

Night School Detention

A Submission to the Competition:
Into the Fire – Fiction I



Written by
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37 ABY
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BOOM!

The explosion shook the ground and filled the air, echoing even to the bar where Orion Gale sat. He started at the drink before him on the bar for a moment before draining the last dregs from the glass. His comlink chirped and he answered it.

“It’s time again, isn’t it, Reiden?” the Kiffar questioned his friend, assuming that’s who was on the other end of the line.

“Yeah. Our intelligence was right; Meraxis agents attacked the tower. Word has come down that more enemy agents are planning another attack soon. We could use some help in stopping it. You in?” Reiden asked, knowing the answer already.

“Hey, you know me. I’m always up for having a little fun. Where should I meet you?”

“The latest reports suggest the military academy is the next target. No surprise that they would want to take out a place that would be symbolic of Scholae wresting control from them and then training people to join the Imperial armed forces instead.”

“Right, just make sure you don’t start the party without me, got it?”

“I wouldn’t dream of it. I’m assembling a team now, so get here as soon as you can.”

Half an hour later, Reiden stood before his assembled strike team that had been gathered from among the ranks of Gundark Company soldiers, along with the recent arrival of Orion who now stood at his side. He had no idea what the Meraxian sleeper agents had in store for them, but he trusted each member of his team to take care of whatever was thrown their way. The team was reviewing the information that had been provided by Imperial Scholae Intelligence, what little there was, at least. The only details were that Meraxis agents had been lying in wait for the right moment – triggered by the assault on Adoniram Tower – to spring into action and execute their own attacks. The group that Reiden had been tasked with eliminating had reportedly set their sights on The Emperor’s Academy of Military Studies. Given the initial attack, it was reasonable to assume that they were armed with both blasters and explosive, wanting to cause as much damage as possible; they were trying to make a statement that Meraxis will have its revenge. In their minds, Scholae Palatinae was only there temporarily, and they would reclaim their lands. Reiden considered it his personal mission to dissuade them of that notion and show them just how wrong they were in their thinking. The Palatinaean’s musings on the matter were brought to an end when he was approached by Commander John Riley, the leader of Gundark Company. Reiden hadn’t worked with him too often, but he knew by reputation that he was a competent soldier and leader, skilled as much with his hands as he was with a blaster.

“Sir, the team has been briefed on the matter,” the older man stated.

“Good, we need to be ready to act as soon as possible. I assume warning about a potential attack was passed along to the Academy – any word from them?”

“They responded, yes. They decided that it would be better to try to shelter in place, rather than risk leaving en masse where there would be a large crowd of people vulnerable to attack. Can’t say that I agree with their choice, but it’s what we’ve got to work with.”

“Very well,” Reiden said as he considered the implications for a moment. “We’ll have to be more careful with our aim, and that could also prove difficult if panic sets in, but I have faith that the soldiers can manage.”

“I’m almost tempted to say that we should set our weapons to stun, but that kinda takes the fun out of it,” Orion said, flashing a grin. “And then there’s the whole thing about how they’ll get up after a time and, if not secured, they’ll just start attacking again...”

“No, we can’t afford to do that,” Reiden agreed. “We don’t know how many of them there are, and we can’t sacrifice the manpower to keep watch over them while their incapacitated and come to again. We need to stop them as soon as possible.”

“What we need to do is strike a blow against them and make them think twice about ever challenging us again,” Riley added quietly, barely containing the anger in his voice.

“Don’t worry. That’s exactly what I intend to do to them,” Reiden replied plainly.

“Sir!” a familiar voice called out. Reiden glanced to his side to see Captain Jake Sloane rushing forward. “We have a new report. The Meraxis agents have made their way into the Academy. Shots have been fired and at least two people have already been reported dead. Unfortunately, that’s all we know at this time. Communications have been blocked off, whether through jamming or other means remains unclear.”

“Karabast,” Reiden swore. He turned to the Commander, “Riley, go get the men ready. We move out now.”

When Scholae Palatinae had originally taken control of Caelestis City, the plans for the major structures held within its borders had been reviewed. It was discovered that a service entrance to the Academy had been sealed, most likely due to there being another, larger one located elsewhere. However, this smaller entrance was more conveniently located, so it had been reopened.

Reiden watched as Orion entered the Academy through that very service entrance, his twin blaster pistols held at the ready. After making sure that nobody was in the immediate area, he gave the signal that the way ahead was clear. Reiden followed him inside, taking a quick glance around the space that greeted them. His eyes took a moment to adjust to the change in lighting as he transitioned from the moonlit night outside. When his vision had acclimated to the new environment, he noted that the room was dimly lit, with a few old and discarded storage containers strewn about the floor, but the room was otherwise empty.

