

Empire Overthrown

A Submission to the Competition:
Iron Sky Fiction – Multi-Objective Prompt



Written by
Reiden Karr (10106)

37 ABY

Outside Nardash, Seraph

Reiden Karr stood at a table bearing a holographic map of the Meraxian capital of Nardash. He studied it closely, arms folded across his chest and brow furrowed in concentration. Scholae forces had quickly taken care of the surrounding areas that were determined to be the largest threats, and now only the capital remained. Civilians were spared and soldiers were given the option of fighting or surrendering. Those that surrendered were taken prisoner while the others were brought to a swift end. Efforts were also made to ensure that civilians were brought out of fighting zones, including search and rescue crews that had been sent out.

While the desire for revenge against Meraxis was strong, the hope was to avoid a long, drawn-out battle and so far that goal had been achieved. However, there would be a tough battle ahead no matter what. Intelligence and surveillance reports indicated that a large contingent of Meraxis soldiers had set up a fortified position within the capital, surrounding Emperor Adoniram's palace. The current plan was to launch a powerful assault on the city and fight to the palace where Adoniram's reign would finally be brought to an end. Much of Scholae's military might had been brought to the planet, and it would be utilized to the fullest extent.

As Reiden was going over the list of assets planned to be used in the assault, he heard a commotion from behind him. He turned around, curious about what was going on, angry shouts reaching his ears before he saw anything. One soldier made his way toward Reiden's position followed a short distance by a man in stuncuffs being escorted by another soldier behind him, occasionally being shoved as they made their way over. He took a closer look at the prisoner, recognizing his uniform as that belonging to the Meraxis forces, and also the man wearing it.

"What's the meaning of this, trooper?" Reiden asked plainly of the soldier leading the way as the other soldier and the prisoner caught up to him.

"Sir, we caught this enemy scum sneaking around the perimeter," the soldier replied.

"Is that right?" Reiden said, cocking an eyebrow. "Leave us. I'll question this one myself."

"Are you sure, sir?" the soldier behind the prisoner questioned.

"I can handle myself, don't worry," Reiden replied with a smile.

The two soldiers nodded and left, returning to their patrol of the area to which they were assigned. Reiden studied the prisoner for a moment, wanting to see how he'd react. True to form, the man before him appeared to be quite nervous, casting furtive glances

around. He reached up and scratched at his neck as he did so — a nervous tic Reiden had noted on many occasions. It was nice to see that some things hadn't changed.

“So, can we do this already?” the prisoner asked. “I don't wanna be here any longer than I have to be, y'know?”

Reiden laughed quietly. “Don't worry, Dmitry. You're safe here. Nothing will happen to you on my watch. These soldiers listen to me.” He had forgotten how paranoid and restless this man could be.

Dmitry Lenkovo was a soldier in the Meraxis army. He had long grown tired of the strict, authoritative rule of Emperor Adoniram, and once Scholae Palatinae arrived on the scene with their initial takeover of Caelestis City, he began harboring hope that they would be able to put an end to Adoniram and his tyrannical rule. He began to reach out to an underground network of citizens that supported Scholae Palatinae, and eventually managed to convince them, and members of Scholae Intelligence, that he could be of help. Ever since their first meeting in person over a year ago, Lenkovo had been supplying Reiden with useful information in the fight against Meraxis.

“Sure. Whatever, just make it quick, okay?” Lenkovo asked. More neck scratching followed.

“That's entirely up to you,” the Palatinaean responded. “What do you have for me?”

Lenkovo lifted his arms up, pulling back the flap of one of his chest pockets and reaching inside, withdrawing a small datacard. He handed it over to Reiden. “This contains the layout of the compound where the main forces are gathered, along with likely formations being used and soldier positions. Adoniram will probably be using those because they're what we've drilled in the most, so the soldiers have familiarity with it, and a confidence that they can pull it off more effectively than the others.”

Reiden nodded. He took the datacard and inserted it into a computer terminal, pulling up the file. “And that confidence will prove to be their downfall.”

Lenkovo nodded quickly, which almost reminded Reiden of an enthusiastic child. “That's what I'm hoping, yeah. And not just me — the others in the underground movement supporting your side hope for the same outcome. We're sick of living the way we do. The Emperor cares nothing for his people. It's time to put an end to things.”

