress reopening many of the doors that had been sealed shut, but all of a sudden, they were hitting intermittent roadblocks. Doors would shut themselves back, or the opening would be canceled partway, and they’d have to try again.

According to the report, the science teams and technicians couldn't discern why this was happening now. Their progress hadn't been brought to a near standstill, but his teams had to hurl themselves at the problem repeatedly until finally they could break through, causing frustration and a blow to their morale.

"Have nonessential personnel move themselves towards the entrance. Should we get a chance to escape we should be ready to take it. Continue rationing our supplies evenly throughout." Scales commanded stoically. He continued to remain at his post as Fleet Admiral and would remain within the facility until a route for evac had been assured. Slow though the process might be now, they were still making some headway.

"Sir! Will there be anything else?"

"No, dismissed, Kanis."

His Lieutenant snapped a salute and returned to his own post to carry out his orders.

This new turn of events felt erratic, uncoordinated. The report didn't specify if there was any sort of pattern in how their efforts were failing. The Krazoa were very advanced, and he did not believe that this could be so casually dismissed as a system's failure or a glitch. Emperor Andross thought highly of the technology that would be found here, and the Admiral was willing to trust the Emperor's judgement on the matter.

If the Temple's programming was not to blame for these failures, then what was? His teams were not incompetent, so that was out of the question. It was something else.

He just didn't know what.

Scales turned his gaze to the large crystalline object that floated in the center of the chamber, and the body that was just barely visible as a silhouette within it. He searched the blue surface for any sign of his missing hand but found none. If they were to find a way to deactivate the crystal, he wondered if his hand would come falling out of it, and could it be returned to him, sparing him a life with a cold prosthetic?

"Sir!" Lieutenant Kanis returned to him in a hurry.

"Yes?"

"We've just received a report from one of our recon teams deeper in the facility. They've just opened another door and found a storage room on the other side. They think they've found what the Emperor was looking for!" He replied with excitement.

Scales turned his full attention to the coyote, his gaze almost like a glare that withered his subordinate's excitement.

“Are they certain of this?” He asked, his own excitement being held back through sheer force of will. He would not let his emotions carry himself away with so much at stake.

“They’re reporting that they match the schematics drawn up by the Emperor, almost identically, Sir. The Emperor was right!” The Lieutenant replied, sober now under the Admiral’s gaze.

After a moment, Scales finally permitted himself to smile.

The girl explained everything as best as she could with Fox stopping her to pull more details from her every step of the way. There were necessary pauses in her story as she’d stop to ‘keep the gates closed’. He didn’t understand what that all meant until after she’d finished explaining herself. The amount of new intel he had to digest wasn’t what he had expected, but neither was it unwelcome.

Now Fox knew he had someone on the inside that had some pull.

“So, to make sure that we’re clear. There are at least 81 Imperial warships somewhere on the planet?”

“Yes, that’s what the voice says.” The teenager replied in his head by some method Fox didn’t want to ask about.

“Can the voice give an estimate for how many troops they have on planet? How many soldiers.” Fox asked, then scanned his surroundings again. Enough time had passed now for the crashed shuttle to have been swarmed with Imperials, the pilot recovered, and no doubt they were trying to revive him. He didn’t know how much time he’d have before it was revealed that the shuttle had been hijacked.

“It says there’d about 3,200 hostiles on the planet. Is that a lot?”

It’s a hell of a lot for one stranded pilot to deal with. Most of those would be on their warships serving as crew. If they pulled together this many ships across eight years, then it wasn’t to wage a ground invasion. The troops he’d seen so far are the specialists they needed to take the research station and to investigate the ruins. Fox was ready to assume the Empire was probably aware of the Cornerian military overhead and ready for combat as soon as the shield drops, if it dropped.

“I need to call this into the Great Fox. Let everyone know what they’re up against.”

“Oh, ok.”

“Keep working on the gates for now.” He told her, then ducked low and crept away from his hiding spot to find a new one amidst the rubble and debris. He felt uncomfortable staying in one place for so long when so many watching eyes were around. Once he was in a new location he hunkered back down and radioed The Great Fox to tell them what he knew, skipping over some of the more difficult to explain details involving alien AI and teenage girls.

