

Separation Anxiety

A Submission to the Competition:
[GJW XIV Phase 1] Fiction – In Opposition
Option 1



Written by
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38 ABY

***Nesolat* Platform, Orbit above Arx**

War had arrived once again. This time was different. This time, the Collective had struck in the Arx system — the Brotherhood’s home and seat of power.

Reiden Karr let out a slight snarl as he pulled his knife free from the throat of a Collective soldier and rose to his feet. Not long before, he and a small group of Scholae Palatinae troops had arrived at the Shadow Academy’s space station, the *Nesolat*. They had split into two teams; a group led by Reiden was to head in one direction, while a second group led by the Imperial Scholae Army’s Commander John Riley was to head in the other. The goal was for each to circle around the station and make their way toward the administrative section and help defend against the Collective assault and aid in the evacuation. The administrative section could detach from the main body of the station and descend from its orbital location down to the surface of Arx. Brotherhood forces were to buy time while preparations were made and the evacuation was finally underway.

The Palatinaean nodded to the group in front of him, which included his good friend Orion Gale and Captain Jake Sloane, another reliable member of Scholae’s armed forces. He signaled for them to move out, and they headed down the hall. Along the way they checked into rooms to clear them of any possible enemies or lingering students that hadn’t yet begun to evacuate. Reiden’s hand hovered above the panel to open one such door. He took a breath to steel himself and opened himself up to the Force. There was no initial malicious intent that he could perceive. He pressed his palm to the panel and the door slid open then pulled off to the side while a couple troops leveled their blasters at the open space. There was no blaster fire. He peered inside and found a trio of students scrambling among rows of artifacts and tomes.

“What are you doing here? The station is under attack! Get to the administrative section with everyone else and evacuate!” Reiden barked at them.

The trio jumped, seemingly not having noticed that the door opened. One of them spoke up. “But these are priceless resources, they must be saved.”

“Are they worth more than your lives?” Reiden waited for a response but all he got was a few shared looks between the trio and silence. He sighed, deciding to try a different approach. “Listen, I know how important the items housed here are. Just take only what you can carry in your arms and hurry to the evacuation point. There will be soldiers on the way that can help you get to the assigned areas. Don’t stop for anything, understand?”

The students nodded emphatically and scooped up various items into their arms and hurried from the room. Reiden shook his head in disbelief and exited the room to continue his journey. He was never one to get caught up in research, but he thought the students here would be smart enough to heed the alarms ringing out throughout the station signaling for evacuation.

Reiden was about to round a bend in the corridor when he could feel a sudden wave of malice coming from up ahead. He quickly signaled to his team that there were enemies and pulled his lightsaber from its holster, thumbing the activator. The viridian blade crackled to life as he sprang forward. The Force user quickly scanned and took note of enemy positions and ran to the opposite side of the hallway and planted a foot on the wall. He pushed off and launched himself at the closest Collective soldier — a Technocrat, judging by the cybernetic limbs. He brought his lightsaber to bear on the enemy and sliced through the arm that held a blaster. Both the arm and the weapon clattered to the floor as Reiden followed up with a quick stab through the Technocrat's torso. Reiden's team joined him and opened fire on the Collective soldiers.

While the Palatinaean wove his lightsaber through the air to deflect blaster bolts sent his way, he noticed something different about this selection of enemy forces. Throughout various encounters with the Collective, he recognized the similarity of some of them to foes faced in the past, there was a new addition clad in dark armor among the ones before him now. As he deflected shots and redirected some others, he took a moment to observe what he could of these new opponents as his team traded fire with the enemy. However, something seemed different about them — somehow off. Reiden jumped back and ducked around the bend to allow his team to fire unimpeded. Having fought with him before, they knew to fill in the gaps of fire coverage.

He studied the new enemy, noting their actions. There didn't seem to be any weak points where they aimed their blaster fire. When one moved, the others followed. When there was a weak point, it was immediately strengthened. They were fighting as a team, like nothing Reiden had seen before. It was different and it was unnerving to see it in action. He had to do something about it, and quickly. He spotted something on the belt of one of his teammates and a solution began to take shape.

"Cover!" Reiden shouted to his team. They quickly joined him, members covering the retreat of others until they were all safe — at least as safe as one could get while in the midst of battle. He grabbed a flash grenade from his teammate's belt and pulled the pin, tossing it at the Collective soldiers and shielding his eyes as he went for cover again.

