

## Chapter 07//OBLIVION

### << Force Point Temple, Planet Sauria >>

Several minutes had passed since the girl had told Fox to wait, and it was starting to make him anxious. He had no way of knowing when or if the patrols would start tightening up around him, since he couldn't get past the idea that someone would have figured out the shuttle crash hadn't been an accident. He breathed out a quiet sigh, checking over his shoulder and panning his eyes across the charred ruins around him. He couldn't smell it anymore now, the burnt smell of the cooked soil.

From his vantage point he could count... There were supposed to be four guards. Two were by the door and two more were meandering around a few hundred meters back behind him. As he wondered where they went, he felt a headache coming on, but he ignored it. He had plenty of other more important things to worry about than his own bumps and bruises, which were plenty. He really needed to figure out where those soldiers went if he was to maintain his cover. Last thing he needed was to get startled from behind by the barrel of a gun pointed at him, the thought of which prompted him to carefully turn and survey the area behind him. There wasn't a soul visible.

He adjusted his grip on the metal staff, wishing in that moment that it wasn't so big and cumbersome. If it could only just retract- and the entire length of the staff suddenly snapped short, Fox let it drop to the ground in a moment of fright. He stared down at the object, seeing it had returned to its original size and shape before reaching down to touch it.

"That was weird and convenient." Whispering.

Grasping it around the middle he wondered what made it do that all of a sudden, feeling the object with his fingers and studying it with his eyes to see if he'd somehow missed a button or a switch on its body. Could he have accidentally hit the trigger to make it retract, and if so, how would he go about extending it again like it had in the shuttle? Thinking more on it, it'd had been very convenient there, too, what with how this artifact seemed to do what it needed to do right when it was needed. Even if by accident.

With no visible interface on the item, he was at a loss. Fox knew he could figure it out if it would only extend for him one mo- and the object shot out in both directions, snapping to its full length with Fox keeping a better grip on it this time. The kinetic force of the extension was difficult to control, the staff wanting to leap from his hand. With a tight grip he squeezed the handle, and nothing happened.

"Shrink." He whispered, and the staff popped back into its retracted state, his eyes widening at the stupid simplicity of it.

“Uh huh.”

He didn't say anything the other times though, and so he just thought about it extending, and it did exactly that.

“Well, you suddenly got a whole lot more useful.” He said to himself, noting that even if he didn't know how to fight with a staff or a spear, he could always just point it at someone and make it extend, since that alone was enough to knock out a grown man.

Fox shrunk the staff back down and crawled out from his hiding place, reaching up to rub at the pain between his eyes before emerging into a crouched position. If he could get closer to that door, he could figure out what happened to the guards that were posted there, and his headache seemed to be getting worse.

Creeping his way towards the door, he kept his profile as low as possible while keeping his head on a swivel. There was no one in view, which only grew the feeling of unease that sat in his belly. The closer he got to the door the tighter his head became to feel until he finally had to stop and blink his eyes, hands coming back up again to rub between his eyes. What a time to be getting a migraine of all things.

He pressed himself up against a chest high piece of rubble, peeked around and saw he had a clear stretch of charred earth before reaching another section of rubble. He could make that, he thought, blinking away the discomfort before ducking low and zipping across to the next piece of debris. He was a dozen or so meters from where the soldiers had been patrolling in front of the gate.

With a deep breath he peeked, saw nothing, and then slowly crawled out from behind his cover and made his approach. He reached the debris, a pile of blackened rock, then ducked so low he was on his hands and knees, crawling forward until he could just begin to peek again over the rocks and into the clearing beyond. Before the door was a patch of earth flattened and smooth with two bodies slumped together in a heap under the floodlights.

Sensing alarm, he checked all around himself, saw no one, then crawled over the rock pile and into the clearing. The bodies were lying as if they'd collapsed quickly, but with no apparent cause. Fox shook his head, pushing aside his now waning headache. He came to the first body, a canine whose face was turned away from him. He checked for a pulse, found none, then gently took the young man by the chin and turned his head.

“Shit.”

He let go of his chin and let the head droop back to the ground. Both his eyes were bloodshot, full red within red, with blood running from the man's nose. More blood was leaking out from

around his helmet. He crawled around the corpse and checked the second body, and with his head clearing up all of a sudden, he was able to pay more attention to this one.

Same bloodshot eyes, nosebleed, no blood from the helmet though. And there was a pulse, but the ape was out cold. Looking back at the other body he had to consider if they'd been shot, but by who and by what? There were no bullet holes from a ballistic weapon, nor were there any energy burns.

