

Floor VII Observation Section Nesolat
Platform, High Orbit Arx System —
Brotherhood Territory

The traditionally quiet stillness of *Nesolat Platform* had been broken. Once a place of learning, the war-torn facility now sang. Its thick durasteel armoring rang with an imperfect beat of fire against its hull. The throbbing, aching thuds of blaster fire dissipating against the *Nesolat's* protective barrier was relentless, like a nightmarish heartbeat reminding all onboard of the dire circumstances they found themselves in.

Throughout the station, that beat was punctuated with periodic sounds of explosions from within; fallen Collective agents meeting their end somewhere within its halls. The advanced assault team from the Aliso system had not yet encountered any enemy forces, but there had been plenty of bodies. Among them were the bodies of students and faculty, some only indiscernible charred chunks of what had once been a living person.

"I have a bad feeling about this," Khryso Mallus said as he stepped over yet another body. His grip on his lightsaber tightened.

"Something is very wrong with all of this," Liandry agreed. Behind them, a dozen of their fellow clanmates muttered in agreement. The Collective was storming the station by force, yet like ghosts, they could not be found. Only the fallout of their presence remained.

As they rounded a corner, they got their first taste of the conflict within: a hail of blaster fire immediately pushed them back.

Seconds later the blaster fire ended.

"Hold your fire! I said *hold* damn it! Those aren't the Collective," a rough voice shouted. The Plagueians peered around the corner.

"It's fine, you can come out. We're just a bit eager for some action," Aleck Winters yelled. The man gestured around to the Sadowan forces behind him.

"So you haven't seen any Collective either?" Khryso asked as he approached. The Sadowans all shook their heads.

"Eerie, isn't it?" Aleck responded.

Floor XIX Administrative Section

Nesolat Platform Arx System

The assault teams sent by Arcona, Odan-Urr, and Scholae Palatinae did not find their situation just a section and several floors away so eerie.

Each had arrived at *Nesolat Platform* in different locations within the Administrative section. Yet, through the freakishly and unnaturally coordinated offensive by the Collective soldiers, all of the Clan forces had found themselves herded together on floor nineteen. Any sense of animosity between the different Clans was ignored in the face of impending death by Collective blaster fire.

"If we don't work together, we are going to all die here!" Agate Gua'lara yelled as she slid next to a wounded Arconan soldier to administer some bacta.

"Brilliant deduction," Aru Law yelled back, deflecting an oncoming blaster bolt away from the Odanite's head. It hit one of the Collective soldiers straight in the chest. The soldier fell forward dead as, in unison, those nearest him stepped away, neatly avoiding the explosion that followed. None of the Collective seemed surprised by this, nor did they seem bothered by the chunks of their compatriot that now stuck to their armor.

From further behind the front line of different Clans' soldiers actively engaged with the Collective, Xendar Thendaris let out a surprised yell.

"We've got students and researchers back here!"

After checking the pulse of countless dead, said students and researchers were the only living ones that had been found thus far. Though their mission to retake the platform was their priority, it was a welcome morale boost to find someone alive.

"We shall escort them to safety!" the hefty, modulated voice of Stres'tron'garmis said.

"This way, please!"

He looked down the hallway behind them, considering what he knew of traditional station layouts. He picked what he thought was a likely choice, more so due to the emergency exit lights near it.

The Chiss took his power hammer and, with a mighty swing followed by a second, destroyed the barred door, giving them an opening for a retreat.

