

Ghosts of Meraxis

A Submission to the Competition:
Consul's Savior or Assassin?



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39 ABY
Adoniram Tower
Caelestis City, Ragnath

Reiden walked quickly through the halls of Adoniram Tower, Scholae Palatinae's headquarters and seat of power. What he really wanted to do was run, but he knew that wouldn't be wise. Running meant drawing attention, and he needed to avoid that in this instance. Even so, time was of the essence, so he moved with purpose. With any luck, people would just assume he was late for something...he hoped.

About an hour ago he had received an alert that there was a possible security threat. But that was nothing new, several happened in any given day and was hardly worth his time, truth be told. The officer relaying the message had no real details, so he left it to Imperial Scholae Intelligence to investigate - they were competent enough and could surely handle whatever it was. However, it wasn't long before that alert proved to be credible, which elevated it to warranting his attention. Still, the team hadn't wanted to divulge any information over comms, even if they were encrypted, and to make matters worse, they personally requested that he be the one to meet with them. They were being extra cautious, and everything they had said set off alarms in Reiden's mind. *That couldn't possibly be a good sign.*

Finally arriving at his destination of the security center, Reiden raised his palm to the door's interface panel. A moment's wait and it issued a *bleep* and flashed a green light, the door sliding open to allow him access.

The scene inside was chaos. People were milling about; hushed conversations were held and worried glances shared. It was clear this was no ordinary threat. Slowly, the room became aware that the door was open. Silence spread. All Reiden did was nod at them.

"As you were," he spoke calmly, entering.

"Good to see you again, sir," an officer said as he approached Reiden, offering his hand.

"Likewise, Davis," Reiden replied, shaking his hand. Despite the situation, the two shared a grin. Major Keith Davis was someone with whom Reiden had worked before and trusted. He had heard the man had transferred to Intelligence, but hadn't seen him in some time. Both men had been otherwise occupied with their respective jobs. "So, what can you tell me about this threat?"

"Well, we don't know much at the moment, I'm afraid," Davis answered, stepping over to a computer terminal. He punched in a series of commands and pulled up a file to display on the screen. What appeared was a letter, with a specter of the past as the backdrop: the symbol of the Meraxis Empire, Scholae's old, bitter enemy of years past.

While Meraxis had been toppled and their mad Emperor Adoniram captured and thrown in prison, there still seemed to be pockets of resistance every now and then. “This message was sent in before. Given that similar things have been sent in before—you know, ‘you’re a false empire and you’ll pay for your transgressions,’ that sort of thing—the officer that initially received and reviewed it didn’t pay it much attention.”

“Right. So, what changed?”

“One of the senior officers was reviewing things and noticed something different, something familiar. That’s when I was called in due to my experience in the field.”

Reiden’s curiosity was piqued, an eyebrow raised, but he still didn’t know why he had been called specifically. “And? Come on, Davis, you know I was asked for. Why am I here?”

“This line here,” Davis said, pointing to the last line of the message.

In his desire to get to the bottom of things, Reiden had only briefly skimmed the message. It was the standard thing, as Davis had said, but that final line was certainly different: *I told you that you hadn’t heard the last from me and that I’d have my revenge. Now, that time is at hand. The name of Rigel Syklan will go down in history as the victor.*

Reiden tore his eyes from the screen and stared at Davis. “How credible is this?”

“Very. It was sent on an encrypted channel – one of the old Meraxis ones. We haven’t deactivated them in case we need an alternative way of securely getting in touch with someone. The codes used to authenticate the message prior to getting through links back to Syklan. Listen, we’ve double-checked, Reiden. I know the two of you have history.”

History is an understatement, Reiden thought to himself.