What could drop a man dead or near dead like this? He gritted his teeth, thinking now that the girl had told him she was going to try something.

"Krystal?" He whispered, hoping for a reply.

When nothing happened, he asked her name again, then waited. Minutes were passing, and the longer he waited the more oppressive the air around him felt. He was feeling uneasy and the deathly silence that settled over the ruined earth that was giving him the spooks.

"Krystal, I need you to answer me."

"I'm sorry!" the girl's voice shouted in a sob, Fox's ears folding back instinctively as her voice rang loud in his head. Any attempt to cover them did nothing to drop her volume.

"Too loud!" He winced.

"I'm so sorry! I didn't mean it!" She was sobbing in his head, her volume somehow dropping like a dial had been turned as she spoke. The girl sounded like a mess, blubbing a constant apology.

"Krystal! You need to calm down, you need to tell me what's happened!" He replied, keeping his voice firm but at a low enough volume as to not be too easy to overhear. His eyes darted around him, cutting the best they could through the still air and into the darkness beyond. Distant spotlights showed no signs of movement of Imperial soldiers.

"It didn't tell me what it did! I just did what it told me to do!"

"Krystal! Are you safe?" Changing tactics, focusing on her.

"I'm sorry!"

"Are. You. Safe!"

"Yes." Her distress was through the roof and it was difficult to understand her half the time, but something had clearly just happened that sent her over the edge.

“I need you to tell me what’s hap-“

“I didn’t mean to kill them, I didn’t!” She sobbed harder. He looked down at the bodies next to him, the one unconscious and the one that was clearly dead.

She did this?

“Ok, listen, you have to listen! Is it safe for me to come inside? Can I come in to get you?”

There was a moment of silence from her, the stillness enveloping him once again. Looking again at the two bodies he felt a chill run down his spine. If she was inside, how did she manage to do this to two grown men? What the hell does that do to a body?

The giant door began to move. The vertical seam in the center parted, the halves of the doorway separating, air hissed as it rushed from one side of the doorway to the other as the pressure equalized. Fox immediately stood up and hurried to the door, squeezing himself between the widening gap and into the buried facility.

“I’m inside, you need to tell me where to go.”

The doors kept opening wider behind him, and ahead of him was a long corridor littered with cargo crates and stray equipment, but no people. He started jogging down the hallway until he hit a tee junction, then waited for directions.

“Krystal? Please, you need to help me get to you!”

“Turn right.” She said after a moment, her voice still distraught.

Going right he followed the corridor until he found an open doorway with equipment plugged into the floor and crumpled bodies. He counted four of them and they all had the same bloodshot eyes and nosebleeds as the men outside. Fox didn’t stop to check for any pulses.

He approached another tee junction and the girl told him to turn left. Her voice sounded empty and defeated now. She continued to give him directions and the deeper he went into the Temple the more the bodies began to pile high. Five minutes in and he’d counted over fifty bodies, all on the floor with blood coming from their faces.

“Go straight here, then turn left at the next intersection.”

Fox was sprinting now, wanting to get to her as fast as possible so they could both get out of here. The Academy didn’t prepare its pilots to see this many bodies lying on the ground! He didn’t envy what the infantry would have seen back during the war.

He turned left and kept running until he reached a large circular room. A dozen or so bodies were strewn about the floor with a large blue object hovering in the center.

“Dead end. Where are you?” He asked, looking around the room, recounting the bodies to find exactly twelve were in a collapsed and bloodied state.

“I’m in the middle.” She said, directing Fox towards the object.

It was much larger than a person, and crystalline in structure. Stepping over the large body of a reptile he approached the blue stone. It looked solid and smooth like glass, with him touching it with his hand to confirm. It felt cool to the touch and felt like it was quietly humming with life. It was the biggest crystal he’d even seen, like a huge version of the kind that formed in rivers back on Papatooon. Just this one was blue instead of yellow or amber.

“Is this...” He started, staring into the crystal until he jerked his hand away. Deep within the object was a faint silhouette of a person. “No way.”

“I think I’m inside that thing, that’s what it tells me.”

He had to ignore the cosmic humor of a girl like her being stuck in a thing like this.

“Is there a way to get you out?” He asked.

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[Fox McCloud Is In Possession Of A Command Staff.]

“I don’t know what that is.” Krystal replied. She was depressed, her heart empty. She had no idea what she was doing, what she had done!

