

In Opposition
Option 1

Solidago streaked through the void, threading through a stray volley of turbolaser fire as it approached the *Nesolat* platform. Warrior Khryso Mallus, the craft's pilot, glanced over at the control panel as text began to scroll across it.

"Just let me know if we get another tail," Khryso said in response, his attention only staying with the message for a moment. "I'm going for the landing."

The ARC-170 starfighter had managed to weave its way through the naval battle surrounding the space station after parting from the *Silent Scream* and was now in position to enter one of the station's many hangars. Clan Plagueis had arrived only a short time ago to assist in the defense of the station, but the Collective had already begun blockading the *Nesolat*. The Ascendant Fleet had quickly worked to punch holes in the Collective's forces and land soldiers on the orbital platform. Due to the battlefield's unpredictable nature, Khryso has been one of many higher-ranking Plagueians asked to split off from their usual assignments and assist the boarding soldiers. Not everyone was able to make it through the blockade, so whenever any of them saw an opportunity, they had to take it.

Khryso carefully but quickly maneuvered the *Solidago* through the hangar shield and let M7 take over the landing processes as he prepared to exit. A pair of Plagueian shuttles was already parked in the hangar and dozens of Ravagers were patrolling the area in formation. The bright lights and ever-present gray forms throughout the room painted a sterile picture that belied the nature of the furious battle taking place elsewhere. As *Solidago* settled onto its struts, Khryso popped open the canopy and jumped down onto the ground, his eyes quickly locating the nearest officer.

"Captain," Khryso said, making his way over to a pair of officers who were crowded around a datapad, "what's the situation?"

"Lord Mallus." The captain, a Weequay male, turned suddenly to face Khryso, clearly caught a bit off guard. "Captain Slau, at your service." Khryso detected a slight unease coming from the Weequay. Perhaps things were going worse than the Sith realized.

After offering a quick salute, Slau went straight into his report. "The Collective already has control of Beta Quadrant and are gaining more ground every minute. Our efforts to try and stall their forces are proving minimally effective. We're drawing battle lines and extracting Brotherhood personnel trapped in the Collective controlled areas of the station. Evacuations are progressing slowly but surely."

Khryso nodded, gesturing for Slau to hand over his datapad. The captain did as ordered, and the Sith pressed his lips together as he glanced over the information there, transferring some of the more vital intel to his own datapad. It certainly looked grim. Judging by some of the reports that were queued on the side from those on the front lines, the Collective was employing some new strategies.

Since the Clan's encounter with the Collective at the Thuvis Shipyards, Khryso had taken the time to study up on the enemy. The Collective was a consistent threat to Plagueis and the Brotherhood as a whole and Khryso had been woefully unfamiliar with them, especially compared to his Clanmates. While he couldn't entirely wrap his mind around the group's philosophies, their goals seemed fairly straightforward.

Khryso had learned a lot throughout his life, growing up in the Empire under the tutelage of an Imperial Moff and travelling the stars as a mercenary. It seemed, however, that ever since he joined the Brotherhood, he was learning something new almost every day. The Force had opened up an entirely new avenue of understanding to him. He couldn't help but wonder what his childhood would have been like had he known back then. Would Moff Tadrin have accepted him or hated him even more?

Khryso realized his mind was beginning to wander and quickly refocused on the task at hand. Glancing back up at Slau, he began forming a plan in his mind. "Do you have a platoon available?"

"Yes, m'lord. They're yours to command."

Khryso shoved the datapad back into the captain's hands. "Have them form up at the hangar doors."

Without waiting for a response, the Chiss turned and began briskly walking towards the doors he had specified, pulling out his own datapad to organize the information he'd transferred and begin planning his strategy. As he arrived at the door, squads of Ravagers were beginning to step into formation, awaiting his orders. The specs on the platoon came up on his datapad and Khryso glanced over it as he synced his comm frequencies with his new platoon's. They were the Second Platoon of Company Gamma.III.b - not soldiers he had worked with before, but that didn't matter much when it came to Ravagers. They were all basically the same.

