

# Big Trouble in Little Ulress

A Submission to the Competition:  
Pro Bowl III Week 1 – Fiction



Written by  
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## 36 ABY

### Island of Sailyo, Seraph

*Frak, he's late...so late,* Reiden Karr thought to himself as he sat in a booth of the bar that was set as his meeting location. He checked the time once again and let out a low sigh, shaking his head as he took a sip of his drink.

The man he was supposed to meet was a Meraxis soldier named Dmitry Lenkovo. Having grown tired of the authoritative rule of Emperor Adoniram, the young man was secretly a supporter of Scholae Palatinae, and had been supplying them with enemy information whenever he could for the past couple months. It had been a rocky start, of course, with neither party trusting the other. However, the information he had provided proved to be true and ultimately ended up being useful, so the relationship had continued.

Reiden had dealt with the man a couple times before in the past and he knew the soldier could be a bit squirrely at times, even bordering on paranoid — which was understandable, given their arrangement and the risks involved. As such, they had decided to meet at Reiden's current location. Sailyo was an island located off the west coast of Elaya on the planet Seraph. It was controlled by the United Corporations of Elaya. Due to companies controlling things, it has a unique nature where business drives everything, and dealings between all four countries on Seraph are commonplace. That made it the perfect neutral ground for a meeting such as Reiden's to take place. Dmitry would be wearing civilian clothes, and Reiden's own attire bore no markings that would indicate his own allegiance to Scholae — although he was still armed, only his blaster and knife were within sight, and he had opted to leave his lightsaber safely secured on his ship as an added precaution.

Just as the Palatinaean was reminiscing about his first meeting with Dmitry, the Force alerted him that someone was approaching. Not sure who it was, he kept his gaze down, waiting to see what happened next. The figure drew nearer and then slid into the booth, taking the seat on the opposite side of the table, a mug of ale settling onto the table as well. Reiden glanced up from his glass to see the Meraxis soldier facing him at last.

"It took you long enough," the Corellian grumbled lowly.

"Hey, I had to be careful, you know?" Dmitry countered. "I'm risking my life here, after all."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm well aware. But a little punctuality wouldn't kill you, would it?" Reiden sniped.

"Look, it's not my fault this time, okay? I thought I was being followed, so I had to double back and fake like I had forgotten or lost something before continuing on. But I'm here now, so take it easy. Gods," the soldier let out an exasperated sigh, then took a swig of his drink.

Reiden waited a moment to let the man get settled before bringing up business. “So, do you have something for me?”

Dmitry cast a furtive glance around. “Yeah, I do. The higher-ups are getting a bit nervous about how you guys keep expanding. First you took Caelestis City and now you’ve grabbed up the Nethal Archipelago as well. They don’t want to lose any more land. So they’re trying to raise their armies, even bringing in those outside guys from before, on Nethal.”

Reiden sat up straighter. “You mean the Collective?”

“Yup, they’re the ones,” Dmitry said with a look of contempt as he took another gulp of his ale, clearly not pleased with the development. Reiden knew the man to be proud, despite his actions of aiding Scholae instead of his home country. The fact that his fellow countrymen were seeking help from a third party must not sit well with him.

“Karabast,” Reiden swore. “I knew we hadn’t seen the last of them after the battle on the islands, but I had hoped they wouldn’t be back so soon.”

“Yeah, well, they are. We’re all just gonna have to deal with it,” the Meraxis soldier replied grumpily.

“Is there anything else you got for me?” the Palatinaean pressed further.

“Sure. Yeah. It’s actually why I wanted to meet with you so suddenly. It may have been risky, but I felt it was worth bringing to you.” Dmitry looked directly at Reiden, “Does the name Erised mean anything to you?”

Reiden thought for a moment and shook his head. “No, it doesn’t sound familiar. Why?”

“The Vault of Erised,” the man said after taking another quick look around them. “It’s a place where all sorts of important, valuable things are kept — securely, of course. Heavily guarded. Those higher-ups I told you about, the ones getting nervous? I hear that they’ve stashed something away in there that’s of great importance to the war effort.”

Reiden’s eyebrow rose as he listened. “That sounds like something I should try to get my hands on, then. On the other hand, it almost seems too good to be true.”

“You’re right, it does. But I’m telling you, they’re crazy worried about whatever it is falling into the wrong hands. That’s why they decided to move it off-site, see?” Dmitry continued. “The Vault has a great reputation for protecting the assets of their clients — and they’re paid an exorbitant fee for doing just that.”

“All right, so where is this place then?” Reiden pried.

