



SUBMITTED IN ENTRY TO CSP COMPETITION - WORD
BANK

Zentru'la Rising Chapter 2: Masakado

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Zentru'la PALPATINE (5951)

NOTES: Zentru'la Rising is the new character arc of the newly named General Zentru'la Palpatine following GJW XIII. This fiction is Chapter 2. The full story can be found at https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ldl1VBKKW23I7m2Cvy86zZXSXSV_XyW8fG/view?usp=sharing

In Chapter 1, Zentru'la broke CSP pilot Rohla Thugain out of prison for piloting drunk, took Elinia Rei's old ship and started his solo mission against the Collective.

October 9, 2019

The ship shuddered back into reality, and the blackness of space once again filled the viewport. “Here we are Gen’ral!” Rohla Thugain took another swig of drink. “Coruscant!”

Coruscant was unlike anything Zentru’la had seen before: a planetary metropolis. The planet looked black with a maze pattern of orange, as the major transport routes were the only thing visible from space. Corporate space stations orbited the planet, like a flock of birds in synchronous flight. “We could be searching here for years. G14, Do we have any other leads besides ‘Coruscant’?” Zentru’la growled to the ship.

“Yes,” said a bodiless voice.

There was an awkward silence. “Tell me,” the mountainous twi’lek demanded.

“There have been reports of a cybernetic sword-wielding slicer on local holonet news. Last seen on Level 1313. Sending waypoint to the cockpit terminal.”

“Ooh there’s a cantina nearby! Let’s get a drink!” Rohla said with excitement as soon as the waypoint appeared in front of her. “The Space Bar!”

“Might not be a bad place to get information,” Zentru’la acknowledged.

“Wait...” Rohla said hesitantly. “Are you actually... willingly going to a bar?”

“We need to start our search somewhere. You can just drink and I’ll collect you when I’ve found Masakado. G14, what happens now? Will they just let us dock?”

“I’ve altered the ship’s transponder codes and registered us as a private security firm,” said G14-D05. “They’ll be expecting you. You’re a bounty hunter here to apprehend a dangerous gang leader at large on Level 1313. Mae Draven has been a thorn in the side of local security forces for years. They’ll appreciate your presence.”

“A bounty hunter? If only Bale Andros was here. Take us in, Trugaim. Slow and steady.”

“I’m many things, General, but steady is not one of them,” Rohla smiled as she brought the *Harbinger* into a steady decline towards the planet. Her voice wavered,

her steps swaggered, but Rohla's intoxicated piloting was as smooth as a . The shuttle glided on a slight arc. The closer they got to the city, the denser the traffic became, to the point where they were funnelled into a tight stream of incoming ships, on the same vector at the same speed, regimented to the millimetre like an army of well-drilled soldiers.

The city blocks stretched as far upwards and downwards as the eye could see as over a trillion people went about their lives. This was new territory for the General, having spent 20 years commanding his troops on the front lines and in the trenches. Eventually, Rohla pulled the ship to the left, into a docking station.

The ship landed softly on the hard interior. "I hope you had a pleasant flight!" Rohla attempted to get up from the pilot's chair, and almost fell over twice while doing so, spilled the remainder of her drink across the terminal, swore, and finally regained her composure.

"If they see you flew us in, they'll arrest us on sight. Stay behind me, and let me talk to customs," Zentru'la ordered. The General's heavy frame clunked against the landing ramp as he disembarked from the ship, with Rohla close behind him, struggling to keep her balance on the sloped surface.

As they disembarked, they were flanked by security officers, humans in light armour, carrying light blaster pistols, in stark comparison to Zentru'la's heavy armour, heavy repeating cannon and grenade launcher. "You're a sight for sore eyes, Zentru'la. Draven is still at large and our own forces haven't stood a chance with her."

"I'll take her down," Zentru'la growled with grim determination.

"And her? We weren't briefed on the Duros. Is she ok?" a guard gestured towards Rohla.