She’d killed so many people, she wanted to scream! It didn’t tell her she was going to kill them! She- she didn’t know what it meant! Once she got started it was like something was happening on its own, and she didn’t know how to stop it until it was done. She was so exhausted, her head hurt so badly, and all she could do now was keep talking to herself in her head so she could push everything else out, all the awful thoughts and feelings.

Fox’s thoughts were in her head, too, loud like he was speaking in her ear, and he was upset and afraid. He’d seen what she did! There were so many people, she didn’t mean to do it, even if they were bad people this isn’t what she thought would happen. She wanted to believe she had been doing something else... anything but just killing!

[A Command Staff Is A Weapon System and Interface Device Awarded To Masters Of Koul Rank And Higher. This Command Staff Has A Blank Identification And Has Not Been Formally Bonded To A Master. Its Clearance Level Is Zero.]

“Why is this important?”

[It Can Be Used To Free You Once The Self-Destruct Sequence Has Been Initiated.]

“Ok.”

We're more people going to die when she blew up the Stronghold? She felt so empty inside now, but what else could she do? Fox was already here and waiting on her, and she'd already hurt so many other people. What were a few more when she set the sequence?

“How do I initiate the self-destruct sequence?”

[Central Command Is Not Permitted To Directly Inform A Navigator Of The Method.] The voice replied.

It was then that a view screen appeared before her with a string of foreign text, all of it Krazoan. Somehow, she could read it, and understood their meaning. The voice was showing her an excerpt from a database of information now, explaining what to do if the Krazoa suffered a serious military defeat that was going to cost them a Stronghold or other installation.

It was strange seeing how easy it was to blow up a military base if you were a Navigator. All it would take was a single spoken sentence, then set the timer. What sort of training did they put Navigators through for them to be trusted with this much power? Even without blowing the place up they'd have control over the planet's energy shield, all their weapons, and even the ability to kill with just a thought.

She once believed the Krazoa to be this mysterious dead race of beings full of wonder, but now she was terrified of what they were. She was glad they were dead.

“Ok, I know how now.”

[After You Set The Sequence, Please Have Fox McCloud Insert The Command Staff Into The Central Command Interface Port. It Is Located Directly Forward Of The Stasis Chamber Near His Feet.]

She didn't need to ask the voice to show her Fox McCloud. As she was thinking it a view screen appeared for her and showed him to her. As she watched him, she could hear his thoughts, his worries, all the details zipping through his head as the older fox tried to reason his way through every problem he imagined could arise. It was intimidating being inside his head, the background noise of his own thoughts filled with memories of combat and death, the destruction

of warships and space fighters, the voices of long dead foes ringing in his ears as they challenged him and then when they cursed him as they died.

How did he, how could anyone, live like this with all that noise and pain inside?

“Krystal?” He called out to her, looking up at the large crystal that she now knew contained her body. She could even see herself on the view screen.

“Fox, there is a hole in the floor in front of me. Extend your command staff and insert the large end into the hole like a key.” She told him, and he immediately moved into action by popping the staff to its full length and moving towards her, searching for the hole, then kneeling down to unplug several wires that had been affixed to it by the scientists from before. Once the hole was clear he inserted it inside with the double handed grip.

“Ok, it’s done.”

All he’d need to do now was hold tight to the grip and think of a specific command. She had all this information now in her head that she wasn’t sure how she knew. One moment she’d have a question and then the next she’d suddenly have an answer like information was being fed into her brain as soon as she needed it and without asking the voice for guidance.

“How much time do we need to get away from the facility?” she asked him.

As soon as she asked the question, she could hear in his thoughts the mental equation he was working to determine his answer. He was recounting the path back out of the Stronghold by memory, counting the steps and the time it would take, and he was guessing at how long it would take for his Arwing to fly to him on autopilot, and factoring in the time it would take to radio Dr Tappa to tell him to exit the Arwing and warn the EarthWalker village.

She had her answer now and spoke the command.

“Initiate Failure Protocol Threta Pol Gahni. T Minus 30 minutes.”

“Half an hour, that’s my be-” He replied, but cut himself off as the lights in the central chamber all turned red, bathing everything in a crimson hue. A warning tone began to play in the Stronghold, repeating in Krazoan a call to evacuate to a safe distance. No one but her and the voice would have been able to understand the warning to flee.

“You need to call your Arwing now, Fox! Grab the staff and think these words, quickly! Stasis Override Zero Eight Two Eight Five Zero Zero.”