“I couldn't agree more, Dmitry,” Reiden responded. He thought for a moment before looking Lenkovo in the eyes. “You've done well. Thank you. I'll have my men let you go, just try to act like you're in a stupor when you leave here. They'll think I got everything I could from you and be more inclined to release you. They don't know of everything that I can or can't do, but they've heard enough rumors and won't ask questions.”

The Meraxis double agent scratched at his neck and shuffled his feet uncomfortably as he weighed his options before slowly nodding. "Yeah, I-I can do that. No problem."

Reiden called the two soldiers back in and instructed them that the prisoner should be released where they found him as he would be of no further use. He was careful not to slip up and use Lenkovo's name. While he trusted that his men were loyal to the Scholae Empire, he still wanted to keep the informant's name a secret. The only people that had any knowledge he had a spy within the enemy ranks were his superiors and they understood the need for secrecy. They couldn't risk him being found out and lose a valuable source of information.

Lenkovo played his part well as he was escorted to where he had been apprehended. He stared off into the distance and shuffled his feet as he walked. He almost tripped over himself as they proceeded. Reiden was surprised by the man's dedication to their little ruse, and at how well he pulled it off. Then again, Reiden knew that the best lies often contained a grain of truth. In that regard, the man's paranoia likely sparked some self-preservation instinct in him that allowed the truth and the lie to blend together into a believable performance. Reiden had no doubt that Lenkovo was probably terrified that the soldiers would disregard Reiden's orders and kill him solely on the principle that he was an enemy soldier, so he was putting his all into the act. However, Reiden knew that his orders would be followed; the soldiers knew better than to disobey an order given to them, and the penalty that awaited them if they did.

Reiden called the leaders of the various teams over to join him. He shared with them the information that Lenkovo had delivered, claiming that it was new data gathered by Scholae Intelligence. Together, they reviewed that, along with what scouting reports mentioned, and a plan began to take shape.

Inside the city of Nardash, Seraph

Reiden sought cover behind a parked airspeeder on the side of the street as the battle raged on around him. Scholae forces had fought their way from the city limits of Nardash up until this point and enemy activity until then had been light. Now, however, they were facing a larger force. The soldiers around him traded fire with enemy troops. Reiden popped up from cover and let loose a flurry of bolts from his blaster. The fire struck down two soldiers.

A small group of troops began to close in on his location but they were each swiftly taken out in turn by precise fire coming from an elevated position across the street. He glanced in that direction and sent his silent thanks to Orion, knowing it must have been his friend looking out for him as the bounty hunter watched over the battle, dispatching enemies at range. Reiden spotted a fallen Scholae soldier, his belt still holding two thermal detonators. Knowing that the dead man had no use for the explosives any longer, and would not object even if he had been alive, Reiden pocketed the first one. Taking the second small spherical device in hand, he pressed the button on it and threw it into the throng of enemy troops that were in front of him before ducking behind the airspeeder once more. Seconds later a sharp sound of detonation was heard, and anguished screams of pain reached his ears. He knew without looking that the soldiers within its blast radius were no longer among the living, but such was the cost of war.

At that moment, Imperial Combat Speeders bearing Scholae markings swooped by overhead, their blaster fire lancing down from above onto the Meraxis troops. The airspeeders broke off to circle back around for another run. Reiden knew that similar strikes were being conducted at other points in the city, making for an impressive concerted effort. Scholae ground forces pressed the attack as well, bolstered by their air support, creating an opening. Reiden holstered his blaster and grabbed his lightsaber. Its viridian blade sprang forth from the hilt with a crackle of power as he thumbed the activator.

The marauder threw himself into the fray. He let his mind become immersed in the flow of battle, taking note of where the enemy was located. Reiden wove through the battlefield, cutting down enemy after enemy. Orion provided backup as he sniped anyone that got too close.

The deadly dance continued and the street became littered with bodies. The Meraxis troops weren't pulling their punches either and fallen Scholae soldiers would join those from Meraxis as time wore on. The battle eventually made its way to outside the palace where Emperor Adoniram was likely in hiding.

Reiden took a moment to duck around the corner of a nearby building for cover and spoke quickly into his comlink. "We've reached the palace. Deploy the first wave of armors now!"

