

Securing the Target

A Submission to the Competition:
[RoS: Meridian Phase II] Fiction/Graphics - Fiction II
Objective 1



Written by
Reiden Karr (10106)

36 ABY

Aboard Valkyrie I

Laser fire shot past the ship as it approached Meridian Station.

Reiden watched the scene unfold through the viewport from his seat. He was glad that the soldier at the helm of the Gamma-class ATR-6 transport was a skilled pilot and that the vessel had good speed to it. If not for those advantages, this flight would have been over rather quickly, before the mission had ever really begun.

Out in the black void of space, the rest of Krennic's forces took the brunt of the Collective station's attention. A squadron of TIE fighters streaked about, drawing fire and returning their own in kind. A flight of Decimator provided additional fire support, their laser fire occasionally interrupted as missiles were launched — trailing smoke as they rocketed towards their targets.

One gunner at his console let out a whoop of joy, having just taken out one particularly pesky turret with a well-placed missile. This was followed closely by yet another utterance as a different gunner disabled an enemy fighter with the craft's ion cannons. The pilot continued to guide the transport closer to the nearest hangar, avoiding enemy fire to the best of his trained ability — further aided by the gunners and sensor operators as they supplied him with any relevant information.

Reiden looked around him, taking stock of the men in the transport that would be accompanying him on this mission. He had with him a full transport of forty soldiers, all members of Battleteam Krennic's Gundark Company. It was a mixture of veterans and some newer recruits, but it was a stroke of good fortune that they had all seen combat before. There were even a few familiar faces among them: Major Kole Warner; Captain Jake Sloane, a former captain that Reiden had served with on a few missions and recently promoted following the events of Scholae Palatinae's expansion into the territory of the Nethal Archipelago on Ragnath; and a Major Keith Davis, who had recently helped to retrieve information from a sabotaged Inquisitorius listener ship.

The Palatinaean looked to his left, where Orion Gale was seated, the Kiffar making some last-minute checks of his gear before the battle began. He first met the bounty hunter years ago when on a mission and the two soon came to be friends. The Kiffar had even gone so far as to aid Scholae Palatinae the year before during the Battle for Nancora, and once again when Major Davis had helped to retrieve the data that made this mission possible. Reiden had worked with Orion before as well, but the assistance against the Collective seemed to further strengthen their partnership and solidify his trust and respect in the bounty hunter. Any further thoughts were cut short as the pilot spoke through the transport's comm system.

"We're making the final approach to the hangar bay now. Prepare for exit soon," he spoke.

“You heard him, men,” Reiden called out to the troops around him. “We’re about to enter the belly of the beast. Be ready. Given that there are trading hubs on the station, there will likely be civilians inside as well, so be mindful of that — pick your targets and take your shots carefully. Remember, our mission is to find and secure Kendra Icasta, the leader of the Huntresses. We need to bring her back, alive, as ordered by the Voice. It may be a challenge to take her down, but I feel confident that we can pull through in the end. The Huntresses are likely to be with her, so keep that in mind as well.”

Minutes later, the transport touched down and the troops poured out into the hangar. They set up a defensive formation as Reiden and Orion exited the transport and stepped out onto the deck. Reiden’s lightsaber snapped to life, viridian blade thrumming with energy. Orion drew his blaster pistols quickly. Reiden looked around, spotting nothing amiss initially. Not wanting to rely solely on his eyes and ears, he allowed himself to slip into the flow of the Force. He extended his consciousness outward, searching for any enemies that may be lying in wait.

Sure enough, he sensed a group of presences located behind a stack of cargo crates. No sooner had he sensed them than they sprang up from their hiding spot, blasters in hand and taking aim. The enemy soldiers were Technocrats, as evidenced by their various cybernetic enhancements. They opened fire.

Reiden sprang into action and leapt forward, his lightsaber a blur of ghastly green as he deflected blaster fire away from his team. The others on his team ran to find whatever cover was available to them as they opened fire as well, taking out any Technocrat bold enough to pop up and fire off more shots under the barrage of blaster bolts. Orion had taken cover behind a jumble of crates that had fallen over some time prior to their arrival in the hangar. He propped himself up on top of one crate and squeezed the triggers of his blasters quickly, unleashing a flurry of shots.