“You can find it in Ulr Uvi, on Ulress,” Dmitry answered plainly.

“Wait, what? That’s where the criminals thrive. Why would you establish something like this Vault of Erised in such a place? There’s no way that the people there can be trusted,” Reiden said.

“Oh, they can be trusted all right. If you pay them enough money, that is,” the soldier countered with a grin. “Like I said, the prices they charge are outrageous. But such a thing is a small price to pay when you’ve got the backing of an entire country and its military. The guys in charge in Meraxis consider it money well spent if it keeps their secrets safe.”

Reiden spent the next half hour listening to what Dmitry had to say, gleaning further information about the Vault, in addition to that of Meraxis. The man was able to divulge things such as how a portion of their troops were being moved along the border that separated Caelestis City from the rest of Meraxis-controlled Maqor. Once they had concluded business, they said their goodbyes as if they were simply two friends that were catching up, and left to go on their own separate ways — the Meraxis soldier departing to go back to where he was stationed, while Reiden set off for the starport, where the shuttle he had borrowed from the clan for this trip awaited him, along with a pilot outfitted in civilian clothes. The gears of his mind were already churning through the information that had been provided to him, and a plan slowly began to take form.

Knowing that he’d be heading to Ulress, which was a haven for all sorts of criminal types, Reiden had contacted his friend Orion Gale when he got back to the shuttle. He let the bounty hunter know what the situation was and that he might need some help on the mission. Of course, having known each other for a few years and had successful joint ventures together before, the Kiffar agreed to help out. The two met up at Caelestis City before boarding Reiden’s personal ship and taking off for Ulress.

## Ulr Uvi Starport, Ulress

Upon landing at the starport, Reiden and Orion split up, pretending that they were each going off to take care of their own pieces of business before meeting up later. In truth, Reiden was simply wasting time while Orion checked out the area surrounding the Vault of Erised — the Palatinaean wasn't going to head in without first finding out what he was up against. Orion had his surveillance droid Reeco with him, and Reiden had sent out his own probe droid, Sparks, to get some footage as well just to be safe.

It didn't take Orion long to reach the desired area and report back that he was in place. He had taken up a position along a cliff that had been carved out of the walls of the underground city from a long-abandoned mining operation. Conveniently, that same operation was seemingly what cleared the space which allowed the compound housing the Vault of Erised to be erected.

"What kind of security are we looking at, Orion?" Reiden spoke quietly into his comlink after finding a somewhat private space to talk.

"Well, the perimeter of the compound is surrounded by a fence, but it should be easy enough to scale as it's maybe eight six, seven feet high — I've seen you jump higher than that," the Kiffar replied with a laugh.

Reiden smiled, knowing that having use of the Force meant such a thing was easily possible. "What about manpower?"

"Honestly, I expected more, based on what you told me about how that informant described it. Maybe they hype up the reputation as a way of scaring people off? Either way, it shouldn't be too much of a problem. I've seen only a few guards patrolling along the perimeter of the fence. No idea what's waiting inside, though," Orion warned him.

"Yeah, that's the wildcard in this whole situation. Then again, I've got myself, my lightsaber, and you backing me up; it doesn't seem like it'll be too much of a problem, all things considered. Most people run when they see a saber light up, and if they don't, some just stand still, frozen by fear. I'm sure we can handle it," Reiden said simply. "At least the compound is located away from everything else. While the people running the place might feel like the isolated location and the cliffs along two sides help to secure the building, it also aids us in helping to avoid drawing any more unwanted attention when we execute the plan."

A short time later, Reiden had carefully made his toward the compound that was reported to hold the Vault of Erised. He cast his gaze over the building, taking in as many details as he could. The fence around the perimeter had a base that appeared to be made out of duracrete that extended up from the ground to half of the fence's total height, with the top half comprised of a mix of wood and metal with cracks between the pieces that revealed the interior — clearly the builders had used whatever material they could get their hands on to complete it. From between one of the larger cracks he had found, Reiden caught sight of the nearest guard. Even from the distance, Reiden could make out the points of horns that marked him as a Devaronian.

Reiden took a breath and focused, calling up the Force and directing it to his lower body and into his legs. He backed up slightly, then ran and jumped, vaulting the fence easily and landing in a crouch on the ground on the opposite side. He got up quickly and ran toward the guard. His hand touched the hilt of his lightsaber, but he paused and thought better of it. Wanting to avoid tipping off any other guards unnecessarily, he instead opted for his knife, silently pulling it from the sheath in a fluid, practiced motion. As he neared the guard, he plunged the blade into the base of the Devaronian's neck, covering his mouth with his free hand before he had a chance to make a sound. The alien's body slumped to the ground, and Reiden pushed him close to the base of the building, hoping that the shadows from the lights would hide his body from being discovered until the other guards continued making their rounds and drew closer.

