

Though it looked no different to how she had seen it before, Sakura thought that Octo Canyon looked rather smaller, emptier, and less intimidating now that DJ Octavio was in custody where he belonged. She stood on a ridge overlooking the deep gash in the ground, sunglasses perched atop her head so she could press her binoculars to her eyes instead. Of course, there were still Octarians mooching about the place, but they would be little trouble for someone like her without their leader to organise them.

Her mission was simple: do as much damage to the Octarian infrastructure as possible to truly cripple them. Lowering the binoculars, she glanced down into the backpack at her feet: inside were a good dozen paint bombs, ready to be lobbed at whatever important installations she would come across once she descended from her perch; what she damaged wasn't too important, just so long as Octo Canyon was riddled with cyan paint when it was all over.

Having spent much of the day scouting the canyon from different vantage points, Sakura's feet were itching to do something more, especially now that the sun was sinking low in the sky, threatening dusk. She flicked her sunglasses down onto her nose and snatched up her backpack, making for the narrow rocky path nearby that she knew would lead her down to the flat bottom of the chasm.

Her feet moved quickly but cautiously down the track carved into the rock, doing her best to blend into the greyish wall behind her. She held her pistol at the ready in case she was spotted, a shotgun-esque weapon was strapped to her backpack in case she needed a wider spread of ink.

Down and down she descended, hearing nothing but the sound of dirt and pebbles crunching beneath her boots and the faint but growing buzz of late afternoon activity among the Octarians she was approaching. She tightened her grip on her gun as the adrenaline pumped through her in anticipation of the task of remaining stealthy but destructive; she was by no means scared at the prospect, merely excited and poised for action.

When she reached the bottom her gun-arm raised, following her gaze as she scanned the area around where she had emerged through rose-tinted lenses. Her other hand crept behind her, taking a light hold on the butt of her shotgun. Slowly, she crept along the wall of the canyon, eyes still peeled for movement, making her way towards the building she had spied nearby during her reconnaissance.

She froze momentarily as a figure came into view ahead of her, then pressed herself back against the rock, hoping to use a jagged outcrop to conceal her. The Octarian, dressed in a worker's uniform, ambled passed, seemingly oblivious to the intruder's presence. She could have shot them, of course, but she didn't want to reveal that she was here until she had to.

As soon as the coast was clear she walked on, pausing again between beside a tall rocky pillar, sliced free from the canyon wall many millennia ago. To proceed towards her first target, she would have to break cover, dashing around twenty metres before reaching the shadow of the concrete installation. She steeled herself, glanced around once more, then ran.

The moment she was clear of her natural protection alarms began blaring. From behind the very building towards which she had been sprinting emerged several dozen Octarian soldiers, their guns raised; at the front of the line was one pushing a roller.

Letting out a cry of surprise, Sakura hurtled back the way she had come, diving behind the tower of rock to avoid the projectiles flying towards her; they splattered against the canyon wall, daubing a portion of its lower surface magenta.

She took a moment to recompose herself, then her brow furrowed in determination; *I'm Sakura, and Sakura doesn't give in so easy.*

Poking her head around the edge of the rock, she fired off several shots at the approaching Octarians; though a couple missed, her aim was true for the others, leaving at least two on the ground in cyan puddles while another limped on, looking as though they were wearing a pale blue boot. She withdrew as soon as she had loosed the last of that volley, glimpsing that the roller was getting mighty close.

It was time for a bomb: they were intended for structural attack, but desperate times called for desperate measures. Pulling one from her backpack, she lobbed it wildly around the corner, barely looking where she was aiming. It exploded on the righthand flank of the advancing Octarians, taking out a good half a dozen of them. Several who would have been in the line of fire transformed rapidly into their squid forms, diving into the purplish ink spread behind the roller.

Another! Sakura reached behind her again, her fingers fumbling through the opening of the bag in search of another ball of explosive blue justice.

"Hold it right there!"

