

*Planet 457-23, GFDate ?????:????*

*What kind of idiot puts dildos on mining equipment?* Samus thought to herself. She grimaced and then smiled as the answer came to her. *A dead one, just as soon as I find him, her, or it.*

Samus had spent the better part of a week wandering up and down the length of the coastline. She could see mountains in the distance, canals running into lush fauna that she had no intention of exploring if she could help it. Instead, she'd kept to the water's edge, feeling much more cautious than she was used to.

Her nudity didn't bother her. She'd been raised among the Chozo and they'd had a much more *laissez-faire* attitude towards sex than any of the humans that she'd met. Sex was a hunger that she indulged in when the mood struck her, tied to intimacy but not dependent on it. The threat of rape was not the horror for her it was for the other humans she'd spoken with.

Pain, on the other hand...

She'd seen her father burned to ashes when she'd been three years old. Her mother had been eaten alive. The killer had crooned to her all the while, torturing and killing everyone she'd ever known. She'd been left for dead, nearly died of wounds and exposure. Pain was horror, but the Chozo had taught her how to deal with that.

*"Every species tries to use pain as a source of authority at some point in its development,"* Grey Voice had told her, holding her on his knee when she'd been eight. *"Often, the species will adapt and grow beyond that sort of thinking, but some never do. There needs to be someone that can stand up to those that seek to assert their strength through force, by the infliction of pain. You can be the one that stands up, hatchling, if that is what you would like."*

The Chozo had taught her to deal with pain but never pleasure. She knew that had been what the things had been after, their treatment of her meant not to frighten but to arouse. She'd destroyed every single shaktool she'd run into since, all up and down the coast. She drove her heel into a broken sphere from her latest victim, feeling satisfied when it crunched underneath her foot.

*If only I had an extra zerosuit...* She sighed. The gun she'd found was nothing special, a half-rate rail pistol. It was the sort of thing low-rent muscle bought when they wanted to look tough. She recognized the make and model, a Xaero Needle Gun Mark IV. It fired literal needles at Mach 7 over a short range, the adverts claiming it was capable of punching through solid steel. She had claimed the thing during one of her first bounties, had kept meaning to get rid of it and never had, sometimes tooled with it in her spare time. It held close to a thousand rounds of ammo, had maybe half that in the single clip the thing possessed.

She'd never thought she'd actually have to use the damn thing.

Sighing, she stood on the black stone beach and looked out into the jungle. There was movement in there, a whole unknown ecosystem that she knew nothing about. It was becoming increasingly apparent that she was going to have to go in there – she could see mountains on the other side of the canals, a whole cave system that would lead further inland to whatever lay beyond. She held herself, shivering in spite of the heat.

*So many goddamn unknowns. I don't like any of this.*

It bothered her that this was a concern, but armed as she was... these *things* kept flinging themselves at her, shelled insects that bounced themselves out of the trees while rolled up. She'd kicked most of them back into the woods, wanting to conserve her ammo.

If those were the worst she could expect she should be fine.

She entered the woods cautiously. The foliage grew in and out of the black stone ground, the canopy not nearly so dark as she had feared. She went slowly, investigating signs of fauna but finding little enough. Small minnows swam around her feet. The ball things bounced down into the water, eating the minnows before rolling away. Some of them bounced towards her but what had happened with the shaktools had made her watchful; she was not going to be taken off guard again.

The path was actually easier than she had thought it would be. She began to relax, kicking aside the balls whenever they got too close. The minnows were no threat and the few shaktools she hadn't destroyed didn't come this far inland. She was feeling a little more confident about things, which was no excuse for letting her guard down.

It started simply enough.

The leaves on the trees here veered between shades of purple, blue, and green. She noticed spheres hanging from the branches in similar colors and assumed they were some sort of fruit, but without any means of telling whether they were poisonous had no intention of eating any of them and so left them alone.

She yelped the first time one spun in the branches and opened an eye.

She pointed her gun at it but didn't fire.

Nothing happened.

She waited and waited and nothing continued to happen. The eye eventually looked away and she went on, glancing back at the not-fruit that had looked at her; it wasn't looking at her anymore. She shrugged, kept moving, keeping an eye on the balls but generally ignoring the eye-fruits.

– *Kneel* –

*What?*

She looked around. There were few minnows, no balls, nothing except the eye-fruit. She approached one, cautiously, looking at it as it looked at her.

