

40 ABY Seraph, Caperion System

Reiden made his way through the halls of the Monolith. He quietly muttered to himself about the fact that he had been summoned so suddenly and without any kind of explanation other than it was for an 'urgent' matter. Then again, he was wide awake already, so the late hour didn't overly matter to him. A soft, low whistle came from behind. He turned to see his droid Blitz quickly catching up to hover alongside him. He gave the droid an appreciative pat. He still couldn't believe how fast it could move, but he was sure that it would come in handy sooner or later.

He finally made his way to where the emperor had asked to meet him. It was a familiar scene, but yet somehow different. Something was *wrong*. And that's when it hit him—the decorations were all gone. The tree was bare and the usual presents gathered beneath were missing.

"Ah, Reiden," came a voice from farther away. "Thank you for coming so promptly. As you can see, we have a problem on our hands, and one that needs solving immediately – for the good of the empire."

Reiden bowed his head slightly to Emperor Lap'lamiz. "Of course, Emperor. You know I'm happy to lend my support when I can. Although, I do have to wonder, what exactly are you asking of me?"

"Can't you tell?" Kamjin asked, gesturing to their surroundings. "Someone has stolen from us. Our decorations, presents, all things for the festivities. I want them reclaimed and for a lesson to be taught to those foolish enough to dare take from our empire."

"I see. I'm sure I could deliver that message then." Reiden glanced around. It was surprising that someone would be bold enough to do such a thing, especially after they had quelled the civil war earlier in the year. Then again, that period, along with attacks from the Children of Mortis, meant their position was admittedly somewhat weakened. Still, it was hard to imagine. "What leads do we have, if any?"

"It just so happens the mastermind, if he can even be called such, actually took credit for it. A Hutt by the name of Claudius, his operations are located in the Krumpett system."

Reiden raised an eyebrow at the news. "He took credit? That's either incredibly brave or incredibly stupid, likely both. But the Krumpett system? That's not too far from here at least. Any intel or surveillance on him that could prove useful? I know the people in Intelligence are always on the hunt for more info that we could use at some point, even if not immediately useful."

“Not yet, I’m afraid. We’re still putting out feelers and all that, but after this I’ll make sure to have more on hand. If he’s willing to do this, I doubt this will be the last time we’ve heard from him.”

“No, I suppose not,” Reiden agreed. “I can take a small team and try to sort things out, but to be cautious I think I should bring a larger force to hold in reserve, held within close distance to get to the surface quickly if needed.”

“Take what you need. Just get this done, Reiden.”

“Yes, sire.”

Onboard the *Espada* En route to Grinchous V of the Krumpett system

“So what’s the deal here, like, really?” a strongly Core Worlds-accented voice asked.

“I told you, Kal,” Reiden began, “this Hutt stole from Scholae, things for the festivities. The emperor wants it back and asked me to help with it. So, naturally, I dragged you along for the ride.” He flashed a grin to the Ryn.

“I thought we were going to be doing something fun though.”

“Come on, I’m sure it’ll be plenty fun. Just think of all the ways you can mess with them once you get into their computer systems,” Orion reminded him from his spot beside the pilot’s seat. He had opted not to fly himself this time, instead relying on the talents of one of Scholae’s talented naval pilots. “We all know how much you love to pull tricks on people.”

“Yeah, okay, that’s a fair point.”

The two continued to talk as Reiden stood on the other side of the pilot, Commander Talina Rhade. The half-Sephi woman was formerly a pilot for Battleteam Krennic and dedicated to the clan. After the team was disbanded, Reiden made an effort to keep in touch with some of the military members attached to the unit, the former Gundark Company, and call upon them when he had the chance to. It was nice to have someone at your side that you knew and could trust, rather than taking a chance on requesting someone at random from anyone a commanding officer could spare at the moment.

“How are we on our approach, Talina?” Reiden asked.

“Looks fine, as far as I can tell, sir,” she replied. Her head turned to look at him briefly. “Are you sure we’ll be okay?”

“We should be. But this is territory ruled over by a Hutt, so there’s really no way to be certain. On the other hand, that’s why I always made sure my ship has no outward signs connecting it to Scholae Palatinae. The exterior and interior bear no such markings. There’s only my own sigil on the airlock, and even that can only be seen from inside while waiting for the initial interior set of doors to open.”

“Right. A good idea.”

Reiden turned to face behind him where the passenger seats were located. Kal Arias was there, along with Captain Sloane and Major Davis from Scholae’s military. More trusted allies. The military men were stripped of their usual stormtrooper armor and instead wore simple armored chestplates and gauntlets. Talina was outfitted in civilian clothing as she would remain with the ship, ready for a quick takeoff if needed.

“Let’s go through the plan once more while we have a moment. As soon as we land Kal will send out his droid to do some quick surveillance of the immediate area and come back. We’ll review it and then set out. Ordinarily I’d say this should be handled quickly and quietly, but I doubt that will be an option this time around. And I also think we should make a statement with this. Claudius needs to be reminded not to cross Scholae or else he’ll be crushed under its boot like the overgrown slug that he is.”

