

# Murder Island

A Submission to the Competition:  
Murder in Springtime...



Written by  
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## 39 ABY

### Balda Island, Seraph

Reiden stared out at the sunset and smiled as he rolled up the sleeves of his shirt. There was truly nothing quite like a sunset over the water. The gentle sound of crashing waves filled his ears as the water lapped at his toes. It had been a while since he had really gotten the chance to relax like this and he was prepared to take full advantage of the opportunity. Still, he couldn't help but wonder who had sent out the invitation.

From the way it seemed, the entire clan, even members of the military, had received an invite to Balda Island, an island resort off the eastern coast of the Xen Imperial Protectorate, a territory that had once belonged to the Meraxis Empire, before their fall and the capture of Emperor Adoniram. Having just finished with yet another battle, plenty of people were eager for a bit of rest and relaxation, a chance to let loose. After research was done, it was concluded that the island was real and there was indeed a resort there. From the images that had been shared, it looked to be a pretty fancy one at that.

While others had quickly flocked to the island, Reiden had waited. Despite wanting to take part in the fun, he had other work that needed to be finished first, much to his annoyance. But such was life – you don't always get what you want. Still, it wasn't so bad. He had managed to convince Orion to hold off on leaving until he had finished working, on the condition that they would get some drinks together – which Reiden would be paying for, of course. The promise of free drinks was always a good bargaining chip to use when it came to the Kiffar bounty hunter. Initially, one of their concerns was that they would have to land in the Xen Imperial Protectorate and then take a shuttle or boat to the island. Fortunately, part of the research conducted on the island revealed that it held a small starport. So once Reiden had finished his work, he and Orion made the short journey from Ragnath to Seraph, and then on to Balda Island.

The Force user was still enjoying his view when his comlink chirped, breaking the spell that the beautiful scene had cast over him. One last wistful look at the horizon and he sighed, shaking his head. He pulled the comlink from his pocket.

"What is it?" he said in a voice more annoyed than he meant to use. "Sorry."

"Yeah, Rei, so am I," came Orion's voice. "Bad news. I heard that a body was found floating in the pool. Dead. Not sure what caused it yet, but there are people looking into it. Thought you should know."

Reiden groaned audibly. "You've got to be kidding me. Okay, I'll make my way there and see if there's anything I can learn. Thanks for the heads-up."

He disconnected the call and pocketed the device once more. Brushing off his feet, he slipped into his sandals and headed off in the direction of the pool from what he remembered of the map he studied earlier. He didn't know what was going on, but he had a

sinking feeling that this was only the beginning of something more. Because when it rains, it pours.

\* \* \* \*

Reiden arrived at the pool area to find a crowd of people gathered around the perimeter. Some faces he recognized, while others were veritable strangers to him, despite their ties to Scholae Palatinae. He had heard that their invitation was an exclusive one, meant only for the clan, almost like a private event. He waded through the crowd to get closer to the pool itself. A makeshift exam room was set up using one of the cabanas that ringed the pool, with the addition of some sheeting that had been hung up for further privacy. Through a gap in the sheets, he saw that the body had been fished out of the pool and was laid out on a massage table for want of anything better to use.

He pushed past some of the closer onlookers and made his way to the cabana and a couple of doctor-looking types, eyeing the body. "Hi, I'm Reiden Karr, one of the guests invited here. I heard about the body and thought maybe I could help...somehow," he said with a shrug. "Do we know anything yet?"

"I'm Dr. Vikka," one of the men replied, looking up from his work. "I'm afraid we don't have much information."

"Well, as soldiers, some of these guests undergo regular screenings, so I doubt they'd suddenly drop dead with no known cause," Reiden countered. "Wouldn't you agree?"

"Yes, you're right," Vikka conceded. He looked about to say more, but was cut off.

"We got something, Doctor. Take a look at this," one of the technicians spoke. It was a young woman that looked to be somewhere in her mid-twenties, if he were to hazard a guess. She showed Vikka an image from a scan on her datapad.

Vikka nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, that's fascinating."

"What is it?" Reiden asked. Whatever they had found, he wanted to know what it was. There was no telling what small detail could help in figuring this out.

"Right, of course," Vikka stammered apologetically. He turned and showed Reiden the datapad, indicating an area on the screen. "You see this here?"

