

Ghosts of the Past

A Submission to the Competition:
[The Uprising of the Force] Fiction: Your Eyes Only
Prompt 1



Written by
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38 ABY

Tokare, The Republic of the Force, Seraph

When it rains, it pours.

That was Reiden's initial thought when he had been briefed on the situation developing in the Republic of the Force. As if it weren't bad enough that the clan and its members were still rebuilding and regrouping after the previous battle with the Collective and the attacks in Caelestis City, now it seemed that some unknown entity had assassinated the leader of the Republic, Master Troykal Berckur.

Of course, rumors had filtered in through Imperial Intelligence that there was possible Scholae involvement, but Reiden knew better. They wouldn't do such a thing in the first place — they were not enemies with the Republic and there was no benefit in taking such action. Still, something was amiss and Empress Nighthunter wanted members of the clan to do what they could to figure out what that was.

Wanting to be of some use, Reiden had quickly volunteered to see what he could learn. He would have to be careful, but he felt confident that he'd come away with something. To ensure that he didn't miss anything, he brought along his bounty hunter friend Orion. Between Reiden's knack for picking up on details in his gaze and the Force powers at his disposal and Orion's skill with psychometry, the pair could prove to be invaluable in determining what really happened.

Luckily Reiden had an ace up his sleeve. An old informant of his from the Meraxis Empire, Dmitry Lenkovo, had defected shortly after the fall of Emperor Adoniram and somehow wound up within the borders of TRF. The man's military experience was being utilized in helping shore up the defenses of TRF's lands. After hearing the news, Reiden wasted no time in reaching out to his contact and seeing if it would be possible for them to meet and discuss what had happened. With a date and time set, Reiden and Orion had made the short space flight from Ragnath to Seraph and made their way to the capital where they then traveled to the tower where the Master of TRF dwelled.

Much to Reiden's annoyance, he had learned while en route that they would not be meeting alone — a high-level advisor and administrator within TRF government was to join them. The man had insisted on it upon hearing that members of the Scholae Empire had requested a meeting with his military advisor. It threw off the Force user, but it couldn't be helped. He should have expected as much, considering that Dmitry likely held a mid-level position, if not a lower one. But he had to make do with what he could. Resigned to the situation, Reiden was determined to ensure they made the best of what was available to them and make the best of impressions while stating their case for why they should be allowed to help with the investigation.

"So what do you think we can expect here, Rei?" Orion asked as they entered the tower. They were screened for weapons, which were then confiscated and held in a safe

place until their visit ended. Security and various other people milled about as they tried to make sense of what had happened. Some wore angry expressions, while others openly grieved for the loss of their beloved leader. Others still simply wore blank faces, clearly in shock. The pair of visitors was escorted to a turbolift that would take them to the floor where their meeting was set to take place.

“I honestly have no idea,” Reiden replied, his own brain trying to come up with the best approach to the meeting. “We need to be truthful and open to what they have to say, no matter how it may seem. And we must be respectful.”

“Yeah, that makes sense,” the Kiffar said, nodding his head in agreement. “Let’s hope they’re willing to listen to us.”

“I know Dmitry. He can be trusted and will give us the time to make our case. I’m sure of that much at least.”

“Well, I trust you. If you trust this guy, I guess I can, too,” the bounty hunter said with a flash of a grin. Reiden simply nodded his head in approval. He could always count on Orion to have his back. In turn, he would always have Orion’s back; such was their partnership that had been forged in flames.

The doors of the turbolift slid open and their escort guided them down a long hallway, pausing at an ornately carved wooden door off to the left. “Your meeting will take place here. Please wait inside. The others will be with you momentarily.”

“Thank you for your help,” Reiden said with a genuine smile as he passed the man and stepped inside.

The richness of wood greeted them when they entered. From a large meeting table to the chairs surrounding it, to the two upholstered chairs situated on either side of a large window, to the back wall lined with bookshelves. They were filled with tomes of various sizes and, judging from the look of them, some were quite old. Reiden could almost feel the history of it all.

