

## *The Signal is Down*

### **Jormundgand Quarry**

### **Ptolomea**

### **Cocytus System**

The rocky landscape with its pockmarked craters and deep ravines showed the damage of sentient creatures to the natural beauty of the area. Years of cutting into the rock had been driven by man's greed and rapine nature. Yet, the Jormundgand Quarry had a tactical significance equal to its commercial output. Here, the warped minds of Excidium had hidden a communications relay station that was nearly impervious to frontal and air assault.

Battlemaster Fenn had studied the schematics he had been able to smuggle from his Inquisitorius contacts. Not even Imperium's leadership had such detailed information on this location, perhaps many within Excidium did not as well. The recent sectarian violence between Imperium and Excidium had taken many off-guard and unprepared for such hostilities. Both sides were normally at least marginally open and transparent with each other; now only the most clandestine military assets were left standing.

Piloting the bulk ore hauler *Rancor's Hide*, Fenn was reviewing the options that had been presented to him. Leading a frontal assault coupled with air support and amphibious operations landing troops behind enemy lines would have strained the resources of Imperium too thin elsewhere and would have risked the joint forces. The laser turrets built into the walls of the quarry were hard to target, and more soldiers would die through a misstep in the rocky terrain and from industrial hazards than the House could replace. Simply getting into position to target the communications arrays and data center would cause catastrophic loss. Fenn also shrugged off using troop transports; he cared little to see soldiers and marines blasted from the skies before being able to land forces inside the hub.

Fenn knew the location of all the anti-air turrets for the quarry, and even the composition of the corporate defense force of snub-fighters and interceptors that were enough to scare away pirates and smuggling gangs. He also knew the routes and schedules of commercial shipments and cargo procurement. The warning shots were fired far to the left and right of the hauler, as the communications array sparked up. "*Rancor's Hide*, you are cleared to take station above the embarkation zone. New security precautions require us to scan your hull immediately before access to this secured area".

The droid pilot responded to this call as Fenn tried his best to mask his presence in the Force while also probing to see which Excidium personnel specifically were below. His cover would not last long once the scanners had done their work. The hull of the ore-hauler was not thickly armored, nor was the ship swift by any means. But, it was massive and held a half full cargo-bay of highly flammable phosphorous ore. If

the anti-air turrets opened up on the Rancor's Hide Fenn would die in a fiery cavalcade of black smoke and burning white heat. He instructed the droid which course to take as he briskly walked towards the cargobay.

Fenn didn't hear the warning shots or the angry communications from the quarry. It would take a few short minutes for the hauler to impact the quarry. It mattered not to Fenn if Excidium shot him from the sky or knowing the even worse fate this would cause decided to abandon the complex and let the Rancor's Hide crash into the quarry itself. Either way, the communications apparatus of Excidium would be crippled. Fenn smiled as he felt the first burst of laser fire and ion cannons lance his vessel. He smiled again as he strapped inside the ore extractor that had been so costly to acquire. The Zeltron sincerely hoped that it was indeed rated for volcanic worlds and deep core drilling. He depressed the docking clamps and the spherical extractor dropped to the quarry as the radiant heat of the explosion above buffeted his tiny vessel. Fenn smiled.