After a moment, Reiden silently signaled for everyone to hold their fire. The onslaught died down, and all remained silent. Moving quickly, Reiden went over to where the Collective force had been hiding, vaulting over the crates. There were two Technocrats there. One had a hand clutched to his shoulder, clearly in pain from a blaster wound; the other was busy fumbling with a grenade. Reiden plunged his saber into the wounded man’s chest before quickly turning to the other and making a motion with his hand. The grenade flew from the Technocrat’s fingers and away from the area, it landed in the distance, detonating a couple seconds later. Reiden gave the man a quick smirk before dispatching promptly him as well.

“Clear!” he called to his team. “Watch out for any reinforcements that might be on their way, though.” With that handled, they all set off down the corridor and into the main area of the station, searching for their target.

Reiden, Orion, and his troops made their way through the first trading hub of Meridian, having split up into several smaller groups. All around them were various stores and even stalls. The goods there covered almost the entire gamut of options: ranging from various gadgets and technology to foodstuffs, even clothing and what looked like medical supplies. The scent of fresh produce wafted through the air, filling their nostrils. Civilians all milled about, seemingly oblivious at first to the presence of armed men. However, one mother, accompanied by a small child, strayed from the throng of people towards the outer perimeter. The child clearly wanted to show her something. As they approached, the mother stopped dead in her tracks, gaze locked on Reiden and his team. She screamed, picking up her child and running away quickly. This caused others to pause and look around before spotting the group that Reiden and Orion had been traveling with, as well as the other groups of soldiers. Something clicked with the civilians as they realized that these were not the normal security forces that they were used to seeing. Then panic began to take hold, and they all tried to run away from the invading force.

“Karabast,” Reiden swore under his breath. He activated his comlink and spoke clearly. “All units, be advised: we’ve been made. Security personnel are sure to be en route. Prepare for the enemy.”

Everyone scattered for cover as both Technocrats and Imperial Sentry Droids came onto the scene. The Collective forces exchanged fire with Reiden’s team. Before entering the trading hub, Reiden had deactivated his lightsaber for fear of being identified right away. Now, he drew his blaster pistol instead as he dove for cover behind a stall selling electronics. He peered around the edge and took careful before squeezing the trigger and firing off volleys of blaster bolts at the enemy.

Orion had taken up a spot nearby, firing off shots of his own. “There’s always excitement when I work with you, Reiden,” the bounty hunter said with a grin. “You’re consistent there, I’ll give you that.”

“Less talking —” Reiden began, squeezing the trigger twice and striking down a Technocrat that had wandered into his line of fire. “More shooting!”

The Palatinaean force had soon taken care of the initial wave of Technocrats. However, Reiden extended his senses out with the Force once again. As he had expected, reinforcements were already on their way.

“Move out, everyone!” Reiden said into his comlink, having to raise his voice to be heard over the noise of screaming civilians trying to make their way to safety.

Reiden and his team made their way through the corridors of Meridian Station. There were small pockets of Technocrat and droid security forces along the way, but they were quickly dealt with. Blaster bolts streaked across the halls as each side traded fire with the other. Reiden stepped out into the open, his saber moving quickly to deflect bolts away. Using the Force to augment his speed, he wove his way through the enemy, sinking into the flow of battle. His green plasma blade was a blur of motion as he cut down his foes.

Orion and the troops provided cover fire as Reiden darted from enemy to enemy. Some had turned to face the marketplace they had just left. With both sides covered, they easily handled any security forces that came their way and managed to slip past Reiden and his deadly lightsaber. Orion had seen his friend like that before and knew that it was best to stay back and provide cover as best he could manage. To that end, the Kiffar had selected his blaster rifle for this exchange, trading off the ability to unleash a flurry of shots in favor of more accuracy. He gazed along the barrel of the blaster to find his target, exhaled, and pulled the trigger.

One Technocrat broke from the ranks of the others, seemingly in desperation. He was rushing straight for Reiden. The Marauder was engaged with a couple others that wielded Z-6 riot batons. His attention was focused there, his lightsaber blade clashing against the batons in a flurry of sparks.

