

The Apocalypse is Nigh

## **Falger Mining Company Facility**

**Aliso**

**40 ABY**

The staccato drumbeat of heavy raindrops shifted into a static hum as the shuttle doors opened and Battlelord Khryso Mallus stepped out into the storm. The Chiss raised his gloved hand over his face, moving rapidly across the few meters of open air between the Tyranus shuttle and the opposite building's entryway. The doors hissed open, the sterile white light spilling out into the overcast storm and Khryso eagerly slipped into the welcoming shelter. Shizu, his BD-3000, was right behind him. When the doors shut, the sparse lobbies soundproofing sealed off the sound of the rain outside.

"Lord Mallus," the woman behind the desk that sat across the room responded almost immediately to his presence. "I'll page the Administrator straight away."

"Appreciated," the Sith grumbled in reply, setting his lips in a firm, thin line as he gently wiped the water from his face with his cape. Khryso paused for a moment to take in his surroundings. This particular facility, located in the mountains a few kilometers north of the Valneikian spire, was fairly new. Sallo Wur, the Administrator for Falger Mining Company, had just purchased the land a few months ago and it was still undergoing construction. It wasn't surprising to see the decor for the lobby was still so bare. Khryso would offer some suggestions, but unfortunately, this was not a leisure visit. A fact he was reminded of as a small tremor rippled through the earth.

It was only minutes before a stocky Skakoan bustled into the lobby from the rear, muttering things to himself. When he and Khryso made eye contact, the Skakoan straightened his posture slightly. "I apologize for dragging you away from your work, Lord Mallus, this was—"

Khryso raised a hand, immediately silencing the man. "Administrator Wur, you do realize how bad this will make me look if your theories are true, don't you?"

"You and me both, m'Lord," the Skakoan answered, turning and motioning for Khryso to follow him. Khryso fell into step beside him as they made their way out of the lobby. "I assure you, the fools responsible have all been removed from their positions. I have their files ready to be pulled if you are interested in a more permanent form of justice, but that can wait until later."

Outside the lobby, the facility looked much less sterile. Clearly under construction, equipment and materials were scattered throughout the rooms and halls. Dirt floated in the air and smeared the floor everywhere and the distant sound of heavy machinery echoed throughout. Khryso was surprised at how oddly pleasant it smelled, despite the faint fragrance of oil and metal in the atmosphere.

“We’re still working on dislodging the device, but it’s been completely encased in duracrete. To be honest, I’m not sure how they unearthed it in the first place.” Wur paused to adjust one of the dials on his chestplate. “Is it true that it’s connected to the seismic activity that’s been plaguing us for the past few weeks?”

“We won’t know for sure until we can properly examine the device,” Khryso responded, his arms folded across his chest. “I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the earthquakes started on the same day your workers encountered the artifact. Word from the Pinnacle is that this is one of the hot spots.” As if to punctuate Khryso’s words, the passageway they were in shook, causing both men to pause and root themselves in place. The tremor was much stronger than the one he had felt up in the lobby, causing the corners of Khryso’s mouth to turn downward.

Wur turned to Khryso. “They can’t be serious about some earthquakes threatening the stability of the planet, right?”

Khryso tilted his head slightly. “I haven’t been studying the phenomena myself, but they haven’t given me reason to doubt. It seems implausible, but there may be more to this than they are not telling us. Regardless,” Khryso fixed his gaze to Wur’s. “It’s not your job to question anybody. Let’s keep moving.” Wur nodded, turning to shuffle down the corridor at an increased pace. Khryso was hot on his heels.

When the tremors had started twenty days ago, nobody had thought much of it. Aliso was not immensely seismically active, but it wasn’t totally out of the realm of possibilities that seismic activity could cause a small chain reaction. However, when an earthquake big enough to collapse one of the Valneikian hive’s spires rippled across the surface, people had started to take notice.

It was only a few more days before House Tyranus had received the orders from the Dread Lord to begin investigating the continual earthquakes. While scientists at the Pinnacle and Fort Dooku studied the events in detail, Khryso mobilized Tyranus’ resources to gather as much information as possible. It hadn’t been easy, since he had only just been elevated to Quaestor and was quite busy, but the Dread Lord insisted this was a top priority.

Then, only a day or two ago, Khryso had received a transmission from Sallo Wur. Falger Mining Company was Khryso’s company, but due to his work with House Tyranus, he relied on Sallo Wur to run the business for him. It was normal for him to get reports from the Administrator. However, when he heard about the new mining facility Wur was building and the strange artifact they’d discovered, something seemed off. After cross-referencing the information with the data, Khryso got the strong sense that the two were connected.