“There’s no way!” Fox could hear Falco shouting from the background after the team had been told how many warships were hiding on Sauria.

“There was a way, and they clearly found it. Have the Cornerians call for reinforcements while they still can.”

“And you’re certain of this, Fox?” It was Slippy asking nervously.

“My source is reliable and is currently hiding amongst their troops. She’s one of the researchers that went missing. You need to convince the Cornerians to pull everything they have to spare to Sauria if they want this to end well.”

“I don’t think it’ll take much convincing, but they won’t be expecting a request for another fleet.” Replied the hare.

“I know, but they’ll just have to deal with it the same as we are. I know you’re already coordinating with them up there, but now you’re outnumbered. Prepare for that.” Fox said with a sigh.

“Roger that, Fox. Thanks for the update. Is there a timeframe for when the shields might go down?” Peppy asked.

“No, I have no idea. That’s the next hurdle I have to solve.” Fox lied. He chose to omit the fact that the flashpoint of war was in control of a teenage girl.

“But that’s got me thinking. If that shield does go down, I’m going to need a way off this planet. Did that Dr Adger fix my Arwing?” Fox added, Slippy took a turn to speak.

“I’ve been working with him by radio for the last several hours. He’s got the engine repaired, but your G-Diffuser is still busted. He doesn’t have all the tools and parts he needs, and I can only do so much from here by radio. He promised to keep tinkering with it, but I’m not going to promise you it’ll work, Fox.”

“But it can fly?” He asked.

“Yeah, should fly just fine according to him.”

“Then that’s what I needed to know, and I’ll deal with the G-Diffuser when the time comes.”

He stopped to think. If his Arwing could fly again, then he knew he had an exit strategy for when things got bad. The girl had the power to shut the field down from her position, but they were all outgunned. It’d be better to keep the shields up for now and then when reinforcements arrived, they could be dropped. If they could turn this around and outnumber the Empire when the fighting starts, then Corneria holding dominance in orbit would be to their advantage.

But how would he go about getting the girl out of there and to safety with all these Imperials around? He’d have to do that at the same time she brings the shields down, he figured.

“Mr. McCloud?” The girl’s voice suddenly rang in his head, spooking him for the moment.

“I need to go silent, Out.” Fox said, then keyed his radio off so they wouldn’t think he was going crazy by talking to himself.

“Yes? And don’t call me ‘Mr.’, you can just call me Fox.”

“Oh, ok, um, Fox, the voice is telling me that the insurgents have just stolen several ‘kinetic batteries’ from their storage racks.”

“And what are those?”

“I, I don’t know, but the voice is acting like that’s really really bad. I’m trying to keep the gates shut, but they’ve got more people working to open them now, and they’re making it harder for me to keep them shut!”

A tall reptile watched as his men worked. Sergeant Mire’s team had been trying to open this same door for nearly a quarter of an hour with every attempt ending in failure. There were other teams elsewhere in the facility working to breach their own doors, and they were encountering the same problems. Something was causing their forged credentials to fail, but every now and then the Sergeant would hear a team cheer over the radio that they’d opened a door. They now had nine teams working at breaching doors with the science team busy training even more. They currently had 33 doors opened, but they were still trapped inside the facility with much of their forces isolated from one another.

When they'd first entered the facility, they'd been ordered to carefully map out every corridor and room they accessed, so they were fortunate now to have an accurate map as a guide that they could also use to identify all opened and sealed doorways. Little by little, they were making progress at moving men and supplies around the facility and closer towards the exit.

Per the Admiral's orders they were to secure an evac strategy for all troops sealed inside the facility, but with the caveat that their highest priority should be given to the recon team in the storage chamber. The room that recon had uncovered was filled with something the Admiral wanted, though the Sergeant didn't know anything more about it aside from them being called 'batteries'. Alien tech, which didn't surprise him. Everything in this place was alien.