Not wanting to take any chances with the approaching threat, Orion acted quickly. He gazed down the barrel of his blaster rifle to find the target. Once in his sight, he exhaled and pulled the trigger just once.

Suddenly, the head of the rushing Technocrat snapped back, and his body collapsed to the floor, a blaster wound seared into his forehead. Orion continued to pick off his marks as efficiently as he could. Every now and then he'd let off a rapid-fire burst of shots to discourage any others from attempting to rush at his friend again, lest they suffer the same fate as their fallen comrade.

Reiden had seen the rushing enemy and the shot that took him out in the periphery of his vision. However, with his attention focused on the enemies before him, he had decided to trust in the abilities of his team. They did not disappoint. He noticed that one of the Technocrats had pulled his arm back, winding up for a swing of his baton. Seizing the opportunity, Reiden dropped the hand holding his lightsaber to the side as he lunged at the man, his shoulder hitting him square in the chest and knocking him off balance. With preternatural speed, Reiden quickly turned his lightsaber on the opponent into an upward slash along his torso, followed by a horizontal slash for good measure. The man's head toppled to the floor with a dull *thud* as the body crumpled.

The second baton-wielding man was stunned by the turn of events for a moment. He recovered quickly and let out a cry of anger, bringing his baton to bear on Reiden. The Force user parried the blow and extended a hand forth, projecting his will and the Force to push the Technocrat to the side in a bid to throw off his aim. The man stumbled over into

the wall, and then Reiden followed up by plunging his lightsaber into the man's chest before removing it and taking cover once more, risking a glance back at his team.

The members of Gundark Company that he had brought with him were holding their own in the firefight. The security personnel of the station kept coming. The enemy forces, however, appeared more uncoordinated than his team — less trained, perhaps, or just caught unprepared for the fight they had on their hands. Either way, the Palatinaean and his team held the advantage, for the moment.

“How does it look back there, Major Davis,” Reiden called back to the man as the forces in front seemed to retreat further down the corridor. They were most likely regrouping and considering their strategy.

“We've got it covered here, sir. Just a few stragglers now, it seems,” Davis replied.

“I'll take care of it then. We need to get moving, and soon. Cover me,” Reiden said. He took a look at the front. With the lull in action there, he stepped out of cover and swiftly made his way towards the rear. His orders were relayed to the other teams that were nearby.

“You heard him, men. Let's show them we mean business!” Major Warner shouted. He and the troops in the corridor fired shots that were more discouraging than lethal when enemies attempted to get too close from the front. Some shots struck home when a few Technocrats became emboldened upon seeing the Force user leaving the area.

Major Davis, his small group, and the troops outside the corridor laid down covering fire as Reiden made his way among the remaining security personnel found in the trading hub. Moving quickly and with his lightsaber a green blur of motion, he made quick work of those closest to him. When seeing what had happened, a couple turned tail and attempted to run away.

Reiden knew there was no way he'd make it that easy on them. After all, they were the enemy, and this was a time of war. He gathered the Force in his legs and leapt across the distance, spinning around to land in front of the fleeing enemy soldiers. He flashed a quick grin and dispatched them with ease, their shock holding them in place, unable to move fast enough to stop the Force-augmented speed of Reiden's limbs and the deadly power of his lightsaber.

A droid appeared in Reiden's periphery. The droid raised its arm, built-in blaster taking aim at him. The Marauder ducked and spun to the side, barely dodging the bolt as it seared past him. He reached out with his left hand, summoning invisible tendrils to his will and pulling the droid towards him. He raised his right hand which held his lightsaber and extended that forward, impaling the droid on the plasma blade. Sparks flew as the blade made contact with the metal and carved its way through to the other side. Once the droid had stopped moving, Reiden continued upwards, cleaving through the torso, the lightsaber

exiting from where the droid's neck joined its body. The glowing and smoldering chassis of the droid clattered to the floor.

Reiden extended his senses outward as he glanced around. He wanted to take stock of the situation. All around him, he found a space that now seemed devoid of civilians. His troops that had not made it to the corridor were regrouping and making their way over to join the others. His expanded consciousness picked up on no other hostile threats nearby. The sound of blaster fire coming from the corridor had died down significantly. The battle here was done, for the moment. Reiden made his way back to the corridor, but kept himself alert for any potential threat that may appear, just in case. He spotted Captain Sloane and gave the man a nod.