She had been too slow. Octarians were surrounding her on all sides, cornering her with her back to the rocky pillar. She had at least ten guns trained on her now, all ready to cover her from head to foot in magenta before she could so much as find a bomb to throw.

"Drop your weapon and put your hands up." The speaker was the Octarian stood in the centre of the rough semicircle, perhaps DJ Octavio's successor to the leadership.

She could have done as she was being told, accepted defeat and allowed herself to be captured; but, after all, she was Sakura.

Her finger squeezed her pistol's trigger, taking out the nearest Octarian, at the same time she whipped her other hand out from behind her, bomb at the ready. She didn't even get the chance to wind up her desperate toss: her world had turned magenta.

Sakura was dead, dead and buried six feet under in a grave surely marked with a gloating sign of the Octarians' victory. But then, if she was dead how could she be conjuring images of her burial ground?

She tried opening her eyes. Lo and behold, she could see and see well: an Octarian stood before her, purple lips spread in a broad grin.

"Welcome, Sakura, to your new home," the Octarian said, seeming to be the same one who had orchestrated her capture.

She made to get to her feet but found that her arms and legs were bound to the chair in which she was seated.

"Where am I?" she spat, looking around the room but seeing little more than darkness.

The Octarian laughed, watching her struggle fruitlessly against her bonds. "Somewhere they'll never find you, nor will you ever escape," he said gloatingly, still staring at her avidly.

Somewhere in the gloom she heard something move creakingly, though she could no sooner identify what it was than from whence it had come.

The Octarian continued, glorying in her helpless captivity, "But I will show you how to get out, just so you can torture yourself with pointless little schemes."

On cue, a door slid open behind him, allowing a rectangle of light to cleave the darkness in two.

"We are in a bunker beneath that building you were obviously hoping to destroy – quite pointless, by the way, for it has been disused for ages. Out that door, up a ramp, and through another door and you'll be practically right back where you were when we caught you, then it's just a short trek up and out of the canyon." He smirked, summoning a pair of guards with a flick of the tentacle atop his head. "But you're not getting out," he added, leaning in close to her, "Never."

"Why don't you just kill me, then?" she snarled back, still training at the sturdy straps tying her down.

"We've got something much more enjoyable in store for you than that!" He raised his gaze to someone clearly stood behind her chair and out of her line of vision. "You may begin."

As he departed, something began to descend from the ceiling: something long and translucent, its end flared wide. Another Octarian emerged from the darkness, inserting the end of what turned out to be a plastic tube into her mouth. She tried to turn her head away, tried to spit it out, but the design of the mouthpiece secured it firmly in place.

And then something began to flow down the tube: a thick, cream-coloured liquid that oozed into her mouth and over her tongue; she had no idea what it was, but there was no questioning that it was quite delicious in its sweetness. Her cheeks swelled out as more and more poured down through the tube, giving her but two choices: swallow or burst. She chose the former, feeling the delicacy running down her throat and into her stomach.

The second Octarian then disappeared back into the gloom, though she could hear the orders they were barking to other who were clearly still lurking out of sight: "Ensure that the vat never drops below one third capacity, the boss wants her to be feeding night and day."

Time quickly ceased to have meaning for Sakura as she sat there, unable to do anything but continually swallow the sweet that became so much less of a treat with every mouthful. Even as she slept her throat muscles continued their work, settling into a rhythm of contracting every few seconds to clear her cheeks ready for the next wave.

The only thing that did give her a clue as to the passage of time was the effect this constant, never ceasing nourishment was having on her body. The first thing she noticed was her jacket becoming tighter around her shoulders, chest, and tummy; within what felt like a very short period it was bulging outwards, then pushed up as her belly expanded across her lap, a lap that was itself growing as her thighs began to cause her pants to split along the seams as the pounds packed on.

