City Under Seige

A Submission to the Competition:
[GJW XIV Phase II] Fiction – The Front Lines
Option 1

Written by
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38 ABY
Central Market, Eos City, Arx

Blaster fire rang through the air, punctuated by screams. The noise came from both civilians and military personnel alike, not to mention the enemy. The forces of the Collective had made their way to the surface and continued to press their attack. Word had broken out too late about the attack, so civilians were caught in the crossfire. Evacuation efforts were under way, but there would certainly be many lives lost due to collateral damage. Such was the unfortunate truth of wartime life.

Reiden Karr crouched for cover behind a parked landspeeder as blaster bolts screamed across the distance. He and his team had barely managed to evacuate *Nesolat* station in time to avoid the massive destruction that had occurred, narrowly escaping attacks as they made their way to the surface of Arx. When reports came in that Collective forces were now assaulting Eos City, some of the team jumped on any vehicles they could find unused at and around the spaceport and sped towards the new battlefield while others ran, not finding enough vehicles to use. It didn't matter how they made their way into the city because there was but one thing in their minds that was certain — time was of the essence to rush to defend the city, and even the planet itself.

The Palatinaean team was trading fire with the members of the Collective that were nearby. This was surely only just a part of their forces, but that didn't matter. Reiden knew he had to do all that he could to ensure that the city wasn't destroyed and the enemy forces were pushed back. It would be difficult considering the numbers on the Collective's side, but it was only a matter of time before more Brotherhood forces joined the fray and helped changed the tide of the battle.

Reiden popped up from behind the landspeeder and fired off a trio of shots from his blaster. The bolts struck home and the Collective soldier dropped to the ground. His allies didn't take too kindly to that and directed their fire at Reiden's location. But they, too, were silenced. Bolts lanced down from the right-hand side as Orion laid down covering fire a rooftop nearby. The Palatinaean troops joined in as well. More Collective bodies fell. The exchange of bolts continued.

Orion rolled to the side to evade some fire that was directed his way after revealing his position atop the roof. He got up and jumped down to the roof of a neighboring building which was slightly lower, tucking into a roll when his feet touched the ground, absorbing some of the shock. He made his way to the ledge and fired a few quick bursts of shots. They were more to buy time than actually hit anyone, but he got lucky and clipped the shoulder of one Technocrat. Even luckier, it was a cybernetic arm. Fluid began leaking from the mechanical limb. The Technocrat fought to bring the arm up to return fire on either Orion or the Scholae troops. But Orion would never know his true target — the man couldn't bring the arm up fully and, before he could try again, he was cut down in a hail of fire.

The bounty hunter fired the grapple from one of his vambraces at the roof and, once he made sure the line was secure, be backed over the edge and rappelled down the side of the building. He would pause occasionally to brace himself against the exterior wall and fire off shots with his blaster pistol to discourage the enemy from getting closer. The troops on the ground covered his descent with fire of their own. Orion quickly made his way to the bottom and disconnected the grapple line, swapping his pistol for his rifle and strafing the advancing enemy before diving for cover as the Collective soldiers returned fire.

The fighting continued, but something seemed off to Reiden. He called upon the Force and stretched his senses out. There were Collective soldiers coming at them from the front, but not as many as thought he remembered there being a moment ago. As he concentrated, he could feel more people coming closer somewhere off to the left.

There are alleyways in that direction. They must be trying to use them to their advantage and catch us off guard, Reiden mused silently.

"Axl, come with me, there's something we need to take care of," Reiden ordered.

"Knowing you, I doubt it is wise. Nevertheless, I will assist you," a mechanical voice responded. It belonged to Reiden's E-XD Infiltrator droid. While the droid hadn't been with Reiden long, it was helpful in situations where back up was a smart thing to have.

