

The Truth Revealed

A Submission to the Competition:
[GJW XIII Phase I] Fiction – Multi-Objective Prompt
Objective 2



Written by
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37 ABY

Island of Sailyo, Seraph

Reiden Karr sat in a booth at the back corner of the bar, facing the entrance, as he waited for his contact to arrive. The bar was located on Sailyo, an independent city controlled by the United Corporations of Elaya that was a hub of scientific, technological, and financial business and development on Seraph. Given that the island had dealings with all the major powers of the Caperion system, Reiden had set the bar as the meeting place with his contact. The man he was waiting for was Dmitry Lenkovo, a soldier within the ranks of the Meraxis Empire's army – Scholae Palatinae's main enemy in the system. Lenkovo had grown tired of the strict authoritative regime run by Emperor Adoniram and began to secretly support Scholae's efforts when he was able by providing information on the enemy's operations.

Lenkovo had contacted Reiden and demanded that he see the Palatinaean. It wasn't yet time for their scheduled meeting, but the man's voice sounded urgent. On top of that, the Meraxian had never before requested to meet early – nor would he have wanted to, always feeling like it was a chore but also a necessary step towards getting rid of his cruel emperor. As such, Reiden knew that something big must have happened and agreed to see him. Truth be told, Reiden had more important places to be. Intelligence reports from the Inquisitorius revealed a faction known as the Severian Principate, and based on the information provided, the Imperial remnant seemed like it could be a good ally for both Scholae Palatinae, and the Brotherhood itself as well. The fight against the Collective waged on, and having someone to fight at your side was always of benefit. Unfortunately, news had gotten out that there was an attack on the Principate, and the Collective were blaming the Brotherhood.

Just as Reiden was musing over what must be going on, and eager to get to the Lyra system and make sure the Collective didn't get away with the frame job, the door of the bar opened. Light streamed in through the open doorway as a man walked inside – it was Lenkovo. As was typical of the skittish man, he glanced around nervously as he made his way to the booth where Reiden sat before taking a seat himself. He cast another look around the room and leaned on the table. Reiden could feel the man's leg fidget restlessly through the table – a nervous tic he had noted in previous meetings.

"Dmitry," Reiden said with a nod. "What was so important that we had to meet early? Scholae needs me elsewhere, so I don't have a lot of time, unfortunately."

"Heh. Trust me, you'll make time for this," Lenkovo replied. A tinge of smugness twitched at one corner of his mouth – not quite reaching a half-smile yet.

"Oh, is that right?" Reiden raised an eyebrow. He wasn't used to this kind of attitude from the double agent. "What do you have for me?"

Lenkovo slid a datacard across the table. "It's all on there. As you already know, the Collective have been helping Meraxis in our fight against you guys. I grabbed this footage from security feeds when I first discovered it while going through things to make sure there weren't any spies lurking about – ironic, I know. I think you'll find one of the faces in that video to be familiar."

"That's nice. But why was this so urgent?"

Reiden took out his small datapad and inserted the datacard, pulling up the video footage. What he saw on the screen shocked him, and there was indeed a familiar face. A figure on the screen was directing workers as they milled about either piecing together and repairing TIE fighters that had been damaged or painting ones that were new or had already been put back together and awaiting a fresh coat. The insignias being applied were those of the Iron Navy. Judging by the appearance of the workers and all their cybernetic enhancements, they were clearly members of the Collective. However, uniforms of the Meraxis Empire were mixed in as well.

The man directing things turned to address a worker that came up behind him, allowing Reiden a proper look. It was a balding man with the build of a soldier that had let things slide and grown soft around the middle, more than likely past his prime. He also had a cybernetic right arm and an implant for his left eye, both of which bore a striking resemblance to those seen on Collective zealots ever since their initial attacks on the Brotherhood. Reiden recognized him immediately. The man's name was Rigel Syklan, and the Palatinaean had run into him while he was the commander of a group of Meraxis and Collective soldiers. Scholae forces had battled those of Meraxis in a bid to expand their territory into the Nethal Archipelago on Ragnath. In the end, the enemy commander had ordered his troops to withdraw, but not before swearing vengeance. The man lacked any sort of cybernetics at the time, so he must have joined the Collective shortly after their encounter.