Fox’s thoughts were now swimming in a state of electric panic as he grabbed tight to the staff and began to repeat the words and numbers in his head just as she’d instructed. As soon as he was finished the void around her began to vanish into black.

[Stasis Override Initiated. Farewell, Interim Navigator Krystal. A Report Shall Be Sent To The Masters Prior To Stronghold Primea's Destruction With A Record Of Your Service.]

Around her the real world came into view, the crystal that had encased her was evaporating like ice under hot water. As the material vanished, she could feel her body again, but numb as if it had been soaked in painkillers. With her limbs weighing her down like lead she collapsed from the evaporating material and into the waiting arms of the pilot, who caught her and pulled her feet free of the crystal before it vanished completely from sight.

"Dr, where are you? Are you at my Arwing?" Fox was laying her gently down on the floor. As the numbness faded from her body the cold chill of the floor bled into her, and beneath that chill she was reminded of the pain of her injuries, that she'd been stripped naked. Pain and shame filled her, and it was only growing faster and faster and she felt her heart beginning to race.

"I need you to get back to the village and warn everyone to start moving away from the ruin's, get as far away as you can! There's going to be an explosion, a big one! Do it now, Doctor, you've got half an hour before it blows! NOW!" He was shouting at the communicator, but she could hear him twice. Once through her ears and once in her head, every word a clone of itself as she read his mind, with his internal monologue was faster and drenched in detail.

The background noise of the void was gone, but it had been replaced with a softer noise that was now all around her. As the pain of her broken ribs screamed at her, she could hear the dull aching thrum of another's pain. So many others were in pain!

Fox had injuries he was ignoring, a wounded leg, and there was more, everywhere around her she could feel numerous confused voices chattering away about their injuries, their fear, a great wellspring of panic and terror was awakening around her, and she couldn't block it out!

A big voice, confused and angry, was rousing somewhere nearby but she couldn't find it through all the noise.

"Arwing 01, seal cockpit and launch. Home to my location, maintain low altitude!" Fox was still talking, and she opened her eyes, the red light blinding her at first, but as she blinked her vision cleared. Looking up at him he was looking down at her, a worried look on his face before he stood up and ran from her, in his head she could hear him thinking, wanting to find something he could cover her body with, but now there was someone else searching for him.

The big voice, its thoughts storming in a rage, she could feel him now, her eyes tracking the room for the source. It was the Admiral from before! She watched helplessly as he forced himself up from the floor with Fox's back turned to him. She tried to speak, but her throat and mouth was dry and full of cotton, leaving her to choke. She tried to 'think' at Fox, but she couldn't reach him, he was too concerned with ripping a jacket off a soldier to notice the Admiral staggering to his feet and reaching for the gun on his belt.



“F-Fox!” She barked painfully at last, drawing his attention towards her, Krystal feeling in his mind the sudden shot of alarm as he caught sight of the reptile in his periphery. She could feel every movement of both men as they drew their weapons from their holsters and leveled them at each other, her screaming behind shut eyes as the weapons both fired.

A flash of pain came from the Admiral as he flew into a rage, Krystal forcing herself to look, now watching in horror as the huge dinosaur charged at Fox, his blaster missing and clattering to the floor away from him. Fox hesitated, thinking to himself that his opponent was unarmed, that hesitation failing him as the reptile swung his fist, Fox jerking his head out of harm’s way only to be sent flying by a shoulder slam to the chest.

The smaller man went flying, his grip on his weapon failing and letting it hit the floor. Krystal forced herself to roll off her back, the pain knocking the wind from her chest. For the briefest of moments, she had mental clarity, a silence falling over her as the pain pushed away all the noise. As the parade of voices returned, so did Fox’s thoughts as he wrestled with the bigger reptile.

A balled fist collided with his skull, Krystal losing track of his thoughts in the brief moment he was knocked unconscious, the Admiral slamming his fist into him again and again, the fox helpless to stop the towering brute. The Admiral’s thoughts were terrifying, with rage and elation filling him, the thought of murdering Fox McCloud sending a rush of ecstasy through him as he reveled in the blood spilling from the cuts appearing on the fox’s face.

She had to do something! Climbing to her knees against the tidal wave of pain she reached for the Command Staff, feeling the cold metal under her fingers before wrapping them tightly around it. With what little strength she had she pulled it free from the socket, her body toppling to its side, staff clattering to the floor.

All that knowledge that had been fed to her in the void was telling her how the Staff worked, so she knew that she just needed to point the larger end at the Admiral, and then she knew exactly what to think!