"She's my problem, not yours. I'll keep an eye on her. Rohla, with me, let's get a drink." Rohla looked like she wanted to chat more with the guard, but the offer of drink was more appealing, and she followed the general out of the spaceport into the vastness of Coruscant's Level 1313. There were a thousand levels of city below them and four thousand above. A wide walkway that acted more like a street ran through the centre of Level 1313, crammed with people old and young, human, Twi'lek, Zabrak, and alien races Zentru'la didn't even recognise. He had never been on a planet like this before.

They could hear The Space Bar cantina before they could see it. Loud, pulsing music and the smell of alcohol. It was everything Zentru'la hated, and Rohla loved. On the inside, things weren't that much better, barely dressed twi'leks danced on stage, the stench of body odour mixed with the smell of alcohol. This was the kind of establishment he'd strongly discipline his troops for visiting.

Zentru'la handed Rohla a credit chip. "Go get yourself a drink, and don't cause any trouble." Rohla happily swaggered off to the bar, and Zentru'la approached a human, sitting alone with a drink of blue liquid. "I'm looking for someone. Masakado."

"Never heard of him," said the man who immediately returned to his drink. Zentru'la moved on.

"Do you know where I can find Masakado?"

"You don't find Masakado," the next man growled, putting down his sandwich. "If he wants you, he will find you. Now leave me alone." Zentru'la backed off. He asked a few more people, until he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder.

He turned to see a Zabrak almost as large as he was, neatly dressed, holding a blaster pistol. "My patrons have been complaining about you making *strange requests*. Cut it out, or you can leave."

Zentru'la and the manager were interrupted by Rohla, bouncing across the cantina with a swagger and a smug smile. "I've got a lead! Masakado is hunting Mae Draven. We find her, we find him. Let's go." She grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him towards the exit, her drink still in the other hand.

Even outside, the music still pulsed in Zentru'la's ears. "So I was chatting with some guys," Rohla said, still holding on to Zentru'la's arm. "One of them works for Draven. Talked about a 'butcher' that killed five of her men with a sword. He's after her next. Gotta be him."

"I'm impressed, Trugain," Zentru'la admitted, not expecting the Duros to be useful for anything except her piloting skills. He tapped into a commlink. "G14, where is Mae Draven based?"

“2 kilometres from your location,” said the AI. “Sending a waypoint to your datapad. Expect heavy resistance, Draven’s security is stronger than local police forces.”

“Acknowledged. From here on out there will be a lot of fighting. It’s best if I go alone for this one. Trugain, you can go back to the cantina or meet me back aboard the *Harbinger*.”

“Sure thing! I need another drink anyway. See you back at the ship, boss!” Rohla slipped back into the cantina, leaving Zentru’la alone to face down Mae Draven. This was more his sort of fight. An enemy surrounded by a load of guards. A straight fight. Zentru’la made his way through the streets of Level 1313 towards Draven’s base while scanning blueprints sent through by G14-D05. Draven had set up a freight forwarding company as a front for a gang of thieves and lowlives, a hive of scum and villainy.

His plan was simple. Be the one with the bigger guns, heavier armour and fight everyone in his way. Anyone working for a crime lord was a fair target, and if the fighting took place within Draven’s base of operations, the chances of killing any bystanders were minimal. Draven had set up her base in plain sight. The bright red signage for Draven Logistics was the brightest object on its street, almost teasing the local security forces to try to take her. Zentru’la readied his weapons, checked his armour, and walked straight in the front door.

The one-man raid was swift, brutal, and executed with surgical precision. Draven’s grunts attempted to surround the twi’lek, but a powerful personal energy field and top-of-the-range armour repelled their small arms fire while he unleashed a torrent of bolts from his repeating cannon. A flurry of cannon fire and grenades made short work of the guards on the lower floor. Zentru’la made towards the turbolift before the dust even settled.