Commander Riley entered next before the soldiers from Gundark Company poured in as well. It wasn't necessarily an overwhelming force that entered; their numbers totaling only fifteen, not counting Reiden and Orion. Nevertheless, it should give them the strength they needed to complete their mission. Reiden could only guess that for the enemy team to be effective, it would have to remain lean, so he doubted they had many members. Not wanting to take any chances with escaping enemies, Reiden had left the remaining ten members of the team outside to guard the other entrances of the building.

Reiden summoned his will and took hold of the Force, sending his senses out of the room and into the hallway beyond the door in front of them. There was a lone guard waiting there and, judging from the hostile intent coming off of him, he was most likely one of the Meraxis agents, guarding against would-be escapees. His hand grasped the hilt of his lightsaber and he pulled it free from his belt as he slowly approached the door. He palmed it the control panel with his free hand and the door slid open with a soft hiss. In one motion he brought his hilt up, pressed it against the enemy soldier's back and ignited it. The viridian blade sparked to life, boring a hole through the man and emerging from his chest. A gasping and choking noise came forth from his mouth as his body began to slump. Reiden quickly covered it just to be safe as he deactivated his lightsaber and dragged the man's corpse back into the service entrance, out of sight from the hallway.

"Orion, can you try to get a read on how many men there are from him?" Reiden asked of his friend.

"Yep, shouldn't be too much trouble," the Kiffar replied as he crouched beside the body. Orion closed his eyes and laid a hand upon the shoulder of the fallen soldier. The faint but familiar sound not unlike rushing water filled his ears as he delved into the Meraxis soldier's memories.

"What do you see?"

“It’s just coming into focus now, hang on a minute...”

Orion’s eyesight snapped into clarity, although he was seeing from the perspective of the soldier. He could feel the hatred the other man felt. It was a hatred for the Scholae Empire that had unjustly usurped the Meraxis Empire that had reigned for so long. Orion concentrated on that feeling and pushed on. The soldier was in a room with others like him. They were all talking about how they were going to make the false empire pay for the grave sin of seizing territory that they had no right to claim. The Kiffar froze the memory and scanned the room.

“They’re discussing the attack on Adoniram Tower and what will come next...other cells had different targets, but this one was assigned to hit the Academy,” he explained. “It looks like there are maybe twelve of them, the ones I can see, at least...”

Orion resumed watching the memory, pushing forward in time. He looked on as the soldiers were given weapons, blaster rifles small enough to conceal under a jacket. Some grenades were passed around as well. Still, Orion moved on, wanting to see where the enemy team would be located. The next memory came to the surface. Judging from the surroundings, and having studied the plans beforehand, Orion could tell that the team was now at the larger service area, located at the rear of the Academy. They were ready to breach. One of them sliced into the control panel beside the door. Within moments, they slipped inside, undetected. The team split up, leaving a single guard on the inside of the doorway while the rest of them continued on. Orion saw that another soldier was stationed at the smaller, secondary service area – it was the man that Reiden had just taken out. The team’s goal, he learned, was to create a panic and try to herd everyone into the cafeteria, where they would be held hostage. The team would then hole up there, barricading themselves inside before contacting Scholae forces with a list of demands. The bounty hunter released his hold on the memory and it all slipped away. He opened his eyes and took his hand from the body. The Kiffar let out a breath and relayed to Reiden what he witnessed.

“Well, at least we’re not dealing with a larger force, I suppose,” he remarked.

“That’s true, but we still need to put a stop to them, and quickly,” Reiden admitted. “Okay, let’s get going, there’s no time to waste.”

Stepping back into the hall, the Palatinaean looked around. Without anyone else in sight, he waved the rest of the strike team forward and they entered the Academy proper. From there, they split into three teams of five. Reiden, Orion, and Commander Riley would sweep the main level, while Captain Sloane took another team to the upper levels, and Major Kole Warner took the final team to the lower levels. They wanted to be sure that they didn’t miss any of the enemy agents.

Reiden and his team struck out down the hall, senses alert and weapons raised. The Force user, however, had opted to keep his lightsaber deactivated – he didn't want the telltale hum to give away any element of surprise that they had working in their favor. Then again, with the aid of the Force, he would be warned of upcoming enemies in advance anyway.

Reiden activated his comlink. "Sloane, are you there?"

"What do you need, sir?" the Captain replied.

"Given what the enemy's plan is, I want you and your team to clear the lower level as quickly as you can, then make your way to the security room. I need eyes on these soldiers. I want to know—" his voice was cut off by a loud explosion that came from a connecting corridor.

"What the frak was that?!" one soldier called out.

"Probably a grenade, if I had to guess," Orion said. "I saw them being passed out among the enemy agents."

Reiden set off down the hall at a run. "Sloane, find out if they are in the cafeteria. If not, alert me when they are. Karr out."