Orion’s curiosity took hold and he wandered over to the bookshelves and examined the contents. Most of them seemed to be related to philosophy, likely about the Force, given their current home, while some were about the history of the people that called this place home. Reiden strode over to the window and gazed outside. The city was beautiful, as was the surrounding land. His admiration was cut short, however, when he sensed an approach outside the door. He turned to face it as it opened. Dmitry Lenkovo entered, followed by a man wearing a longer variation of the tradition robes the people of the Republic were known for favoring. Reiden assumed it traced back to the Jedi somehow.

“Dmitry, thank you for setting this up,” Reiden said as he stepped forward, offering his hand to the former Meraxis soldier, then the robed man. “I’m Reiden Karr, and my friend over there admiring your books is Orion Gale. Thank you for meeting with us.”

The man shook the offered hand and sniffed lightly. “It was not as if I had much choice in the matter, seeing as how it was already set to take place,” he cast a dismissive gaze at Lenkovo who merely shrugged, looking a bit sheepish. “I am Councilor Medhir. I will be the one weighing what you have to say.”

“Listen, you can trust these guys, okay?” the Meraxian assured the other man. “They always treated me right and really helped out when it came to getting rid of Adoniram.” Lenkovo practically spat out the name, his face twisting into disgust. This was a far cry from the man with whom Reiden had been familiar. The twitching tics that had been so prevalent before were much less noticeable and he seemed much less agitated and nervous. Much had changed in the short time since the two had last met.

“I assure you, we’re only here to help. As soon as we received word that Master Berckur had been killed, I knew we had to act quickly,” Reiden spoke. His arms were in front of him, hands separated and palms facing each other, trying to show that he meant every word he said.

“And I’m just supposed to believe you? How do I know it wasn’t your own people that did this?!” Medhir snapped, eying the Force user.

“What would we gain from killing Master Berckur, much less even attacking you?” Reiden questioned the man. The familiar coals of anger within him began to glow, but he quickly tamped them down. Anger would not serve him here. He must remain calm and patient. “We had one real enemy since first arriving in this system, and that was Meraxis. As I understand it, your own people felt their wrath in the past, correct?”

“It appears that you’ve done your research. Yes, we have felt the sting of that particular nation. What of it?”

“We recently toppled that Empire. We have made no moves since then, much less against you and your people. We don’t wish to be at war if it can be helped. Nothing is gained by killing Master Berckur aside from fighting. Having been in battle not so long ago elsewhere in the galaxy, the last thing we want at the moment is a fight on the homefront. Furthermore, wouldn’t it make sense that a mutual enemy strike at you and then try to pin the blame on us? It would kill two birds with one stone, as the saying goes. I don’t know for sure what happened, especially not without more examination, but that scenario makes the most sense to me.”

Medhir was silent, brow furrowed as he carefully weighed Reiden’s words. “Yes, I suppose you have a point.” Still, Reiden could feel that he had not yet won the man over.

“Wait a minute, there might be more to it,” Orion spoke up. “Have you had any problems of your own here? Are there any homegrown factions trying to rise up against the government?”

“Yes, there have been some movements gaining traction of late among certain members of the populace,” Medhir admitted, his face showing clear disappointment.

“Then maybe they gained some support by rogue elements from Meraxis,” Reiden suggested, sensing where his friend was going in his line of thinking. “Please, Councilor Medhir, we only wish to help. Allow us to assist in the investigation so that we might find the party truly responsible.”

“Very well,” Medhir finally said after much consideration. “What do you need?”

“Access to any information you’ve gathered so far,” Orion said. “Physical evidence as well, if you have it. Access to the crime scene would be ideal, but we can make do with whatever you can provide.”

“I will see what I can do. I’ll need to consult with the other leaders here, but I think that can be arranged. I shall return shortly. Dmitry?” The man stood and bowed to the pair before exiting the room, Lenkovo giving them a brief wave before following suit.

“Do you think we have a shot here, Rei?”

“I hope so, my friend. We need to dispel the rumors and clear Scholae of any responsibility. I’m sure that we can be of help to them, but only if they allow it. Either way, I feel like we got through to our friend here. And I’m sure Dmitry can add his two credits as well. We just need to have a little faith, perhaps even trust in the will of the Force.”

After some time, Medhir returned carrying two datapads and a small, slim case. He passed a datapad to each of his visitors and set the case down as he took his seat. "These contain the information from the investigation. Unfortunately you won't be allowed to view the scene in person."