With rumors about the planet being in danger as a result of the excessive seismic activity circulating, Khryso had decided to investigate the facility personally. If his company was at fault, he wanted to be able to deal with it himself.

The pair reached a lift that they boarded, taking them down into the mine proper. It wasn't much further after that before they arrived at the sight of the artifact, which was roped off and being guarded. Khryso and Wur made their way through the barricade and finally came face-to-face with the object. As Wur had said, it was mostly encased in duracrete, but the square meter or so of the artifact's surface that was visible was smooth durasteel. Some kind of outer shell for whatever lay within. Something clearly did lie within, Khryso could feel that immediately. Energy was radiating from the object, causing the hairs on the back of his neck to stand on end.

The two personnel that were studying the object were quickly waved away by the Administrator. Khryso glanced up at them as they passed. "Send any new findings to me immediately."

With a hurried bow in response, the underlings made themselves scarce. Khryso reached out slowly and put his hand on the artifact. Reaching deeper into himself, he called upon the Force, willing his senses to extend further than his physical body. His awareness ballooned out into the chamber around him and he forced it into the artifact like a needle into a balloon.

Whatever the artifact was, it was definitely filled with energy. It didn't vibrate physically, but raw potential was clearly present. It was hard for him to decipher exactly what the energy was or what the artifact was doing, but Khryso was sure he could figure it out if given time. Keeping one hand on the artifact, the Sith reached into his cape and brought out his datapad. His fingers moving swiftly and precisely, Khryso brought up the information he had been sent by the Dread Lord on the seismic activity. "I'll need some time," he muttered, glancing up at Wur.

Wur nodded and quickly backed out of the chamber, giving Khryso some space as the Battlelord turned his attention fully to studying the artifact.

## **Hours Later**

The situation had definitely become more complicated. The artifact wasn't just emitting energy by itself. Rather, from what Khryso could discern it seemed to be drawing energy from elsewhere. After studying the data and conferring with the engineers, the Chiss drew the conclusion that there was a network of similar artifacts buried within the crust all across the planet. This particular one becoming unearthed was beginning to activate the entire group. Furthermore, it seemed the tremors were definitely connected. He couldn't be certain without actually cracking the object open, but from what Khryso could discern, the seismic activity might be the artifact's entire purpose.

Feeling as though he had gathered all the information he could for the time being, Khryso stepped away from his work. Without a word to Wur, he made his way back to the surface to contact the pinnacle. He delivered a detailed report of his findings and conjecture, concluding with the theory that should the entire network of artifacts be awoken, it would indeed spell massive ecological disaster for Aliso on a possibly apocalyptic scale.

After conferring with the scientists at the Pinnacle over the hologram, they decided that finding and destroying all of the artifacts was their best chance of ending things before they got worse. The energy feedback could cause some serious damage, but the scale would be localized and much less damaging to the planet as a whole than simply allowing things to continue while they thought of a safer solution.

Quickly mobilizing Tyranus, Khryso began using their available data to pinpoint approximate locations of the artifacts. Having spent some time in proximity to one, he was able to relay the details of the energy signature the objects give off to help narrow the search. By cross-referencing the seismic activity's epicenters with the more specific information of this particular artifact, they were able to discern approximate locations for what appeared to be roughly one-hundred twenty possible devices.

After dispatching the orders and information, Khryso returned to the site of the artifact. He ordered an immediate evacuation of the mine and for the object to be wired with explosives. He gave Wur a brief explanation of the situation, and while the Skakoan was hesitant to accept the potential destruction of the mine, he wouldn't have dared to raise any objections to Khryso given the circumstances.

The resulting explosion was indeed larger than one might expect, swallowing half of the facility in a ground-shaking rumble. After confirming that the artifact was indeed non-functional, Khryso ordered the object's remains to be extracted for study before heading out to confer with the Pinnacle and his away teams on their progress.

Over the next several weeks, the whole Clan mobilized to hunt down the remaining artifacts. It was slow at first, but the more they found, the better they got at pinpointing their location. The seismic activity picked up at first, as if the destruction of the objects was triggering some last ditch effort to fulfill their purpose. However, after twenty or thirty of the objects had been destroyed, things began to quiet down for the most part. Many of the artifacts still likely remained inactive, so finding those would take longer, but it seemed they had successfully diverted the immediate crisis.