The Force user shook his head, allowing a grin to cross his lips, despite knowing that his helmet of his armor obscured it from sight. He reached out to the Force and sent out tendrils of unseen power to ensnare a landspeeder that was on the opposite side of the street. He pulled it closer, creating a makeshift place of cover. He and Axl crept low behind it, some of the Scholae troops following to take up a better position. With the view partially obscured now, Reiden and the droid continued to the other side of the street and took up positions on either side of the nearest alley. He pulled his scatterblaster from his back and stood ready. Axl switched into attack mode, blasters emerging from his wrists and his limbs lengthening. They were ready for the Collective soldiers that Reiden had sensed earlier; all that was left to do was to wait for their arrival.

It didn't take long. Trusting in his allies to do their job, Reiden was able to focus his attention on sensing the approaching enemies while the others exchanged fire with those in front of them. He waited until they were a little closer, but not yet at the exit to the alley. Then he gave a silent nod to Axl and the two sprang out of hiding from their corners, blasters leveled at the enemy. The droid was faster to react and opened fire. Reiden racked the pump on his weapon and blasted the closest enemy soldier, quickly repeating the motion and firing on the next, and then the next one after that. There were crates and pipes and other objects to use for cover within the alley, and everyone soon made use of whatever they could find.

Reiden lobbed a thermal detonator at the enemy forces. The sharp noise of detonation filled his ears, as did the screams of the Collective attackers. He placed his scatterblaster on his back once more and pulled out his lightsaber, the brilliant green blade springing to life as he activated it. The Force user himself sprang to life next. He jumped high into the air, vaulting over the Collective forces and landing behind them, his blade a blur of motion as he set to work dispatching any unfortunate enough to be in his path. Axl backed him up with a barrage of blaster fire, strafing the area.

"Commander Riley, it's time to press the attack," Reiden spoke into his comlink from behind cover, deflecting a blaster bolt that went wide from its target as it came at him. "The team they sent here was a small one. I'll be mopping them up shortly."

"That's music to my ears, Karr," the Scholae soldier replied. "These Collective goons seem to be falling like dominos, so it shouldn't be too difficult to push them back. I'll relay the orders to the men."

Reiden could hear the sound of blaster fire pick up as the Scholae team pushed back against the Collective forces.   Wanting to rejoin them, he took note of where the enemy soldiers were through the Force and moved out of cover, slashing and stabbing his foes. Axl continued blasting anyone that got too close. Once the final would-be ambusher had fallen, the two moved to rejoin the rest of their team and finish off the detachment of Collective soldiers that were attacking this section of the city.

Volleys of blaster fire were exchanged as each side sought to gain the advantage over the other. Reiden's team had taken a few hits, but they were using the environment to their advantage and knowledge of the area to their advantage. Collective soldiers fell, one by one, until there were no more. Before too long, a contingent of Scholae troops showed up to secure the area and it was time for Reiden and his team to continue on to the next area of the city.

Outside the Residential Area

The neatly arranged, identical buildings that made up the residential suites of Eos City loomed overhead as Reiden and his team made their way through the streets. From having toured the buildings before, Reiden knew that the interior was a match for the exterior of the structures — efficient and neat. Though the people dwelling within could put their own touches on things, it wasn't as true of an expression of the occupants as one could find elsewhere in the galaxy. Still, it was home to the people of Eos City, and right now that safety was being threatened.

Evacuation efforts were already underway by the time the Force user had arrived, but there were still signs of battle. Blaster fire and screams and shouts filled the air. The acrid smell of smoke reached Reiden's nostrils, but it was faint, likely coming from somewhere in the distance. Reiden was beginning to wonder if perhaps the fighting hadn't yet come to this part of the city. His mind began to replay the images he'd seen in this battle and previous ones over the years. He had borne witness to so much pain and tragedy; it was disheartening to know that now it was affecting the heart of the Brotherhood, especially given the recent battles Scholae Palatinae had been through on the home front and the betrayal and death of its previous Consul during the last encounter with the Collective. Reiden still couldn't believe that Elincia had turned on them, not after everything she had done to rise to power. He knew deep down in his gut that he was missing something, that there was more to the story — the details released about the events never really *felt* right to him, but there wasn't much he could do about it, especially at this point in time.