"Sloane, it's good to see you made it through. Are there any casualties?" Reiden asked.

"You too, sir," Sloane replied. Then his face turned grim. "We lost at least three men, new to the unit from the looks of things. We'll get revenge for them, that's for sure."

Reiden nodded. "Yes, we will. But now we have to press on. We've got a mission and it needs to be seen through to the end. We can mourn our dead later, when everything is over."

"Right... You're right, sir, that makes sense. We'll get the job done," Sloane said with a nod.

Reiden and the troops joined the others waiting in the corridor. He stepped forward and spoke clearly. "From here, we press on. We'll split up; I'll take Captain Sloane, Major Davis, and a portion of the troops to continue searching this level. Major Warner and Orion will lead the rest of you down to the second trading hub. You know what the mission is. Alert me at once if you come across either the Huntresses or Kendra Icasta herself. Call for help if you need it. Move out!" The troops split up into their respective groups and went their separate ways deeper into the station.

Orion accompanied Major Warner and his team down to the second trading level of the station. After the firefight before, it seemed that the news had spread — the place was practically deserted. There were a few people milling about, but a quick glance revealed they were armed. They may not be openly hostile at the moment, but the bounty hunter had little doubt that they would not hesitate to defend themselves if needed.

This trading hub was different from the other, the atmosphere almost sinister. That made sense to Orion. An inspection of the stalls present showed that there were weapons being sold, left abandoned in what must have been a rush to evacuate the area and get to safety. All around stood shops selling what were more than likely illicit goods, stolen from others. One shop sold electronics; another held spice and other various substances of a recreational nature; and then another contained transparisteel cases of jewelry.

Despite there being very few people visibly present, something still didn't feel quite right to Orion. He couldn't place a finger on the reason why, but he had learned long ago to trust his gut when it came to such things. Trusting one's instincts was always the best thing to do when faced with an unknown situation. Orion was about to continue on when he noticed something out of the corner of his eye: one of the people still present had a cybernetic arm. He looked over at the man, who sneered in response. The following moments unfolded almost in slow motion. The man brought up a blaster and pointed it at Orion. The Kiffar reacted on instinct, diving to the side and finding cover.

"It's a trap!" he shouted to the soldiers as he readied his blaster pistols. He peered around the corner of one stall and let loose a flurry of bolts at the nearest enemy.

The Scholae soldiers scattered and split up. Defensive positions were taken behind whatever cover could be found the quickest. All around, shots were traded between both factions. Orion glanced over at Major Warner who had taken up behind a stall several feet away and got his attention.

"Cover me, I'll see what I can do, okay?" the bounty hunter asked.

Warner nodded and signaled other nearby soldiers. They all popped up and unleashed a torrent of fire at the station's security forces. With their attention divided, Orion made his move. He shot out from cover and spun about, taking stock of the situation. He found the closest two targets and lined them up with each of his blasters. He squeezed the triggers rapidly. Bolts leapt from their barrels and hurtled towards their designated targets. The one on the right was struck in the center of the chest; the man on the left merely hit in the shoulder, causing him to spin to the side. Orion adjusted his aim and fired again, striking him down.

After a moment, the small security force had been dealt with and the team regrouped. They continued on, more cautiously this time. They didn't want to be caught off-guard like that again. They spread out and combed through the trading hub, wanting to make sure there weren't any stragglers left in hiding.

The search was almost complete and they hadn't come across any further hostiles. Orion was about to signal that they should move on when he heard a noise coming from behind one stall located against a wall. He approached it slowly, one blaster trained on the area. He stopped for a moment in front of it before sidestepping to the side of the stall and peering behind it, blaster leveled.

It was a small child, a little girl, and her mother. The girl saw the weapon and began to cry loudly. The mother let out a whimper and lowered her head, shielding the girl with her body.

"Relax," Orion told them, lowering his blaster. "We're not here to hurt you. Just...just get out of here, okay?"

The mother glanced up, confused.