– *Kneel* –

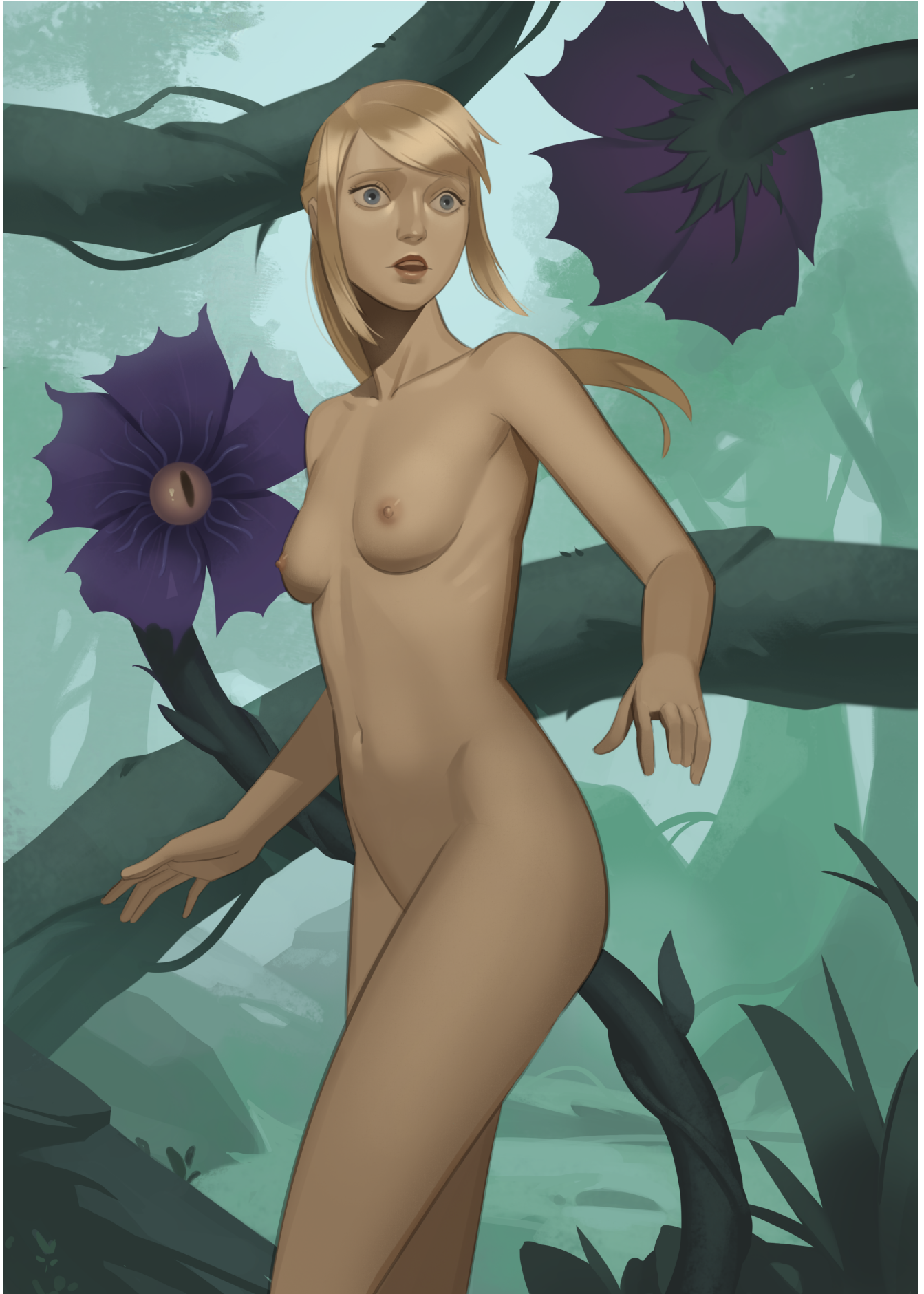
She shuddered, was halfway to her knees before she stopped herself. She tried to break eye contact with the thing but

– *No – Stay – Kneel* –

found that she couldn't. Her eyes narrowed as she looked at the not-fruit, realizing that it was trying to hypnotize her. Its eye turned into a spiral of pretty yellows and blues, it trying to draw her in, but she knew how to deal with mental assaults. She dropped to her knees, letting the thing think that it had her, and when she felt the pressure of its will relax she *blinked*.

The disconnection freed her.

She raised her gun in the span of a heartbeat, fired, smiled when she heard a satisfying burst and the sound of goo falling into the water. She opened her eyes and grinned at the would-be hypnotist – she'd dealt with beings capable of influencing entire worlds with their minds. That thing, whatever it had been, had been powerful but even powerful psychics could be beaten with the proper application of force.



Minnows surged past her feet, grasping at the goo that had fallen from the not-fruit. The balls followed, a feeding frenzy for both species. A couple of the balls tried their luck with her but she bounced them away, grinning at them before moving on and walking right

– *kneel* –

into

– *Stop* –

a nest

– *STOP* –

of not-fruits.