An explosion rocked the ground underfoot, coming from somewhere ahead of them. Reiden's mind had been so preoccupied with his thoughts that the Force hadn't been able to warn him of the danger beforehand. Luckily nobody had been injured, but it was still a bit too close for comfort. Reiden's team fanned out and took up defensive positions while he joined them, but his eyes were scanning the area, trying to locate the enemy and take note of everything in the vicinity. He spotted a line of Collective soldiers charging, already opening fire. Blaster bolts leapt from the barrels of their weapons and flew across the distance.

The Scholae troops returned fire. Orion had already set up his blaster rifle on the hood of a speeder, gazing through the scope. He lined up a shot and took in a breath, slowly letting it out as he squeezed the trigger. One Collective soldier's head snapped back as a blaster bolt burned through his helmet and he crumpled to the ground in a heap. Orion repeated the process with the calmness and precision of a well-practiced action, making quick work of a couple more enemy soldiers before ducking for cover. Reiden fired off a volley of shots from his blaster as well before exchanging it for his lightsaber.

The Force user skillfully worked the plasma blade to send some bolts back to their source. Screams of pain could be heard as some soldiers clutched the wounds that were inflicted upon them, while others weren't as lucky and were struck dead by the returned

bolts. Reiden began to move forward, his blade in constant motion while the Scholae troops covered his advance, careful to make sure he wasn't caught in the crossfire. He danced among the blaster bolts, cutting down what Collective soldiers he could while his team took care of the others. The fighting was beginning to wear him down, but he pushed himself through it — there was still work to be done here. For the time being, he had no other choice but to continue onward and hope that Brotherhood reinforcements would arrive on the scene before long to drive the forces of the Collective back and protect the city.

Reiden jumped back to rejoin his team. They increased their barrage of blaster bolts now that area ahead was clear. A grunt of effort passed his lips as the Force user hurled his lightsaber through the air at the enemy ranks. Bodies fell to the ground as their lives were extinguished. The weapon spun about, slicing into the soldiers, carving an arcing path as it made its way through them before returning to Reiden's outstretched hand.

There must be a way to finish this faster, Reiden thought to himself. His mind raced as he deflected more blaster bolts, sending some back at the enemy. A thought bubbled to the surface and he latched onto it, deciding to give it a chance.

The Palatinaean took a moment to concentrate and made a sweeping motion with his arms as he brought them together in front of him. A group of Collective soldiers were thrown together in a mass, struggling to move. But Reiden held them tight in a telekinetic vice.

"Focus your fire on the cluster there!" he ordered, straining to hold them in place.

The Scholae troops seized the advantage and opened fire. Some covered the other Collective soldiers, but most targeted the cluster. Out of the corner of his eye, Reiden saw Orion throw a thermal detonator at the writhing mass of bodies. The ensuing explosion took care of most of them while the blaster fire took care of the rest. Reiden had long ago learned to trust in his instincts and that trust had once again paid off — a good chunk of the Collective forces now lay dead and more were injured.

The Force user's mind rang out in warning. He could sense rage and hostility coming from the right, so he spun on his heel to see what the new threat was. A Collective soldier had broken from the others and was charging at him, firing his blaster. Reiden snapped his lightsaber up and deflected the bolts away harmlessly before rushing over. In one smooth motion he brought his lightsaber up and slashed it across the man's neck, severing his head. Reiden had already jumped back to his team before it even hit the ground.