So far, it was proving to be difficult to secure a route from the front entrance to the storage room, and once doors started closing back on their own, they had to start propping equipment underneath every door they opened now. They were using anything that'd strong enough to keep it from being shut again that was also expendable.

Some doors that closed on them were being kept open with about three feet of clearance, since that was the height of a rifle box standing on its end. The solid steel construction of the box was enough to resist the PSI of the alien doors. The recon team had managed to wedge their doorways open wider, since the storage racks they'd found could be disassembled. The racks were honeycomb in design and had long metal plates making up the side walls of the honeycombs, which were made of the same strange metal the rest of the facility was built of.

Despite being only a half inch thick the plates could hold open a door just fine and gave everyone a four-foot clearance for passage. Recon had already reported that they'd secured six of the batteries the Admiral wanted and had managed to move them out of the storage room and down two corridors before being stopped by another sealed doorway.

"Woo!" Private Howler shouted from the door as it hissed and slid upward. Another soldier immediately sacrificed a rifle box by wedging it inside the gap the doorway had left in the doorframe. If it decided to randomly shut itself like many other doors had tried to in the last hour, it would hit the rifle box instead.

“Door 30 is breached and secured. Over.” Sergeant Mire keyed his radio and reported the news to HQ, then waited for a response. HQ was still located in the central chamber with the Admiral, and they were coordinating the operation from there.

“Roger that, Sergeant. Now proceed to door 29 for breach. You’ll be linking up Squads 04 and 11 past that doorway.” Came the reply.

“Affirmative, moving out. Over.”

The Sergeant ordered his team to break down their gear and begin moving it to the next doorway. Little by little they were linking their forces together.

<< Unknown Location, Planet Sauria >>

They were opening even more doors now and wedging them open! Krystal was beginning to panic. Before her on one of her screens was a growing list of gates that were suffering breach attempts, and behind that was another screen with a list of every gate that had been opened.

“How are they doing this so fast!”

[Their Operating Procedure Is Becoming More Efficient With Practice, Interim Navigator.]

“Then what am I supposed to do? I keep stopping them, but they keep trying! I don’t know how to do this any faster, they’re going to get through!”

[Several Kinetic Cells Have Been Stolen From Their Holding Racks. Protocol Recommends A Focus On All Exit Gates. Disregarding Interior Gates Will Allow You To Maintain Lockdown On Entrance Gate 03 Indefinitely.]

“Wait, you mean forever? I’m supposed to just cancel the door from being opened forever!”

She would have slapped her palms to her cheeks to rub at herself in frustration had she the hands to do it. The teams of soldiers had her way outnumbered and they were gaining ground little by little with every mistake she made, and they weren’t opening the doors on a schedule.

Every time a team reached a door, they immediately set to work to open it, relentlessly, with every team working to their own timetable. This meant that for every two minutes of Krystal's time she had over a dozen doors to monitor, canceling the verification for the first one to be breached, then shifting to the next, then the next, all as fast as she could to give her verbal command.

Sometimes she just wasn't fast enough to get to each Gate in time.

[Scans Of Insurgents Indicate An Estimated Lifespan Of Six Weeks With Their Current Supplies.]

"So, I have to wait until they all starve to death!" She shouted. "And what about me!"

[Stasis Slows, But Does Not Halt, Biological Processes. Estimated Lifespan For Interim Navigator Krystal Is Three Weeks Given Your Present Physical Condition.]

She wasn't just stressing out; she was going into a full-blown panic with her losing track of Gate list as she struggled to process what she was supposed to do next. She'd die before they would, and if that happened, even if she kept the front door closed until she croaked, they'd just opened it after she died. She was going to die!

She wanted to cry so badly, but couldn't, she was going to die here!

[Gate 14L Has Been Breached.]

Krystal heard it but didn't make any move to deal with it. She was frozen in place with the thought of her slowly starving to death in this empty void consuming her heart and soul. She was all alone here and couldn't do anything but die.

[Gate 23T Has Been Breached. Interim Navigator Krystal, Please Continue Containment Efforts.]

"I don't know what to do." She whispered.