He cut off communication and trusted that the man would be able to carry out the task. Not wasting time on the element of surprise anymore, Reiden activated his lightsaber and charged forward. Orion was at his side, blasters at the ready. They rounded the corner together and caught sight of three Meraxis agents, one of whom had a blaster leveled and pressed to the head of an Academy instructor. Orion locked his gaze onto that man and let loose a flurry of blaster bolts. They lanced forth from the barrels of his blasters and tore into the agent. He let out a cry of pain and crumpled to the floor.

Reiden rushed to the nearest agent and brought his lightsaber to bear on the man. He swung the blade in a diagonal slash across the man's chest, cutting him down. Pivoting on a foot, he faced the final enemy. Sending the Force into his muscles and augmenting his strength, he closed the distance in one leap, stabbing down at the other man before his feet had even touched the floor. The man barely had time to raise his weapon before the blade sank deep into the side of his neck, passing down into his chest cavity. A gurgle issued forth from his mouth before he toppled to his side with a heavy thud as Reiden deactivated the blade.

The rest of Reiden's group fanned out and secured the hallway, making sure that there was nobody else there. Orion helped the instructor to her feet and told her to make her way to the smaller service area where a team could bring her to safety. She thanked him and quickly went on her way.

“Warner, this is Reiden. How is your team doing with its sweep?” the Force user questioned after activating his comlink.

“We’re fine here, sir,” the Major replied. “Only found two tangos, but we took care of them quickly. My guess is that the rest are situated in that cafeteria, like the bounty hunter said they would be.”

“That’s likely, yes. Double check that your area is clear, then come meet us on this level. We’ll be at the main entrance to the cafeteria. Make as little noise as you can when you arrive.”

“Roger that, sir. We’ll join you as soon as we can.”

Just as Reiden severed the connection, his comlink chirped and he answered it, “Sloane, what’s your status? Have you made it to the security room yet?”

“Yes, we’re here,” Sloane replied. “We managed to arrive without encountering any resistance along the way, too. I’ve accessed the system and pulled up the security feeds. It looks like everyone from the Academy is gathered in the cafeteria like we thought they would be. Doors barricaded. There are six Meraxis agents, all armed. One of them is holding a device, possibly a detonator. It makes sense that they would have explosives. I can’t quite tell where the bomb, or bombs, might be set up, though.”

“That changes things a bit,” Reiden responded. Aside from the potential for explosives, the barricade – which was likely made up of the tables and chairs from inside the cafeteria – made little sense. The doors didn’t swing open. At best, it was a means to buy more time, since he and his team would have to move the items out of the way. The enemy could also open fire on them, which was another problem. “Warner and his team will be joining mine, so we’ll figure something out. Your team should remain where you are and patrol the corridors just to be safe.”

“Of course, sir. I’ll keep you informed of any changes, should they arise.”

Reiden and his team set out to where the cafeteria was located. Just before reaching the corridor, he had them pause. He gathered up the Force with his will and stretched out his senses to check for any hostiles – there were none. He signaled the all clear and they quietly proceeded to make their way to the door, waiting beside it. As he waited, a plan slowly began to take form in his mind.

Major Warner and his team arrived minutes later and joined them. Reiden informed them of what had happened, and what Sloane had told him. It was then that, in hushed tones, he revealed his plan. Reiden would take his team around to the rear wall of the cafeteria while Warner would take his and open the door to talk to the agents waiting inside. They would be a diversion while Reiden cut his way into the cafeteria and try to

surprise the enemy from behind. The others thought a moment before agreeing that the plan was sound and then everyone got into position.

“Okay, Warner,” Reiden spoke quietly into his comlink. “You’re up.”

A moment later, a blaster fire rang out. Warner and his team took shelter beside the doorway. With the tables and chairs blocking line of sight, the Meraxis agents weren’t likely to hit anything and were just taking pot shots, but it was better to be cautious. Next, voices could be heard talking back and forth, echoing throughout the empty corridors.

“Hey, hold up a minute, would you?” Warner’s shouted. The blaster fire continued, but then died down.

“Stay back! We’ve got hostages in here, and we’re not afraid to kill ‘em!” a voice from inside called out. “What do you want?”

“Just to talk, that’s all.”

Reiden took the opportunity to activate his lightsaber and began to slice into the duracrete wall. He slowly carved his way through, trying to listen in on the conversation taking place. Unfortunately, all he could hear clearly was the sparking and hissing from where his lightsaber made contact with the wall.

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“What’s your goal here, anyway?” Warner questioned.

“We are going to restore the Meraxis Empire to its rightful home. You Scholae dogs had no right to take our land!”

“Look, pal, we beat you – fair and square. Just give it a rest. You’ve still got land back on Seraph, right? Can’t that just be enough? Surely, this isn’t worth all the bloodshed.”