Off in the distance, a slow but steady rhythm of metallic clanking could be heard as the AT-STs whirred to life from where they had been left earlier. The armors began their trek through the streets, making their way towards the palace. Adding to the new sounds was the steady thrum of treaded wheels grinding over the ground as MTV-7s joined in on the approach. The armors converged on the palace from multiple angles. When within range, the AT-STs launched a salvo of grenades at the gates, walls, and fencing surrounding the palace grounds. The explosions tore through the barriers and the ground forces poured in, only to clash with those of Meraxis.

Reiden made sure he was leading the charge, carving his way through the enemy. Just as he turned to dispatch one soldier, he sensed a threat coming from behind him. He whirled around on his heel and intercepted a punch by catching the man's arm within the crook of his left elbow. He deactivated his lightsaber and clutched it tightly in his right hand as he drew back a fist and launched it at the soldier's face. The blow connected with the man's face, hitting him in the nose with a resounding crunch. Blood streamed from the soldier's nostrils as his face twisted up in pain and anger. Acting quickly, Reiden activated his lightsaber once more and brought it down in a diagonal slash across the other man's torso, kicking him to the ground and moving on.

All around him were the sounds of battle. Fortifications lay ahead, giving Scholae forces pause while they tried to breach them, work around them, or simply have them destroyed by the armors acting as support for the assault.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Elsewhere, while the two opposing forces clashed, Orion Gale made his way to a new location. He had gotten lucky with sneaking by undetected so far, but as he crept past one fortified spot, he found himself face to face with a trio of enemy soldiers. What happened next took unfolded quickly. They appeared startled at first, but then grins crept across their faces when they saw that their opponent was alone. It was a look that Orion recognized; they thought they had him beat before anything had even begun. He planned to show them just how wrong they were. He quickly brought up an arm and activated the small flamethrower on his vambrace. Gouts of flame erupted forth, causing two of the soldiers to stumble back. The third wasn't quite as lucky — his clothes caught on fire and he screamed, trying desperately to pat the flames out of existence. Orion dropped to a roll to evade fire from the two that had recovered. He snapped his blaster rifle up and proceeded to unleash a hail of bolts on all three men from his crouched position. His aim proved true and they dropped to the ground.

Orion stood quickly and made his way around the fortification, which was really no more than a walled-off guard house. He held a thermal detonator in hand and pressed the activator. He moved to the doorway and brought his arm back to throw it when he stopped short. The place was empty. With the trio he had just taken out being the only enemies there, he had to assume that the others must have rushed off to join the rest of the battle. That worked perfectly for him. He pressed the button on the detonator again to deactivate

it and returned it to his belt. He made his way to the area in the front of the structure that allowed guards to fire from within and assumed a firing stance, beginning to pick off enemy soldiers. His location was ideal since the battle had yet to reach that area. The enemies never knew what happened.

After some time, he had to abandon his location. He made a quick exit and went around the side of the structure, tossing his thermal detonator at the rear of the group of enemy soldiers engaging Scholae forces. The blast from behind caught some off guard, but not everyone. Still, it served its purpose and allowed Scholae to press forward. Orion noticed a small group of Scholae soldiers circling around the battlefield in a pincer maneuver. He ran to join them, firing off shots from his blaster as they opened fire on the Meraxis troops. When that group of enemies was finished off, he got moving again. It was time to put the rest of Reiden's plan into motion.

Reiden watched as the smoke cleared from the battlefield. The armors had launched yet another salvo of grenades among the enemy troops, decimating their ranks. He knew they had to continue pressing their advantage while they still had the opportunity. He took aim with his blaster and fire off a series of shots at a few stray troops before signaling for Scholae forces to advance. Things seemed to be coming to a head now, but there was still work to be done.

The Force user took a moment to duck behind cover and consult his datapad. Based on the map from Dmitry and their own scouting and intelligence reports, they had taken care of most of the forces that had been stationed outside of the palace. Now there was just one spot that remained — the enemy command center.

He activated his comlink. “Orion, how’s everything going on your end? Are you set up yet?”

“Looking good, Rei,” Orion responded. “Ran into a little trouble, but it was nothing I couldn’t handle. I even managed to help some of your guys with some stragglers!”