[Current Containment Efforts Must Be Continued. Theft Of Kinetic Cells Must Be Prevented.]

"I don't even know what those are! Why should I care when I'm just going to die in three weeks, and they'll all get out anyway!"

She was shouting, angry and hurting, with all the hope she had from before having been snuffed out. She'd been so sure that there had been a way to fight back, to do something, but now she only had a slow death to wait for.

[Kinetic Cells Are Free Energy Generators. With Minimum Input Of Energy, A Maximum Output of Energy Results. The Theft Of All Kinetic Cells Must Be Prevented.]

“Then tell me how I’m supposed to do that!”

She was too angry to think straight, hardly listening to the voice as it urged her to fight the futile battle against the Empire. What did it matter! She could fight them at these stupid gates for every moment of every hour and all that’d do is leave her dead in three weeks with a bunch of hungry soldiers storming out of the front door killing everyone she knew, starting with... Mr. McCloud!

“I want to talk to Mr.- Fox. I want to talk to Fox McCloud!”

[Containment Efforts Must-]

“I Will Talk To Fox McCloud!” She shouted at the voice, and the view screens in front of her shifted until the video feed of Fox came to the fore. He was still waiting in his hidey hole as the night grew darker, waiting for something to change.

[Link Established.]

“Fox, I don’t know what to do!” She shouted, startling the pilot.

“What’s wrong? Has something happened?”

“I’m going to die! I can’t keep all the gates shut, and the voice is telling me I’ll be dead in three weeks, but the soldiers have supplies to last them six! I’m going to starve to death and then they’ll open all the doors!”

She sounded hysterical now, telling it to someone that actually cared was breaking the dam within her that was holding back much of her emotions.

“You have to help me, please!” She pleaded.

The man in the video looked confused and distressed and there was a long pause of silence between them as the older fox strained himself with thought.

“If we let them break free on purpose, I can sneak in and get you out.” He suggested.

[Theft Of Kinetic Cells Must Be Prevented.] The voice interrupted her thoughts.

“It keeps telling me I can’t let them steal the kinetic cells! That’s all it cares about now!”

Fox looked confused, and asked her what those were, which prompted the voice to repeat its earlier description of the cells.

“It says they’re ‘free energy power generators.’” She told him, and both his ears flicked down them up again in consternation.

“Free energy? That’s not possible. That’s what it called them?”

“Yes!”

[Free Energy Was Perfected By The Masters In Krazoa Year 4521.]

“The voice just said the Krozoa perfected it in 4521. I don’t know when that was, it’s just what the voice said.”

Fox was looking more distressed.

“That’s not good.” He finally replied.

“Why?”

“Most modern weapons systems use energy, so if the Empire has access to free energy, then they can fight a really effective war.” He explained, and her heart sank, her anger and pain falling mute in the face of what would be the worst thing to happen to the Lylat System since the Lylat War. Everything was falling apart around her.

“Krystal, I want you to ask the voice what the Krazoa would do in the event an enemy force was to occupy one of their military bases.”

She didn’t need to ask the voice, since it was already listening and prepared to give an answer.

[In The Event That A Hostile Force Overruns A Stronghold’s Defenses, And There Is No Means Of Reversing The Offensive, Then The Acting Navigator Must Have Central Command Initiate A Self Destruct.]

She didn’t know if she wanted to tell Fox that. She’d have to tell the voice to blow up the whole place, and what else would that destroy! How big of an explosion!

“Krystal?” He asked her, but she hesitated.

[Interim Navigator Krystal, Central Command Cannot Directly Communicate With Subjects Outside Stasis.] Implying that she would have to be the one to tell him.

“It says you’re supposed to blow up the stronghold. A self-destruct.”

“What kind of self-destruct? What’s the radius of the explosion?”

[The Stronghold Self Destruct Sequence Relies Upon An Implosion Ten Miles Beneath Primea’s Surface. All Stronghold Facilities Will Be Drawn Into The Implosion And Destroyed. Estimated Radius Of Damage Is Ten Miles.]

She repeated a truncated version of that to Fox, who seemed to furl his brow, and began to thumb the headset he wore.

