

Escape From Tokare

A Submission to the Competition:
[The Uprising of the Force] Fiction 2: Very Important Pilot



Written by
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38 ABY

Tokare, The Republic of the Force, Seraph

Reiden listened carefully to the transmission being relayed to him from a ship in orbit. “Understood. I’ll do what I can to see this through. I’ll be in touch when I can.” He terminated the connection and sighed quietly.

“What’s up, Rei?” Orion asked.

“It looks like our job here isn’t done.” He glanced at his hand and removed the ring bearing the seal of Scholae Palatinae, depositing it in his pocket. “There’s a contact we need to meet here. We’re to get him out of TRF and bring him back home, but we can’t be caught. This can’t be connected to either us or TRF, apparently.”

“That sounds like it could be fun. Count me in,” the bounty hunter said with a grin. “Do you have any other information, or maybe a plan?”

The Force stood there and rubbed his chin in thought, letting the silence stretch between them. He had been thinking of possible solutions even before ending the transmission. “I just might have something in mind, yeah. It’s not as straightforward as I’d usually like, but it could work.”

“Care to share with the rest of the class?”

Reiden shot him a look that was a mixture of annoyance and amusement. “It’s unlikely that this contact would remain in the capital too much longer given everything going on right now. There’s too much confusion, panic, and suspicion. It makes for a good cover, but security is no doubt tightened. We’ll need a cover story. With our skills, we could easily pass for somebody’s private security.”

Orion nodded. “That makes sense. Anything else?”

“We have an idea of where the contact will be and have an image to use as reference. We’re in a good location being near the border of Elaya. We say we’re escorting a client back home. Once there, we head to the island controlled by the United Corporations of Elaya. They deal with every nation, so it wouldn’t be too difficult to get passage to Ragnath from there. Land in the capital or Ryax and make our way home via Maqor. Remember that little fishing village you went to last year to catch the traitor?”

“Yeah, it was called Kima. I met Grex there — he told me he had all sorts of stories about you.”

Reiden laughed at the mention of his Lasat friend. “That’s the one. Anyway, we head there since it’s a popular vacation spot. But we’re going to need some help in pulling this off.”

“I think I know the person you have in mind. Should we get started?”

The Palatinaean merely nodded then contacted Kal Arias to fill him in on the plan. Luckily the slicer was already on the planet dealing with a consulting job, so it would be easy to meet up. Reiden spent the next few minutes explaining his idea to Kal and answering his questions.

“Think you can do it?”

“Aye. Shouldn’t be too hard,” the Ryn responded. “I can probably score us a transport to use, too.”

“Good, we’ll meet you as soon as we can at the location I sent you.”

Reiden severed the connection and gave Orion a nod that they were good to go. Together, they made their way through the streets of Tokare. The sidewalks were bustling with people going about their daily business, but it looked like they were merely going through the motions, their faces stricken with grief. Reiden was sure that it was due to the news that their beloved leader, Master Troykal Berckur, was dead, murdered by some unknown party.

While the nation may not have been a wealthy one, Reiden admired the history present as he wound his way through the capital city. Here was a group of people that were bound together by similar beliefs and steeped in tradition. Many of those he passed by even wore the robes typical of the Jedi. Still, he couldn’t be caught off-guard, so he kept his eyes open and his senses on alert for anything suspicious.

It wasn’t long before they reached their destination: a park dedicated to the ancient Jedi Master that had founded the nation thousands of years ago. Time and the elements had worn away the name carved into stone pillars that turned into a grand archway that marked the entrance, but Reiden had to assume it was someone important to the history of the nation, perhaps even the founder himself. Intelligence had reported that their contact frequented this park both to relax and pay respect to the founder and the rest of the past of the nation.

The two continued through the archway and wound their way along a circuitous path through the park. Before long, they found themselves before a grand fountain. At its center was an artfully carved stone statue of a wizened old man in traditional Jedi robes. His arms were outstretched and his head tilted back as if looking up at the sky, and a smile on his face. Reiden immediately recognized the countenance as that of Master Berckur. Small clutches of people were scattered around the fountain. Some were silent, while others openly wept for their deceased leader. Others still clustered together to talk in hushed tones. They were probably wondering how such a thing could have happened and who might be responsible for such an atrocity.

