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A faint casting of fog drifted across an isolated compound on one of the least populated planets in the Dominion's control. The facility had stood in that location for over a century, forgotten by most citizens of the human civilization. The exception being, of course, the few soldiers unlucky enough to draw it as an assignment, and the occasional settler who happened by on their way to some location more preferable.

Just as the OSIRIS had planned.

Burton's Clutch, the otherwise forgettable name supplied by the first astronomer to discover it, was not on any current transportation route or relevant star chart. Aside from the initial fanfare of discovery, it had avoided the attention paid to many of the more accessible, valuable and strategic planets. After the current night, there would be one less reason to search it out.

Being perpetually barren, rocky and damp, inhabited in the temperate biomes by little more than lichen and patches of scraggly brush, made for a dreary existence. The plant life, with more similarities to soft coral, swayed gracelessly in the thick air, searching for photons of sunlight above while churning through the veins of muddy turf below. Farther out and equally isolated in the countryside, several miniscule colonies similarly clung to life in their desperate attempt to scrape together an existence away from the prying eyes of a galactic government.

"Power's out. Proceed to objective."

The order echoed through the radios between a dozen special operators positioned at the edge of their objective: an isolated Dominion installation. The activities performed therein were of no consequence for the force; it went without saying that since the order had been given that it would be fulfilled regardless of the dilemmas or cost to come. No one questioned orders in the pursuit of a stable world.

Such a small facility would have remained nearly invisible if not for the modest cluster of dish antennas and a flat phased array pointed towards the sky which protruded over the surrounding trees. Although suggesting an ongoing mission, their designs were so common as to further reduce interest.

The diminutive footprint of the facility, designed to reduce impact on the local population as well as keep anyone from looking too close, worked to the advantage of the team. Even though the arrival of a transport would perk up more than a few local ears, few would notice their descent from the sky in the dead of night.

After a modest hike, the team members found themselves positioned only a short sprint from the only gate, unseen in the ditch twenty yards from the durable chain fence that served as the only physical method of protection.

Lieutenant Mercer watched the pair of guards at the gate stumble about in the sudden darkness, lost in the unforeseen onset of twilight as the cluster of lamps ceased to function. "Take the gate." He ordered softly through the channel. From deep in the distance, two suppressed shots snapped out and with a quick rush of dirty air, dropped the two soldiers where they stood. The activity drew no attention as was expected.

Mercer scanned the entrance for a moment longer, checking for secondary movements but found none. "We're clear. Move up." He finally said, climbing up from the depression and took a knee on the sandy road to guard their advance.

The concrete fighting position that doubled as a guard shack was as dark as the rest of the compound without access to the generator. Normally, most systems would be augmented with local fuel cells but remote locations like Burton's Clutch garnered few notes of importance. Facilities this far removed from high-tempo life in the Dominion were only partially fueled or not at all. A virus, supplied by OSIRIS Command and applied by an advance, unknowing infiltrator, did its job with unrepentant efficiency, simultaneously disabling the power network in addition to the individual nodes without so much as a spark.

The glint of starlight reflected gently from the gate as well as the line of fencing as it extended outwards in both directions, useless against the unexpected assault. Mercer checked the position one more time and upon finding no movement in the deeper shadows, slunk to his feet and with a low yet expedited approach, continued into the base.

“Base” implied a certain size or level of importance which was a misnomer of Burton’s Clutch. There was little more to the outpost than a small cluster of earthen bunkers, sealed with vault doors with each extending underground and piled high with dark, local soil and crushed stone harvested from the lowest cost supplier. They had been compacted with time, the indigenous plants now extending through the layers of rock as the doors turned towards sepia, gently oxidizing as the years battered down upon their exposed surfaces. The third and final guard rounded the wrong corner in a similar daze as the others and met a comparable end, facing a thirty-caliber bullet to the chest.

Three such defenders were the expectation, according to the team’s orders. Five more targets were still at large including two pairs of system operators and a lone supervisor to manage their actions and assume responsibility for communications with the rest of the Dominion. At present, there was no reason to consider any deviations from the established mission profile.