"You're clear to proceed," Orion's voice sounded from Reiden's comlink.

"Copy that. Moving forward," Reiden responded quietly.

The Palatinaean's destination was around the next corner of the building. While scouting the location, Orion had spotted what looked to be a back door of sorts. He had said that when guards inside went on breaks, they would often use it to get some air and have a quick smoke before returning back to work. It was most likely secured by a lock system to get into and out of the building, judging by the electronic panel that Orion saw beside the door. However, most security measures held little chance of holding out against the cutting power of a lightsaber. The amount of time it took depended on the thickness of the material, but given that it was doubtful to be the same as the blast door of a ship, it shouldn't be an issue.

Reiden advanced from his position. When he reached the corner he paused. He reached out with the Force and tried to determine if anyone was waiting for him on the other side. A moment later, with no warning bells sounding in his mind, he rounded the corner.

The door was located roughly two-thirds of the way along the wall, so he continued towards it cautiously. Once at the door, he took a moment — more out of curiosity than anything else — to examine the security panel beside the door. The components looked new, possibly a recent upgrade. It wouldn't have surprised him if it was due to an uptick in

any break-ins recently. Or, perhaps, it was because of their latest client. The Meraxis forces had already begun working with the Collective. The latest enemy to the Dark Brotherhood, and even all Force users regardless of affiliation and beliefs, had proven themselves to be technologically advanced. It was entirely possible that they had urged Meraxis to upgrade any security measures they used, which could extend to off-world, third-party establishments such as this. Reiden noted that the panel held not only a slot for a keycard, but also a pad for numbers to be entered.

*A two-step process, huh? Not bad,* Reiden thought to himself. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind that he felt the familiar presence of the Force tugging at his mind, alerting him to some unseen danger. His hand flew to the hilt of his lightsaber, which he unclipped from his belt and activated in one fluid motion, developed from years of training. As he did this, he also spun around to find a guard about a dozen yards or so away. A blaster pistol was leveled at Reiden, and the guard's finger was already on the trigger.

The trigger pulled and a blaster bolt leapt from the barrel of the weapon. But Reiden was ready, despite only a moment's notice. Muscles aided by the speed of the Force, the blade of his saber swept up quickly and batted the bolt aside. Just as he was about to make a move to counterattack, another blaster bolt seared down from above, burning a hole into the guard's temple. His body crumpled to the ground in a heap. Reiden turned his gaze in the direction from which the shot had come. Off in the distance, he could barely make out the form of Orion, perched upon the ledge carved out of the cliffside.

"Sorry about that. I was checking out the other corner for a second to make sure the coast was clear for you to head in. I guess that guard made a move before I turned my attention back to you," Orion explained in apology. "You're clear now, though."

"Don't worry about it," Reiden spoke into his comlink. "You still managed to have my back. Besides, nobody can split their attention to two different things as once. I'm heading in now."

With that, Reiden turned his gaze to the security panel and plunged his saber through the electronics. He heard the fizzle of electricity and saw smoke curling from around the area where the blade made contact. He deactivated his saber and reached out to try the door — it swung open easily. Reiden turned to give Orion a nod of thanks and then stepped inside.

Before executing this plan, Reiden had reached out to one of Orion's underworld contacts and managed to find someone that had access to the building's plans and had bribed the man for a copy of them. Together, he and Orion had studied them closely in advance and such preparation would serve Reiden well. He now focused on his memory of the plans — he knew exactly where he was and where he needed to be. Keeping that mental image in place, he set out into the building. An intersection of hallways lay in front of him. After a moment's thought he took the one that lead off to the right.

Reiden rounded the corner to find another guard in front of him. The man stared at him, seemingly dumbfounded. However, he quickly gathered his senses and fumbled for his blaster which he had holstered — clearly not expecting anyone to be attempting a break-in. The Palatinaean wasted no time, activating his lightsaber and lunging forward, dispatching the guard before continuing on.

After crossing another couple of intersections, Reiden found himself in front of a door with another two-step security panel. Treating this one much like the first, he sank the plasma blade of his lightsaber into the panel and removed it before pushing the door open and stepping through. Expecting to be met with the contents of the vault, or even various containers holding everything, he was instead met with a surprise. In front of him stood a large vault door, the likes of which hadn't been used in ages as technology grew more sophisticated and people came to rely on it more than such old fashioned methods. Reiden swore to himself — this was not on the building plans and it would take longer to cut through, given the thickness of metal that such doors used to be made from.