Rigel Syklan had been a persistent thorn in his side ever since the early days of Scholae Palatinae arriving in the Caperion System. Driven from their old home, they needed a new one. The system seemed to be a good one, and of course a fight ensued to carve out their own territory. The Meraxis Empire fought back. During one of the conflicts to expand territory, Reiden had first met Syklan. The enemy commander had been forced to retreat when Scholae forces proved to be too much for his own. But even then, the man had, much like this new message, sworn that he’d be back and get revenge. Years later, he had been caught on camera helping the Collective frame Brotherhood forces for an attack on the Severian Principate. Later, there was the battle against The Republic of the Force when their leader was assassinated, and Reiden found evidence that Syklan may have played a part in that, or perhaps that’s what the man wanted people to believe. Only months after that, Reiden had been on vacation with others from the clan when someone was murdered at a beach resort. Syklan had been responsible for that and even held someone hostage before fleeing. However, he had left behind a datadisk telling Reiden how

to reach him if the Force user ever wanted to settle things. Reiden had thought that would have been the end of it until he confronted the Meraxis commander one final time, but he should have known better. Of course, Syklan wasn't done wreaking havoc and sewing chaos.

The Force user sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Okay. Can you tell me anything about the message, like where it came from? Give me any information you've got."

"Well, the time it was sent won't help much given how long it's been since then, but our guys have tracked the origin to the entertainment sector of the city. I can have the address forwarded to you?"

"That'd be great, thanks. I'll head out now. Let me know if you learn anything more, or if another message comes in." Reiden paused for a moment. "Keep an eye out for anything suspicious, just in case."

"You've got it. Good luck, sir."

The wind tousled Reiden's hair as he zipped through the streets of the city on his speeder. Angry shouts followed him as he cut people off, veering in and out of traffic to get to his destination as quickly as he could. Normally, he would have obeyed the transit laws, but this was more of a beg for forgiveness situation. He checked his computer linked gauntlet and saw the tiny map of the city that was zoomed in to show his location. He was coming up on his destination – the point of origin for the message that Imperial Intelligence had received.

He had walked these streets many times before. It was a great area to explore if one had the time. It was also popular, which was why so many shops and restaurants were found there. Unfortunately, that also meant it was easy to get lost in the crowd that was inevitably present. And around this time of year, things always got quite busy.

His gauntlet beeped, alerting him of his arrival. He pulled the speeder to the side of the road and looked at the building before him. It seemed like pretty standard fare, as far as he could tell - tall and made of duracrete, with large glass windows dotting its face at regular intervals, and even some balconies could be seen. The signage outside told him it held apartments, which made sense.

Reiden entered the building. A desk was ahead, with a rotund Twi'lek man at work behind it, looking rather bored. The Force user strode over, offering a polite smile before quickly switching to a serious expression.

"Can I help you?" the Twi'lek asked.

"I sure hope so," Reiden replied. The Twi'lek looked confused at first and was about to speak again before Reiden raised a hand to stop him. "Imperial Intelligence tracked the origin of a message to this location and I need to find the person that sent it. Now."

The Twi'lek paled, his face growing worried. "Whoa, I don't know what's going on, but I have nothing to do with it," he exclaimed, raising his hands in surrender.

"Then help me find the one who did. Has there been anyone suspicious around here, or acting strangely? Anything that stuck out to you?"

"Nah, not really," he began. But then his face changed, turning thoughtful. "Actually, you know, there was this one guy."

"What can you tell me? Even the smallest detail could be helpful."

"He was human, like you, but older. He carried himself real seriously, you know? Guy had a cybernetic hand, too."

Alarm bells went off in Reiden's head once again. That description was close to that of Syklan. Still, he didn't want to jump to conclusions and allow it to cloud his perception of

things - even if it was looking more and more likely that he was indeed responsible. He took a breath, centering himself.

"Is he here?" A shake of the head in the negative. "Where's he staying? I need to see that apartment."

"I dunno, not sure I can just tell you that, or let you in. I really need this job, man..."

"Listen, this is official Imperial business and if you don't let me in, I'll just let myself in. Now, tell me, which apartment is it?"