"Rigel Syklan...I was wondering when I might run into him again," Reiden mused aloud. He turned to face Lenkovo, feeling like he already knew the answer to what he was about to ask, but wanting to hear it from the man himself. "Tell me, Dmitry, what's the significance of this?"

"That issue Scholae's got going on right now?" the Meraxian said, glancing about furtively. "You guys and the larger group you belong to were blamed for an attack, right? These are some of the ships that were used."

"Karabast! I knew I should have given chase and killed that man when I had the chance." Reiden realized, however, that eliminating Syklan back then would not have changed anything. These attacks would have happened with or without the man's involvement. The Collective were nothing if not determined in their zealotry to accomplish their goals.

“Well, hey, think of it this way,” Lenkovo began. “You just might get your chance to finish things with him now that he’s emerged once more.”

“Yes, that’s a good point,” Reiden replied with a nod. He glanced at the glass that was before him and picked it up, quickly draining it of what little contents remained. “So, do you have anything else for me?”

“Nah, that’s it. Shouldn’t that be enough?” Lenkovo glanced around and scratched slightly at his neck – another nervous tic of his.

“Yeah, that’s enough. You actually came through nicely this time, Dmitry. Thank you.” Reiden slid a credit chip across the table and stood up. “I’ll see you next time.”

With proof of Scholae’s innocence in hand, Reiden activated his comlink and contacted his ship where Orion was waiting for him. He informed his friend that they would be leaving on a trip to another system and that he would provide him with the coordinates when he got to the spaceport. He only hoped that he wasn’t too late and that his pleas of innocence would be heard by the members of the Severian Principate.

Aboard the *Espada*
En route to the Lyra-3K-a system

“So, what’s the game plan here, Rei?”

“Honestly, I’m still trying to think of what would be best. Straightforward might be the best shot, and definitely truthful,” Reiden replied.

“Yeah, okay. But what are we gonna do, y’know, specifically?” Orion eyed him from his seat at the controls of the ship.

“I was thinking of just requesting a meeting with the governor of Lyra Colony, demanding if I have to. With something this important, it needs to be heard. Lives are on the line, and I’ll be damned if I let them turn me away.”

“Right, sounds like you’ve got it under control then,” the Kiffar said with a laugh.

“I’ll just have to explain how we value making allies, not enemies. I’ll figure something out, don’t worry.” Reiden would have preferred to be a little more prepared and actually have his thoughts in order, but there was precious little time to set things right before more substantial fighting broke out. His mind was busy running through what they would do if the version of events the Collective were laying out became what the Principate believed to be true.

“We’re approaching our destination now, Rei. Dropping out of hyperspace,” Orion informed him. A moment later, the eerie blue of hyperspace surrounding the ship dropped away and gave rise to the Lyra-3K-a system. Their destination filled the viewscreen – Eorilia’s moon, home to Lyra Colony.

“This is the *Espada*, we’re requesting clearance to land,” Orion spoke over the ship’s communications system as he contacted the spaceport on the moon’s surface below.

“State your business,” a man’s voice answered plainly. There was a tinge of anger and suspicion to his tone, no doubt due to the attacks that had happened earlier.

“We have urgent business to conduct on the colony.”

“We were recently attacked and our sensors indicate your vessel has weapons. Why should we allow you to come closer, let alone actually land?”

“The weapons are for our protection only and we wouldn’t attack anyone unless provoked first. The purpose of our visit is purely diplomatic, may we please land?”

There was a brief pause as the operator on the other end weighed the options and, more than likely, consulted with his superiors. "Very well, you're cleared to land. Please proceed to Platform 4."

Orion glanced at Reiden with a relieved expression on his face, cracking a grin. The Palatinaean gave him an appreciative nod, glad that the operator had accepted their story and they hadn't been denied entry. He took a moment to examine the datacard that he had obtained before putting it into his pocket. It was time to set things right.