The Force user examined the image closely. It seemed to be a close-up of the victim's neck. There was a small mark on the skin, just at the edge of the hairline. "That freckle? What about it?"

"Ah, that's the thing! It's not a freckle. It's really a puncture mark, you see? Someone was clearly trying to disguise it, which is why it was placed there."

"So, this was no accident, was it?"

"No, I'm afraid not," Vikka said with a somber shake of his head. "This was intentional."

"*Karabast*," he swore. He looked around, trying to spot someone that looked like they were gathering information. He found one and walked over, leaving Vikka behind. "Does anyone know what this guy was doing before he went into the pool?"

The investigator looked confused and annoyed, but when he saw the determined look on Reiden's face, he merely sighed, flicking through notes on his datapad. "We don't have much to go on, really. Although a couple people did say that they thought they saw him getting a massage."

"Anything else?"

"No, that's it. He arrived with a group of others after being at the bar, then got a massage. After that, he went into the pool for a swim."

"Okay, thanks." Reiden walked off, giving Vikka and the investigator a wave.

*What happened here? What are we missing?* His comlink chirped again and he stopped dead in his tracks.

"Reiden here, go ahead," he spoke into the device."

"We've got another one, Rei. At the bar this time," Orion reported.

"Right. I'm on my way."

Reiden arrived at the bar to find Orion waiting for him, leaning against the entryway. The bar itself was open to the air on the sides, but provided cover from the sun with a thatched roof. Despite the situation, he noticed that Orion somehow still managed to look relaxed. But that would only be what the casual observer would be able to pick up on the surface level. Reiden knew better – Orion was likely alert and thinking through the possibilities, trying to remember little details about his surroundings. He also knew it was something he would do if he were in the same position. It had been a lesson he learned long ago about always paying attention to the world around you. There was no telling when the smallest detail could prove useful.

“Nice of you to finally show up,” the bounty hunter quipped.

“Hey, I only get so many days of vacation time,” Reiden shot back, offering a smile. “But really, I was gathering some information, like I said I would. I can’t believe this is happening now, let alone twice already...”

“Yeah, I know what you mean, brother.”

“What’s the story here?” he asked, heading under the awning and into the bar.

“The guy was here when I arrived. Hell, he even bought me a drink. We got to talking and then a friend of his showed up, so I left them alone. His friend left after a bit. Nothing out of the ordinary about any of it. But a few minutes later, the guy just starts gasping for breath and falls over. We tried to help him, but it wasn’t any use.” Orion let out a heavy sigh.

“Then there’s nothing you could have done. Best not to worry about it too much, you did what you could, and you made sure he wasn’t alone in his final moments. That counts for something,” he laid a reassuring hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. What did you learn from the first body?”

“Just like your guy here, he was fine...until he wasn’t. Must have been swimming when it happened, and nobody noticed anything. But it was definitely foul play.” He knelt down to examine the body that was still lying on the ground. “This where he fell?”

“Yup. Made sure nobody touched him once he was dead, just in case.”

Reiden nodded, almost absently. He was out of his depth here in terms of being able to know what happened, but he’d be surprised if the two incidents were unrelated. However, there was something he could do to help shed light on that. “Good thinking. Come here a minute, help me turn him over?”

Orion nodded and stepped over. Together, the two carefully rolled the dead man over. Reiden could feel that his friend had questions but was willing to give him the benefit

of the doubt with this. He appreciated that part of the bounty hunter, and it's why the two had worked so well together over the years. They always had each other's backs, no matter what happened.

Reiden turned his attention to the man's neck. He leaned in a bit, examining the area by the hairline. Sure enough, there was a small mark hidden there, just like the victim at the pool. He nodded to Orion and they gently turned the body over again.

The crowd outside the bar had grown larger now. The news had gotten out and people, always curious to see what was happening, showed up to check things out. A low murmur could be heard, likely the onlookers talking amongst themselves as they shared theories. Above it all, one voice was louder than the others, its owner demanding to be let through. Reiden turned and waved at the crowd to let him pass.

From among the crowd, a tall man emerged, fighting his way forward despite the others parting slightly. When he made it, he stumbled a bit at the sight of the body. Once under the thatched roof of the bar, he sank to his knees at the sight of the body. His face clearly racked with grief.