Reiden lacked the technical skills necessary to slice into the security panel just outside the room, and he wanted as small a team as possible for this mission from the beginning. There was no way around it. However, now that the panel was disabled — trashed, really — any passing guard would instantly know that something was wrong and sound the alarm. Then again, the body that he had left sprawled in the hall earlier would accomplish the same task, just in a different manner.

With no time to spare, Reiden began the slow process of cutting through the thick durasteel of the vault's true door. Once he had made progress on it, his comlink chirped. He activated it quickly, not sure what the reason could be.

"What is it?" he asked of Orion.

"Reiden....the body....company. Hurry..." came Orion's garbled reply. The transmission was likely strained due to the materials the compound was constructed from, and possibly countermeasures that had been built in as well. Despite this, Reiden understood the message easily enough: the body outside had been found and the guards were now on alert. No sooner had the transmission ended that a shrill alarm blared throughout the building.

"Karabast!" the Palatinaean swore as he finished cutting as quickly as he could manage.

Once through, Reiden hauled the door open and moved swiftly. Dmitry had given him an idea of what to look for. For some reason, the Meraxis army leaders had decided to emblazon their property with their sigil. An odd choice given that most people who used the vault likely would have wanted to remain anonymous. Perhaps they simply wanted to be able to find their belongings more quickly? It didn't matter what the reasoning was. Reiden needed to hurry. He searched through stacks of large crates, smaller boxes, and

sealed tubes — containers of various shapes, sizes, and technological sophistication. Finally, he found the one that bore the seal of the Meraxis Empire. It was small crate, about the size of medical backpack. Reiden examined the lock and where it was situated. It appeared to be a simple key lock, and that it could be easily bypassed by using his lightsaber. He placed the crate on the floor and held the ignited blade above the lock, slowly lowering it to make contact with the mechanism. Metal sizzled and smoke curled around the blade, wafting upwards. With the lock taken care of, Reiden threw open the case, eager to see what it contained —

Nothing was there.

Reiden stared down, a mixed expression of confusion, surprise, and anger flashed across his countenance. He didn't understand — Dmitry's information had always been good before, and there had been numerous, small tests in the initial stages of working with him. So what had gone wrong this time? Had Dmitry been playing him all along, simply waiting for the right time to feed Reiden false information and lure him into a trap? He thought back to his last conversation with the Meraxis soldier. Dmitry had said that Meraxis command had grown paranoid lately. This could have been their way of testing to see if there was a mole among their ranks. Whatever the case, Reiden would figure it out later. For now, he had to escape, and quickly. He could already sense that the guards were making their way to the vault.

The Palatinaean rushed out of the vault. He didn't sense that there was anyone there, but he glanced around anyway. Satisfied, he continued on, backtracking to where he had first entered the building. The Force nagged at his mind, so he stopped before that final intersection. In his hurry he had overlooked the presence of a group of enemies that lay in wait ahead of him. He retreated down the hallway a bit and activated his comlink and whispered into it.

“Heads up, Orion — I'll be coming out hot. Be ready,” Reiden warned his friend, hoping the message got through safely now that he was close to the exit.

Taking a moment to call upon the Force, he gathered it in his hands. Reiden set out quickly and turned the corner, sending a wave of invisible force at the guards gathered there, throwing them against the wall. One guard reacted faster than the others and regained his feet. Reiden grinned and clenched a fist, mimicking throwing a punch as he sent a directed wave of force at the man. The guard flew backwards once more. His head cracked against the metal door hard, and then he remained still. Reiden walked over and pushed the man aside then paused at the door. He cast his senses out and found that the exit was clear, so he hurried outside and ran to the fence, vaulting over it once more. He looked toward Orion's cliffside perch and saw that his friend was ready. The Kiffar took aim with his blaster rifle and fire off volleys of suppressing fire as Reiden made his escape. After a moment, he, too, began to quickly make his way down the cliffside ramp to the ground, firing off potshots as he went. It was definitely time for them to leave.

## Island of Sailyo, Seraph

Using their predetermined method of secure communication, Reiden had left word for Dmitry indicating that they needed to meet as soon as possible. A third party courier had delivered the reply Dmitry sent, and Reiden had then set out for Sailyo immediately. Upon landing, Reiden made his way along the streets to the bar where he had last met with the Meraxis informant.