Draven had dark skin, dark hair, and an exotic purple jacket that reminded Zentru’la of the clothes his daughter used to wear. She put her notebook down and rose to her feet, flanked on both sides by a small squadron of guards.

His repeating rifle aimed squarely between the eyes of Draven, Zentru’la stared down her personal guard, four blaster pistols pointing back at him. Draven, despite being unarmed, seemed calm and composed, feeling safe in her numerical advantage. “You’ve come far enough, bounty hunter,” she said smoothly and confidently. “You did well to

take out so many of my men. Lay down your weapons, and we might be able to work out a deal here.”

Zentru’la noticed visible surprise on Draven’s face as he lowered his cannon. “I am not here to claim your bounty.”

Draven kept her hand held high, signalling her men to keep their weapons raised. “Then why are you here, killing my enforcers, raiding my personal quarters and destroying my property, and why shouldn’t my men kill you on sight?”

“I am looking for someone that’s looking for you,” Zentru’la said honestly, keeping his weapon in his hand, but safely lowered towards the floor.

“I don’t believe you,” Draven said directly. “Who would be looki-

A guard grunted in pain and fell to the floor dead, blood spurted from a knife wound in the side of his next. “What was that?” shouted Draven as the remaining guards scanned the rooms. Zentru’la raised his cannon back up to shoulder height and reactivated his shield generator.

A sliver shadow swept across the floor. A blur of black steel. The remaining guards were dead before they could move. The assassin darted behind Draven, putting a sword of black steel to her throat. A moment later, he cut the throat of the crime boss before she could say a word.

Masakado was more machine than his natural race of Shistavenan. His canine face, covered in short grey fur, was gaunt and thin with a mechanical lower jaw, framed by a thick mane of black hair. He wore a pitch black tunic, tattered and torn, revealing dark grey cybernetics, sleek and smooth. Zentru’la could see bits of his torso were mechanical too. “General Zentru’la of the Scholae Empire,” said a rasping voice that sounded half-way between organic and synthetic as he dropped Draven’s limp body to the floor. “I thought I’d find you here.”

Zentru’la paused for a moment. *How did Masakado already know his name?* “But I came here to find you,” was all Zentru’la could think of saying.

“I can see why you’d think that,” Masakado said as he sheathed his sword. “I’ve been

watching you for some time. The trick with the transponder codes was clever, but your AI is not as thorough as she thinks she is. I wanted to see what you could do before meeting you.”

“You used me as a distraction to get to Draven?” Zentru’la grunted.

“I needed a diversion and you needed to speak with me. I wanted to see what you could do before joining your crew.” *He already knows everything* Zentru’la thought. There was no way he could gain the upper hand in this discussion, he felt like a nervous young student in a job interview way above his pay grade. “If I have to fight guards, I’ve made a mistake. But you seem to seek it out.”

“I’m no assassin,” Zentru’la admitted. “I prefer a straight fight. I need someone like you. Someone that combines the skills of a slicer and an assassin.”

“I know,” Masakado said with such a tone that made Zentru’la even more uneasy about how much he knew about him and his plans. “You need someone to help you in your mission against the Collective. I can provide you what you need. I have one thing to ask in return.”

There was a moment of pause. “What is it you need?”

“I’m dying, General. The Cybernetics. The Collective turned me into the ultimate assassin... but their tampering has a cost. A sickness has taken over. My body is a machine, but my mind is dying. Cell by cell. High levels of bacta have halted the process... but only for a time.”

Zentru’la was caught completely by surprise by Masakado’s revelation and request. “I’m not a medic. I wouldn’t know where to begin. I can hire a doctor onboard the *Harbinger*? Would that be sufficient?”

“I have found no doctor that can help,” Masakado said darkly. “This is outside the realms of science.” Masakado dramatically drew his sword, kneeling and placing it on the floor in front of him. “Find me a healer that can reverse this sickness, and my sword is yours. No charge.”