The thrum of an engine caught his attention, accompanied by blaster fire and a streak of fire and smoke as a missile flew at the Collective soldiers. The sound of the impact was deafening and Reiden shielded his eyes from the brilliant explosion. He turned his gaze to the source of the missile and spotted hover tanks bearing the seal of Scholae

Palatinae and members of the Imperial Scholae Army on foot beside them. It seemed like the reinforcements had arrived at last. The remaining members of Reiden's team let out cheers of joy. With morale boosted by the new support, they redoubled their efforts, advancing on the Collective soldiers.

A trooper bearing a pauldron signifying the rank of captain climbed out of one of the tanks, being replaced by another soldier on the ground beside it. The man began to make his way over. Curious, Reiden remained behind, turning his attention to the incoming fire from the Collective and doing his best to deflect it away from the new arrivals.

"I thought you could use a hand over here, so I requested that we bring you guys some back up once we reached the surface," the trooper said. Even though the man wore a helmet, Reiden could still make out a trace of amusement in his voice. Not only that, but it was someone he knew. "It was a rough journey, but we made it out fine."

"Nice of you to finally join the fight, Sloane. I was wondering if you'd ever show up or if you'd had enough action back on the station," Reiden quipped, laughing. "Ready to give these guys hell?"

"Always," Sloane replied. "Let's get to it."

With nothing more than a nod to his ally, Reiden turned back to the fighting and charged forward. Sloane and the other troops followed suit, opening fire with their blaster rifles. Reiden engaged the closest enemy and swept his lightsaber across the man's legs before stabbing him through the chest. Infusing his body with the Force, he moved faster, making quick work of the enemies nearby. Sloane was right there with him, making sure nobody got too close or snuck up behind him. Reiden allowed a small smile to form. It was always good to have those you could count on at times like this, and after four years of serving together, he knew he could trust Sloane to handle whatever was thrown his way.

The Scholae forces continued to push forward. Orion let off a blast of fire from his flamethrower, driving a small group of enemy soldiers back and obscuring their vision. Captain Sloane and the others took advantage of the lull in opposing fire to cut them down in a hail of blaster bolts. Reiden threw his lightsaber once again, this time impaling a Collective soldier with it before calling it back. He spun to the side and cleaved through another that managed to get within striking distance.

It wasn't long before Reiden and his team, along with the new reinforcements, had managed to clear out the Collective forces from this section of the residential district. He waved the tanks and the majority of the Scholae force onward, deciding that the rest should stay back to make sure any civilians that hadn't been evacuated were safe and tend to the wounded. Even if there was nothing they could do, at the very least it would give him some time to recover from the exertion.

The Force user leaned back against the wall of one of the buildings, removing his helmet and breathing out a heavy sigh. He knew that the war wasn't over, but he figured it wouldn't hurt to take a small break. The day had been draining. There would be more to come soon enough, he was sure of it. And even further into the future would be even more battles — whether the enemy was the Collective or some other foe. There would always be another fight. And, truth be told, he was beginning to grow weary of it. Even so, he was part of a team and there were people that counted on him. If there was a need for him, he would answer that call — it was the least he could do for the people that had given him a home again.

Orion and Captain Sloane had made their way over to him. The bounty hunter cocked an eyebrow at his friend, a crooked grin on his face. "You ready to get back to business there? You do know that even if you stop fighting, you still have to pay me, right?"

"If you want to get paid, you better start pulling your weight," Reiden shot back, returning the grin. A thought came to mind, and the grin grew wider. "You know what? I bet I can rack up more kills than you."

"Oh, you're on, *Runt*," the bounty hunter teased. It was a nickname another old friend had given Reiden years ago, but it still caused some irritation to hear it, especially when it was someone else saying it.

"That settles it. I'm docking your pay. Unless your count can beat mine," Reiden taunted, pulling his helmet on with a smirk.

The trio joined the rest of the team that had remained behind to do a quick sweep of the building. A few civilians needed some medical attention, but it was nothing serious. The medic treated them and sent them on their way to safety. Together, the team set out deeper into the city. There was more work to be done and the fight was just getting started.