Krystal could see inside the Admiral’s mind the moment his attention was finally distracted enough to turn to her, and she could feel the rush of danger he felt as he saw the end of the staff open sideways to reveal a bright white light. The Staff ejected its charge with a dull roar, the bolt of energy slamming into the Admiral’s side, his mind screaming an avalanche of pain before blacking out as he lost consciousness, his body crumpling to the side.

She retracted the staff as Fox pulled himself out from under the reptile and crawled to his feet.

“We have to leave before anyone else wakes up!” She heard him say twice, the noise surrounding her making more sense to her now. If the Admiral could wake up, then that meant she didn’t kill everyone. There were more soldiers!

"I didn't kill them all." she struggled to say, clinging to the Staff as Fox lifted her into his arms and began to carry her through the room and out the chamber.

"Yeah, I noticed!" He replied, both angry and frustrated, pain echoing through his head, blinking away the blood from his eyes.

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Fox was hurt, this naked girl was hurt, the soldiers were hurt, everything everywhere was hurt and in less than half an hour everyone was going to be dead! The only good thing was that this girl was light enough for him to carry without slowing him down. His Arwing was in the sky and flying towards their position, but he'd have to find a place for it to land and get this girl up into the cockpit, and he'd have to do that without a ladder!

He ran down the next corridor, his memory aiding him in backtracking his way towards the entrance. As he ran down another corridor, he passed by a handful of soldiers that were trying to wake their companions. He ignored them, ignored their shouting, and kept running. It didn't look like anyone here was in fit enough condition to go chasing after somebody. Hell, Fox was hardly fit enough to be doing what he was!

The precious little time he had to get to the Arwing and to safety was running out, and when he came to the entrance, he had three armed soldiers training their rifles at him. There was an ATV behind them with the engine running, like they'd only just arrived with a fourth man rising up from the collapsed guards Fox had passed on the way in.

"Hands up!" One shouted at him, but Fox had his arms full of teenage girl and couldn't rightly comply.

He hesitated, shrugged.

"Kinda got my hands full, pal." He smarted off. The soldier in the lead signaled to two of his men and they began to walk around to Fox's either side to flank him.

"Then I suggest you drop her before we light the two of you up, now!" He ordered, but Fox knew there was going to be an awfully large problem in less than twenty to twenty five minutes from now.

"You won't believe me, but this place is going to explode in a few minutes!" He shouted, but the soldiers didn't seem phased. The girl in his arms groaned, almost whimpering in his grip.

“Psy. Psy Pa-Purge.” She muttered, and suddenly he felt his headache come back, almost losing his grip on her as his knees went weak. The soldier in the lead suddenly became distracted, shaking his head and reaching up to his now bleeding nose. The other three all joined him in their confusion, their noses suddenly bleeding, the capillaries in their eyes bursting and turning their scleras red.

In less than thirty seconds all four had been knocked to the ground.

“Run.” She whimpered again, and the headache he was feeling was gone. That was scary, that really fucking scared him, so he started running. She literally said a word and four men just dropped! How did she do that?

“I’m sorry.” She began to sob, Fox adjusting his grip under her back and legs as he ran to the ATV, her moans of pain growing louder as his every foot fall sent shocks up his body and into hers.

“It’s ok, it’s going to be ok! My Arwing is coming this way!” He said, finding the backseat of the ATV empty and sliding her into it. He was wishing now that he’d thought to grab his blaster, but too late now!

Knowing his time was running out he kept glancing at the corner of his headset’s display, eyeing the distance tracker that told him how far away his Arwing was from him. He hopped behind the wheel and started driving, keeping the girl in his thoughts every time he drove over a rock or a bump, her noises of pain sending waves of guilt through him as he navigated the broken terrain to find a way out to the tree line.

He found a spot that wasn’t too bad to drive over and crossed the rock and debris, the girl crying out at every rock and shake of the vehicle.

“Sorry, you’re going to have to hang on!”

He sped off on the grass, away from the spotlights and toward any direction that didn’t have trees, finding old trails that must have been used by the science teams. A few minutes later he put on the brakes and hopped out of the ATV, finding the girl whimpering in the backseat, clinging to the staff and a loose seat belt.

The tracker was telling him the Arwing was near, and shortly after he could hear the engine roaring in the distance, Fox lifted the vixen out of the vehicle and anxiously held her close to him.

“Ships almost here.” He tried to reassure her, but she only moaned in reply.