“I need a way to get inside, get to you, and then back out. If I break you out of there, we can let the AI blow the whole thing up and the generators with it.”

“How do we get him inside to rescue me?” She asked the voice.

There was a moment’s pause.

[Should Stronghold Primea Self Destruct The Planetary Defense Field Will Deactivate.] The voice informed her, reminding her that open conflict would break out as soon as the barrier keeping the two factions apart disappeared.

“It says if we blow it up the shield around Sauria will turn off. Is that ok?”

“I can radio everyone overhead, so they’ll know what’s coming. That’s the best we can do if we want to stop them from having any time putting those generators to use.”

She again asked the voice if there was a way to help Fox to get inside to save her.

[The Odds Of Defeating The Insurgent Force Are Still Low, Interim Navigator. Should The Insurgent Force Utilize Any Kinetic Cells The Odds Of Victory Will Shrink Further.]

Krystal grew angry again and shouted at the voice to tell her how Fox could get inside the stronghold. There was a long pause.

[All Navigators Possess A Means To Neutralize Threats That Reside With A Stronghold. Interim Navigator Krystal Is Not A Master, So This Option Was No Presented Due To Biological Incompatibilities. To Attempt A Psionic Purge Would Incur Great Risk To Yourself, Interim Navigator.]

Again, the voice was telling her things she didn’t fully understand. Was it trying to talk her out of it?

“Are you telling me I can’t do it? Whatever it is?”

[It Can Be Attempted If You Command It, Interim Navigator. At Great Risk To Yourself.]

“What kind of risk?”

[You Must Be Made Compatible To Attempt A Psionic Purge. You May Not Survive The Effort, Interim Navigator.]

Well, she was going to die anyway, wasn't she? What sort of choices were these! The voice read off another gate being opened, and she knew there were many more to come after that. Thinking back to her original option, a lonely death as her body slowly dies here in this empty place. She wanted to inhale nice and big, so she could feel like she was preparing herself, like just before a big race.

But she couldn't, not here, not without a body. The only way she'd get to experience having a body again was if she escaped, if Mr. McCloud could save her, and the only way that was happening is if she took the risk and did what she needed to do. To do a 'psionic purge', whatever that was. She could do it, and she would do it.

“Mr. McCloud...” she told the man, pausing for a moment to steel herself before continuing. “I'm going to try to find you a way in. Just wait!”

When she said her piece, she told the voice to do it, whatever it was, so that she could do the purge.

[Are You Certain, Interim Navigator?]

“Yes! Do it! Show me how to do it!” She shouted, forcing herself to be strong.

[Affirmative.]

With that last word spoken the world around her went black in an instant, all the viewscreens vanished into the void leaving her floating in the dark like she had been in the very beginning. As the darkness consumed her, she felt a ringing in her ear, followed then by great pain as her head was compressed from all sides, the pressure forcing a scream out of her as her skull seemed to shudder and creak under great force.

For the first time in many hours, she could feel her body again, her skull screaming as loud as she was all while something terrifying happened to her. From her skull she felt a fire spread, like she'd been lit aflame with the embers catching and spreading across her by igniting the fur of her body, her broken ribs crying out in agony, her bruises and cuts shrieking as if doused with salt and lye.

The pressure in her skull reversed, and her body vanished again, the void around her shifting now in color. From black it switched to blue, then to green, to yellow, to red, rotating rapidly,

faster, and faster through every color, every hue in the universe until they blended together in an infinite blur of the purest white light she'd ever seen. It blinded her, the pressure pushing outward in her head causing her to scream again as the light pierced through to her very soul.

Color returned, a blurred mass of colors like wet oil on a canvas, the pain was terrible, she wanted to cry, to scream, to beg the voice to stop, but she was left mute in what felt like her last moments as the world around her kept moving and shifting chaotically from color to color until at last things began to slow.

