

Hidden Dangers

A Submission to the Competition:
ISI: Infiltration



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This certainly changes things, Reiden Karr thought to himself. He ran a hand through his hair and let out a sigh as he set down the datapad that had been delivered to his office. A new report from Imperial Scholae Intelligence indicated that the Meraxis forces had a new training facility up and running. The news was particularly troubling considering how Scholae forces had recently wrested control large portion of Maqor from the Meraxis Empire, while Elaya had managed to conquer the rest. As near as the Corellian could tell, the Meraxis foothold on the moon of Ragnath was all but gone. However, the report he had just read told a different story.

While out on a routine patrol of Scholae's borders, a guard unit was out on the westernmost point of the Nethal Archipelago — Nethal Prime — one guard had been looking through some high-powered macronoculars over towards the eastern coastline of Quelabon and had noticed some lights in the distance, which indicated some sort of activity. Now, the guard knew this was strange, as the continent was supposed to be under quarantine as directed by the United Corporations of Elaya, which controlled the land. Given how Meraxis had once controlled the archipelago and that they would have likely sought to expand their territory more, the guard decided to investigate further. Not wanting to draw attention, he had borrowed a boat from one of the numerous fishing villages along the island chain and made his way towards Quelabon. What he had found when he was there was a sight he never would have expected — soldiers in Meraxis Empire uniforms running training drills and a medium-sized base of operations sitting just off the shoreline. Upon realizing the significance of such a find, the guard immediately returned to Nethal to relay his findings to his superiors. The information had been passed up the chain of command and had then found itself in front of Reiden's eyes. The Palatinaean knew that something had to be done about it, so he decided to take a look at things himself, rather than send in someone less experienced that might crack under the pressure. But he knew that going it alone wouldn't be very wise either. He allowed himself a small smile and activated his comlink.

"Orion, are you there? It's Reiden," he spoke into the device.

"Reiden! Yeah, I'm here. What do you need?" Orion Gale replied a moment later.

"I've got a job for you. Are you interested?"

"Depends. Will there be payment, and will it be any fun?"

"You should know better than to ask me that by now, friend," Reiden said, smiling to himself. "As for fun, it'll be like last time, at the Vault. It's the best I can do right now; we need to keep this one quiet and among a select few for now."

"Well, you have my attention. Go on then," the bounty hunter replied.

After ironing out the details of the mission, Reiden and Orion met up a short time later at the western coast of Nethal Prime. A boat was already waiting there to ferry them across the ocean to the coast of Quelabon. Since the compound was on the coast along the eastern arm of the continent, their aim was instead focused on the southern portion of that arm. From there, they would approach the base on foot, using the cover of the jungle, surrounding terrain, and the growing darkness that started to settle in after dusk had fallen to their advantage. They would have to be quick about it, and do their best to avoid detection. To be on the safe side, Reiden had already ordered that the ships of Battleteam Krennic be on standby in case they ran into anything unexpected.

After the two had reached the shoreline, they disembarked and Orion sent his droid Reeco to scout the area ahead. The little droid rolled onwards, its black paint scheme blending it into the shadows provided by the surrounding foliage. After waiting a moment, Reiden and Orion set out into the thick jungle as well. The air was thick with humidity trapped by the canopy of leaves above their heads, and fading rays of sunlight filtered through to the ground below. They trekked through the jungle for a time before coming to an area where the trees began to thin out, indicating a cleared area was up ahead. They continued on cautiously, noticing that the facility could be seen now. There wasn't much activity at that could be discerned, but that could change at any moment.

"It looks like the way ahead is clear," Orion said after checking his datapad which was linked to the audio-visual sensors on Reeco.

"Okay. I'll continue on ahead. Wait a bit before following, then find a good place to set up for support," Reiden responded as he gazed ahead towards the facility which

"Sounds good to me," the bounty hunter said with a grin, removing his blaster rifle from its holster on his back.