– *KNEEL – STOP – STOP – OBEY – KNEEL* –

They were floating in the air all around her, their single word commands slamming into her mind.

She tried to blink, tried to look away, but they were everywhere whenever she opened her eyes and moving whenever she closed them.

– *KNEEL – STOP – OBEY* –

– *LOSE* –

*What?*

She looked in the direction she had felt that last command come from, shuddering, trying to raise her gun and fire.

– *STOP – KNEEL – OBEY* –

– *LOSE – LOSE* –

– *GOOD* –

On her knees, whimpering, Samus felt herself slipping away as command after command slammed against her mind. She dropped her gun, holding her head, screaming defiance – but even with her eyes closed the alien commands were seeping in, a rapid collection of images that made words in her mind.

– *OBEY – OBEY – GOOD* –

A burst of pleasure swam through her whenever the word 'good' formed inside her mind, starting between her legs and spreading out until it consumed her. The more she obeyed the stronger the pleasure became.

– *DOWN – DOWN – OBEY – GOOD* –

– *LOSE – GOOD – LOSE* –

She shuddered, bit her lip. It was becoming hard to separate her thoughts from the commands that were assaulting her mind. If she could just have a minute she could come up with a way out of this, but as it was

– *LOSE – GOOD – LOSE – OBEY* –

she tried to stand, failed, tried again. She was on her knees.

She was losing and that was good, that was okay, when she accepted her loss it felt good. That

meant it was right to lose...

– GOOD – GOOD – GOOD –

Samus Aran screamed, pressing her forehead against water and black stones, bowing down as the will of a dozen milling creatures thrust into her, demands echoing inside the deepest recesses of her soul as her body quivered and shook and all thought abandoned her...



*Planet YS7-23, GFDate 4034:0211*

"Took her long enough," Melissa growled. "A whole damn week. What was she waiting for?"

She had placed him at her feet, chained and naked and exposed. He felt the pressure of her foot removed from the back of his neck and he whined as she dragged him into a kneeling position.

"I'm treating her with more respect than you did in your report," she tittered, looking into his eyes before tossing him to the ground. He looked at the image on the view screens, feeling himself harden at the sight presented there. The Hunter, naked and kneeling, a dozen floating eyes spiraling around her.

"You want to know about the kaayes?" Melissa asked, looking at the floating spheres. "They're from the moon RK18-94, though no one recognized their hypnotic prowess until they were moved by the Khanate to asteroid WD1-967. Yoshio had a bunch brought here for his experiments, and I've been fiddling with them since. They're extensions of my will now, magnifiers.

"There were some early problems. The Bormu kept eating them. Fast little things, though dear little Samus Fucktoy has avoided them so far. We'll see how she does after the Kaayes are done with her."

"S-stog 'ou," he managed to mumble.

"Stop me?" Melissa laughed, grabbed his collar and hauled him into a sitting position, forced him to look at the screen. "Yes, she destroyed some of my shaktools. So what? There's another three hundred on that coast alone. Let her have that victory. Besides, you'll be pleased with what I make her. What I make of her. Of her."

He looked at her, feeling himself shudder as he looked into her eyes.

– *I'm going to reduce her to what you are now. Just another victim* –

He shuddered, closed his eyes, and began to cry.



*Planet Daibon, GFDate 4034:0211*

"Chairman Keaton...?"

The Sazin looked up from his work desk. One of his aids was hovering in the doorway, looking stricken. He beckoned the woman inside, got her to sit and take a few deep breaths.

"Calm?" he asked. She shook her head, so he offered her some brandy. That seemed to help.

"Alright. Now. What is it?"

"Sylux just attacked Bottleship N-7," the aid looked at him.

Keaton sat down, took a deep breath, poured himself some brandy. Bottleship N-7 was one of those found to be missing, one of three that Colonel Sakamoto had claimed for his illegal operations.

*Damn the man... if I ever get my hands on him...*

Something of his thoughts must have crossed his face; his aid went pale.

The Sazin people had been known for two things before getting in politics – their capacity for sadism and making the best audio equipment in the galaxy. He struggled to calm himself down, thinking of some of the more calming symphonies composed by his people over the years.

*Ah, Idow Aria Nimber 437. That was a good one.*

Few other species appreciated Sazin music, singular performances that were focused around the modulated screams and cries of the slowly dying. He smiled with both his mouths, drank some brandy, imagined that he looked friendly.

"It's alright," he said. "We'll deal with it. What else did you want to tell me?"

"Madeline Bergman was seen leaving the ship with him."

The glass shattered in his hands.