* * * *

Governor's Office Lyra Colony

Governor Jar'deon Blazio was sitting at his desk when a chime came from the door. He glanced at the time. He wasn't scheduled to have any meetings. He frowned, wondering what could be needed of him. Surely, whatever it was could be done by someone else. Nevertheless, he cleared his throat and answered.

"Come in," he spoke clearly.

His assistant stepped through the doorway. For a woman that was usually so well put together, she was looking rather worried. It was unlike her.

"Yes? What is it?" the Governor asked.

"Sir, I'm sorry but there are two men asking – no, demanding – to speak with you."

"Tell them to make an appointment like everyone else. I'm a busy man."

"Well, you see, that's what they were told at the front desk upon entering the building. I'm told that they recently arrived from space and told whoever would listen that they just had to meet with you, so they were directed here from the spaceport."

"What could possibly be so important?" the man wondered aloud.

"Sir, they claim to be from the Scholae Empire."

"What's that?"

"They're affiliated with the Brotherhood, sir."

Blazio paled at the mention of the group that had recently been blamed for the earlier attacks. Fear quickly gave way to anger and rage, turning his face crimson. "How did they even make it into the building, let alone out of the spaceport?! What good is security if they let threats roam about as they please?"

“That’s just it, sir. They never revealed where they were from until they stepped foot in the building. Your security team is currently holding them in the lobby and relieved them of their weapons. However, they claim that they mean you no harm, and are rather insistent about that fact. How would you like to proceed?”

“They’re unarmed and in custody, are they?” Blazio spoke softly. He placed his hand on his chin, rubbing it in thought. “Send Chief Cirrus to my office at once and have her take my private lift. After she arrives, have the visitors brought up as well. Let’s see what all the fuss is about.”

Reiden and Orion were led, shackled and at gunpoint, from the lobby of the building and into a turbolift. From there they were escorted to what Reiden assumed was the governor's office, its door open. Two security officers entered first and turned on their heels to level their weapons at the pair, making sure they didn't try anything. The remaining two officers pushed them through the doorway before entering as well.

There was a man standing in front of a large desk. He was older than Reiden and had dark eyes that matched his dark, swept back hair. And although he was taller, he was doughy. It was the typical build that Reiden had seen on many politicians on many worlds before.

Beside him was a woman that appeared to be around Reiden's age, with a dark complexion, hair the color of desert sand that was pulled back into a bun and pale blue eyes. She was dressed in armor made of leather and a bit of metal, and had its helmet tucked under one arm, while her other hand held a blaster that was leveled at the new arrivals. From her posture and the way she carried herself, Reiden could tell that she was a well-trained soldier and not one to be taken lightly.

"Gentlemen, welcome to Lyra Colony," the man spoke, spreading his arms to his sides. "I am its governor, Jar'deon Blazio. The woman next to me is Amara Cirrus, the head of security for the colony."

"Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Governor," Reiden spoke clearly, offering a genuine smile to the man. "My name is Reiden Karr, and my friend here is Orion. Before we begin, I'd like to first offer you my sincere apologies for the attacks that took place—"

"Oh, how nice of you to apologize for something that you did," one of the security officers behind him sneered. The man took the opportunity to deliver a jab of a blaster barrel at Reiden's back. The Force user simply turned his head to glare at the man menacingly.

"Knock it off, soldier," Cirrus spoke sternly. "Act professionally. We're all upset about what happened, but we should hear the man out before passing any judgment."

Reiden turned back to face the governor and his head of security, giving her a silent nod of thanks. "I assure you, neither Scholae Palatinae nor the Brotherhood were behind these heinous attacks."

"And we're just supposed to take your word for it?" the head of security questioned, narrowing her eyes.

"No, of course not. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think I stood a chance at convincing you of the truth of my words. But believe me when I say that we would not want to make an enemy of the Severian Principate."

“And why is that, may I ask?” Blazio interjected.

“It’s simple, really. Fighting a war on multiple fronts is something that should be avoided at all costs. We much prefer to make allies, not enemies.”

“Yes, that does seem like the wiser course of action.”