Only a couple of minutes passed before the entire platoon was present, ten squads of Ravagers standing at the ready. Khryso glanced down at his datapad one more time before tucking it into its pouch in his cape. He had only been to the *Nesolat* a few times during his tenure in the Shadow Academy, so he wasn't completely familiar with the facility. Fortunately, however, he'd been able to secure a map from the captain and had been able to plan out a route. There were several points of interest marked on the map: specific areas that the overseers of the Shadow

Academy had an investment in not falling. If the Collective managed to gain full control of the station, there was an abundance of knowledge that would fall into their hands.

Fortunately, there were multiple hangars around the station, where Plagueian and other Brotherhood forces had established command centers. It was already being reported that many Plagueians similar to Khryso in rank had made their entrances elsewhere and were working to secure different parts of the station. With that in mind, the Chiss was best off selecting a target that was closer to his current location.

Khryso settled on one of the priority points near the forming battle lines. With his marching orders decided, he relayed the information to his platoon's HUDs. Taking one last look out over the neatly arranged rows, Khryso afforded himself a moment to smile, the corner of his mouth twitching upward slightly. It was always satisfying to see things lined up neatly.

Moments later, they began a brisk march down the halls, staying in formation as Khryso led the way. Passing from the brightly lit hangar into the halls was like passing through a portal to another world. The shining white gave way to flashing red emergency lights while a soft siren echoed through the empty halls. The synchronized stomp of each booted foot was muffled just enough to avoid being obnoxious.

Khryso stretched his senses out before him, allowing his frustration with the Collective and their boldness to seep into his psyche. His body was aching for a fight, eager to release the pent-up anxiety and energy that often accompanied marches into battle. This section of the station was still and silent. Not the type of stillness that came with peace, but rather more akin to the eye of the storm. On the fringes of his awareness, Khryso could feel a battle raging elsewhere, all around him, in front and behind him. Nothing close, though.

The further they drew from the hangar staging area, the more keen Khryso's concentration became. The Ravagers behind him were focused and sharp, like always, not committing to the same fluctuation of emotions that were passing through the Sith. Khryso began to get more detailed and concerning senses of the battle that was taking place on the *Nesolat*. Captain Slau's information stream was running behind. It was as Khryso had suspected, the Collective seemed to be employing some sort of new strategy.

Like bright lights on the very periphery of his senses, Khryso could sense a few of his fellow Plagueian Sith. They were far, some closer than others, but none in immediate range. Most of them he was familiar with to some degree or another. In fact, one of them he nearly recognized. That is, until he realized the platoon was coming up on their destination. Khryso refocused on the area directly ahead now that they were closing in.

Their destination wasn't far, perhaps a dozen meters past the next bend. However, as they approached it, Khryso knew the battle had found them. Before they rounded the corner, his lightsaber had leaped into his hands and activated. The deep violet blade shimmered in the

station's red emergency lights, catching the first volley of blaster bolts that flew down the corridor.

"Get to cover!" Khryso shouted, gritting his teeth as he turned his focus on deflecting the blaster bolts.

At first, he thought it must be a whole platoon or more that they had encountered, but as he focused his senses forward towards the hastily stacked crates and boxes that filled the corridor in front of them, he was surprised to discover that it was only two squads of four soldiers each. The blaster fire was not relentless because of its quantity, but rather because of the extremely coordinated pattern of shot placement. Khryso couldn't advance any further as he had to keep his blade in constant motion, and his mind sunk into the Force to keep himself from getting hit. A shield of purple light seemed to form in front of him as Khryso gave himself fully over to the Force and his training, his lightsaber moving almost without thought.

Thankfully, it didn't take long for the Ravagers behind him to begin returning fire. Khryso had finally begun to catch glimpses of the shooters, keeping themselves concealed behind the cover they had set up. There wasn't enough space to accurately and consistently deflect their blaster bolts back towards them given Khryso's current level of concentration. The Sith did what he could to try and think up a counter-attack as the hallway quickly became filled with streaks of red blaster-fire. The space wasn't tiny, but with the sheer amount of blaster fire from his entire platoon added to the Collective soldier's barrage, it was beginning to feel claustrophobic.

Before Khryso could completely form a plan, one of the Collective soldiers stuck their head and arm over their cover just long enough to fire a wrist rocket. The missile streaked through the air, heading right towards Khryso. Furrowing his brow, Khryso had to commit to an action. Throwing himself backwards, the Sith took the moment of breathing room to stretch his Force awareness out behind him, gaining as much information as he could about where his Ravagers were positioned and what terrain they had to work with.