Reiden nodded and kept his attention focused ahead of him as he made his way towards the facility. He used whatever cover he could find in order to mask his presence as he approached; large rocks, trees, even hills — anything was fair game. He was almost to the facility when some part of his mind screamed out for him to stop. Recognizing the warning from past experience, he heeded the advice, ducking and rolling to the side. The butt of a blaster rifle whizzed past overhead. He glanced up to see a Meraxis soldier standing there with a wicked grin on his face. Reiden swept his leg along the ground and under the man's legs, toppling him to the dirt. The Palatinaean called upon the Force and clamped an invisible hand around the enemy soldier's throat, cutting off his air supply. Reiden continued doing so until the man had stopped moving. He knelt down and checked for a pulse — there was none. He dragged the man's body behind a nearby tree and propped it up against the trunk. Reiden eyed the man and his uniform, and a plan slowly began to take form — they were both around the same size. Deciding that he had nothing to lose, he stripped the uniform off of the dead man before donning it himself. The fit was just a touch too big for him, but it was close enough. Luckily the jacket fit loosely so he would be able to

keep his vibroblade bracer on his arm, and he opted to add his own blaster pistol and knife to the ensemble rather than relying on the fallen soldier's sidearm. From a glance, there was no telling how up-to-date the maintenance on it was, and there was little time to examine it more closely. He knew that his last-second disguise would never hold up under close scrutiny, but he had to hope that he would receive no more than a passing glance as he went about making his way through the enemy facility. Reiden left his own clothes on the ground, slightly hidden by a fallen leafy branch that he had placed atop them, and picked up the dropped blaster rifle, heading toward the facility once more.

Reiden soon arrived at a fence and what seemed to be a checkpoint. Between where he had encountered that soldier and the fence of the facility, Reiden met no further enemy forces. He didn't know where they were, but perhaps he had gotten lucky and caught them at a time when the majority of the forces were out training in the jungle, or perhaps the desert that lay along the southern arm of the continent. Whatever the reason was, he was glad. He approached the small guard post, certain that there would be someone attending it. His instincts proved right, as a man inside looked up. Reiden nodded to him. The guard gave a nod in return and a cursory glance before waving him on, indicating that he could continue through. A short distance later Reiden stood in front of set of doors that had a card reader next to them, but no keypad. Reiden had indeed gotten lucky. He took the card clipped to the stolen uniform he was wearing and waved it over the reader. An electronic whirring could be heard, followed by a beep as the door unlocked. Reiden opened it and stepped through.

The hallways that greeted him were an off-white color, giving it a sterile feel, perhaps more suited to a hospital than a military compound. However, there were no sharp scents in the air that would have been associated with the cleaning products used in medical facilities. Reiden continued on, and was glad to see that there were signs posted along the walls, indicating the directions to go to reach various destinations.

Leave it to the military to be so efficient. Too bad for them that it also helps my needs here, he thought to himself with a smirk.

He walked along the corridors, following the signs pointing him towards the file room. Without a droid with him and no skills in slicing, he had to hope that there was a hard copy of the plans for the base that he could take with him when he left. Along the way, he passed by two people with heads down and in deep conversation. He gave them a nod and one gave an absent-minded wave of her hand while the other didn't even look up from the datapad clutched in his hands. That suited Reiden just fine — he would rather not be dragged into anything much more than a nod, wave, and perhaps even a 'hello'. Before long, he found himself in front of another door with a card reader. He waved his stolen card over it, hoping that the soldier he'd pilfered it from had sufficient access to such a space. There was a different sounding beep this time, followed by a red light appearing on the reader. Reiden looked around, worried. No alarms rang out. There was no pounding of boots coming down the hall. He shrugged, more to himself than anyone in particular. He tried the reader again — the result was the same. Not wanting to risk setting off an alarm

or triggering some kind of lockdown to the room, he stopped and glanced from the reader to the card in his head. He was angry, but he tamped down those sparks quickly, lest they blossom into something more that could compromise his shoddy disguise.