The base’s five vaults were arranged like a pentagon, clustered around a clear quad containing a small landing pad and an accompaniment of communication equipment. Command, personnel, supply, armory and a maintenance shop was the expected layout and Mercer’s first fire team broke off to canvas the barracks for the off-duty operators. Simultaneously, the others set to work on the sealed door to the command bunker.

While the rest of the facility was aged and evident of a society that had intended it to withstand the onslaught of time, the lock itself, a mixture of mechanical keys and biometric scanners, was far more modern and enhanced. It held fast until the four special operators returned from the barracks, carrying the officer-in-charge’s machined steel key along with his right arm, severed at the elbow, in order to counter both the handprint and subdermal radio-frequency tag.

Behind the door was nothing more than a few square feet of corrugated steel to serve as a landing, a utility elevator, and a spiral staircase, which provided emergency access to the lower extremities of the station. There, the fire teams split again, each taking an avenue of approach so as to reduce the risk of total compromise.

The elevator doors opened, revealing to Mercer and his companions a small, unlit command center, containing a semicircular arc of workstations and a few disparate pieces of service equipment at the sides. The facing wall was comprised of a long set of paneled windows, the contents of the far side of which he could not discern, flanked by rows of larger status monitors above their heads. In its entirety, the scene took barely a second to process until the soldiers spied the pair of swing shift workers still blinded in the darkness. They had evidently made it halfway from their stations to the access shaft but two bursts of silenced fire from the team dropped them like the others.

Together, Mercer’s squad froze in place, scouring the room for any sign of secondary movement. Every corpse had been accounted for, yet there was always a part of their training that reminded them not to take chances. A secure Dominion facility was a low risk but after enough close calls, that corner of their minds refused to be shut out of the process.

“Clear.”

“Clear.”

The confirmations echoed between the operators and Mercer relaxed his stance, letting his rifle drop from his shoulder to his chest. “All clear,” he said and broke from the formation, “opposing force neutralized. Bring the power back.”

A distant rumble shuddered through the facility, the illuminated panels above their heads quickly flickering on in quick succession. The room itself showed its age, more of a cavern than a state-of-the-art governmental installation. The workstations were clean and clear, except for those splattered with blood from

the unfortunate staff members. On the opposing side of the glass, more lights sparked to life and Mercer carefully approached the panes, drawn by their ultimate target.

Another floor down and occupying the space of a moderately-size hangar was arranged a massive network of server racks, miles of spanning cables, and no additional workstations of which to speak. In a way, Mercer was surprised, as their orders stopped short of defining what it was they were sent to destroy.

“Sir, this is really it?” his staff sergeant asked from the side after following the lieutenant to the glass.

“Absolutely; set the charges, take down the arrays and let’s get gone.”

He watched as the cadre of soldiers scattered among the processing systems, piecing together the explosive devices which would render the facility nothing more than a memory. Back at the surface, their ride was waiting on the pad, the small shuttle now being able to land on top of the target for extraction, instead of BFE, and force them to march forty miles over land to avoid detection. As they filed out of the bunkers, Mercer accounted for each member of his team before slumping onto his seat at the end by the rear hatch. He secured his equipment and allowed himself a moment to relax, content in the knowledge of a properly executed mission in service to the OSIRIS. They lifted off without another word passing between the crew. Below, the charges detonated in an expertly-timed symphony of destruction, collapsing the bunker and taking with it all knowledge of its existence.

“Status?” the navigator inquired from the hatch to the flight deck.

“Mission complete,” Mercer said, barely looking up as his eyes grew heavy. “Conditions as expected, target secure.”

“Understood. Alerting MOC.”

Forty lightyears farther down the galactic arm, the report arrived alongside a thousand others for the day. Collated and compared against the expected outcomes, the calculation was confirmed and all was as expected. From there, the log was updated appropriately, as according to the mission report, and added to the archive. Burton’s Clutch was long known as nothing more than an isolated aid station, which had been savagely destroyed by a random pack of rebels who were intent on shrugging off Dominion control. The report as it was received would have caused a tinge of remorse in the soul of a human, but the times for such frailties had long since been left in graves and in the dust. The OSIRIS followed the report with a new order to increase local patrols to find the criminals responsible for the act.

And thus began a new day.