“We are fighting the Collective, that much is true and I would not deny it. Their ultimate goal is wiping out Force users, which presents a problem for many of us, not to mention those who cannot use the Force that would also die in the battle. But, you see, that goal is impossible.”

“And just what makes it impossible? Surely, given enough time, they will eventually accomplish their goals.”

“I’m afraid not, Governor. The Force is in everyone and everything. Not all people will have the ability to be Force users, but it’s still there nonetheless. Because of that, more Force users will be born, no matter how hard they try. And they certainly put forth a lot of effort towards that end. We’ve engaged them in battle twice before now and they are relentless.”

“It’s true,” Orion spoke up at last. “I’ve been there each time. I’m a bounty hunter and mercenary, so ordinarily I’d go wherever the credits took me. But since Rei and I go way back, I decided to lend a hand. I owe him my life, so helping out is the least I could do. I can’t use the Force, but the fact that I align myself with those that can is the only evidence the Collective needs to paint a target on my back.”

“The zealotry of the Collective gives them the drive to do anything to ensure the completion of their goals. They campaign against the collateral damage that has been caused to civilian lives in the battles that we’ve fought amongst ourselves, but they are no better, and they routinely make use of suicide bombers in their attacks. There is no doubt in my mind that they would even go so far as to frame someone else for an attack that they themselves perpetrated,” Reiden explained.

“That’s quite an accusation you’re making, Mr. Karr. You better be able to back it up if you want us to listen any further to what you have to say.”

“I’m well aware of that, Governor Blazio, but I do have the proof that will show you I’m telling the truth,” Reiden said. He lifted his arms, indicating the binders around his wrists. “If you’ll allow me? Please, if I meant you any harm, I would have done something by now. I’m here in an attempt to prevent fighting, not start it.”

Blazio nodded to his security officers. The one closest to Reiden removed the binders. Orion was left in his restraints, likely as an added precaution just to be safe. The Palatinaean gave his friend an apologetic look, and the Kiffar shrugged in understanding.

Holding one hand up in surrender, he slowly reached into his pocket and withdrew the datacard he brought with him. He held it out to the politician.

“And what am I supposed to do with this?” Blazio questioned.

“There’s video footage on there. I believe you’ll find it interesting.”

Blazio walked around to the opposite side of his desk and inserted the datacard into a holoterminal. Before long, the footage from the security feed sparked to blue-tinted life. The video unfolded before them and, when it was over, Reiden moved over to play it again. He hit pause when the man centered in view turned to face a worker behind him.

“What am I looking at here? This could easily be Brotherhood members rebuilding ships.”

“That man right there,” Reiden replied evenly, pointing to the figure. “His name is Rigel Syklan. To understand, I must tell you about Scholae Palatinae. In our home system, on the moon of Ragnath, we are at war with a faction known as the Meraxis Empire. Rigel Syklan and I met on the field of battle during a campaign to expand Scholae’s territory.”

“That’s all well and good, but how is this relevant to what happened here on the colony, or what you’re showing us?” Cirrus demanded to know, an annoyed look on her face.

“After first losing territory to our forces, the Meraxis Empire began to search for potential allies. Somehow news of the Collective reached them, and the two factions decided to pool their resources. You see, Scholae is part of the Brotherhood, which is full of Force users, the same people that the Collective wish to wipe out. Now, in that battle where I encountered Syklan, he and his Meraxian soldiers were fighting alongside Collective zealots. The enemy commander and his troops were forced to retreat, but I can tell you with certainty that he himself was uninjured.”

“What is the significance of that fact, Mr. Karr?” Blazio questioned.

“You see the cybernetics he has in the footage?” Reiden gestured to the blue-tinted images paused before them that hovered above the desk. “It is well known to members of the Brotherhood, and thoroughly documented by its intelligence agency, that those within the Collective’s Technocratic Guild and their soldier zealots employ the use of cybernetic enhancements. The modifications that Commander Syklan has undergone match the designs in use by the Collective. Furthermore, Imperial Scholae Intelligence reports have come in which indicate Syklan’s defection, as well as my own source within Meraxis that can attest to the same. Apparently, losing him was quite a blow to their morale and Emperor Adoniram was furious.”