As it would happen, it wasn't much. The Ravagers had mostly taken cover in slight doorways and alcoves along the hallway along with the occasional support beam. The cover that the Collective had set out for themselves wasn't present for the Legion's use. As a result, only about a third of the platoon had actual cover while the majority had taken to crouching or going prone, sometimes against a wall, to lower their chances of being hit.

Khryso landed roughly on his back, wincing slightly but not wasting any time before rolling to the side. He had to move quickly to avoid being caught in the crossfire. The Chiss came back to his feet in a more advantageous position, hoping to use the Collective's own cover as a shield from this angle. His violet blade back up at the ready, Khryso projected his voice back towards the Ravagers.

"We outnumber them handily! Charge their position!"

It wasn't the wisest tactic and would likely cost more Ravagers than necessary, but Khryso wanted the scuffle over quickly before Collective reinforcements could arrive. If they could take the position the Collective soldiers had constructed, they could potentially hold off any additional enemy soldiers.

The Ravagers obeyed immediately like the finely trained men that they were. The Collective soldiers unleashed more explosive ordinance towards the charge, their blaster bolts also turning to fight the tide. As the Ravagers shouldered their way through the counter-assault, constantly firing back, the brilliant light of multiple explosions in the relatively dimly lit hallway forced Khryso to look away. Fortunately, the Collective soldiers had been forced to mostly ignore the Sith at this point. Khryso decided to take advantage of the opening, pulling his senses inward. His mounting anger and eagerness to end the conflict manifested in an invisible telekinetic grasp. Reaching out with one hand, Khryso began to focus on dismantling the assembled Collective cover, causing the crates and bins to begin tumbling backwards like a slow-motion avalanche.

With the platoon's pure bulk and Khryso's added support, they were able to break the Collective line. However, as soon as the Ravagers crossed the Collective's battle line, a small series of explosions broke the Plagueian charge. They must have planted some kind of mine trap just behind their cover. As Ravagers were thrown backwards and dismembered, Khryso realized there may be more traps than that. With some more direct support, perhaps he could keep the Platoon from stumbling into more of them.

The Sith broke off his telekinetic attack and drew his blaster, charging in to support the Ravagers. Leaping over the pile of shattered boxes and bodies, Khryso's lightsaber wove a defensive pattern in front of him as his senses once again stretched outward, searching for the enemy and any possible danger. To his slight relief, the remaining squad of four Collective soldiers was retreating down the hall. The Ravagers charge had managed to take out only one of the squads, but Khryso still took it as a victory. Just how effective the Collective soldiers had been caught him off guard long enough for the fleeing hostile forces to disappear around a corner.

For good measure, Khryso sent a couple of blaster bolts after them before turning to take in the state of his platoon. The sight was grim and the sudden silence that punctuated the scattered bodies did Khryso's mood no favors. Grimacing, he shook his head. The Collective soldiers had been too well prepared for them. There were fewer Ravagers standing than there were dead on the ground. Looking over the carnage, Khryso spotted the door that had led to their original target. One of the station's many artifact chambers. Molten metal glowed bright orange in a single line down the door's right side. Khryso deduced that the platoon had arrived just in time to stop the Collective from cutting their way into the room.

“Quickly,” Khryso said, turning to his still standing soldiers, “reconfigure this debris to form a defensive perimeter around this door.” He turned to a nearby squad leader. “I need a status report on the platoon. How bad were our losses and how much more can we take?”

The Ravagers all turned to immediately begin carrying out their orders. As they began dragging around bodies and twisted metal boxes, Khryso marched over to the half-sliced door and pounded firmly on it.

“This is Warrior Khryso Mallus of Clan Plagueis. Is anyone inside?”

There was no response after Khryso waited several seconds, so he holstered his pistol and began using his lightsaber to finish the job the Collective soldiers had started. After half a minute, he had cut a hole large enough to step through. As the metal fell away, however, several blaster bolts suddenly came from inside the door. Khryso easily caught them on his blade and deflected them into the floor as he stepped through.