“Shut up! Just shut up! This was our land, we were here first. Now we’re taking it back from you!”

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Reiden was just about through with his cutting. He told everyone to stand back and make some room. Once he finished the job, he immediately called up the Force and extended his hands, holding the slab of duracrete in place. Slowly and carefully, he willed the slab out of the wall. It was a strain given the weight of it, but he persevered, guiding the piece free and setting it down on the floor and leaned it against the wall as gently and quietly as he could manage. As luck would have it, blaster fire erupted once again, this time from both sides of the door. It appeared as if talks had broken down.

Wasting no time, Reiden stepped through the opening he had carved, followed closely by Orion and the rest of his team. The bounty hunter had traded out his twin blaster pistols for the rifle on his back, wanting to have more control over his aim since there were hostages between them and the enemy agents. Reiden and his team quickly sought whatever cover they could find.

“It’s over, we’ve got you surrounded,” the Force user called out to the Meraxis agents.

The one holding the detonator whirled around and snarled. “Shoot him!”

Blaster fire rang out. But it struck harmlessly into the duracrete column where Reiden had taken cover, as well as the metal serving station that the others were crouched behind. Orion popped up and took aim with his scope, unleashing a hail of bolts as covering fire.

“I think you have it backwards, Scholae filth,” the leader sneered. “Do you see what I have in my hand? This is a dead man switch. That’s right. If I let go, the bombs go off, we all go boom!”

“Karabast,” Reiden muttered under his breath. Then he spoke up. “You wouldn’t do that, would you? How will you get told that you did well if your people have to scrape you off the floor and walls?”

“They placed their faith in me to carry out this attack. By succeeding, and taking out as many Scholae sympathizer traitors as I can, they will know I’ve done well. They will sing my praises!”

“Oh, please,” Reiden taunted. “You really think they’ll care that you killed off, what, ten people, fifteen at best? That’s just a drop in the bucket, and you know that. Your superiors sent you here because they felt sorry for you. They gave you the job that, if you screw it up, will cause the least amount of damage to the greater cause. They sent you here to die.”

“Y-You’re wrong! They believe in me, so I won’t disappoint them!”

“You’re already a disappointment. Think about it. It’s nighttime, and there are fewer staff and students here than there would be at any other time. You’re lucky you got this many collected here.”

Reiden stood up and slowly took a few steps forward, lightsaber in hand, the green blade casting an eerie glow on the floor. A few blaster bolts streaked across the distance, but he batted them aside easily with the plasma blade of his lightsaber. Orion and the others let loose a torrent of their own bolts, striking down two of the agents in the cafeteria. Now, only four remained, including their leader with the detonator. Wanting to

emphasize his earlier point that this fight was, in fact, over, Reiden extended a hand, sending his will out to the objects barricading the entrance to the cafeteria. With some concentration and a simple gesture, he tore the barricades away, allowing Major Warner and his team to come pouring in. At the same time, Reiden's team popped up from their cover, blasters trained on the enemies.

"As I said, it's over," Reiden stated plainly, continuing forward.

"Not yet, it's not. I still have the detonator!" the leader cried out, a mad grin on his face.

Reiden closed the distance quickly with preternatural speed – his body pushed past what would be considered normal thanks to an infusion of the Force. He swiftly brought his lightsaber around in an upward swing, slicing through the flesh of the hand that held the detonator. The Palatinaean brought his free hand up and sent out an invisible hand to clamp down on the man's severed one, ensuring it remained firmly gripped to the detonator. Tense seconds passed by, but nothing happened. Reiden kicked the leader in the chest, sending him sprawling onto the floor.

"It's over," Reiden said, stepping over and leveling the plasma blade of his lightsaber at the man's throat. "I have the high ground."

The leader let out a whimper and nodded, closing his eyes as he waited for the end to come. But Reiden did nothing. The other man opened one eye at first, then the other.

"Wh-Why do you not finish me?" he asked, clearly confused by the situation.

"You're not worth my time," Reiden countered, turning to entrance to the cafeteria. "Warner! Find the bomb and get it defused."

"Roger roger," the Major said with a nod as he ran over.

The bomb, as it turned out, was located in the middle of the ring of hostages. The remaining Meraxis agents, having just witnessed what happened to their leader, had promptly set down their weapons and raised their hands. Reiden's team made their way across the short distance from their place of cover to secure the prisoners while Orion pulled out his knife and cut the bindings from the hostages' hands and feet. Warner's team joined them as well, blasters trained on the enemy agents.

Reiden activated his comlink and contacted the Empress. "Elincia. It's Reiden. The situation at the Academy has been resolved. We'll be on our way back shortly, and we have prisoners that can be interrogated for further information regarding any plans that the Meraxian forces have."