He breathed a sigh of relief when the nose of his Arwing came into view, the rest of his ship following as the thrust of its engines rocked the trees beneath it from their force. With wind now

whipping at their faces the fighter's autopilot pivoted the craft through its landing procedure, landing gear dropping to the earth and settling into the soil.

"Almost there!" he shouted, before setting the girl gently on the ground so he could jump up to the cockpit to find a way to safely lift her into the craft. Seeing his jacket crumpled into the pilot's seat he grabbed it, then jumped back down.

"Yes, I'll try." She said as he rushed to her side, his confusion palpable. He was going to ask her if she had enough strength to hold onto him with her arms while he used his jacket as a sling under her butt. Her legs didn't seem strong enough to wrap around him on their own.

He shook out his jacket and slid it under butt, then gently pulled her up by the arms before twisting himself around so she could grab him around the neck. Using the sleeves of his jacket he hoisted her up onto his back and tied the sleeves around his middle like a belt. Now he could climb up into the cockpit with her.

They were running out of time, but when he finally settled into his seat with the girl in his lap, he felt safe, if only a little. As he piloted the Arwing back into the sky the girl was whimpering through the pain as she pulled his jacket on to cover herself.

He hit the thrusters and they flew off into the sky with every intention of putting as much distance between them and what would soon become a crater. As they ascended through the night sky Fox could see on his radar countless other vessels around him scrambling to do the same. Well, that was a problem, he thought.

"They know." She whimpered.

"Yeah, seems like it." He replied.

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A muffled voice was in the distance as his thoughts swam through the dull fog of pain. The Admiral's head felt like it was splitting open, but he blinked his eyes open despite it. The world was full of fog, his vision turned crimson, and the taste of iron and blood was in his mouth. A foreign language was dully talking, incessant and persistent, he couldn't make any sense of what it was saying, he didn't know if it was his injury impairing his comprehension or if it was truly alien.

It was so hard to move, he ached, but he was remembering. He, his men, what had happened to them. The nosebleeds! He'd collapsed, and as he began to recall what had happened his

clarity of mind began to return to him. Fueled by his anger he roused as someone started shouting over the noise of the alien tongue, a voice he could understand.

“Do it now, Doctor, you’ve got half an hour before it blows! NOW!” A male voice cried, and that was his trigger. He tried to blink away the fog, flexing the fingers of his remaining hand as he tried to will his body out of its short-lived atrophy. What was going to blow? This alarmed him.

Turning towards the voice he saw two figures, one nude and blue and one orange, a male in a green vest. Blinking again he saw the man’s profile, a fox not in Imperial fatigues. Scales gritted his teeth, watched as the fox set the girl onto the floor, it was the girl from the research team, she was alive! He followed the fox with his eyes as he moved away to search one of the bodies of his men, and then he pushed himself up.

Lifting himself up off the ground he nearly staggered and fell but caught himself. He reached for his sidearm.

“F-Fox!” the girl shouted, the fox turned sharply, the two men locking eyes before they both drew their weapons. Scales shot first, the blast whizzing past the fox’s head missing him only by an inch. Firing second, the fox scored a hit on Scale’s sidearm, the blast hitting the barrel of his gun and knocking it from his hand and sending it skidding across the floor.

Enraged, he charged, letting his weight carry him forward with a balled fist ready to strike. The fox didn’t shoot quick enough, and he closed the gap between them and swung his fist, missing narrowly, but salvaged his failed strike by turning it into a shoulder slam, throwing his body into the fox and letting all his built-up momentum come crashing against the smaller man.

He had the fox pinned to the floor; his weapon discarded on the floor. He.. He recognized him! It was him! Scales’ raised his fist and slammed it into the side of the fox’s head, making contact with the man’s cheek bone sending his head to briefly droop limp to the floor as his eyes fluttered shut before popping back open.

Fox McCloud was the pilot of the Arwing! He raised his fist again and struck, the fox trying to block the coming blows, but lacked the physical strength to overpower the large dinosaur as he pummeled away at him with abandon. He was going to kill him! This was his chance to kill him, and he could do it with his bare hands!

Something blue was moving to his side, and he felt uneasy all of a sudden, passing a glance into the girl’s direction. Seeing her grope at a metal stick he wasn’t worried, as it wasn’t McCloud’s sidearm, but then she pointed it at him with the end of it popping open to reveal a glowing light. There was a loud boom, a bright flash of light, then something hot slammed into his side, agony overtaking him as he lost consciousness again.

But it wasn’t the end.