Periodically the Octarian leader would arrive to taunt her. With a mirror in hand, he would show her the changes being wrought on her body: from how her knees and ankles were seemingly vanishing, each leg melding into one jointless whole; to how her belly, once so flat and toned, was slopping down between her thighs; to the extra chins blossoming beneath her rounded, plump-cheeked face.

By the time her paunch had covered every last inch of her lap and was spilling over the sides of her thighs, spread wide by their own girth, the leader ordered for her to be untied from her chair and for the guards to stand down: he believed that she would be kept imprisoned by her own weight now, an assertion Sakura grudgingly thought was quite true.

From overhearing orders being given and the conversations held beyond her prison, Sakura had pieced together a picture of her predicament: the room in which she was being held was more or less empty but for her, while the vat of sweet liquid that was constantly being refilled thanks to her consumption was located in a separate room a floor above. She was therefore, apart from when the leader came to taunt her, quite alone now. It quickly struck her as these thoughts raced through her mind, one after the other, that, as she had been unbound, the chances of her escaping had grown substantially; in fact, as she would inevitably continue adding to her already thick layer of adipose, her chances of achieving freedom were dwindling by the second.

There was still one obstacle to overcome: the tube's mouthpiece.

It was something of a struggle just to raise her arms now as she was forced to fight against the fat swaddling those limbs, pressing and squashing it out of the way until her hands were able to grasp and feel about the tube that was still delivery a steady stream of nourishment to her.

Ah ha! What felt like a pair of tabs. She squeezed them, feeling the two halves of the mouthpiece press towards each other, releasing their grip on her cheeks.

The gooey substance on which she had been feasting for so long poured onto her chest as she pulled the tube from her mouth, but there was no point worrying about that. As her chair had no arms to grasp, she instead flung her weight forward as best she could, hoping not to overbalance onto the floor as she was far less certain of her chances of getting up from such a position. She teetered for a moment on what now seemed like a pair of undersized feet, then struck out for the light.

She happened upon a radio as she stumbled through the door: with all her possessions hidden she knew not where, her only hope of calling in a rescue team was if she could tune it to the right frequency; however, first she would need to escape the Octarian compound.

It was when she started up the ramp the Octarian leader had mentioned that it began to dawn on Sakura how arduous and audacious her plans for freedom were: it was a relatively gentle slope and not more than ten metres long, but she had barely taken two steps up it when she began to pant. Her belly now hung down past her knees, badly obstructing each stride she tried to take; what was more, her thighs had ballooned so much that they were impeding each other, each forced to push past the inner bulk of the other just to put one cankléd foot forward.

By the time she reached flat ground once more, Sakura was feeling quite exhausted and ready to flop down where she was for some respite. However, dark though it was outside, she was more than aware that even a short interruption in her progress could scupper her remotest hopes of escape.

There was no moon out that night and little activity among the Octarians, meaning that Sakura's waddling, shuffling gait took her to the foot of the path up to the ridge in near total darkness. She raised her eyes to the top of the canyon, dark grey on the black of the sky, and let out a low groan at how distant it seemed. Nevertheless, she pushed her bloated body onwards, doing her best to ignore its many and growing cries of protest.

Foot up. Drag thigh past its sibling. Force belly upwards. Foot down. Repeat.

On and on she climbed, step after agonising step that barely seemed to close the distance to her salvation. One hand clutched the radio, the other was held out towards the wall of the canyon against which she was bracing herself. Every movement she made sent vast waves through her fat-laden frame; her belly in particular jostled violently as her expansive thighs collided repeatedly with it from below, in turn sending her numerous other rolls aquiver.

And then, at long, long last, after what must have surely been hours of determined waddling, she was able to let herself topple onto the blissfully even ground at the summit. There she lay panting, wheezing, and gasping; exhausted, but safe.

Though desperate for a proper rest, she raised the radio into her field of vision and, after a moment's fiddling with dials, found her base's frequency.

"Sakura." *GASP!* "Rescue." *WHEEZE!* "Octo." *GULP!* "Canyon." *PANT!* "Hurry!"