

CRYSTAL WARS: PROLOGUE

He ran his experienced eyes lingeringly over the crystal half-buried in the sand before him. From the deep, glittering veins he could glimpse beneath its smooth surface, he knew that this one would be well worth his time. Even through his insulated gauntlets, when he picked the surprisingly lightweight crystal up, he could feel the thrum of the energy singing inside. He could hear the whispering gathering at the edge of his mind, like it always did when he and other hunters like him came into contact with raw crystals. He shook it off and made to stand up.

The point of a wickedly curved knife dug itself insistently into his throat, and his eyes widened in surprise. A silent, sinuous hand wrapped itself around his neck, jerking his head back in a calm, professional manner, and ripping a strangled gasp of shock and surprise from his throat.

“Shush, my dear”, a voice of dark velvet whispered in his ear, a voice he knew all too well. His hands twitched involuntarily at the recognition, and the crystal shook helplessly. “Uh-uh-uh”, she said, pressing the point of the knife the tiniest bit further into his neck. “We wouldn’t want you to go dropping that now, would we? I’d hate to have to use you as a shield against any unfortunate explosions your... carelessness might create.” He managed to shake his head slightly.

“Wh-“ he managed to say, before she tightened her arm around his windpipe. “What have I done to your team, you ask?” He nodded slightly, beginning to feel blood welling in the hollow of his throat. “They’re all dead, dear boy.” She laughed as he stiffened in anger. “My employer was very... specific. You know as well as I what a cut-throat market we’re in. And now, I’m afraid, I tire of our dalliances.” As she spoke, she wrenched her knife sideways and down, tearing his throat open.

He jerked once, twice, as his blood spurted out, arcing through the air, some of it spattering against the crystal. Where it did so, it smoked and sizzled, and the crystal began to glow with a new, darker inner light. She smiled and lowered his body quickly but gently to the ground, and slipping on her own pair of insulated gauntlets, pried the crystal from his hands. She lifted it to catch the light, noting with satisfaction the way that the blood was beginning to work its way inwards, towards the heart of the crystal. Excellent, she thought to herself.

She sheathed her still-bloody knife and took out an arcane looking device that would pinpoint the location of the nearest nexus point. She sighed, noting it was right in the heart of unclaimed territory, and wished to herself not for the first time that the aura of the crystal didn’t disrupt her cloaking abilities. Suddenly the unmistakable crack of spellfire sounded in the air, and the sky lit up to the west – right where she needed to head. Another heavy sigh escaped her lips.

It was going to be a long day.