"That's the one this guy was meeting with," Orion said with a tilt of his head towards the deceased.

"I'm sorry," Reiden said softly as he stepped over to the man, kneeling. "Was he a friend of yours?"

"Y-Yeah...he is—or was, I guess..." the man stammered. Tears rolled down from the corners of his eyes. "We met at training and have been friends ever since. It's just so surreal to see him lying there, you know? We were talking and laughing together less than an hour ago..."

"I know this is hard, but could you tell me what he was like when you were with him? Any detail can help."

"Of course, yeah. He was fine...he was himself. We were laughing about some of the crazy things we'd get into when we were younger, just after we joined up in the army. You know how people are at that age."

"Yeah, I know exactly how that is, believe me," Reiden said with a nod. He paused a moment before continuing, not wanting to seem like he didn't care about the man's friend or his death. "Do you know what he's done since arriving on the island?"

"No, not really, sorry. We didn't get into that too much. We hadn't seen each other in a while so we were mostly catching up."

Reiden noticed something change in the man's expression. He had seen that look enough times before to recognize it – he had remembered something. "What is it?"

"It just came to me. He said he got a massage earlier. I remember because he mentioned that the guy who was doing it wasn't very good. He joked that he must have still been in training or something."

"That's great, really," he said, turning to Orion and getting his attention. He looked back at the man before him, offering a sad but genuine smile. "Thank you for your help. Sorry again for your loss. I'll make sure he receives the proper honor he deserves when we get home. And I'll get to the bottom of this, you have my word."

Reiden stood and motioned to a guard nearby. The guard came and gently helped the man stand and move back to where the others were gathered. He wasn't sure there was much more they could do here without any kind of official examination of the body or test results from the first victim. Still, they had learned something at least.

"I know that look," Orion said when they were alone again. "What's up?"

"There's a connection between our two victims. They both went to get a massage at some point before their deaths. And both have the same marking on their necks, partially hidden from view by their hairline. There was a doctor by the pool that told me it was a puncture wound. Neither of these deaths were accidents."

"Do you think the two things are related?"

"They must be. It can't possibly be a coincidence that they both have the same mark and both got a massage."

"Yeah, you're right. What do we do?"

"Well, it's not so much 'we,'" Reiden began, giving his friend a grin. "I want you to do one of your memory dives and see what you can find out."

"You just keep me around for my psychometry, don't you?"

"Well, it does come in handy." Orion gave him a perturbed look and he laughed softly. "You know that's not the reason. But we do need that information..."

Orion knelt down beside the body. It was strange for him to be doing this to someone he had actually been talking to. Usually, he used his psychometry on objects or fallen enemies, sometimes ones that were still living. But an ally was a first for him. He reached out and laid his hand on the dead man's neck and closed his eyes.

There was the familiar sound of rushing wind that typically accompanied using his gift and a flash of light. As the light dissipated, the outside world faded away and was replaced by the other man's memories. He could see what the victim had seen, smelled what he smelled. The man's emotions were his own. At that moment, the tang of cleaning chemicals from the nearby pool stung his nostrils.

*That's right, the massage area was near the pool,* he thought as he remembered looking at the map directory upon arriving at the island resort.

The memory moved along, showing the man approaching where he would be getting a massage. An older man with graying hair was waiting for him, waving him to come over. Something about him nagged at Orion's mind, but he couldn't yet figure out why.

The victim laid down on the massage table and let out a sigh. He began to talk about how much he needed the relaxation the resort offered, and especially a massage. He said that he was always tense, his back and shoulders in particular. The masseur smiled politely and nodded, explaining that he had the remedy the victim needed and that soon all of his aches and pains, all of his stress and tension, would melt away. The masseur got started and Orion could feel that, as the victim's friend had told Reiden, the older man was not quite as skilled as one would hope.

After a moment, the victim saw the masseur doing something with his hands, almost like he was wringing them. A flash of gold – a wedding ring perhaps? Then he got back to work, rubbing the victim's neck. But something was wrong. The pressure was too much, and suddenly there was a piercing sensation in the back of his neck.

He tried to move but found he was unable to. His head had already been turned to the side, so he watched helplessly as the masseur approached.