"Go, now," Orion urged them, stepping back to give them room. "We're not after you, so you're free to go. Tell no one that you saw us, got it?"

The mother nodded quickly and got up. She lifted her daughter into her arms and stepped past Orion warily, then ran off as fast as she could.

Orion turned to the troops. "Let them go. We're moving on."

Reiden turned to face Captain Sloane and motioned for him to move forward and check around a corner up ahead while the rest of them held back. A small group of men covered the rear. The remaining soldiers had their blasters trained ahead, covering Sloane as he advanced. He signaled that the way ahead was clear and they all advanced together.

The group had cleared the upper trading hub and continued searching the station. After checking various rooms along the way, they were now almost at one of the other hangars. There had been pockets of resistance that came up, but were quickly dealt with. Reiden imagined that some portion of the security was holed up in the command center, protecting the computer core there and ensuring that control of the station did not fall into enemy hands. That suited him just fine; the fewer people he had to deal with, the better.

Worried that something may happen soon, Reiden made his way to the front of the group to take point. He moved forward at a cautious pace, not wanting to give away their position so easily. The Palatinaean rounded another corner and found that he was staring ahead at the entrance to the next hangar. He could see cargo crates strewn about, much like the previous one. Off in the distance he spotted a small group of security droids patrolling the area.

“We’ve got droids up ahead. Stay frosty, there could be more trouble in store for us as well,” Reiden warned the soldiers.

Just then, more Collective forces came into his view. He advanced down the corridor and as he got closer, he could see that one had distinctive blue skin, and the others had hair in dreadlocks and carried what looked like bows. It was Kendra Icasta and the Shikari Huntresses.

“It’s showtime, men,” Reiden said quietly. “Our target is in sight.”

“About damn time,” Sloane said. “I’ve been waiting for this.”

“Hold back for now,” Reiden started before activating his comlink. “Orion, come in. We’ve spotted Icasta and the Huntresses in the hangar. Get back here as soon as you can.”

“You got it, Rei,” Orion’s voice came in response. “We’re on our way now. Just try to hold them off as long as you can.”

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Orion turned to face Major Warner and gave him a smile. “It looks like the fun is about to start. Let’s hurry back and see what kind of damage we can do!”

They had just cleared a handful of small rooms nearby and were about to proceed further when the call came in. Major Warner and the soldiers he was in charge of all turned to follow the bounty hunter as they retraced their path back towards the lower trading hub

that they had initially searched. Luckily for them, the way was clear and they did not run into any further security personnel. They gathered around the turbolift and waited for its doors to slide open.

“You all know what the mission here is,” Warner began, speaking the soldiers. “We need to capture Icasta alive. Do what you want with the Huntresses, but she is our main objective and there can be no mistakes. Watch yourselves; she’s a skilled fighter.”

The turbolift doors opened smoothly and they all piled in. Orion activated his comlink and contacted Reiden.

“We’re on the way up now. Draw their attention while we’re in the lift and we’ll come out, blasters blazing,” the Kiffar said, trying to keep the excitement from his voice. He did love action, and now he was about to get his fill.

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Reiden didn’t bother replying to his friend. More accurately, he couldn’t afford to. Immediately after contacting Orion, he and his men had advanced further and entered the hangar. They were currently engaged with the enemy and Reiden had his lightsaber out, deflecting blaster fire from the droids. More Technocrat security entered the hangar and joined the fray.

Off to his right, Major Davis and his team split off from the group to draw more fire while the group to Reiden’s left engaged the Huntresses. Taking advantage of the momentary lull in fire as the droids tracked their targets, Reiden rushed forward. With the Force coursing through his muscles and granting him increased agility he wove through the droids and quickly dispatched them before diving for cover from Icasta and the Huntresses. Shots rang out and hit against the metal cargo crates with a sharp *ping*.

Icasta must be using a slugthrower, Reiden thought to himself. That certainly complicates matters for me.

It was at that moment that the turbolift doors slid open and the rest of the Scholae force poured out into the hangar. Major Warner led the group while Orion held the rear. They all scattered for cover and let loose a volley of shots at the Huntresses.