There was the sharp noise of a detonation and a brilliant flash of light as the grenade went off. Reiden darted around the bend with Orion close on his heels. The bounty hunter and Scholae troops opened fire on the disoriented Collective combatants in a hail of blaster fire while Reiden moved on the others, opting for dispatching them quickly with stabs to their torsos. But a couple of the new type of soldiers recovered quicker. One raised his arm and pointed it at Reiden and a moment later a plume of smoke belched from behind his wrist gauntlet. It was a rocket, and it had just begun its flight straight at the Force user.

Frak, frak, frak, Reiden thought to himself.

He should have noted that while observing before, but it slipped his attention in the thick of it all. He thrust a hand forward and, with an effort of will, sent an invisible wave of the Force at the projectile. It wobbled a bit before being diverted into a wall. The explosion wasn't close enough to cause him harm, but Reiden knocked back, the flash of light and the smoke disorienting him and obscuring his vision. But he wasn't going to let that stop him. He forced himself to concentrate and recovered, stretching out his senses and letting the Force flow through him. He was able to get a rough idea of where his opponents were and used that as a guide as he began to move once more.

Orion noted a Technocrat rushing forward from the smoke and took aim. He squeezed the trigger and unleashed a trio of shots from his blaster rifle. The bolts tore through him. He and the Scholae troops continued to cover Reiden and press the assault.

Reiden leapt to another Technocrat and brought his lightsaber up in a block, catching the riot baton that had been swung at him. The plasma blade of his saber and the electrified tips of the baton crackled as they came into contact. From the force of the blow and the strength being employed against him, Reiden guessed that they were about an even match. Each tried to gain an advantage over the other, but to no avail. Thinking quickly, Reiden spun to the side while lessening the strength behind his own block, dipping the blade of his lightsaber. The baton came crashing down to the floor. Reiden then followed the movement with a quick slash across his foe's neck. His helmeted head toppled to the side and fell to the ground with a clatter. The Technocrat's body crumpled a moment later.

A warning rang out in Reiden's mind as he spun on his heel and dove to the floor, trusting his instincts and the call of the Force to save himself. Another one of the soldiers in dark armor had leveled his blaster at Reiden and opened fire. The blaster bolts barely missed Reiden as he had dropped low. Orion was quick to respond, sending an invisible blast from the repulsor on his vambrace that collided with the enemy, sending him reeling into the wall behind him. The bounty hunter and the Scholae troops let loose a flurry of blaster fire at the armored foe. The bolts tore through him, leaving smoking marks on his armored body.

Reiden gave a silent nod of thanks to his team as he rose to his feet and surveyed the scene as he slid his lightsaber into its holster. The detachment of Collective soldiers they had encountered now lay dead before them. He wasn't sure what the deal was with the new type of soldier, but he was willing to bet that more information would come to light in the future. For now, there were more pressing matters that required his attention. It was time to continue the evacuation effort.

Reiden and his team had continued their sweep of the Shadow Academy's station. It seemed that most rooms were empty, but some held more stragglers, tucked away and in need of urging to clear out. Some people were securing their research and various artifacts. Others were of the mind that they should stay and protect their artifacts and the knowledge held by the Shadow Academy. Others still were simply young and scared, likely unsure of what to do and deciding to stay put due to fear of making the wrong decision. It was something Reiden had seen many times before and would surely see again in the future. It was something he had done himself in the past, many years ago.

His mind flashed back to being home on Corellia when he was growing up, back when his parents were still alive. He remembered coming home from school to the welcoming arms of his mother and waiting for his father to return from work in the evening. He remembered some birthdays and special trips they had taken. Time seemed to flow quickly as he only caught glimpses of certain events—all of them precious memories. Suddenly he was fourteen years old, recalling the angry pounding on the door of his home one night. Fearful of what it could mean and wanting to keep their child safe, his parents had sent him to his room to stay out of sight. Little did he know that was the last time he would see them alive. From his room, he watched through a partially closed door as a small group of thugs berated and interrogated his father, even beating him when he wouldn't, or perhaps couldn't, give them the information they were after. His mother was threatened. Then after some time had passed and still not getting what he wanted, the leader shot and killed them both. Reiden was paralyzed by fear. But some part in the back of his mind knew that his parents would want him to stay safe, so he did his best to remain silent and in hiding. He watched as the thugs began to set fire to the house. While they were busy, Reiden crept to the window of his room and exited the only home he had ever known, running off into the cool night. Sadness had welled up inside of him as he did his best to hold back hot tears, but they came streaming down his cheeks. It was a mix of emotions, with sadness and fear perhaps being the most prominent, but there was plenty of anger there as well.