Off to one side of the fountain, away from most of the other people, Reiden spotted another familiar face. He quickly checked his datapad and confirmed that he had found their contact. The man was sitting on a small, round platform that was raised from the ground by about a foot or so. He appeared to be meditating. He strode over to the man. Orion followed behind, casting his gaze around, keeping watch for any problems. This served a dual purpose as it also lent credence to the cover they had decided upon.

“Sir, we’re here to escort you home now,” Reiden said to the man. He lowered his voice so anyone nearby wouldn’t overhear. “Rhono Vega?” The man had opened his eyes and looked annoyed, but gave the slightest of nods. “We’ve been sent by Scholae Palatinae to collect you. Please, come with us. There’s not much time.”

The man had opened his eyes when Reiden first spoke. His initial expression quickly shifted to understanding. He nodded and stood, brushing off the front of his clothing. “Very well, let’s get going.”

Orion brought up the rear as the trio began heading towards the opposite end of the park. His head was on a swivel, casting a menacing look to anyone that paid too much attention. His hand was resting on the butt of his blaster for added emphasis.

“So, what’s the deal here?” the bounty hunter asked once they were out of earshot of the other people in the park. “What are you so important?”

“You know the group most likely responsible for the death of Master Berckur, the Wards of the Force?” Vega began. “They’re the reason why my family died years ago during their last strike at those in power here. Of course, their plan failed, but the collateral damage was still there. The investigation revealed that someone incorrectly mixed components in an explosive and it went off early.”

“I’m sorry to hear that,” Reiden said. He meant the words, but something wasn’t adding up. “But what does that have to do with our mission here?”

“I have information that I can provide that proves your side had nothing to do with it. I have some pull here, if only I can get the right people to listen. But I can’t say any more than that until we’re at our destination. It’s not safe here.”

“Yes, we know,” the Palatinaean replied. “We have a plan, so stay close to us. From here on out, we’re your bodyguards and you’re our client — an Elayan businessman being escorted back home. Understand?”

“I’m not sure my clothes will be good at selling that. They’re not the robes most people around here wear, but they don’t scream business either.”

“Vacation maybe?” Orion suggested.

“We’ll take care of that, don’t worry. I have a plan,” Reiden assured the man. “For now, let’s keep going. We need to get out of the capital first, and then make our way over to the border.”

“Okay, I’ll trust you guys on this,” Vega said after a moment.

The trio eventually made their way out of the bounds of the capital and into the smaller cities and towns that surrounded it. They weren't paid much mind as they traveled. Everyone was too concerned with getting from one place to another quickly and safely. It seemed as though the assassination had made people more cautious as they went about their day-to-day lives. There was certainly an increased security presence, just as Reiden had thought there might be. But never did they give the group more than a cursory look. To their credit, they did their best to mimic the quickly-moving pace of the other citizens around them in hopes of blending in better.

As they went farther and farther from the capital, the cities became increasingly sparsely populated, or so it seemed at least. Many businesses seemed to have been shut down and boarded up. Such was the case in areas with similar financial circumstances. Unfortunate as it was, it made a certain amount of sense that the most wealth would be located in and around the capital city. Luckily, such old businesses made the perfect meeting places.

With fewer people around, the group had more freedom of movement. They entered one dark and dusty building that had once held a restaurant of some kind. As they ventured further inside, a soft light could be seen coming from the back. They headed towards it and rounded a corner. Waiting for them was Kal Arias, sitting atop an abandoned storage crate with a briefcase and a pack on the floor beside him.

"I was startin' to wonder when you guys'd finally show up. Making me wait here for so long, what's wrong with you people?" the Ryn complained with a grin. There was no hiding his Coruscanti lilt as he spoke. It always became more pronounced when he was irritated.

"We got here as soon as we could, under the circumstances," Reiden explained. He smiled. "It's good to see you again. Do you have what we need?"

"Aye, that I do," Kal replied, nudging the pack on the floor with his foot. "We've got a generic business briefcase and typical business attire suitable for someone from Elaya."

"See, Rei told you we had it covered," Orion said to Vega.

"What about that other matter?" Reiden asked.

"Speeder's parked around back," Kal said with a jerk of his thumb towards the rear of the building. "Not the best available, but it was the best I could do on short notice and without attracting too much attention. But it'll get the job done, no problem. Although I think maybe Orion should drive it? He's better with that sort of thing and we don't know what we'll run into."