“You’ve given us a lot to think about. Given what happened here and the claims that the Collective were making regarding who was to blame, we could have just as easily killed you on the spot. I must ask you, why take the risk in coming here?” Cirrus inquired, her tone revealing that he was being deadly serious.

“Like I mentioned before, we would much prefer to be your allies than your enemies. In order to accomplish that, proof had to be presented. Aside from that, I don’t like it when people get blamed for things they didn’t do; I couldn’t just stand by and let it happen. And rushing off to strike back at the Collective without any further thought seemed like a poor and impulsive plan,” Reiden explained matter-of-factly.

“So, are we all friends now? How about we all go out and grab some drinks or something?” Orion asked, looking at Cirrus for the second part and giving her a quick smile.

Reiden shot Orion an annoyed look before turning to Blazio. “You’ve heard our story and seen the evidence, Governor Blazio. What are your thoughts?”

The man took a moment before replying, weighing his options. “Well I’m sure I can convince the leaders of the Principate that there is truth in what you say and the evidence you presented. Given my position, they would be remiss in not hearing my opinion on the matter. What you have been saying all along is absolutely right – an ally is always preferable to an enemy. We shouldn’t fight each other if it can be avoided, especially since the Collective tried to frame the Brotherhood.”

“Thank you, Governor. I appreciate that you took the time to hear us out, despite there being a perceived risk on your end. Are my friend and I free to go? While I’d love to stay longer, I’m afraid that my people need me elsewhere. I doubt the Collective will just sit back and hope that their frame job sticks. They must have other plans in motion.”

“Yes, of course,” Blazio replied, signaling to his security detail, who lowered their weapons. “I’ll get in touch with Principate leadership immediately and apprise them of the situation, forwarding this footage. I believe we could make good allies once this unfortunate mess gets cleared up.”

“As do I, Governor Blazio,” the Palatinaean replied with a nod.

Amara Cirrus stepped over to remove Orion’s binders herself. “Hope they weren’t too tight for you, bounty hunter.”

“They were quite comfy, actually, thank you,” the Kiffar responded with a grin. “Maybe we can go get that drink now?”

“I hate to break it to you, but I have work to do and orders to follow. Those orders don’t include you.”

“Well, you can’t blame a guy for trying! Maybe I’ll have better luck next time.”

“Quit messing around, Orion. I swear, you never change,” Reiden said with a sigh, though he couldn’t help but smile to himself. “We have to get going.”

“I know, I know. You should really try to loosen up a bit, my friend. It’s no fun if all you do is work.”

“There will be time for leisure later. For now, we have a score to settle.”

Reiden and Orion were brought back down to the main level by the same guards that had escorted them up earlier. From there, they were shown to the security office where they collected their weapons and were allowed to leave. After they had made it back to the spaceport and boarded the *Espada*, Reiden activated the ship’s communications system and contacted the Scholae fleet.

“This is Reiden Karr contacting the *Retribution*, come in.”

A moment later, the holoterminal flickered to life. The familiar form of Empress Elincia Rei came into focus. “Reiden. I was wondering when we’d be hearing from you. Where have you been?”

“I managed to obtain some security footage that proved the Collective was behind the attacks on Lyra Colony. I took it upon myself to reach out to its governor personally and explain what had happened, show him the footage.”

“That was quick thinking on your part. How did that meeting go?”

“It went well. I told him the truth about the situation and how the last thing we would want is to make another enemy. He seems to believe what I told him and has agreed to share the footage with his superiors within the Severian Principate. I like our chances.”

“Well done. Join up with the rest of our forces while we plan our next steps.”

“Of course, right away, Empress. For the Empire.”

Reiden gave Orion the coordinates where part of the Scholae fleet was waiting. He input them into the computer and they took off. Reiden sat back in his seat, his mind wondering how things would unfold from here. But he knew that whatever happened, this was only the beginning of a much larger fight and he needed to be ready for anything.