The void maintained its mixture of colors, but shapes began to emerge from them little by little, like a camera lens being twisted into focus. As the world became clearer to her the more confusing it became. She could see hallways, rooms, control panels, floors, ceilings, gates, men in uniforms, rifles, white lab coats, all at once and separately like her eyes had become that of an insect, a compounding of lenses taking in the world around her in a single instance. And there was talking, talking, talking! Such a chorus of gibberish like a roaring stadium filled her ears with such volume it rivaled the pain that continued to echo through her head. She couldn't shut them out!

[Compatibility Adjustment Complete, Interim Navigator. Please, Direct Your Attention To All Hostile Organics To Begin The Psionic Purge.]

The hostile organics? The Empire. She needed to do the purge! Where were they? As she thought the words, the roaring of voices in her ear grew louder until all she could see in the void was a mass of bodies, like she was peering into a kaleidoscope of flesh. More than a hundred voices were all shouting in her ear, but she could see them! Each one moving within the kaleidoscope, their voice a blur in her ear, but still there like individual instruments in an orchestra of souls.

[You Have Targeted 136 Hostiles Within Range For A Psionic Purge, Interim Navigator.]

"D-do it." She choked out, struggling to form her own words as the weight of so many voices threatened to drown out her own thoughts.

[Central Command Cannot Execute A Psionic Purge. Speak The Command Yourself, Interim Navigator. Gate 28C Has Been Breached.]

She looked deep into the swirling mass of bodies, listened to their cacophony of voices, and gave the command herself, and for the first time she spoke the Master's tongue, something she did not she could do.

Execute The Psionic Purge

<< Force Point Temple, Planet Sauria >>

Over the radio came more cheers that another door had been opened. Sergeant Mire's team, and apparently every other team, were suddenly experiencing a breakthrough with not a single attempt to open a door failing. As much of a relief as this was, it made him feel a little uneasy. They'd been having so much trouble getting a single door open, then about ten minutes ago they suddenly had no issue. His own team was now working at their third door with several other teams all experiencing the same sudden lack of resistance.

Their map was rapidly coming together with corridors being linked up and a true path to freedom being laid out. At this new pace they might have everything open in half an hour, maybe less.

"We're hooked up, plugging in the code now." The Private said from his kneeling position by the door, their makeshift electric equipment spliced into the access panel in the floor.

"Good, get her open." Mire replied, noticing he was developing a headache but dismissing it in the same instance as nothing more than a nuisance.

"Roger that, the code is in, and now we wait." The Private replied, then looked over his shoulder for approval from his superior, the young ape furling his brow at the sight of his Sergeant.

"Uh, Sir, you got a nosebleed." He then said, prompting Mire to lift his hand to his nose, feeling something slick through the leather of his gloves before looking down at the red stain on his fingers.

"Well, shit." He said to that, feeling his headache getting even stronger, strong enough to make his eyes hurt like a bad migraine. Another member of his team collapsed to the floor behind him, Mire's own balance beginning to fail as the pain in his head continued to swell as the young man by the door suddenly cried out in pain, the Sergeant seeing blood beginning to drip freely from the younger man's nose, his eyes going bloodshot before he collapsed to the floor.

With his own vision going red the Sergeant tried to go for his radio, but lost consciousness before he could reach it.

In the central chamber Lieutenant Kanis was fighting his own headache as his communications tech began to complain of one himself, noting that he'd just lost contact with Squad 08 mid conversation.

"Admiral! Something is happening!" He shouted; his voice thick with alarm.

Admiral Scales picked himself up from his chair, lifting a hand to his head and noticing that the vision in his right eye had begun to go pink, blood now dripping from his nose. A powerful

migraine then gripped him tight, the reptile looking around at his officers and saw they were all now suffering their own nose bleeds.

“Get medical here, now!” He shouted, only realizing after giving the order that his medical staff might be similarly affected, then a soldier by the door dropped to the floor limp, followed by the communications tech, the reptile's body slumping over the controls before sliding to the floor.

The Lieutenant tried to grab the tech's headset but stumbled to the side and collapsed in a heap next to him. Furious now, the Admiral took a step towards communications, but felt his balance begin to fail him as the world began to spin as he collapsed to the floor to join the ranks of his men, everything going dark in an instant.