After getting the information from the desk clerk, Reiden rode up to the appropriate floor on the turbolift. He had initially been suspicious of the clerk, but his senses told him that the Twi'lek was being truthful, and that he was genuinely nervous about the whole ordeal, not wanting to get in trouble. Reiden, unsure of what he'd come across, found his hand touching the hilt of his lightsaber, a reassuring gesture he'd developed over time. He wanted to be ready. The lift let out a ding as he reached the floor. He stepped out, summoning his lightsaber to his hand with a flick of his wrist and finding the apartment the clerk had mentioned to him.

He held the saber up to the door's handle, just in front of the lock - it was an older style mechanical one requiring a key rather than a digital one - and ignited the plasma blade. There was a crackle of energy and some flying sparks, but that was all he needed. He thrust out his hand, sending a blast of telekinetic energy forth, the door violently swinging inwards on its hinges, banging against the wall.

Hoping to catch the suspect by surprise, Reiden rushed inside. Suddenly his mind rang out in warning. Trusting both the Force and his instincts, he dropped to a low crouch. A blaster bolt arced overhead. His eyes traced it back to its source and found a man fitting the Twi'lek clerk's description - it wasn't Syklan, however. The barrel of the blaster in his hand was still smoking, the weapon itself shaking slightly. The man looked to be in shock. Reiden reached out a hand and pulled it back towards his body. The blaster was torn from the suspect's grip, clattering to the floor. Another thrust of his hand and the man was pinned against the wall. A panicked yelp escaped his lips. It was almost pathetic, really. But even so, Reiden wouldn't let down his guard.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"W-w-where is w-who?" the man stammered, his eyes bulging with fear. He clearly hadn't expected anyone to barge in, despite being quick with firing the blaster.

"Someone sent a message to the Scholae Empire threatening an attack of some sort. You don't seem like the type - no offense - so who hired you? Where is that person?"

"I don't know, I swear! Some guy just paid me a bunch of credits to come here and act a certain way, said it would be quick, easy money. Please, I have a family!"

Reiden searched the man's mind but found no signs of deceit. Clearly, this man was the fall guy and had been set up. He let out an angry grunt, holstering his saber and pulling out his datapad, quickly tapping at it and pulling up a picture, stepping over and showing it to the man. "Is this the one who paid you?"

"Yeah! That's the guy!"

"Karabast!" Reiden put the device away and eased up slightly on his invisible grip on the man. He had just positively identified Rigel Syklan. *Where is he hiding this time?*

"C-can I go now?"

"No, not quite yet." Reiden stared the man in the eyes. "This man, did he give you anything else? When did you last see him?"

The suspect's eyes darted to a desk off to the side of the room. "There's a datapad over there that he used to contact me. He did something with it earlier today – maybe that was when he sent in the threat!"

A noise behind him caused Reiden to tense briefly. He reapplied his telekinetic grip on the suspect and stretched out his senses into the hallway beyond the room. To his surprise, he found a familiar presence. Major Davis came into the apartment, followed by a couple other security officers, their weapons drawn.

"Sir, we hadn't heard from you and came to your location. What's the situation here?"

"Syklan's not here, Davis. This man was hired to play the part for the former commander, but he doesn't seem to know anything. Still, better safe than sorry. Detain him and bring him in for questioning. I've got more work to do," Reiden explained as he lowered his hand, releasing his hold on the man.

As Davis and the others made the move to cuff the suspect, Reiden stepped over to the desk and picked up the datapad. He had seen his friend Orion do some interesting things with objects belonging to others before and had been experimenting with a similar skill on his own. He closed his eyes and tuned out the outside world as best he could, focusing on the device. A picture slowly came into focus in his mind's eye, though it was: Rigel Syklan in the apartment. Reiden could feel the leftover traces of hatred and malevolence. But he knew his quarry wasn't there any longer. Still, that presence, his essence, was still felt by the Force user. It was pulling him away from his location.