The room was barely lit, with only a duo of lights in its far corners. It was quite large, but surprisingly empty. From the few marks on the walls and floor Khryso could make out, he had to guess that whatever had been in here was recently removed. The only remaining things were a trio of humanoids near the center of the room, a trio of large crates a bit larger than a wardrobe, and a small group of duffel bags. Everything was pushed into the darkened rear-middle of the room with the beings, all clad in casual dress-wear beneath long white coats. One of them, a Zabrak man with long auburn hair, was holding a blaster pistol aimed towards the door and now Khryso. As the Sith stepped in, however, the three breathed a quick sigh of relief as the Zabrak lowered the blaster. “Oh, great, you really are a Sith.” Khryso assumed the three must be Shadow Academy researchers.

Khryso narrowed his eyes. “What happened here?”

“We were starting our evacuation, packing up the most important equipment and artifacts we had here. However, when our guards came back for the final trip, they were ambushed by those Collective zealots. Thankfully, we were able to seal the door before they got in, but we ended up trapped.” The Zabrak motioned around the empty room. “Any chance you would be able to help us get the last of this stuff to the nearest hangar?”

Khryso deactivated his lightsaber and hung it on his belt, taking a moment to reach into the Force and read what he could off of the researchers. Nervous, scared, and anxious, with a hint of relief. They seemed genuine enough.

“That’s why I’m here,” he eventually said, sighing in resignation.

Just then his comm pinged, alerting him to the report he had requested from the Ravager squad leader. Pulling out his datapad, Khryso looked over the information. Thanks to what they had

scavenged from the fallen soldiers of both sides, the platoon was still fairly well equipped. However, their numbers were seriously lacking. Twenty-two deaths, five serious injuries. Which left them with only thirteen fully functioning Ravagers.

“We’ve got to move quickly,” he said, glancing up at the researchers.

They nodded in response. Khryso pulled out his commlink and opened the channel to the platoon.

“I need six men here to transport supplies. Everyone else, hold the line and prepare for a quick exit.”

Mere moments later, six Ravagers marched into the room. The Sith began organizing the Ravagers, researchers, and their loads, making sure everything and everyone was accounted for. As Khryso gave out orders and prepared for the escort, he began to feel the weight of the Force on his shoulders. The crates looked unassuming on the outside, gray corrugated durasteel formed into a rectangular prism, no marking or paint to liven them up. However, the Sith knew that whatever was inside those crates was likely much less innocuous. Khryso felt the need to withdraw himself from the Force slightly in order to keep his focus. After only a few short minutes, thankfully, they were ready to move.

The Ravagers went first, two to each crate. As the first pair passed through the door, now opened the normal way by the researchers, and the second began their passage through, blaster fire began to sound from the hallway. Khryso’s lightsaber was in his hand almost immediately as he glanced towards the researchers, who were carrying the duffel bags. Holding out a hand, he firmly commanded the troops to drop down just as an explosion rocked the room, engulfing the entrance in a ball of fire and shattering the crate that was passing through.

“Defensive positions!” Khryso shouted to the two Ravagers still in the room and alive, mentally chastising himself for not keeping his Force awareness active.

The Ravagers immediately set the crate down and took cover behind it, their blasters trained on the twisted, burning entry way. As Khryso motioned for the researchers to join the Ravagers in cover, he felt his eyes drawn to something. The crate that had been blown to pieces had scattered its contents across the room in various states of destruction. Sitting on the floor, just a few meters before Khryso, was a mask. It looked to be made of various strips of cloth crudely sewn together. A pair of simple goggles had been sewn in to allow the viewer vision while some kind of small breathing device was sewn in over the lower face. Silver shards of misshapen metal were sewn into the top of the head, forming a ring that resembled some kind of primitive, ugly crown.

Before he knew what he was doing, Khryso reached out towards the mask. It floated off the ground and into his hand. At this point he had forgotten about the battle raging just outside. Instead, he was sucked into his memories. A year ago, on Tatooine, when he had killed Lora and taken this very mask from its resting place. He had never expected to see the thing again. The same familiar cold claws dug into his psyche as he held it, but this time he found it much easier to resist. It felt weak and tired, like it couldn't muster the strength required to really manipulate someone like it had before.