"Sounds good to me," the bounty hunter responded, a glint of amusement in his eyes.

Vega stepped away and changed, then returned to the group. “Now what? What’s the plan from here?”

“Take it one step at a time. We’ll take the speeder and get through the Sahro Desert and across the border. Hopefully there won’t be much trouble, but be prepared for anything. I wouldn’t be surprised if there’s a security presence at borders given everything going on. But first, let’s take a moment to rest a bit.”

Reiden and Orion spent the next few minutes checking their weapons and ensuring they were in proper working order. Kal studied something on his datapad and immersed himself in a spirited discussion with his probe droid, his chitinous nose beeping and whistling to the little droid. Vega simply paced back and forth, clearly worried about how they would make their escape.

Reiden checked the time and cleared his throat. “Okay, I think we should head out now. Kal, you said the speeder is out back? Show us the way.”

The Ryn nodded and led the group to the back of the building and out a rear door. What waited for them beyond looked to be a loading space for deliveries while the restaurant was still in business. Now, however, it fell to disuse and was covered in dirt and dust. Parked where cargo transports would usually stop was an older model landspeeder. Reiden recognized it as a Gian Speeder, although it seemed to be a civilian model as the blasters with which it was normally equipped were missing from this one. With its ovoid shape, he couldn’t help but be reminded of the airspeeders he had seen on Coruscant while living there years ago.

Orion hopped into the pilot’s seat while Vega and Kal took the back seat. Reiden took his spot up front next to Orion in what would have been the gunner’s seat. “Let’s head out. Stay sharp and keep your eyes peeled for anything.”

Orion guided the craft out of the loading area and onto the street. He pointed the speeder in the direction they’d need to take to reach the desert and sped off. As they got farther from the city, the presence of buildings became sparse. Soon vegetation was the most prevalent thing. But even that quickly gave way to drier areas, and then sand took its place.

The Sahro Desert stretched ahead, reaching as far as the eye could see. With the way open, Orion was able to push the limits of the vehicle’s speed. But it didn’t last. Shapes began to take form in the distance. Reiden took out his electrobinoculars and peered through them. A checkpoint had been set up ahead. They hadn’t reached the border yet and the people manning the station wore clothing common to The Republic of the Force. As the checkpoint came into view, Orion slowed the landspeeder. They came to a stop several yards before the barricade. Two men were stationed there. One stood in the speeder’s path with a blaster leveled at the occupants. The other approached the side of the vehicle, eyeing them suspiciously.

“What business do you have here?” the guard asked.

“Just taking our client home after the ruckus in the capital,” Orion said with a shrug.

“Do you have any identification?”

“We don’t have time for this. Look, the boss here,” Kal indicated Vega, “is an important man in the United Corporations of Elaya, and we’re very busy. Can we please get going? We’ve got a tight schedule to maintain and we’re already running a bit behind. Can we please get going?” Vega did his best to look displeased and made a show of glancing at his chronometer, huffing in exaggerated annoyance.

“I said I’d like to see some identification. Now,” the guard repeated.

“You don’t need to see our identification,” Reiden said with a subtle wave of his hand. The guard stood there a moment, looking unsure.

“We’ve already shown you our identification,” Reiden pressed, making another wave of his hand. “Everything is in order.”

That seemed to do the trick. The guard’s posture changed, relaxing a bit from the rigid stance he had before, giving the group a nod of his head. “Everything looks to be in order here. You’re free to go on.” He waved to the other guard to stand down. The men returned to their post and moved the barricade out of the way, allowing the group to proceed onward.

After a safe enough distance from the checkpoint, Orion once again pushed the speeder to the upper limits of speed that the craft allowed. They needed to make up for the time lost from being stopped, and the sooner they were able to reach UCE territory the better. Still, Reiden remained on alert, opening himself up to the Force and stretching out his senses. Not wanting to rely solely on the Force, he occasionally scanned the horizon with his electrobinoculars.

Before long, their speed enabled them to reach the border to Elaya. This proved to be an easier deal than leaving TRF’s borders. Without the chaos of an assassinated leader, the bored guards they encountered practically waved them through, only giving them a cursory inspection.