“Sorry, I couldn’t help but notice you were having trouble,” came a voice from beside him. Reiden froze. In his irritation, he had completely missed the presence of someone approaching him, let alone hearing anything. He turned to find a young man next to him. The man — a kid, really — looked barely old enough to enlist.

“Yeah, it seems that way,” Reiden said with a laugh. “I didn’t sleep well last night, so I guess it’s having more of an impact on me than I thought.”

“Oh, I hear that,” the young guy replied. “I only joined up about a year ago and I’m still getting used to the schedule they keep here in the army.”

Not wanting to seem too hostile, Reiden offered him a small smile. “Don’t worry, kid, you’ll get used to it. Just give it time.”

The Meraxis soldier gave a weak smile of his own. “Why don’t you give that another try?”

Nervous, Reiden did so, but to no avail. His mind was racing, trying to come up with an excuse. His muscles tensed, ready to spring into action if needed.

“I’ve been having trouble with these blasted things all week now. I even put in a formal complaint with the higher-ups, and they told me they’d look into it. Typical military bureaucracy; everything needs to be passed up the chain of command and forms filled out in triplicate and then authorized.” Reiden had no idea if that’s how it actually worked, but it was the best he could come up with at a moment’s notice. Besides that, he knew that a little embellishment could go a long way at times.

“Man, you’ve got that right,” the soldier responded. He waved his own card over the reader. A green light appeared and a solid *thunk* was heard as a lock disengaged. The automatic door slid open with a hiss. “I’ll put in a complaint myself. Hopefully they’ll sort through whatever issue is going on soon.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it,” Reiden said, finding himself genuinely glad that someone had come along to help him get in. He could have used his lightsaber, but that would have drawn far too much attention and given away who had broken in.

“Sure thing. Have a good one,” the kid said with a wave as he turned to walk away.

Reiden stepped through the doorway, which slid shut behind him. He waited a moment to be sure that the soldier had moved on, then immediately went about searching through the cabinets and lockers in the room. He searched and searched, but with no luck. He was about to check through the final drawer left, from a large file cabinet along the wall opposite the doorway when all of a sudden he heard something just seemed *off* to him. He

heard that familiar beep and hiss behind him. His head whipped around and he saw the same kid from before. Their eyes met as Reiden's muscles tensed up once more.

"Hey...you're not supposed to be in here, are you? Who are you really? I'm going to call security!" he stammered.

"Sorry, but I can't let that happen, kid," Reiden replied.

The Palatinaean pooled the Force in his limbs as he leapt from his position to where the soldier was standing in one bound. He pressed a button on the bracer of his right arm and a vibroblade sprang forward and activated. Reiden grabbed hold of the solider with his left hand, fingers clamping down hard across his mouth as the right swept up and plunged the blade into the base of the enemy soldier's neck. There was a moment of resistance at first, which gave way as the vibroblade cut the spinal column. Reiden kept his hand firmly over the other man's mouth. He felt his body thrash and twitch briefly before becoming still. He drew the blade out of his neck and wiped it off on the soldier's clothing and retracted the blade. He then did his best to get the blood off his hand and the cuff of the jacket from his stolen uniform. He glanced at it after a moment — it wasn't all gone, but it would have to do. He grabbed hold of the corpse and dragged it completely into the room and around the corner from the entryway, out of sight.

Reiden quickly went back to the drawer he had been about to search and opened it, grabbing anything he could in his left hand before heading for the doorway and leaving the room. The door hissed shut once more. Without wasting any more time, Reiden quickly made his way back towards the exit. Nobody was around, but he remained on edge anyway. Reiden had no way of knowing if the young soldier he encountered had alerted anyone prior to returning to confront him. As such, he kept his senses sharp and gathered the Force around him, relying on it to alert him to any approaching dangers. But nothing happened. However, all that changed the moment Reiden had begun to walk towards the checkpoint. Alarms klaxons blared loudly and an alert about an intruder sounded from speakers both within and outside of the facility.

Karabast, Reiden swore to himself. They must have found that kid's body, or maybe I missed spotting some blood before I left...