*"Don't bother fighting, you're temporarily paralyzed, and you won't remember this conversation when we're through. But you deserve to know what's happening, I suppose. You scum of the false Empire will pay for your transgressions."*

The voice was slightly distorted, but yet also familiar in a way. As the masseur drew level with the victim, Orion could swear he saw a faint red glow from the man's left eye. His right hand came up to touch the victim's face. It felt oddly squishy, like it wasn't real. Then the pressure increased and it felt hard. Orion studied the face more, concentrating. That was when it struck him—he knew this man.



He was staring into the eyes of none other than Rigel Syklan, former commander in the Meraxis army. The constant thorn in Scholae Palatinae's side was back yet again. He tried to focus on the rest of the memory, but it was beginning to fade. Perhaps the victim was passing out from whatever Syklan had dosed him with. Then there was blackness. The world slowly came back into focus and the victim got off the table, apologized to the masseur for dozing off, and went on his way, possibly to head to the bar. Having seen enough, Orion let his hold on the man's memories go, returning to the real world.

"Welcome back," Reiden said when the bounty hunter opened his eyes. "Did you find out anything useful?"

"Yeah, but you're not going to like it."

The Force user raised an eyebrow. "What?"

"Syklan."

With that single name, Reiden's world came to a grinding halt. His memory flashed back to the battle for Nethal Prime, early in Scholae's settling in the Caperion system. He remembered facing the enemy commander in battle and how he had sworn vengeance. Then there were reports that Meraxis had gotten involved with the Collective, and video evidence that Syklan had helped them to frame Scholae and the Brotherhood for the Collective attacks on the Severian Principate. And more recently there were suspected ties to the assassination of Master Troykal Berckur in the Republic of the Force.

*So that Meraxian snake is back, is he?*

"Did you find out what he wanted?" he asked Orion.

"Not really, other than the usual vengeance thing. He's still pissed that you guys beat Meraxis."

"I knew we'd see him again, but never thought it would be so soon. It looks like he'll have to be dealt with sooner rather than later." A commotion was raised behind him and he turned to see what was happening.

Two men broke free from the security cordon and approached them. One was the investigator Reiden had spoken to at the pool. The other was dressed like one of the resort staff.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Are you Reiden Karr?" Reiden nodded. "I was told I could find you here by that doctor...Vikka, I think was his name."

"That's right. I was with him earlier when I got notified of the second victim here."

"This man is a masseur here at the resort," the investigator said, indicating the staff member. "He said he had information and something to show you, and only to you."

Intrigued, Reiden stepped forward, nodding. "Let's hear it, then."

"I was assaulted earlier by some strange older man. He was wearing a staff uniform, but I had never seen him before. But I knew something wasn't right, see? I know everyone that works here," the masseur explained. "Anyway, he tied me up and gave me this cylinder and a message, said I was to deliver both to you."

"I think I know the man you're talking about. What did he say?"

"He said this contains information on how to contact him, and that you should reach out when you're ready to settle the score," he said, passing Reiden a code cylinder. "He said it's time you and your false empire suffered like he and his people have."

Reiden took the cylinder and held it in his hand, giving it a quick look before clenching his fist. "Yeah, I think he's right that it's time things were finished. And I know just the place to do it."

"What are you going to do, Rei?" Orion asked.

"For now, nothing. But we need to make sure Syklan's no longer here and that everyone else is safe." He turned to the investigator, eyeing the datapad the man carried. "Can you run a facial recognition search on that?"

"Yes. Why?"

He took the device from the man and accessed the holonet. It only took him a moment to pull up what he needed from a newsfeed. He handed it back to the investigator, showing him a picture. "Run a search for this man here. We believe he's the one behind these attacks. If he's here, we need to find him. I'm sure he's long gone by now, but we need to be sure."

"Right, I'll get on it."

Reiden turned to the bar and ordered a drink. He took a sip and let the amber liquid warm the back of his throat. All he wanted to do was have some fun in the sun, enjoy the free stay at the resort. But it seemed his enemy was back and more determined than ever to ruin things. Still, he knew that it would have happened eventually. But why did it have to be now? Either way, one thing was crystal clear in his mind.

*Rigel Syklan needs to be handled once and for all. Soon.*