Orion had the barrel of his blaster rifle perched atop a crate. He gazed through the sight of the blaster and lined up targets in the crosshair. He squeezed the trigger a couple times before ducking for cover again. After a moment, he rolled to the side and looked around the edge. He picked an opponent once more and opened fire. He repeated this process of hiding in cover and attacking.

After some time, the enemy forces thinned out to the point where it was the Huntresses and Kendra Icasta. The bodies of dead Collective and Scholae soldiers alike lay

strewn about the hangar. Reiden knew that they had to make their move quickly. He peered around the edge of a stack of crates from where he had taken cover. He took stock of the situation and pulled back once again. A plan slowly began to form in his mind, and he activated his comlink.

“I have an idea for how we can turn this around, but I need you all to cover me,” he began. “When I give the signal, you need to shield your eyes. Understood?”

“Roger that, sir,” came Captain Sloane’s reply. Others sounded off in the affirmative.

“Once that’s done, switch weapons to stun. You’ll know what to do,” Reiden instructed.

From behind the crate, Reiden remained still, concentrating on connecting to the Force and gathering it within himself. He waited for the fire being shot in his direction to die down, assuming that the enemy had either believed he moved to another location, or perhaps they were simply waiting for him to appear again. After several moments, he spoke into his comlink.

“Now, look away!” he ordered.

Following that command, Reiden shot up and extended a hand towards the enemy. A brilliant, blinding flash of white light enveloped the nearby area. Not hindered by the need to shield his own eyes, Reiden leapt to action. He vaulted over the crates and closed the distance between himself and the enemy, lightsaber in hand and viridian blade thrumming with power. He moved quickly to the nearest Huntress and slashed across her torso before moving to the next and lopping off her head. As the enemies began recovering from the flash, Reiden jumped back for cover once again, not wanting to take any unnecessary risks with this part of the mission.

Orion quickly flicked the switch for the fire selector on his blaster rifle, changing it to stun. He glanced ahead at the enemy and fired off stun blasts as quickly as the weapon allowed. Repeating his earlier process of lining up targets, he was able to take down two more huntresses, with the help of supporting fire from the remaining Scholae troops. Some still hadn’t made the switch to a stun setting, but they were avoiding Icasta, which worked in their favor.

Somewhere in front of where Reiden was taking cover, he heard the sound of metal on metal. Concerned, he risked a glance — and found a grenade lying on the floor. A moment later, a second one appeared by where Orion and the other soldiers were located.

Cursing under his breath, Reiden extended a hand and sent out tendrils of the Force, willing the grenades back towards Icasta and the Huntresses. In his haste, he overshot the mark, but at least it landed past the Collective members and was farther from his own team.

“Fire in the hole! Shield your eyes and ears,” Reiden warned, not sure what kind of grenade was used from the quick glance he had gotten.

A moment later, the grenades detonated. A concussive wave of energy spread out from the epicenter. Nearby crates toppled over from the force. Icasta and her team, having borne the brunt of the blast, were knocked back and off their feet.

Reiden and his team, while located at a somewhat safer distance, were still staggered a bit. But they recovered more quickly. Reiden took stock of the status of his team.

“Orion, move in, now!” he called out.

Orion nodded and signaled for the others to cover him. Once blasters were trained on the enemy, the bounty hunter made his way over, blaster rifle held at the ready in front of him, his finger curled around the trigger. He fired stun blasts at the Huntresses and positioned himself over Icasta.

“How does it feel to be the one being hunted this time?” Orion asked with a smirk.

Icasta drew back her lips and snarled at her enemy, opening her mouth to speak. Before she even had the chance to utter a single syllable, Orion squeezed the trigger to fire another stun blast at point-blank range. The Chiss woman sank to the floor, unconscious. The rest of the Scholae team cautiously made their way over.

“Davis, Sloane,” Reiden called out. “I want you to carry Icasta. We’re getting out of here, now.”

They nodded in the affirmative and slapped shackles onto the woman. One man held her arms while the other had her feet. The team regrouped and heading back the way they had come earlier.