"That's fine," Reiden said with a wave of his hand as he began to look at the datapad. "I'm sure we can make do with what's here."

Unfortunately, the evidence gathered had few details and even less physical evidence that had been recorded. Based on accounts by various staff members and footage that had been recovered from the memory bank of Master Berckur's destroyed protocol droid, little seemed to be amiss on the night in question. The Master had been working at his desk and then helped to bed by the droid. As the droid had powered down, it appeared that the elderly man was set to fall asleep. But clearly there was more to the story than that, as the leader had been found dead, pinned to his bed by multiple knives and blood soaking the sheets, dripping onto the polished stone floor.

There were images of the crime scene included with everything else. Reiden's gaze settled on one that showed Master Berckur. Rather than a face full of fear, his displayed something close to peace. It seemed odd, given the manner of death. Reiden's best guess was that the man had at some point realized the end was near and accepted his fate. Perhaps that was wishful thinking on Reiden's part, but he preferred that over thinking the man suffered too much.

Given the nature of the murder, Reiden also doubted the assassin wanted the ruler to pass peacefully in his sleep, otherwise a blaster would have been used, or perhaps poison as it would be quieter. No, the murderer wanted the old man to suffer. The use of blades also made it feel somehow more personal, even sinister.

"Well?" Medhir asked at last. An annoyed look was on his face, as if they were taking too long. But worry was mixed in. He clearly wanted answers to who would have committed such a crime. "What have you found out?"

"Unfortunately, there's not much to go on. But as I stated before, we had no hand in this, and it isn't our method," Reiden admitted. "Would it not be simpler to poison Master Berckur? Killing him in a manner such as this," he waved a hand at the datapad with the image of the dead leader, knives pinning his body in place. "Something like this draws a lot more attention."

"He's right," Orion added, looking up from his work. "There's also much more risk involved. Whoever did this did it for a reason. This was to send a message. Now, what that message might be...I couldn't tell you, not yet anyway. We still need more information."

Reiden's eyes settled on the case in front of Medhir. He had been too focused on what the datapad would reveal to pay it much attention until now. "What's in there?"

“The murder weapon, or at least one of them,” Medhir admitted. “While the other leaders did not want you to look at the scene in person, I thought perhaps you could tell us something about the weapon.”

He opened the case and spun it so the two could see what it held. Inside was what seemed, at first glance, to be a knife that looked like it could have been standard-issue military, but with a slight ceremonial air to it. The design seemed vaguely familiar to Reiden.

He cast out his senses and reached out to the blade through the Force. He found malice there, but underneath everything was a deep well of rage. It had been some time since Reiden had felt emotions that strong before, especially so long after an event had taken place. Delving further, he also felt the dark side of the Force. As he had suspected, there was certainly more to the murder than one may have initially thought at first glance. This was no simple assassination — revenge was the motive here. But revenge for what?

“The Force was involved somehow, I can tell you that much,” he informed Medhir.

“So it really could have been one of you after all!” Medhir blurted out. He stood up and backed away from the table quickly.

“I told you we weren’t responsible,” Reiden spat back, a tinge of anger creeping into his voice. “As I’ve told you, there is no benefit gained by our people killing Master Berckur.” He breathed deeply and let go of the anger, centering himself. “No, this was some other party. Someone angry and with a grudge, judging by the residual emotions I’m picking up from the weapon. But there’s also the presence of the dark side of the Force. It’s faint but it’s there, unmistakable. A Force user was involved somehow. I don’t know if that person was the murderer or merely an accomplice, however.”

“Meraxis already joined forces with another of our enemies,” Orion reminded them. “It would make sense for them to do the same again, but with one of your enemies this time. Maybe members of the opposition you mentioned earlier?”

“Yes, I suppose you have a point,” Medhir conceded. He took his seat once more, appearing deep in thought.

“Orion,” Reiden looked at his friend, a small grin playing at the corners of his lips. “Why don’t you see what you can gather from the knife?”

The bounty hunter nodded and reached out to touch the weapon. As his fingers closed around the hilt, he felt the familiar pull of a memory and closed his eyes, letting it guide him. It was nighttime. Troykal Berckur had been shown to his bed by his protocol droid. Two figures emerged from an unnatural swirl of shadows as the Master settled in and the droid powered down. One was dressed in black, wearing what appeared to be a

military uniform of some sort, but any distinguishing markings and insignias had been removed — torn off, judging from the frayed and tattered edges of where they had once been. The second figure wore dark-colored robes with the hood raised. Their faces were mostly obscured by the darkness, but the military man's mouth was visible and it bore a wicked grin.