“So you’re ready then?”

“You got it. Just say the word, and it’ll be done.”

“Good. Just try not to be seen, okay? I need you to stay put and keep a low profile. I know you like excitement, but this is too important.”

“Don’t worry. You know I wouldn’t do anything to mess this up. These guys need to be taken care of, and if I can help with that, I’ll do it.”

“I knew I could count on you. I’ll contact you again when it’s time to make your move, but maintain silence until then unless necessary. Stay safe,” Reiden said before terminating the connection.

Reiden got up and joined the Scholae forces in the assault. While the majority of the soldiers and mobile armors acted as the main force, Reiden took a small team with him to circle around to the back of the command center. With the bulk of enemy troops busy with the fight, it was a simple matter to skirt around them while their attention was focused on the battle at hand. Once at the rear of the building, Reiden ignited his lightsaber and began to carve an opening into the structure. When he was finished, he ordered the men with him to stay to the sides and then extended his hand and sent forth a burst of invisible energy to push the cut portion of the wall into the room. The duracrete flew through the carved pathway and shattered into chunks as it hit the floor. Reiden signaled for his soldiers to flow into the building, leading them in as they attempted to secure it.

The enemy troops inside were caught off guard. Two of them were able to spin around and raise their blasters, but they were cut down by blaster fire before they could

get off any shots of their own. A third enemy reacted faster than those remaining, but Reiden swiftly brought his lightsaber to bear and decapitated the man. The other Scholae soldiers had already made their way into the room and leveled their weapons on the enemy. The Meraxians all dropped their weapons and raised their hands into the air in a gesture of surrender. Reiden nodded to his team and they quickly secured the prisoners with binders on their wrists and confiscated their weapons. The Force wielder cast his glance around the room before settling on one Meraxian in particular.

“Where is your commander?” Reiden inquired as he approached the man.

“W-Why should I tell you anything?” the enemy soldier retorted.

“Because if you help me, I’ll consider granting you mercy,” Reiden replied, moving the blade of his lightsaber towards the man’s neck. “We’re trying to end this fight, so it would be in the best interests of both you and your entire nation to cooperate.”

“You’re just going to kill us all anyway!”

Reiden shook his head, giving the man a sympathetic look. “No, I’m not. I have no desire to kill everyone here, not unless absolutely necessary. The fighting between our two sides has gone on long enough, hasn’t it? Wouldn’t you like to live under a better ruler? That need not be our own, but that decision is beyond my power. Adoniram is a fool and he is the real target. Why would you continue fighting for a ruler that doesn’t care about his own people?”

“You really think it could become better?”

“Yes, I do, but only if you can help us to make it that way. Now, please, where is your commander? What distinguishes him from the rest of the men outside?”

“He’ll be the one shouting orders from the rear. He’s a coward that failed upwards. Nobody likes him. His armor has red pauldrons and he favors using dual blaster pistols.”

“Traitor! What are you telling him this for?” a second Meraxian prisoner shouted incredulously at the man. Based on the facial features visible, this one was a woman. Her face was twisted into an angry glare. “You can’t trust anyone from this false empire!”

“Shut up!” the first one snapped back at her. “Aren’t you tired of fighting, too? I know I am. Besides, if this guy was going to kill us, we’d be dead already and they’d just slaughter everyone outside.” The woman opened her mouth as if to respond but then closed it. Her expression changed to one of resignation, realizing the man was right.

“Keep watch over these prisoners. Don’t kill them, understand? They are prisoners and I expect them to be treated as such, no matter what they say,” Reiden instructed the members of his team. They all nodded in the affirmative. Among them was Captain Jake

Sloane, a soldier Reiden had gone into battle with numerous times over the years. He was a capable and reliable soldier — one Reiden knew that he could trust completely.

“Don’t worry, sir” Sloane said. “I’ll make sure your orders are followed.”

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Orion was lying across the roof of another guard station that had been cleared out. This one was located farther away from the position he found earlier. With his rifle perched on a small ledge surrounding the edge of the roof, he lined up shots on enemy troops and picked them off. His comlink let out a soft chirp. He reached up tapped the device in his ear.

“This is Orion. Go ahead,” he spoke softly. He knew he didn’t need to be quiet since there was nobody around him, but it was a habit that he had gotten into when in such a firing position on past jobs.

