

### ***Circuit-Breakers and Credits***

The barren southern plains of Antenora were dotted with a mosaic of watering holes, trading posts, local strongholds, and rudimentary fortresses held by tribal warlords. War was the trade and commerce of this region of the Cocytus System. While the Empire was the acknowledged ruler of this planet, few citizens noticed a shift when the forces of Scholae Palatinae subverted the native rulers nearly a decade ago. And the wars always carried onward embroiling all life in the area. Some fled to the more temperate and civilized northern approaches, most simply raided and died.

The mission commander was not told *why* the captive held in this specific stronghold was important. All Battlemaster Zagro Fenn knew was that he was given a task, and members of the Inquisitorius knew better than to ask questions that did not have forthcoming answers. The Zeltron studied the facility through his infra-red goggles pressed firmly to his eye. The two native scouts held their position beside Fenn, seated on Dewbacks with sniper rifles trained on the casually patrolling sentries on the ramparts. Fenn knew getting in would be easy for his force, avoiding unfortunate complications would not.

The native humanoid scout to Fenn's left noted the time and indicated that it would soon be dusk and that the tired guards would be changing the watch and retiring for a meal shortly. The time had come to initiate the plan. The scouts unfurled their saddlebags to expose conspicuous trade goods and reined their mounts in close formation behind the Zeltron who urged his beast forward. From the ramparts a warning shot was fired as the threesome approached the ancient wooded gate barring entrance to the earthwork structure.

"My master Vrylo Gro wishes to offer his trade goods from the far northern Dragon Lands. Humbly, we are merchants who were waylaid by marauding vagrants. Will the master of this holdfast offer us his protection and grace us with his commerce?" asked one of the scouts.

The gate opened slowly, with a mechanical grinding noise and obvious anxiety on the part of the hurriedly assembling guards. Fenn placed the diminutive race as Jawa, and remained his gaze on the humanoids remaining at the rampart. "I, Chieftain Rok Frell, deny you my protection. This place is my prison, and all who come to my doors belong to me. Take them away" stated the tall humanoid as he departed the rampart.

Fenn and his two men did not resist as the Jawa led them towards the cells. They were disarmed, forced to toss their blaster to the ground and dismount their Dewbacks which were tied up in the entry courtyard separating the walled perimeter and the inner sanctum of the holdfast. Half of the guards remained at the gate, attempting to repair the damaged hydraulic lowering mechanisms. Fenn sent calming pheromones to his scouts and newfound jailors alike. All according to plan, thought Fenn.

The group arrived at the prison area inside the holdfast and Fenn quickly eyed his target, a young Twi'Lek woman. The five Jawa accompanying them began nudging Fenn and his men, urging them to disrobe and nudging them towards an adjacent cell. Fenn nodded to his scouts, who promptly

maneuvered hidden knives from their palms into place between their knuckles and waited for his command. Fenn concentrated his pheromones as a calming sensation overcame all assembled. Yet, the scouts had been growing inoculated to this slowly after days in the saddle with Fenn giving a slight defense against the numbing of their senses and death of their reaction times.

Fenn telekinetically released his hidden saber from its harness below his left armpit. The purple blade and golden inlay saber caught the eye of the greedy Jawa, who barely had time to fire off a pair of blaster fire at the Sith while the scouts jammed their knives into the jugular of the nearest Jawa. Their cries alerted others, and rapid short footsteps were heard scurrying towards the prison block. In seconds the struggle was over, and the scouts had retrieved their rifles and held covering positions for Fenn to cut through the Twi'Lek woman's cell. The Zeltron calmed her through the Force and his pheromones, urging her to follow. And in the corridor, a vast body of Jawa assembled.

The shallow corridor was a deathtrap that no escaping prisoner could venture from. Fenn utilized his mastery of manipulation to send a vision of dread and doom to the Jawa guards, overwhelming their senses with horror, causing them to recoil for a slight second and ceasing their endless barrage of blaster fire. The scouts rained rifle fire down the corridor as screams of the Jawa could be heard. "Now!" ordered Fenn as the scouts continued their expert cover fire. The Zeltron ran full speed down the corridor blocking blaster fire with his saber as he rapidly closed the gap with the enemy.

The Battlemaster reached the first Jawa and sliced downward, lunged forward, and then thrust his saber in a wide arc taking down several of the cloaked small enemy. The scouts and Twi'Lek followed in his wake, cutting down Jawa as they ran towards the still damaged gate. The scouts fired upon the Jawas working to repair the gate as Fenn helped the Twi'Lek on the back of his Dewback. As the last Jawa fell and the scouts mounted their Dewbacks, the humanoid along with Chieftain Frell appeared on the ramparts above, firing down harrowing blaster fire. Fenn turned and fired Force lightning in their direction, pinning them down with terror at this novel sight as the scouts regained their situational awareness and rained fire onto the ramparts as Fenn and the Twi'Lek rode out the gate towards the awaiting shuttle that had arrived on the horizon.