Reiden and his team wound their way along the corridors and passageways to get them back to the hangar where they had been dropped off. They were now making their way across the upper trading hub. Reiden and a portion of the team took up the front, while Davis and Sloane carried Icasta in the middle, flanked by soldiers. The rest of the team took up the rear, making sure that no enemy would be able to surprise them.

Suddenly a shot rang out from behind them. One of the troops at the rear crumpled to the floor, a smoking hole seared into his armor. Reiden spun around, eyes scanning the expanse of the trading hub, uncertain from where the shot originated.

“Everyone get to the corridor! Now!” the Force user ordered as he activated his comlink. “*Valkyrie I* pilot, you better get that ship up and running. We’ll be coming in hot and need a speedy exit.”

A small contingent of Technocrat and droid security began to enter the area from the adjacent corridor and opened fire. Yet another shot from the distance took out one more Scholae soldier. The team moved quickly, with Davis and Sloane carrying Icasta in front, guarded by a few soldiers as the rest turned to engage the reinforcements.

Orion took up position behind a jumble of goods next to one of the various stalls. With his eye to the sight of his blaster rifle, he scanned the area from where he thought the shots had come. Another bolt crossed the distance, and he traced it back to its source. There he found a sniper taking aim from a vent on the wall, its covering removed.

“Oh, no you don’t” Orion muttered to himself. He took aim and let loose a volley of shots. The sniper retreated for cover. His angle made the shot difficult, but all he needed to do was create a lull in the fire.

Reiden leapt into the fray of Collective forces, willing himself to move quickly and aided by the Force. He cut down two enemy soldiers before jumping back and finding cover. He glanced behind him and saw Davis and Sloane had reached the end of the corridor and were making their way onto the transport with their prisoner and part of the team. The rest had remained behind and were engaging the reinforcements.

Major Warner commanded a group of troops off to the left. They were taking turns trading fire with the enemy and retreating down the corridor, finding whatever cover they could. Orion continued to fire off shots up at the wall.

Reiden followed Orion’s shots and noticed the vent, along with the barrel of a blaster rifle. *So that’s what happened before*, he thought to himself, remembering the initial shot that had sparked off this confrontation. He moved out to engage two droids that had managed to close the distance. With one spinning stroke, he sliced off the barrels of their blasters then slashed across their torsos. He extended a hand and sent them flying back with a push of the Force, watching as they collided into a group of Technocrats.

The Palatinaean turned and ran towards the corridor and called out. "Everyone get to the ship, we're leaving here!"

Together, they took turns trading fire and retreating. Reiden deflected blaster fire when he could and dispatching anyone that dared stray too close. Orion continued his suppressing fire on the enemy sniper.

Once they had made it to the hangar, the troops broke into a run and boarded the waiting transport. Orion and Reiden were the last to enter. The bounty hunter let loose a flurry of bolts at the Collective forces that followed after them. The ship took to the air, its door beginning to close.

Through the sight of his rifle, Orion managed to catch a glimpse of the enemy sniper, who had managed to get down from the perch and over to the hangar. It was a woman with black hair and a scar by her right eye. He recognized her from the intelligence reports that Reiden had shared with him. Sencara A'theri. She was reported to be one of their best shooters. It must have been a stroke of luck that allowed them to escape without even more casualties. The door of the transport slid shut, cutting off any view of the hangar aside from the one through the ship's viewport.

The transport ship left the hangar and entered the void of space beyond. Reiden looked over at their prisoner. Icasta was still unconscious, but it would only be a matter of time until she awoke.

"Restrain her," he ordered. "If she wakes up and causes trouble, don't be afraid to stun her again."

The members of his team closest to her nodded, turning back to keep watch over her. Reiden sank into his seat and let out a heavy sigh. He stared at the floor.

"I lost more men today than I would have preferred," he spoke quietly, more to himself than anyone in particular. "I just hope their deaths won't be in vain and that we manage to get some valuable intelligence from our new prisoner."

The battle outside the station still raged on. With cover from Shadow Squadron and the Decimators of Banshee flight, the pilot flew the transport away. Once they were at a safe distance and hyperdrives were spun up, they all made the jump to hyperspace together. Their course wasn't home, however. It was Arx, the seat of power for the Brotherhood. The Voice wanted his prize, so that's exactly what they were going to deliver to him.