It was that same anger that brought Reiden back to the present. He was feeling it all over again. But this time would be different. This time he could do something about it. He had always known it would only be a matter of time before the Collective would set its sights on the Brotherhood's home system. What he didn't expect was that the attack would bring back all his old memories. After long coming to terms with what had happened in his past, that burning anger was with him once again. He would use that as fuel to keep him going, to do whatever it took so that the Collective didn't succeed in their goals, whatever they may be.

"Riley, how are things proceeding on your end?" Reiden spoke into his comlink.

"We're making good progress," the commander replied, though there was a tinge of annoyance to his voice. "We've almost reached the administrative section by now and things are going smoothly, for the most part. Some of these guys sure are stubborn with not wanting to leave their precious research behind, but in the end, they're listening to

reason. After all, the research isn't much good if they wind up dead. Besides, everything is kept so secret that the next person to continue the work would need to start all over again. They're a paranoid bunch."

Reiden let out a chuckle. "Yeah, that sounds about right from what I remember of my time in the Shadow Academy. Just continue the mission and let me know if anything happens."

"Will do, sir. Stay frosty out there."

"You too, Riley." Reiden severed the connection and looked at his team. "Okay, we're moving out again. Our sweep is almost complete and I bet the evacuation and separation is almost underway. Keep your eyes open and stay alert. We don't know what's waiting for us up ahead."

"No worries, Rei," Orion replied, a grin on his face. "We've got this."

"That's right. We've faced worse opposition before," Captain Sloane chimed in. "We'll get through it no problem."

"Damn straight, we will," Reiden said with a nod. It was reassuring to know that the two of them had his back, and he trusted the rest of the team to do their jobs to the best of their ability.

Reiden knew they could pull off their mission, but something was nagging at him. Tucked away in the back of his mind, a seed of doubt had been planted, though he was careful not to let it show to the others. Something seemed off. Their progress after the initial enemy engagement was almost unimpeded. It had been...easy. A sense of unease crept into his mind and nestled there. Over the years, he had learned to listen when his gut was telling him that something was wrong. He took a moment to become centered and grounded, immersing himself in the Force and allowing it to guide him as he continued the mission at hand.

Reiden and his team began their approach towards the administrative section of *Nesolat*. The hallway soon came into view. This one had crates and supplies stacked within in, likely items deemed important for the evacuation but that hadn't yet made it to their final destination. The Force user felt a change in the air. He stretched his senses out and found hostility awaiting them up ahead, mixed in with a certain calm determination — but no malice, oddly enough. He had the same feeling earlier when they ran into the Collective soldiers in dark armor. What's more, there seemed to be a group of them this time, maybe six if the feeling he got was accurate. They were in for another fight.

No sooner had Reiden thought that than the enemy soldiers appeared out of hiding. Both sides opened fire on each other. Blaster bolts whizzed by Reiden as he dodged, ducked, dipped, and dove his way closer, Orion covering him with bolts from his own blaster rifle. Reiden pulled his scatterblaster from his back and leveled it at the nearest enemy soldier, pulling the trigger. The multiple blasts from the barrel pummeled the dark armor, the force driving his opponent back. His hand racked the forestock and he quickly fired off another blast for good measure. Rethinking strategy, he returned the blaster to its place on his back and pulled out his lightsaber instead, activating it. The plasma blade erupted from the hilt and he swiped at an incoming blaster bolt, aiming it back at its source. The bolt struck the man wielding the blaster, but it was only a glancing blow. However, it gave Reiden the pause he needed. He extended his hand and sent a wave of invisible energy outward, pushing the enemy back.

The Collective soldiers didn't miss a beat. The group moved like a well-oiled machine — or perhaps more accurately, they moved like seasoned veterans that had seen years of combat together. When the first one was dispatched, another adjusted his aim to target the area that his ally had been covering. When the second was pushed back, one of them strafed the area with blaster fire. The Collective foes regrouped and took up defensive positions. Reiden and his team followed suit.

The two opposing forces traded fire. Ordinarily, this would be when Reiden would wrack his brain for a good solution to this mess, but there simply wasn't time. Luckily, he had noticed that the Collective group was clear of the blast doors that sealed the administrative section from the rest of the station.

Reiden activated his comlink and contacted the other team. "Riley, where are you right now?"

"At the end of the line, helping coordinate evacuation and securing everything at the administrative section. What do you need?" the commander responded.

