*Chasm of Despair*

The mountains of Ohmen City appeared as tiny umbrellas below the cockpit of the lone Tie Fighter, prowling vigilantly, if laconically, across the skyline. The menace below was visceral and depraved. Dead flesh and rotting corpses transfixed upon once living denizens of the capital world of the Empire. No, there was little the star-fighter could do from this vantage but patrol as ordered and ensure the ground teams had air superiority if needed.

It was a tedious if familiar task for Commander Fenn. The last three sorties had ended the same as the preceding eight had; nothing to report. The thrill of *not* having to fill out after-action reports was a novel concept. The ponderings of a solo pilot ended abruptly and adrenaline surged as the static cackling of the communications line opened up from the *Warspite*, coordinating military operations above.

Begrudgingly the voice at the other end began, “Vanguard One… Vanguard One…TAC to Vanguard One…”

The female communications officer’s voice came in spurts, but it was a welcome diversion for Fenn. He immediately responded, “Tactical Operations Center, this is Vanguard One, I read you…”

Not waiting the female continued “Unknown energy source readings near the surface adjacent to your vicinity. Rock formation shows recent fault activity. May have been uncovered in recent activity or a causal. Coordinates sent to your fighter now. Low level reconnaissance ordered.”

Reconnaissance was patently *not* the role of the Tie Fighter, but Commander Fenn did not care to point this out. The order would be a temporary diversion, and with any luck it would reward him with being recalled faster to the awaiting capital ship to debrief. Instinctually he nudged the throttle and began his approach.

Getting the Tie Fighter low and slow enough to view anything meaningful would actually be a piloting feat that the human had not had to demonstrate in ages. He considered himself lucky he was being allowed to conduct such low-level missions as these to break up the tedium of higher rank. The current turmoil and near two years of constant warfare and upheaval in Cocytus had taken its toll on everything.

Fenn studied his rudimentary sensors and indeed received a radiation reading that was unusually high. In fact, the reading indicated a power source that could host an entire city. “What the hell is this thing?” asked Fenn.

Coming into view, the pilots jaw dropped inside of his helmet. He urged the starfighter to conduct several low level loops and rolls to get a better vantage as far as he dared. He would need to call this in to *Warspite* and the ground forces immediately.

“TAC…Vanguard One…suspicious energy source confirmed…ground detachment advised to survey with extreme caution.”

The lone, obsidian pillar stood upright jutting from the teeth of the rock face. It was deeply embedded in the outcropping and appeared to have grown through the rock and not to have been carved from it. The contours and edges were not naturally occurring. A pale golden hue radiated off of the singularity, visible from the cockpit. Whatever this thing was, Fenn was glad he was protected by his artificial breathing apparatus and the cockpit.