It was nighttime now. The bustle of businessmen moving about the city was gone, replaced instead with people that were seemingly in no rush to go anywhere in particular. The relaxed atmosphere was a refreshing change of pace to that during the daytime. Given how business and commerce drove everything on the island, Reiden was actually surprised at the stark difference. Then again, perhaps people were still toiling away as they worked late at their offices, or maybe even working from home. It didn't matter. He enjoyed the crisp night air as he walked along the streets, taking in the glow of lights indicating that there was, indeed, nightlife even here in this haven for business. After all, everyone needed to unwind at some point.

Once again, Reiden found himself sitting in a booth at the bar. He was seated so that he had as unobstructed a view of the front door as possible while he waited. A glass of rum rested on the table in front of him, and he lifted it to his lips to take a sip. He savored the amber-colored liquor. He needed a drink after that surprise back on Ulress. After a while, the door to the bar opened, causing Reiden to look up. Dmitry entered and glanced around before catching Reiden's gaze with his own. Reiden gave the man a nod, making sure that his face revealed nothing of what he wished to discuss. Just as Dmitry made a move to sit down at the booth, Reiden shook his head.

"Not here. Meet me out back," he stated calmly in an even tone.

"Yeah, sure," Dmitry replied. The man looked confused but shrugged it off, likely assuming that he wanted to take more caution given what he had set out to do before.

Reiden got up and headed for the back door which led out into an alley behind the bar. Dmitry followed behind a moment later. As soon as he stepped foot outside, however, Reiden grabbed him by the collar and pulled him the rest of the way out the door and pushed him up against the wall. The cold metal of a blaster was placed under the Meraxis soldier's chin.

"Whoa! Hey, what the hell is this about, man?" Dmitry asked, his voice shaking and full of fear.

"I'll tell you what it's about," Reiden snarled. "You set me up, you little worm! I went to Ulress. I went to the Vault of Erised and got inside. You know what I found? Nothing! That frakking crate was empty!"

Dmitry's eyes shot open even wider, practically bulging from his head. "Wait, you don't actually think that I had something to do with that, do you? I mean, come on. I'm just a middleman here; a nobody. My superiors give me orders, and I follow them. Good soldiers follow orders. But once I realized that they were all so hell-bent on revenge after losing out to you guys, I decided to help out what I thought would be the winning team. I may not be the smartest guy in the world, but I'm not stupid! Why would I double-cross you now?"

Reiden's eyes bore into the man, trying to find the truth. He sensed that Dmitry was telling the truth, as much as he hated to acknowledge it. The man was a soldier, but he seemed to be truly terrified that he might die here tonight. Right now, in this dark alley. Reiden released his grip on the man's collar and stepped back, but kept the blaster leveled at him.

"Then what happened?" the Palatinaean asked.

"I don't know, I swear! Look, I told you before, didn't I? Command has been acting strangely; paranoid. Maybe they thought there was a traitor," Dmitry explained. He stopped for a moment as a look of cold dread crossed his features. "Oh, gods...what if they suspect that I'm the one? Or worse, what if they *know* it's me?!"

"Calm down, Dmitry," Reiden said, lowering his blaster slightly. "I'm sure they're just casting out bait to see what happens. Besides, Ulress has so much criminal activity and criminals aren't always the smartest people. It's entirely possible that anyone there could have tried to do something. And given the fact that the Meraxis seal was on their container, any would-be thief would know that there could be something pretty valuable inside there."

This seemed to pacify the man, as he visibly calmed down. Reiden may have omitted the fact that he had used his lightsaber to break in, but he felt that was for the best. For all Meraxis command knew, some inside man at the Vault could have given Scholae, or any other lightsaber wielder, the information that Meraxis had something stashed there.

"Listen," Reiden started. "I know you're stressed out right now, but you've just got to hang in there, okay? You'll be fine. Just remember to act natural, don't behave any differently as you would on any other day. Keep your head down and go about your business. I'll be in touch. Got it?"

"O-Okay, yeah, I got it," Dmitry said, letting out a long, shaky breath.

Reiden nodded and turned on his heel and began to walk away. He wanted to give the man his space to sort through his emotions and settle down. Aside from that, it was time for him to be heading out anyway. He had to prepare a report that he was to deliver to the rest of the clan summit, and he was sure that they wouldn't be happy that nothing had come of his mission. As Reiden made his way back to the starport, he couldn't help but

wonder what would happen next in Scholae's battle with Meraxis and their allies in the Collective as well. He pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind. That was an issue for another time. For now, he enjoyed the calm night air while he had opportunity before heading back home to Caelestis City.