

Mysterious Sky

Cocytus System 0300

The garbled transmission was received by the droid manning the controls of the VT-49 Decimator. The vessel had no official call sign or designation. Indeed, few within the Empire were aware that it was a Scholae asset. Fenn always traveled with his two-crew members, the pair of assassin droids made for poor companions. He had three crewmembers in truth, yet the interrogation droid only communicated in binary. "Flight Commander, we are receiving a distress call from the surface...far northern hemisphere...corrupted transmission," responded the droid.

The Zeltron paced on the flight deck. He had been busy studying recent intercepts from deep space listening stations, hidden communications in the holonet system. Indeed, this was specifically the type of thing he was in orbit monitoring. There were rumors of Hutt backed incursions into Empire dominated space, and neighboring systems owing allegiance to the Star Chamber. It was a minor posting, one that Zagro Fenn disdained as a high-ranking member of the Inquisitorius Order.

Fenn turned to look at the droid, and a light smile crossed his beautiful mouth. Mazimoff was a trusted crewmember, one that Fenn had spent a small fortune upgrading to be a crack pilot. Still, he and his partner Dagger were temperamental droids. Zagro knew some day the two would leave him, for he did not own the droids as much as they had offered their services to him.

"Can you decipher any of it?" asked Fenn. He studied Mazimoff intensely before glancing over at Dagger, languidly sitting at the sabaac table. Dagger's skills were far less refined as Mazimoff's; a killer need not worry about communications and trajectory.

The droid turned its cylindrical head. It always made Fenn laugh seeing the droid carry out this odd quirk; much like a human's reaction would be. "Flight Commander, it appears to be from a damaged communications device. Signaling coordinates, but no message besides asking for all friendly units to fall back."

Fenn puzzled over what such a communication could mean. He had vaguely seen the flashes of light from across the system of recent fleet activity. Armed with a vast array of listening and visual devices, not much happened in the system that escaped Zagro's grasp. "Dagger...scan in on the location," ordered Fenn. The droid immediately complied. The scanners painted a vivid picture. "Mazimoff take us to the location immediately. Shields up. Dagger I will need you to man the guns with me, now."

Caina Low Orbit

0345

The VT-49 Decimator had superb low altitude speed, but the energy being diverted drained capacity and forced the vessel to slug its way towards the northern pole of Caina. There was a magnetic disturbance in place that made communications and scanning very difficult. When the vessel was on station, Fenn ordered the droids to open communications with House Excidium.

The message would indeed be hard to transmit, but Fenn did his best, "To Excidium Quaestor, this is Battlemaster Fenn of Imperium. I have been detached from an assignment after receiving a distress call from your planet. I understand most of your assets are detained at the moment, but please redirect immediately to my location. Please use extreme caution. I will hold my position until relieved."

He did not expect an answer to be forthcoming. It would now be a waiting game.

Caina
North Pole
1100

The first Excidium shuttles arrived near lunar midday. A fly heralded the arrival over of two fighters, which rapidly diverted once they approached the magnetic field. Something was certainly wrecking havoc at the pole, and Fenn believed he had an answer.

After the shuttles came the troop transports, and finally the heavy gunships took up a high over watch along with the VT-49. Much of Excidium's Force sensitive members were heavily tasked elsewhere, and these were auxiliary units coming to Fenn's call. It was explained to him that several of the best scout teams had been diverted here hours ago and had not reported in. The distress call Mazimoff received was from the last of these scouts.

The briefing occurred at the makeshift-landing zone outside of the magnetic field. Engineers and scientists were being dispatched from off world as fast as possible to try to prove the hypothesis. The infantry commander spoke first, "If what you say is true I can send in a strike team now with close air support to verify. Once that occurs we can go in heavy."

Fenn nodded but disapproved. He had no jurisdiction here, nor rank, and could only offer his services and his vessel. "Commander, the problem is if my hypothesis is correct then sending more men is the last thing you want to do. That, and the fleet will need to set up a cordon around Caina."

The assembled officers and the handful of Sith were incredulous. Fenn continued, "that ship that broke through and got shot down was a Joiner vessel. We

know, for a fact, Killik colonies used to dot this region of space. We also know from historical records that the nascent colony on Alderaan would wake-up and breed every few centuries. What we may be looking at is a Killik breeding ground on Caina, coupled with Joiners coming from all over the sector.”

Muffled laughter emerged to all sides of the Inquisitorius. The commander began to speak, but he was cut off by Fenn, “gentlemen, I know what I am talking about. As I have no jurisdiction here I cannot dictate the plan of action, but until orders come in I will return to my vessel and cordon off the area...nothing in or out.”

The Excidium forces held their positions and awaited the arrival of the Quaestor and Aedile. Fenn returned to the VT-49 and had Mazimoff take up position in low orbit. Dagger scanned as best possible trying to confirm the existence of the Killik hive. There were indeed seismic anomalies directly below the surface of Caina, appearing to converge on the landing zone. Fenn grabbed the comms and pushed Mazimoff out of the way, “all forces, get airborne...now!”