

Scholae Fleet Under Siege

A Submission to the Competition:
GJW XII Phase I Fiction



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35 ABY

Aboard the *ISN Tarkin*

Alarm klaxons blared loudly.

Reiden Karr swore to himself as he made his way through the corridors of Scholae's *Vindicator*-class Heavy Cruiser. It had been some time since he had last faced a conflict of this magnitude — more accurately, a war. He did not miss it. However, there was a call to action, and he could not ignore it. He was loyal to his clan, and Scholae had need of him.

The forces of the Collective were an unknown enemy to the Corellian, but that mattered little. Their ranks were filled with people that fervently believed in the ideals of their leader, Oligard Rath. He believed that the galaxy should be wiped clean of any and all Force users. Of course, that included members of the Dark Brotherhood.

So strong was their belief that they were willing to give up their own lives in pursuit of fulfilling their leader's goals. The damage inflicted by those same suicide bombers was exactly what Reiden had to deal with now. The *Tarkin* had sustained heavy damage, both in battle against the starfighters of the Collective and their ongoing kamikaze tactics.

Reports of damages had filtered through Reiden's comlink. The numbers of injured and dead continued to climb. He wished that there was something more for him to do, but it was out of his power. He wasn't nearly a skilled enough pilot to try to head out into space and take on the incoming enemy craft. While not an expert on warfare or how much damage a ship could sustain, he was certain of one thing — this ship was going down, it was only a matter of time. As such, he felt as though it fell to him to ensure that as many people as possible made it to the escape pods and evacuated to safety from the ship.

As he passed by a common room, he spotted a group of crew members. Several were sprawled out on the floor, while a couple others crouched around them, checking for injuries, or even signs of life. Ceiling panels littered the floor around the men, and there were multiple pools of blood to be seen. He made his way into the room, noticing a familiar face among those crouching, a man not much older than himself. It was a mundane within Scholae's forces, a captain that had accompanied Reiden on a mission the previous year. The captain had a ragged gash along one side of his face, stretching down from just above his left eye to the middle of his cheek.

"Captain Sloane. Are these men capable of being moved?" he asked.

The man shook his head grimly. "I'm afraid not, sir. Three are dead and the other two suffered head trauma. They're not responsive." Sloane wiped a sleeve against his wounded face, wincing slightly.

"Karabast," Reiden swore. "As much as I want to help these men, I worry that we have precious little time remaining. There are medics running around the ship, but there's

no telling what the situation is like with the other wounded, or how many there may be. Are the rest of you able to evacuate?"

The men nodded in the affirmative. Reiden let out a slow breath. "Okay, do one final check on those unresponsive. What is their breathing like? How badly were they hit?"

Sloane and the others checked. "Sounds like shallow breathing, ragged. They were hit pretty hard by the falling panels. One of them even took a direct hit to the head, and another hit to the chest. I'm amazed he's still holding on," Sloane reported.

"If only we had more time..." Reiden murmured to himself. "I don't like this, but we have to move. You should head for the escape pods immediately. Sloane, you're with me as we make a final sweep of the ship." With orders given, the men got up, two of them supporting one man with a bleeding leg — it must have been crushed by one of the ceiling panels when it fell. Reiden and Sloane stayed behind, watching them leave before walking out and starting in the opposite direction down the hallway.

"Karr..." Sloane began hesitantly, "are you sure about this?"

Reiden shook his head, "I can't be sure of anything right now. However, the Collective's forces keep assailing us, and they show no signs of letting up. Even if we fought back, it would be a losing battle, given the damage we seem to have taken already. Believe me; I don't like leaving any men behind either. But we have no choice at the moment. We must ensure that as many crew members evacuate in the time we have left."

Reiden and Captain Sloane continued to make their sweep along the corridors of the ship. Several groups of men were seen helping each other. He nodded to them as they passed by. The pair wound their way to the cargo storage of the *Tarkin* and found supplies and equipment toppled everywhere. Off in one corner, amidst a pile of crashed items, Reiden spotted a pair of legs jutting out from underneath. He hurried over and, together, he and Sloane began to carefully pull the fallen cargo off of soldier. Once the body was clear, the soldier's identity was revealed to be yet another soldier that Reiden knew. A battle-hardened veteran of Scholae's forces, Commander Pierce was a man possibly in his late fifties, his dark hair generously streaked through with gray. Despite his age, Reiden knew that the soldier still had plenty of fight left in him.