The man nodded to his hooded companion. The dark figure stepped forward with an outstretched hand. Master Berckur began to stir in his bed, as if in the throes of a nightmare. Just as the hooded man began his work, so too did the military man. He approached the powered-down protocol droid and proceeded to viciously assault it with a length of metal that he had been carrying. When the job was done and the droid in pieces, he drew closer to the bed, seemingly taking his time in doing so. He opened his jacket, revealing a selection of knives stashed within.

Orion made a mental note that they were identical to the ones that had pinned the Master to his bed in the images that he had seen on the datapad. Not wanting to miss any important details, he quickly returned his attention to the memory.

The military man pulled one knife free and slowly plunged its glinting length into one of Master Berckur's legs. The process was repeated on each remaining limb. With another wicked grin, he drew the final blade from his jacket. His arms were poised over elderly Master's chest. With one final look at the weakened and bleeding-out leader, he savagely thrust the blade down into the old man's chest.

He turned to face the robed figure. "It is done. We need to get out of here quickly and remain unseen. Can you handle that?" The accomplice nodded in response.

But Orion was no longer paying attention to him. In that moment, he had finally glimpsed the military man's features thanks to moonlight streaming in through one of the windows. The man bore a cybernetic right arm and a matching implant where his left eye had once been, and he had a face that the bounty hunter recognized. Not one that he had encountered himself, but one that Reiden had shown him images of before. With the revelation of the man's identity and the vicious killing of the leader done, the strength of the memory faded, and Orion let it go, releasing his grip on both it and the blade. It didn't matter; he had already seen enough.

"Rei, we've got a problem," he said as he opened his eyes and faced his friend.

"What is it?" Reiden noticed the serious expression Orion's face held. Whatever he had uncovered must have been something big.

"Rigel Syklan — he's back."

Reiden's blood ran cold. That was a name he hadn't heard for a while now, and one he was beginning to wonder if he would ever hear again. Rigel Syklan was a member of the

Meraxis army that he had first encountered two years prior during Scholae Palatinae's expansion into the Nethal Archipelago. When a contingent of Meraxis and Collective troops had been forced to retreat, the enemy commander had sworn vengeance on Scholae, and Reiden in particular. Although the two had never exchanged words aside from that moment, he had little doubt that the Meraxian had at his disposal the resources to figure out who Reiden was. And just last year Reiden had learned that Syklan, newly outfitted with cybernetics, had linked up with the Collective again at some point and even helped to facilitate the attempted framing of Brotherhood forces when the Collective attacked the Severian Principate.

Deep down, the Force user had always known he hadn't seen the last of Syklan. He knew the man would be back at some point to make good on his threat that they would meet again. That feeling grew even stronger after the fall of Meraxis and the capture of Emperor Adoniram. He never expected the man's return would be something like this, however. If Rigel Syklan was involved, there was no telling what he would do next to drag Scholae's name through the mud to exact his vengeance.

"We have to go," Reiden informed Medhir as he stood from the table.

"What? Why? What's going on?" the man asked, bewildered by the abrupt change in attitude.

"An old enemy has resurfaced, a former commander in the Meraxis army. I don't think he was acting alone, not if it involved entering the tower unnoticed. This supports my theory that there was help from someone local, maybe even an inside man in the tower. We need to inform our superiors."

"V-Very well," Medhir managed shakily after a moment. The mention of Meraxis involvement clearly had him rattled. "I'll be sure to remain in contact with your people so that we may better coordinate our efforts."

Reiden bowed his head in thanks to the man and gave Orion a nod. The two of them quickly made their way to the turbolift and rode down to the lobby in silence. Reiden's mind swirled with thoughts of how to capture Syklan and what he could possibly be up to. He needed to prevent the man from doing any more harm to Scholae's reputation or TRF's ruling government as it scrambled to adjust to the new reality that its beloved long-time ruler was now dead. One thing was certain: time was of the essence and he needed to contact Shadow and the rest of the summit as soon as possible to let them know of the situation at hand.