Trusting that Davis and his men could handle things here, he turned and left without a word. Back down the turbolift and onto his speeder, he followed the pull in the Force, knowing that it would guide him. Again, the city zoomed by as he guided the vehicle along. Interestingly enough, the trace he had picked up from the datapad – which was tucked safely in a bag he had grabbed from the apartment on his way out – was drawing him back along the way he had come earlier.

Curiouser and curiouser, he thought to himself, wondering where it would take him.

Ultimately, and much to Reiden's surprise, the journey had brought him to Adoniram Tower. Of all the places to find the enemy commander, this was the last one he had expected. The building was under constant monitoring and security was tightly controlled. *How had I missed his familiar presence before if he was so close by?*

As soon as he had arrived, the Force user had contacted security forces and alerted them to the possibility that the Tower may have been infiltrated and ordered a sweep of the premises. It would take a significant amount of time, but there was no telling what Syklan had planned. He focused on the datapad once more, finding that thread and continuing to follow where it led. The sensation was fainter than before, but he was determined to continue on. All the while there was a thought rolling around in his mind: *how did Syklan get access to the Scholae Empire's headquarters?*

Stepping inside, Reiden was met by Major Kole Warner and Captain Jake Sloane, two soldiers that he had fought alongside in battles past. They had been through much together over recent years and knew both to be competent in what they do. He was sure that they would provide good support for him in whatever lay ahead, no matter what Syklan was up to. He quickly filled them in on what he had discovered and they set off, following Reiden's lead. Along the way they checked in with the other teams checking elsewhere. As he suspected, nobody could find a trace of Syklan and he wasn't showing up on any security feeds. A sinking feeling filled Reiden as he began to wonder if there might have been some inside help. He didn't want to believe it, of course, but he also couldn't dismiss the possibility out of hand.

"Sir, where are we going?" Sloane asked.

"I don't know," he admitted. He paused a moment before continuing. "It's hard to explain, and not something I've had extensive practice with, but the Force is telling me where to go. It's like a trace of Syklan that I can feel, leading me there."

Warner raised an eyebrow at that. He knew of the Force, but he hadn't been with Reiden as often as Sloane, or Davis, so sometimes things seemed a little out there to him. Sloane gave him a look. "You get used to it. But I've seen some incredible things it can do. If that's not enough, trust Karr. He knows what he's doing, you know that much at least."

"Right. That I can do," Warner agreed.

"Don't worry, we'll get to the bottom of this," Reiden assured both of them.

Their search, while time-consuming, was ultimately fruitless. The trace of Syklan was fading. Not only that, but it had begun to feel farther away. But giving up would only lead to regret, Reiden knew. And he refused to give Syklan the satisfaction. He concentrated more, immersing himself in the Force, feeling its ebb and flow around him. He seized onto the faint thread Syklan had left behind. The ghostly image of a throne filled Reiden's mind. It was a throne he had seen many times, that he had been in front of often

enough. He glanced up at the ceiling, imagining the throne room located some levels above them. Of course, he knew without a doubt that's what he had glimpsed, he just didn't want it to be true - oh, if only it were that simple.

"The throne room," he breathed, cluing the others in on the information he had gleaned. He set off at a run, the Force fueling his muscles and granting him a burst of preternatural speed. The two soldiers hurried after him, sharing a somewhat irritated look that they had been left behind in such a manner, despite the fact that it was something they had both seen often enough before.

In Reiden's rush to get to the throne room, nearly missed the turbolift. As luck would have it, someone had just stepped off, so he charged inside, followed closely by Sloane and Warner. He jabbed the button for the floor that held the throne room and the three of them were whisked up to their destination, the doors sliding open. They exited, weapons drawn and at the ready, Reiden's lightsaber cracking to life.

But there was nobody there - not even the emperor.

Confused, Reiden looked around, as if it would reveal anything new. He felt so certain that this was where the trail had led him. He reached out with the Force and indeed felt a lingering trace of Syklan. However, the man himself was absent. Even so, something compelled him to step forward, moving towards the throne. It was then, as he got closer, that he knew something was off. There was a slight, soft red glow coming from beneath the throne, hard to spot with the daylight streaming in through all of the windows in the room. That wasn't always there - it was something new, something wrong. His steps moved more quickly, that sinking feeling returning to his stomach. He crouched before the throne, peering under it.