"Commander Pierce!" the Force user exclaimed at the revelation. He sat the man up and leaned him against a wall, shaking his shoulders gently. "Sir, are you all right?"

The old veteran's eyes fluttered open as he groaned. "Ughh. Karr, is that you?"

"That's right, sir. Can you move on your own?"

"Who do you think I am?" the man said with a laugh, standing up. "I'm not so old and infirm that I need help from a young pup like you."

Reiden flashed him a brief smile. "No. Of course not, sir. I'm glad to see that you're not hurt worse. I'm afraid that the ship's taken heavy damage and we need to get you out of here and to the escape pods." As if to punctuate this statement, the blare of the alarms pierced the momentary silence in conversation, and there was now a tinge of smoke to the air.

The commander cast a glance around him as he listened, nodding. "It appears that you're right, Karr. How is the evacuation coming along?"

"I found Sloane, here," he hooked a thumb at the captain, "and a few other men in a common room. I sent those that could move to the pods while I took Sloane with me to continue the sweep. Things seem to be going well. We had to leave some injured men behind though."

"I'm sure you did your best. Don't be too hard on yourself. This is war, and casualties happen."

Reiden nodded and then activated his comlink, contacting the officer that was in charge of overseeing the evacuation. "Major Sheppard, what's the status so far?"

A voice issued forth from the device, "We've accounted for nearly all of those that we can manage. Reports have come in from the various medical teams, as well as anyone with medical knowledge or training that volunteered to assist. Casualties are higher than we had initially thought, I'm afraid. We believe that we have recovered all those capable of

being saved and have brought them to the escape pods.” Commander Pierce muttered a curse under his breath upon hearing this.

Reiden thought for a moment before responding. “Very well, Major. Have the bulk of the pods take off, but hold a couple back in case there are any stragglers that we may have missed. I’m on my way over now, along with Captain Sloane and Commander Pierce.”

“Yes, sir, I’ll inform the men now.” Major Sheppard replied, terminating the connection.

Commander Pierce activated his own comlink. “Bridge, this is Commander Pierce. Patch me through to the ship-wide system.” A faint beep could be heard from the device, followed by a louder one that emanated from the ship’s communication systems. “Attention, all personnel. This is Commander Pierce. It is with a heavy heart that, due to the heavy damage we have sustained at the hands of the Collective’s forces, I’m now issuing the order to evacuate. Escape pods are being launched as we speak. If you have not yet made your way to one, do so as soon as you can; we’re leaving a couple pods behind as a precaution. Be advised, however, that the medical teams have concluded their sweeps and have already boarded escape pods, along with the injured. I say again, all hands abandon ship. Make your way to the escape pods and hangar bay to space craft and make your exit from the ship. We will remember those that have been lost, and honor their sacrifice. We will pay the enemy back for what they have done, but not today. It has been a pleasure to serve with all of you.” With that, he severed the connection and turned to face Reiden.

“That’s right, sir” the Force user said, clapping the older man on the shoulder. “We will exact our vengeance on the Collective’s forces. Those karking cowards didn’t even have the honor to face us without utilizing kamikaze tactics. They’re nothing but a bunch of crazed fanatics. Anyway, let’s move out. There can’t be much time left now.”

The trio left the cargo room and followed the corridor to where the escape pods were located. They passed by several bloodied bodies on their way. Some were covered by sheets, indicating that medics had attended to them, but that there was nothing that could be done for them. Reiden clenched his jaw at each sighting, anger flaring up inside of him. He held onto it, letting the rage simmer, waiting to unleash it upon the Collective’s soldiers whenever he got the chance.

Reiden and the two officers with him made it to the escape pods and climbed aboard, activating its systems. As the craft pushed away from the *Tarkin*, Reiden surveyed the damage it had sustained and pounded a fist against the wall. This would be a day that would be remembered for a long time to come. He would ensure that Commander Pierce’s words were right, and that he would avenge his fallen comrades in arms.