"Tell them to seal all blast doors and detach the section now! We ran into more enemies and I don't want to run out of time or risk things going the wrong way. We need to finish what we set out to accomplish. I'm sure the evacuation is completed by now."

There was a pause on the other end. “They say everyone’s been taken to safety. They’ll begin separation now. Just hold on a little longer. I told my team to back you up and they’re on their way now. Hopefully they can cut across the administrative section in time and surprise these Collective fools from behind.”

“Appreciate it. Got to go now, getting shot at,” Reiden quipped, allowing himself a small grin.

One of the enemies had managed to get a better angle and opened fire on him. The Force user snapped his lightsaber up and batted away a blaster bolt that lanced at him, sending it back from whence it came. This time, the bolt struck home, hitting the Collective goon in the chest. Reiden then threw his lightsaber across the gap, guiding it by an invisible hand to arc around, cleaving the man in two before returning to his outstretched hand.

Orion let off a stream of fire from one of his vambraces at one of the enemies, the flames obscured the soldier’s view. The bounty hunter then pulled a thermal detonator from his belt and hurled it over to where the enemies were hunkered down. The ones that were farther away dove for safety while the one shielding his eyes wasn’t as lucky. His vision hadn’t recovered since the flames were still being sprayed. The detonator exploded and the left side of the man’s body was blown off, his remains crashing to the floor.

Three down, three to go, Reiden silently mused.

It was then that he noticed the blast doors beginning to close. Not far behind was the team Commander Riley had sent as back-up. Their blasters were raised and they opened fire on the enemy troops. Reiden looked at his own team and noted that one of his men had been killed and another was slumped against the wall, clutching his shoulder.

Riley’s team broke into a sprint as they closed the distance. Reiden pantomimed a pulling motion with his hand and the Collective soldiers jerked into the crates they were using for cover. They were momentarily disoriented — that was all he needed. Riley’s team jumped through the closing blast doors just in time as they sealed shut behind them.

Blaster fire streamed throughout the hallway in either direction. But the mission seemed to be a success. Now it was only a matter of time before one side triumphed over the other. Reiden sought out the Force and reached across the hallway to clamp an unseen hand around the throat of an enemy soldier. He squeezed tight. Even from a distance, he could hear the choking and gasping for breath, the man grasping at his neck, looking for something to pry free and seek relief. But it was futile and Reiden only applied more force behind the assault before making a jerking motion with his hand. The man’s neck suddenly bent sideways at an unnatural angle with an audible snapping sound. The struggling stopped.

Reiden and the rest of the Scholae forces advanced on the remaining two enemy combatants. Despite the odds being stacked against them, they would not relent. The

Force user deflected their fire away and into the wall. He extended tendrils of the Force and wrapped them around one soldier, yanking him to his feet and bringing him closer. He thrust out his lightsaber at the last moment, impaling the man. Reiden held him aloft, using him as a shield against the blaster fire from his comrade.

“Your side will never win,” Reiden sneered. He wasn’t sure if the man skewered on his lightsaber was alive or dead, and he didn’t care. He just had to let it be known that he would never stop fighting. He deactivated his saber, noticing that the firing had stopped.

Riley’s team had managed to join together and subdue the final member of the Collective strike team. His weapons were secured and his arms were in binders behind his back. Although the fight was over, he struggled in vain against his restraints.

“Oh, don’t worry, we won’t kill you just yet,” Reiden spoke calmly as he strode over. “After all, there’s always use for a prisoner, even one such as you. I’m sure we’ll be able to extract all kinds of useful information from you about what’s going on.”

Reiden felt a rumble beneath his feet. The administrative section must be decoupling and beginning the process of heading down to the surface of Arx. He took a moment to gaze at the blast doors, as if envisioning the scene unfolding behind them. He imagined the administrative section safely moving away from the station and the beginning of its journey. He imagined it touching down on Arx. He considered this a victory, although he was very much aware that the battle was far from over. Things were just getting started. But he would be ready, and so would his allies.

The all-too-familiar flickering flame of anger within himself was stoked to life once more. He was sure that it wouldn’t be long before it turned into a blazing rage — such was the pattern he had noticed over the years when it came to dealing with large-scale conflicts such as this. The Collective making such a bold move against the Brotherhood was a bit unnerving. Reiden was sure that it meant they were up to something big. He only hoped that their endgame could be determined before it was too late. But for now, it was all he could do to make sure that his prisoner was brought to those capable of extracting any potential information that could prove useful to the war effort. Time was of the essence.