Reiden’s voice came through the small speaker of the comlink. “Orion, I’ve got some details on your target. You’re looking for a man with red pauldrons and twin blasters. He may be hanging towards the back.”

“Got it,” the Kiffar responded. He scanned the battlefield through the scope of his blaster rifle. His first view was of the forefront of the conflict. Not seeing what he was looking for, he panned around the other areas until, as indicated, a flash of bright red at the edge of the fighting caught his attention. He slowly moved the barrel of his blaster in that direction until his view was focused on his target. “I have him. Do I take the shot?”

“Take him out. It’s time to end this battle; it’s gone on long enough already.”

Orion gazed down his sight and made sure the shot was lined up. He inhaled deeply before exhaling and squeezed the trigger once. The enemy commander’s head snapped back sharply. The Meraxian’s body collapsed onto the ground and chaos erupted among those troops nearby. Not knowing what happened, they were looking around, trying to figure out exactly where the shot had come from. But Orion was already gone; he had jumped down from the roof of the guard station, rolling as he hit the ground to absorb some of the force of impact. He circled back around the building to join the battle once more, his blaster firing a shower of bolts at any Meraxian troops that dared come within range.

Reiden had returned to the battlefield, immersed in the action. He didn't need to know the shot had been taken to know that Orion had succeeded in his task. The flow of battle had changed, and he could feel it. The enemy commander was dead. He signaled for Scholae forces to charge forward and the unit commanders barked orders at their individual teams. It was time to contact his newest recruit.

"Kal, this is Reiden," he spoke into his comlink once he found cover. "Have you sliced into the system?"

"All set on my end, boss," replied a voice tinged with a slight Coruscanti accent. It belonged to Kal Arias, a slicer that Reiden had met not too long ago while on an information gathering mission. "Ready to go when you are."

"Good work. Route my transmission to all devices in the area."

Across the battlefield, and even beyond that in the city, there was a brief crackle of static in speakers that were connected to a communication network. From comlinks to datapads to holoterminals, if it could broadcast a message, its signal was hijacked. Kal had done his job well when he managed to break through the encryption in place meant to safeguard devices from just such a thing happening.

"Citizens of the Meraxis Empire," Reiden spoke into his comlink. The signal was sent from his device to Kal's location, and from there was routed to the various devices within broadcast range. "As you're no doubt aware, the Scholae Empire issued a warning earlier. Our two opposing forces have since met in battle throughout the capital. At this time, we have even dealt with much of the force left to protect the palace of your fool emperor. The commander is dead. Our men and mobile armors are surrounding the palace. Once again we ask you, lay down your weapons."

As Reiden spoke, he heard the sound of battle slowly die down. He could feel the animosity hanging in the air, but his words gave the enemy troops pause. He was sure that weapons from both sides of the conflict were still leveled at one another, but they were willing to listen, it seemed. Their curiosity was outweighing their desire to fight — at least for the moment. He planned to capitalize on the chance while he could.

"Despite what you may think, we actually know about what life under the fool Adoniram's rule is like. He cares nothing for his people. This is evidenced by his constant need for vengeance against our own people. When we assumed control over Caelestis City, there were those that welcomed us with open arms. They were more than happy to have someone, anyone, else to govern them than continue living under Adoniram's cruel thumb. We do not oppress our people. We let our citizens be who they are, and we give them the opportunity to not just live, but thrive! Isn't that a more fitting way to rule?"

Reiden paused a moment to let his words sink in. He wanted to allow the Meraxians time to weigh their options. "Join us in throwing off the yoke of oppression. Tear down the

banners of Adoniram that adorn your buildings. Throw down your arms and let your voice be heard — you desire change, and you won't be content until it happens!" Reiden paused a moment to let his words sink in. "Emperor Adoniram, if you're listening, know this: your days may have been numbered before, but now the time has run out. Soon the palace will be surrounded. Our ships can also come down and join us for an assault. If you do not indicate your surrender, or you are not brought before us, then we will not hesitate to bring the might of our forces down on you. We don't want to harm anyone that is willing to surrender, but we will attack if we need to. Do the right thing by your people and leave the palace now, or remain there and have it become your tomb. You have been given your final warning."