Scales found himself lost in the fog again, time moving strangely for him. As the fog cleared, he felt himself being moved, no, being dragged across the floor. When he opened his eyes, the walls were sliding past him, but two men were holding him by the arms as they drug him down a corridor. There was a trail of blood following behind him.

“He’s awake! Stop!” A third soldier staggered and dropped to his knee next to him as the pair holding his arms stopped in their tracks.

“Admiral, you’re seriously injured, we’re taking you to medical, everyone needs to see medical, shuttles are inbound!”

He got a good look at the man, saw it was one of his Sergeants... Sergeant Mire.

“Mire!” Scales shouted, his memories flooding back, shoving away the fog even as the pain from his ribs exploded into the forefront of his mind, making his hiss through gritted teeth. He looked down to see the injury, and it was bad. Flesh was missing, and what was left was singed and cauterized from the heat. He’d been shot by something stronger than a blaster bolt!

“McCloud was here!” He shouted, his rage threatening to push him over the edge, but then he remembered what the fox had been shouting when he first regained consciousness, the corridor they were in was bathed in red light with the dull alien language repeating itself in the background.

“Sir? The Star Fox Team?” The Sergeant scooted himself closer. The Admiral reached out, ignoring the pain that lanced through him, and grabbed the Sergeant by his jacket.

“Evacuate the facility! It’s going to detonate! Evacuate everyone immediately!” He shouted, the Sergeant jumping upright, the two soldiers not needing to be given orders.

The pair started dragging him again, faster now, sliding the reptile down the corridor as fast as he could while the Sergeant got on the radio and started shouting more orders to anyone he could get to listen. As they drug him through the halls he saw the bodies of his men, most of them limp on the floor, some were slumped against the walls, some moving and some not.

“Casualties?” He hissed.

“We don’t know, Sir, lots of us didn’t make it! Sergeant Mire assumed command when we found you unconscious and Lieutenant Kanis dead.” The soldier to his left replied. More rage began to fill him then, and it only continued to grow as he counted more bodies lying dead in the halls.

When they reached the exit, a shuttle was just setting down, and the two soldiers who’d brought him out were helping him to his feet. A confused squad of soldiers filed out of the shuttle’s now open cargo bay, and were immediately met with orders from Sergeant Mire.

“Get everyone into the shuttle! This place is going to blow, we’re evac’ing now!” The Sergeant shouted.

Now on his feet with one soldier under his arm for support, he walked his way up the loading ramp. A member of the shuttle crew was popping loose the metal benches from the cargo bay’s sides and folding them down. The soldier under his arm guided him to a bench and laid him down on his back, the bench not quite wide enough to hold someone with as much size as himself.

“Sir, you need to remain still, Sir, you’re badly injured.” The soldier was calm.

“I know I’m wounded, Private! Go help them load the shuttle!” He shouted, then lifted his arm and grabbed onto a loose strap hanging from the wall and held onto it to keep himself on the bench.

“Sergeant!” He shouted, and a moment later a man approached.

“Admiral?” It was Sergeant Mire.

“I don’t know how much time has passed, but I want us out of here in five minutes! McCloud set this place to blow in thirty!”

“Shit! Yes, Sir!” He replied, then ran off, passing by soldiers as they walked and carried men into the cargo bay to join the Admiral. They were working quickly, trying to get as many as they could into the cargo bay within the short time that they had.

“No, you don’t understand, we must bring these!” A familiar voice shouted.

“We are only evac’ing the wounded!” Sergeant Mire shouted back.

The Admiral lifted himself up off the bench, seeing two men struggle to pull a metal dolly through the dirt just outside the facility’s doors. It was laden with two large white objects that looked like crystals, or prisms. Six sided and coming to sharp points at their two ends. Recognition hit him, and he knew what those were!

“Bring them! Help them load them!” He shouted from the bench before collapsing onto his back, feeling himself go lightheaded as the pain threatened to knock him unconscious again. A soldier came to his side, jabbing a small vial against his neck to administer a dose of morphine.

“Sir, you’re badly injured.” Urgent worry was in this one’s voice.

He grabbed the soldier, a fellow reptile, and looked him in the eyes.

“Tell them I’m ordering them to do as the Doctor says and bring the batteries!” He ordered, then let the soldier go who nodded in fear before jumping up to run out the back of the shuttle. Shortly thereafter five men were shoving the dolly up onto the loading ramp and into the back of the shuttle, other soldiers moving the wounded out of the way so the batteries could be secured against the back wall.