It was a bomb, counting down the time until detonation. And there wasn't much left.

"Warner!" Reiden called out. "We're going to need some of your expertise here, right now. Sloane, send out a warning to evacuate the floors above and below this one as quickly as they can manage."

Sloane nodded and went out into the hallway, already on his commlink relaying the information, which would then be broadcast throughout the tower. Warner hurried over as Reiden extended a hand. Invisible tendrils wrapped around the bomb, slowly and carefully pulling it out from underneath the throne. The soldier began to examine the device, a look of consternation on his face.

"Sir, I'm not sure there's much I can do. I don't have as much experience with this type of explosive setup, and we don't have a lot of time left."

"That's fine, just do what you can, Warner."

The other man nodded, resuming his work. He carefully pried the casing open to reveal the wires inside. To the surprise of both of them, it was a tangled mess, and to make matters worse, every wire inside was the same color. It would take time to sort through everything, let alone figure out what wire went where and did what. Precious time that, according to the display, they simply didn't have. It was time to make a judgment call.

"Karabast," Reiden swore under his breath. "Leave it to Syklan to pull something like this. I knew he was twisted and wanted revenge, but I had hoped that time would lessen that thirst. Unfortunately, it seems to have done the opposite. Warner, I want you to get out of here right now."

"But sir—" he began.

Reiden raised a hand to cut him off, shaking his head. "No. Get to safety if you can, help the others evacuate. I'll handle this...somehow."

The truth is, I have no idea how to get out of this situation, I just don't want anyone else to get hurt if it can be avoided.

Warner gave the bomb one last look, turned his gaze to Reiden and nodded silently. He turned and ran from the room. Reiden could feel that the soldier hated to leave anyone behind, but there was no sense in him staying around if there was nothing he could do. Besides, the Force user would never ask something of someone else that he wasn't willing to do himself. That included giving up his life so that others could get away.

Then again, he didn't quite feel like dying today.

Reiden grabbed the bomb, all thoughts of caution gone from his mind. He pulled out his blaster and shot at one of the large windows, peppering it with bolts. He holstered the weapon and looked around, spotting something he could use – a chair off to the side of the room. He made a gripping and sweeping motion, pulling the chair towards him flinging it at the window. The glass, weakened from the bolts, shattered. A cool breeze swept into the room, bringing with it the crisp smells of winter. He rushed over and hurled the bomb out the window. Once it was airborne, he thrust his hand forward, sending an additional boost in the form of a telekinetic energy. The bomb flew through the air, propelled away from the tower.

Then it exploded.

The force of the blast was diminished due to the distance, but it still shattered windows, and the concussive wave that followed knocked Reiden off his feet. He was stunned for a moment, but managed to prop himself up on his elbows, then slowly rose to his feet. He walked to the edge of the window frame and looked down. The damage, from what he could tell, appeared to be minimal. With any luck, it was mainly cosmetic in nature

rather than something more serious. He had taken a gamble, but it had paid off...for the moment at least.

He shook his head, imagining what the damage could have been and who could have gotten hurt if they hadn't figured things out in time. It seemed that Syklan was moving from engaging in battle and would now stoop to anything to get his revenge.

No, Reiden thought, that's not quite right. I'm sure he'll still incorporate both strategies into whatever his next steps are. But we have to be ready. He thought about the datadisc that Syklan had left for him at the beach resort. Perhaps it was time to reach out to the madman and settle things once and for all. As Reiden gazed out the window, he spotted the lighthouse off in the distance, nestled within the harbor, though it looked small from so far away. The structure was infamous from the days of Meraxis rule. It was supposedly the spot where people went to settle grudges in deathmatch.

This thing with Syklan needs to end. And now I know the perfect place to close that particular chapter in my life.