A commotion broke out around Reiden, among Scholae forces and the Meraxians. No doubt Scholae soldiers were surprised by the decision, but Reiden had briefed the unit leaders on the plan beforehand and he trusted that they would keep their men in line. Reiden stood and moved forward, towards where the Meraxians held their ground. He held the hilt of his lightsaber in his hand and activated it in case it was decided by some to continue the fight. The Meraxians indeed still had their weapons, but some were angled down. Many were deep in discussion. His outstretched senses picked up on the confusion and anger sweeping through them. But there was something else there as well, something more. There was hope. This had been the change that many of them had been waiting for.

A different sound reached Reiden's ears as he glanced around at the soldiers before him. It was the clatter of weapons being dropped or placed on the ground by Meraxian soldiers. A few of them held onto their blasters tightly and argued with those who were surrendering. Some threw punches, but were restrained by others. It was clear that the majority just wanted the fighting to end. Scholae soldiers moved in and secured prisoners, first starting with those that were openly protesting the surrender, and the weapons were collected and moved away. The rest of the Meraxian troops were secured next, some of them even thanking Scholae soldiers for giving them the chance to be free from Adoniram's rule. But the emperor himself was nowhere in sight. That didn't surprise Reiden; the ruler had always seemed rather stubborn, especially in his dogged determination to seek revenge against Scholae Palatinae. Unfortunately, this meant he further ignored his people and dragged them into his schemes regardless of what was actually best for them. It was just as well, since all of that led up to the present moment.

"Sir, our scouts have spotted something!" Captain Sloane came running over, a look of disbelief on his face.

"What is it, Sloane?" Reiden eyed the younger man curiously.

"It's Adoniram! They say that Meraxian troops are dragging him out of the palace!"

Reiden's eyes shot open wide. He had hoped that his words would resonate with the people of Meraxis, but never did he expect an outcome such as this. "Are you certain about that? Is it really him?"

“Take a look yourself, sir,” Sloane replied, handing Reiden a datapad.

He took the device from the soldier and studied its screen closely. There was a live feed on the screen linked to what the scouts were looking at. Based on intelligence reports and images of the man, it certainly appeared to be Emperor Adoniram being escorted away from the castle, albeit with a more bedraggled look than Reiden was used to seeing. Behind the Meraxian emperor was a group of soldiers that had thrown their weapons to the ground, arms raised above their heads in a gesture of surrender.

Scholae soldiers moved out to detain the emperor and the enemy troops. Reiden couldn't help but smile at the turn of events. He turned and waved for the remaining soldiers to stand down once he made sure that the prisoners in the area had been secured. He handed the datapad back to Sloane, giving him a nod of thanks.

“This is Reiden contacting the *Retribution*,” he spoke into his comlink as he contacted the Palatinaean flagship.

“It's good to hear from you, Reiden,” the familiar voice of Shadow Nighthunter responded. It still felt strange to Reiden that she was the new Empress, but he was proud to see how she had ascended to the position over time. “What's the situation down there?”

“The plan worked. We have much of the Meraxian forces in custody and Adoniram himself is being escorted out of the palace by his own men. It seems like they've finally had enough of him and realized that they were on the wrong side of things.”

“Good work. I'll make sure to tell our ships in orbit to stand down. Have your new teammate broadcast the footage of Adoniram being taken into custody throughout the nation. That should get the rest of them to surrender as well.”

“I'll do that right now. I'll be in contact later. Reiden out.” Reiden ended the connection and set to work.

Reiden reached out to Kal and let him know of the latest plan. Before long, footage of Adoniram being escorted by angry Meraxian soldiers was sent out nationwide. Everywhere in the Meraxis Empire, people began to accept the reality of the situation. As full realization settled in, some rejoiced. People tore down banners supporting Adoniram's reign and joined each other in the streets, cheering. The road had been a hard-fought battle up until this point, ever since Scholae Palatinae had landed at Caelestis City and wrested control of it from the grip of Meraxis. But it had all been worth it. Maybe now, people on both sides of the conflict would be able to enjoy the end of Adoniram's tyrannical reign. No longer would Meraxians be forced to endure his cruelty and disregard for his empire's citizens. The day was a victory not only for Scholae Palatinae, but the Meraxians as well.