Whatever the case may have been, he was running out of time now. Reiden broke out into a sprint, pulling his blaster pistol from its holster on his thigh. The guard at the checkpoint was fully alert now and glancing around. His eyes settled on Reiden. The Palatinaean took advantage of the realization sinking in on the man's face as he fully came to terms with the fact that he was the one that let an intruder through. Reiden took aim and squeezed the trigger twice. His first shot missed, but the second one rang true, striking the guard in the shoulder and sent him spinning back against the wall. The guard clutched at it with one hand, while the other slowly and shakily rose up, brandishing a blaster of his own. Reiden ran forward and unleashed a volley of shots. The man's body jerked from the impact then laid still, his fingers loosened, and the blaster clattered to the floor.

Reiden then sprinted away from the checkpoint. He made it to the tree where he had stashed his belongings and scooped them up. He activated his comlink and spoke into it quickly.

“Sorry Orion, I’ve got some heat on me again this time,” he explained, hoping that his friend was ready.

“Yeah, I kinda noticed that, Rei,” Orion replied. “I can hear the damn alarms from out here. Damn, sound carries more than I thought it would. Don’t worry; I’ve got your back...just like right now...” His voice trailed off, followed by a trio of blaster shots ringing out. Reiden glanced around as he ran, spotting a soldier falling to the ground behind him. More soldiers were pouring out of the facility’s doors.

“Thanks. Looks like I owe you again,” Reiden said, firing off a couple potshots before beginning to run again.

Once he met with Orion at the position he had taken up to provide cover, he waved his friend onward. He turned and fired another volley of shots behind them before continuing on. Reiden glanced around and noticed his friend’s droid was nowhere to be seen.

“Where’s Reeco?” he inquired.

“Oh, don’t worry about it. Not long after you went inside, I sent him back to the boat. I didn’t want to risk anyone on patrol spotting him. He’s probably already wondering when we’ll get back. Good thing we waited until this time to try to get in, otherwise we’d have trouble getting away. The darkness will give us cover, especially in the jungle,” Orion explained.

“That’s exactly why I picked this time to try to pull this off. By the way, I owe you a drink when we’re back in the city,” Reiden said with a laugh.

“Damn right, you do,” Orion said, grinning as he unleashed a flurry of shots behind them.

The pair made it back to the boat a short time later. They boarded and left the shore quickly, heading back to Nethal Prime at the fastest speed. They both ducked down in the boat, using its reinforced hull to protect them from any enemy fire. Peering over the edge, they returned fire at the Meraxis soldiers. Given the range, it was doubtful they would hit anything, but it was mostly to keep the soldiers back anyway.

“Banshee Flight, Shadow Squadron — you’re up,” Reiden spoke into his comlink, contacting his ships that were on standby.

Engine noises screamed as a few TIE fighters streaked across the sky, approaching their position. Their blaster cannons opened fire on the sandy shoreline and the edge of the jungle. The Meraxis soldiers leapt back and sought the cover of the jungle canopy as they scattered. VT-49 Decimators swooped down from above as well, angling toward the military facility. Objects could be seen dropping from their main bodies, followed by the *boom* of explosions as their missiles impacted with the facility itself. Reiden didn't know what the Meraxis forces were planning to do there, but he couldn't take any chances, especially since he wasn't sure what documents he had actually managed to take with him as he made his escape.

Reiden and Orion watched on as the Meraxis soldiers all fell back and retreated deeper into the jungle, losing sight of them among the dense foliage. They turned away from the coastline and sank down below the cover of the boat's hull, trusting in the air support by the starfighters and assault ships to ward off any soldier that got too bold. Once they had reached what was about the halfway point back to Nethal Prime, Reiden activated his comlink again and told the ships to stand down and return to their patrol routes until he and Orion were back on Nethal Prime and on their way back to Caelestis City.

While the mission itself may not have been a successful journey of going in and getting out without being detected, Reiden still felt that a good job was done by his men. Not only that, but they had taken out a training facility of Meraxis and some of their troops. That was certainly a win that Reiden intended to take on this day.