Maybe they deal with business people in a rush a lot, Reiden mused to himself. He was just glad the ruse had held up.

The speeder slowed as they reached the edge of the desert and grew nearer to the closest city within Elaya's territory. They cruised along the streets, taking in the sights that greeted them. In contrast to what The Republic of the Force held, Elaya's buildings were more ornate in some instances, and certainly more modern in appearance. That much made sense, as they didn't have the influence of the Jedi Order in their architecture. The buildings were of differing styles and employed various materials such as stone, brick, and transparisteel. People milled about, seemingly oblivious to the fact that a head of state had been assassinated just across the border.

Reiden checked his datapad, pulling up a map of the area. Their current position wasn't far from the port they needed to reach. From there it would be a simple matter of joining plenty of other people on one of many daily shuttle trips from the shores of Elaya to the island held by the United Corporations of Elaya. The independent island was a hub of commerce with a wide range of business interests. They could easily get lost among the people there if anyone were to follow them.

Orion guided the speeder to a stop in the designated parking area outside the shuttle terminal. The group piled out and headed inside. Having planned ahead, Reiden had already purchased the tickets they would need to board the shuttle and downloaded them to his datapad. He flashed the device at an automated scanner and they entered the shuttle. Minutes later, the tightly-controlled schedule of flights indicated that it was time to take off.

The craft lifted off and powered through the air. Reiden glanced out the window beside him, taking in the view of the water. The clear, deep blue color reminded him of being on vacation. It was unfortunate that wasn't the case now, but perhaps he could relax again before too long.

Maybe once the rebuilding efforts the clan was undergoing have progressed further, he told himself. There's still a lot of work left to do, and I can still help.

As soon as their shuttle landed, the group wasted no time in making their way to the starport. Time was of the essence, but they made sure to stick to the speed at which the surrounding people moved to ensure they didn't arouse suspicion. Once at the starport, they booked passage to UCE's Ragnath capital of Ryax without much fuss. They boarded the shuttle and waited as the rest of the passengers took their seats. A few minutes later, the ship had left orbit and powered through space towards the planet's moon.

Ragnath

The journey to Ryax had gone smoothly. Reiden and his group disembarked from the shuttle and ventured out of the starport where the craft had landed. From where the starport was located, he could already see the ocean off in the distance. It felt good to be closer to home, their journey almost done.

They headed towards the coast, searching for the routine shuttles that made trips to Maqor. It didn't take long for them to see a cluster of people that looked like tourists milling around some stalls in the open. Various food and drink items could be purchased there, and beyond them lay the shuttles they sought. They stopped for something to eat, the decision helping them blend in with the rest of the people there. Any little bit could help further the facade they were putting up for everyone else to view.

Reiden took a moment to separate from the others and found a quiet, private space. He activated his comlink and contacted Imperial Intelligence, through which he was transferred to the Empress.

"Reiden, it's good to hear from you," the voice of Shadow Nighthunter issued forth from the device. "What do you have to report?"

"We've got the asset with us and will soon be making our way into Scholae territory," he answered. "Specifically, we'll be in a little coastal village on Maqor called Kima. You can find its location in my old mission reports. If you could have transport there waiting for us, that would help speed things up so we can get back to Caelestis City faster. The asset has said he won't reveal any information until he's arrived safely."

"I understand. I'll be sure to have a transport waiting for you by the time you arrive on our shores," the Empress stated.

"I'll reach out again when we're en route to the capital, then," he assured her. "It shouldn't be long before we get there."

"Very good. I'll be waiting to hear from you and our new contact. Good work, Reiden."

"Thank you, Shadow. For the Empire," he terminated the connection and moved to rejoin his group.

It seemed as though the hard part of their journey was now over and it would be a simple matter of getting back to Scholae territory. Reiden only hoped that all the effort they had put in to get Vega out of Tokare and onto Ragnath would prove fruitful. One thing was certain: there could be a fight on their hands in the near future, and they had to be ready for it with whatever information they could have at their disposal. With any luck, they would be able to convince TRF leadership that they had no involvement in the assassination of Master Berckur and then route out the true culprits. His gaze settled on Vega. Something told him that the man would indeed be able to help them in this matter, and that was enough for him. He had long ago learned to trust his instincts, and they had yet to let him down.