For a moment, Khryso considered putting on the mask. What harm could there be in it? It's power had drained and he was a fully trained Sith now. Surely he was strong enough to resist its ill effects.

"Why do you care so much about that fracking mask?"

Lora's voice startled him. It wasn't something he had ever expected to hear again. Without even thinking, Khryso's lips formed the answer he had given her then.

"I don't. This mask is just a stepping stone to something greater."

His mind came back into focus. That's right, the mask was meaningless. Khryso quickly stashed the mask into one of his capes pockets and brought his saber up into a ready position as another explosion blasted away the wall. A squad of Collective soldiers jumped through, moving without stopping as they fired away at Khryso and the pair of Ravagers. Now framed by flames and the shadows of twisted metal, the soldiers were surprisingly imposing.

The Ravagers weren't bothered, however, quickly returning fire as Khryso began batting away blaster bolts. That mask and its presence here had brought up a slew of memories that left Khryso stewing in feelings of loss, anger, ambition, and even sorrow. He was ready for a fight.

As Khryso batted away blaster fire, he called on those powerful emotions and a memory that was now fresh in his mind. Back then he had used this power for the first time. Back then he was still an apprentice and fresh to the Sith Order. Now, Khryso was a Warrior and a proud Sith of Clan Plagueis. Reaching out with one hand, purple forks of lightning scattered outwards from Khryso's fingers, managing to ensnare two of the Collective soldiers in his assault. They crashed hard, collapsing onto the floor. Their life force didn't dissipate, however. Khryso got the feeling they'd be up in a matter of seconds.

Thankfully, the Ravagers were able to take advantage of the opening, permanently downing the two Collective soldiers. As a result, however, the other pair of hostiles finished off the Plagueian soldiers, leaving the researchers exposed. Khryso was beginning to feel fatigued as a result of his unexpected use of Force Lightning, but he still had enough strength to throw himself forward and call out to the researchers, managing to get between them and the Collective marines before they were killed.

With his back up against a wall, Khryso began to feel like he was on a timer. He was unsure how the battle outside of the room had gone, or even if it was still going. His reserves of energy were noticeably depleting and the Collective soldiers seemed perfectly synchronized as they dodged and juked around, keeping Khryso on the back foot with coordinated blaster fire that required his full attention. Khryso quickly maneuvered so that the researchers were between his back and the crate his Ravagers had been using as makeshift cover. He needed to come up with a plan to turn the tables before his fatigue began to overtake him.

The Force was with the Sith, however. He felt a familiar presence enter his periphery moments before the Collective soldiers seemed to take notice of a new arrival. Due to Khryso's position, with his back towards the door, he couldn't see who it was. However, as the two presences entered the room and quickly closed the gap, he didn't need his eyes to tell him who it was. Two figures came in from either side, moving like blurs as their red lightsabers left trails of light behind them. They were easily able to catch the Collective soldiers in a quick pinsir and finish them off.

"You look like you could use some help," Nefilee Ath'muss said, smirking as she deactivated her lightsaber.

Khryso couldn't help but smile slightly at his Devaronian friend, deactivating his own lightsaber. "Appreciated." He turned to the tall Trandoshan Sith who stood beside Nefilee. "Same to you, Warrior Jherdi."

Jherdi smiled toothily. "The Collective are easy prey. Perhaps you need to spend some more time in the Academy, Mallus."

Khryso's smile vanished. "Not today. Something was different about them." He shook his head. "That doesn't matter right now, though. Would you mind assisting me in evacuating these researchers and their supplies?"

"Of course not!" Nefilee said, glancing over at Jherdi for a moment. "Whaddaya need?"

As Khryso gave them a quick rundown of the current situation, he discovered that the pair had managed to repel additional Collective soldiers outside the room before entering, leaving three Ravagers alive out of the original platoon of forty. Khryso reconvened with his soldiers and the group began their march back towards the hangar, researchers and packages in tow. Khryso took the time to catch his breath and it was only when they were halfway back to the hangar that Khryso remembered he still had the mask in his pocket. His mind went back to his final conversation with Lora and their last exchange.

"If I ever come across a member of your family, I'll tell them your final words."

“Tell my father that I’m sorry.”

It was probably due time for him to deliver on that promise. For now, he had a war to fight. Once it was over, though, he had a message to deliver.