“Don’t worry,” Kal assured him. “Circuit will get the job done. I’m going to have him try to patch me into the system at the spaceport too if he gets a chance.” The Ryn pulled out a datapad and detached a code cylinder from its side, holding it up. Reiden knew that it would transmit wirelessly to the datapad if it was used at a terminal within range and allow him to slice in.

“Excellent. Always nice to not need to mention that kind of thing. While we may not be covert here, I want to leave a small footprint if we can.”

“We’re nearly there,” Talina called from the cockpit. “Get your gear together and get ready. Making our final approach and preparing to land.”

“You heard the woman,” Reiden said, laughing. “Any last-minute checks need to be made now. We have to be able to be on the move quickly.”

Starport of Planet Grinchous V

Up in the cockpit, Orion was checking his weapons and making sure they were fresh so they wouldn't run out of gas or energy while they were retrieving the goods stolen by Claudius. Kal was tapping away at his datapad while the three soldiers talked amongst themselves. Reiden was on the lower deck as he waited, sitting in his quarters. He hated not being able to hit the ground running, but he knew that would be foolish in unknown territory with so little intelligence to guide them. His hand idly found the hilt of his lightsaber, touching the durasteel. It was a reassuring and centering gesture he had developed over the years. The weapon had seen him through so many events over the years. For the most part, he had come out of them intact, more or less. Some metaphorical bumps and bruises were gathered along the way, sometimes literal ones, or worse. But he had survived, and at the end of the day that's what mattered and what he had always been. He felt his mind begin to travel through those very same events before it was interrupted by a rhythmic tapping at the airlock. The droids had returned.

The doors opened with a hiss as he palmed the button beside the airlock. The droids zipped inside, heading to the cockpit where the others were waiting, hovering around the holoterminal in the center. Reiden moved to the lift and leapt up to the deck, not even bothering to use either the lift or the ladder that was recessed into the wall. Time was of the essence. Kal retrieved the code cylinder from his droid, and returned it to its place on the datapad while he tapped in a few commands, briefly resting his hand on the ID9 seeker droid's dome, eliciting a soft chirping from the droid. The data uploaded to the holoterminal and the machine hummer to life, projecting blue-tinted images into the air above its surface.

The footage and stills started with the droids' journey through the skies. Based on armed guard presence, they had been able to determine the location most likely to be their destination and headed towards it. The images weren't enough to determine any sort of pattern of movement or schedule for the guards—the droids simply weren't deployed long enough to ascertain as much—but they were a decent start at least. The guards were largely concentrated in one area. There were a couple blaster turrets on the walls surrounding the facility and further in, near where the concentration of guards was located, a repeating blaster mounted on a tripod was placed near what looked to be a storehouse of some kind. That had to be where the pilfered goods were being kept.

"Well, I'd say that's our target then, don't you think?" Orion suggested, jerking a thumb at the image on display. "Shouldn't be too hard with those guards. After all, we've faced worse odds before and come out on top."

"It has to be," Reiden concurred. "I'm sure we can handle it, but we also don't know how many other guards are in the main facility. We shouldn't underestimate this Hutt, his reach, or his resources."

"Yeah, fine. Good point."

“Still, I think you’re right. And if we pull this off properly, it won’t matter what Claudius has in store. Remember, we’ve got our own back-up waiting for the signal.”

This caused the Kiffar to grin. “And won’t they be surprised when they arrive.”

“That’s the idea. Right, so, it looks like we know all that we’re going to know. I’ve got an idea, and luckily the perimeter walls don’t seem too thick – they probably don’t expect to get much resistance on their own turf after being so established. We may just be able to cut our way in. If we can, we’ll just have to get a little...loud. And we’ll need a distraction.”

“Leave that to me, boss,” Kal chimed in, flashing a grin of his own. “I think Circuit and I can handle that part.”

“Perfect. Let’s move out.”

Outside Claudius the Hutt's compound

The team had made their way through the city without any trouble. Most people seemed more inclined to keep to themselves, which suited their purposes just fine. Before long they had managed to get close to the compound and slipped around the back where the storehouse was located. Reiden had sent Blitz up to examine the top of the wall while Kal slipped away with Circuit to create their diversion. Blitz soon came back and reported its findings. The wall was thick enough to repel what most people around would be able to throw at it, but just thin enough that a lightsaber would be able to carve through it. On Reiden's signal, the droid went back up to watch the guards as the Force wielder pressed the hilt of his lightsaber to the wall. He paused and looked at the other three with him. They didn't say anything. They didn't have to. He knew they were with him and each would have the other's back. They simply nodded at him. And so, he faced the wall again, waiting for the right moment.

Before long, an explosion rang out and smoke belched high into the sky. Without a doubt, that was Kal's distraction. Reiden ignited the saber, carving a small opening into the wall. Sure enough, it slipped through onto the other side, so he began carving a wider one, then thrust his hand out. The carved section flew inward as an invisible force propelled it.