“Admiral! Our time’s up, we’ve got a second shuttle on the way. Do I tell them to pull back to the Grand Gambit?”

“Did we pull everyone out?” He asked.

The Sergeant shook his head.

“Not enough time, Sir. We’ve loaded everyone we were able to get to their feet.” The Sergeant replied. He scanned the cargo hold, which was now filled with no more than forty of his men, and that included the shuttle crew. He’d taken over a hundred men into that facility!

His blood began to boil.

“Launch the shuttle! Have the Grand Gambit ready to receive our wounded!” The Admiral shouted, then laid himself back down to the bench as the loading ramp began to lift shut.

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Within Stronghold Primea the countdown was nearing its end. The red lights of warning that bathed every corridor were now beginning to dim. The remains of the soldiers who’d died from the Psionic Purge were left where they’d fallen, and the handful of surviving men who were still trapped behind sealed Gates were to experience their final moments in darkness as the lights finally shut off.

Resting ten miles beneath where the Central Chamber sat was the Core Chamber. It was here that the Krozoa kept their largest Kinetic Cell, the large white prism that gave an infinite amount of power to the Stronghold. Held aloft by a metallic tether that not only drew out its energy, but also allowed it the freedom to spin so that it could generate its power, it was now spinning at over 50,000 rpms. With the planet’s geothermal energy supplying the push it needed to spin, and thus generate its enormous potential, the prism was now being primed for overload. The faster it spun the more power it would generate; it was a source of limitless energy so easy to produce that it could supply power to every planet in the Lylat System and beyond.



But now it was creating all this power for no greater purpose than to end itself. The tether holding it now no longer drew out its power, and with nowhere for the energy to flow the prism would soon shatter. Faster and faster, it spun until it was but a liquid blur within its silent chamber, a white light consuming the room until the ambient temperature had risen to over 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

[Beginning Final Operating Procedure. Launching Probe.]

The Artificial Intelligence, Central Command, had completed its report of all that had occurred on Primea, loading the data onto a satellite probe before launching it. The object shot out of its silo like a bullet, punching through the thin ground cover that hid the silo from primitive eyes. Quickly passing easily through the Defense Field surrounding the planet, it fell into orbit around Primea. The probe then encrypted and broadcasted its report on a military channel before detonating itself to prevent capture.

With that accomplished, Central Command performed its last act. The Artificial Intelligence that had watched over Primea for thousands of years committed suicide, erasing itself from existence and removing any chance of stopping the Stronghold's destruction.

The Krazoan voice urging evacuation stopped, then began to count down from ten in its foreign tongue, the expansive power grid that had been woven through the planet's mantle layer was then disabled. Its many ribs and ribbons detonating on command, severing the Stronghold from the source of its power, and denying any who'd come after the means to use it themselves.

At eight seconds remaining, the electrical systems within the Stronghold all began to fail, cutting off all hope for the soldiers that were desperately trying to force open just one more Gate, their terror and despair consuming them in their last moments, their instincts telling them that they were soon to die.

At five seconds, the Core Chamber reached 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit, and the prism began to crack, slinging liquid light across the chamber, its heat slicing through the impenetrable material that could stop even the strongest of weapons fire.

Four seconds, and the native wildlife around the Stronghold felt the powerful surge of the ground beneath them, sending them scattering for somewhere to hide.

Three seconds, and the Core Chamber was breached, light flooding the Stronghold one level at a time as the searing heat bounced across the polished surfaces to cook everything in its path.

Two seconds, and the soldiers all vanished into ash.

One second left, and light erupted from the entrance, turning night into day.

The prism ruptured, the ancient battery now a ball of energy so dense that it could not expand outward as an explosion, but instead drew everything into it. The gravity well was so great that it rivaled that of a black hole, its event horizon ripping and tearing apart the Stronghold, shattering metal like glass before evaporating it like water, corridors twisting into ribbons, support columns were ground to dust, then rendered molten in a flash.

The surface above Stronghold Primea, ten miles in diameter, then collapsed in on itself, and in an instant half the planet experienced the sunlight of an artificial star at the moment of its birth, and then it bore witness to its death. The light consumed everything without care or reverence.

The light faded, night returned, and all that was left of Stronghold Primea was a yawning chasm in the ground where a great civilization had once planted its flag.

And up above it all, the Planetary Defense Field vibrated, then slowly faded as the last of its power vanished, and dozens upon dozens of flickering lights all flew to the heavens at best speed. The Imperial armada had been freed, and now their War would resume.