

Zentru'la Rising



CHAPTER 3:
THE BATTLE OF NARDASH

Zentru'la Palpatine (5951)

A Star Wars Story

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Zentru'la Rising is a single continuous story that spans multiple fiction competitions, following Elincia Rei's death. This fiction covers Chapter 3. The full story can be found **here**.

In Chapter 1, Zentru'la broke Scholae ace pilot Rohla Trugaim out of prison for flying drunk in the Battle over Lyra, took Elincia's shuttle, the *Harbinger*, inhabited by the rogue AI G14-D05, and set out on his own personal mission to build a strike team to attack the Collective.

In Chapter 2, he recruited the cyborg ninja, Masakado, a former Collective hacker, infiltrator and assassin, but learned that the Collective cybernetic implants had left him with a neuro-degenerative disease that no doctor has been able to solve.

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THE BATTLE OF NARDASH

Shades of blue and purple shone in the viewports as the *Harbinger* accelerated back to the Caperion System. “Your Duros pilot is rather strange, General,” said the hollow, half-synthetic voice of the half-synthetic, half-canine assassin Masakado.

“Don’t worry about Captain Trugaim,” Zentru’la reassured. “She was the best pilot in the ISN. Her commanding officer didn’t appreciate her flying drunk in battle. I broke her out of prison for this mission.”

“You are an experienced commander. I trust your judgment.” Masakado turned to the desk, and swallowed a large tablet of Bacta. His third in the last hour.

“Is there anything else that’s concerning you?” Zentru’la asked, wanting to make sure that the new member of his growing team was comfortable aboard the *Harbinger*.

If they were going to fight the Collective with such a small force, he knew he needed to ensure absolute trust and respect between every member of his team. “How are you getting on with G14?”

“Masakado is a fascinating specimen,” said a smooth, female robotic voice from every corner of the ship.

For a second, it almost looked like Masakado was about to smile. “She’s certainly a unique AI. We had in depth discussions about where she went wrong on Coruscant. She may be able to fool most automated systems. There is room for improvement.”

“And your condition?”

“It won’t affect my work. Bacta is continuing to halt disease progression. I still have my mind... for now. But it’s not enough.”

“G14, any luck on the search for a healer?” Zentru’la asked the ship.

“I have found an optimal match,” said the AI. “Lilina Mirin. A Jedi Healer that retrained as a medical doctor. She was last seen in the Caelus System.”

“She sounds good, but there must be someone closer to home. Keep searching. We will find someone to reverse your sickness, Masakado. You have my word.”

The *Harbinger* jumped abruptly out of hyperspace. “Welcome home guys!” shouted Rohla, as she swaggered through the ship, leaving it on autopilot. “I need another drink!”

“General, there’s a message coming through,” said G14-Do5. “It’s from the... Empress. Shadow Palpatine Nighthunter.”

Zentru’la paused for a moment. He understood that the Palpatines ordering his daughter’s death had been her own plan... it was her last, final mission. Self-sacrifice,

sacrifice of both her life, and her honour. He understood the Palpatines were carrying out her plan, but he couldn't help but feel some resentment that one of them had taken her place as Empress. And although he respected Shadow as an assassin, she was no commander. "Fine, patch her through," Zentru'la finally said after a moment of thought.

A hologram of Shadow Nighthunter appeared in the centre of the ship, a shimmering blue projection of a black hooded cloak. "General Zentru'la," said the young voice. "Our war with Meraxis is at an end. Our final assault on Nardash is underway, but our attacks have been repelled by a city-wide shield generator. We need you to take a team inside and shut it down." The hologram flashed into nothingness.

"She can fwec off!" shouted Rohla as she stumbled across the ship, her glass now full. "We choose our own battles! We follow no commander but Zentru'la!"

"A target's a target," said Masakado darkly. "It doesn't matter who, or how many."

"Rohla's right," growled Zentru'la, slowly pacing the ship. "Shadow does not command us. But this is a battle I choose to fight. The Meraxis Empire are bankrolled by The Collective. Let's crush that investment. Ready your weapons, and Rohla, bring us towards Seraph."

Zentru'la walked through to the cockpit, loading up a terminal. A green and black screen showed the battle-lines above the planet of Seraph. Once the pride of the Meraxis Empire, now the Scholae Empress' flagship, the *Retribution* loomed menacingly over the Meraxis capital city of Nardash, flanked on each side by two Vindicator class cruisers, corvettes, and fighter carriers. Turning the *Retri-*

bution against its owners had dominated the space battle for Scholae, but on the ground, the Meraxis Empire had the home field advantage. Walls five metres high were mounted with anti-personnel and anti-vehicle turrets, encased in a protective shell that only allowed outwards fire. The Scholae army surrounded the city, but with the entirety of the Meraxis Army safely behind the shield generator, they had no way of advancing without deactivating it first.

Zentru'la scrolled and rotated the map. "Rohla, see that area round the back of the city, 140 degrees off north? It's guarded but it's probably our best approach vector... Rohla put your drink down and look at this. Masakado come over here too." Rohla moaned a little but looked over at the terminal. "We'll approach the city at midnight and under the cloud cover in the South-East. G14 will keep the stealth systems engaged. We'll be invisible to sensors, obscured by cloud and camouflaged by the night. Masakado, you'll infiltrate the city alone. Deactivate the shield generator, and the war is over. Make sure we arrive above Seraph after nightfall. I'll call in extra support."

There were only two people he needed for this mission. First, a legendary Togruta sniper, gifted in both the Force and the rifle. Zentru'la turned and left the cockpit to a quiet corner of the living area, speaking quietly into a commlink. "Zehsaa? I need your help."

The reply came almost immediately. "All I want to do right now is find Bale," she said with a pained tone. Zentru'la could sympathise with that. He understood all too well what it was like to lose a loved one in war, and how difficult it was to move on despite knowing it was the right

thing to do.

He paused for a second. Soft, gentle words had never been the General's style. "Bale is dead, Zehsaa. I wish it weren't true, I wish he could be here fighting with us right now. But he died in Kaera's Run."

"They're wrong," Zehsaa said with resolve. "I've felt it in the Force. Bale is alive. I have no idea where, but he's out there, somewhere" Zentru'la had spent decades working alongside the Force users of the Scholae Empire, and respected the power of the Force. They said his daughter was one of the greatest illusionists that ever lived. He didn't understand Zehsaa's visions, but something told him to trust them.

"If Bale is alive, I want to find him too. When this is over, we'll track him down. I'm sending co-ordinates to your datapad, meet me there at 1:20 am." He cut off the call and called the explosives expert, the Nautolan Aylin Sajark. She was much more amenable to his proposition, jumping on the chance to 'team up with Zen' again. The plan was set, and the team was in place.

The viewports were a pitch black on the outside as the ship descended into the lower atmosphere. The only source of light was the blue hue of the shield generator and flashes of explosive weaponry as Scholae artillery bombarded the city with fire from the ground, and from the *Retribution* in orbit. "Stealth systems engaged," said the voice of G14-Do5.

"Perfect," said Zentru'la to the AI. "They'll have a hard time spotting anything by sight in this darkness."

"You're telling me, I can't see a fwecing thing! Every-

one hang on to something! I'm bringing us down!" shouted Rohla as she brought the ship into a smooth dive through some low cloud cover towards the protection of the Imperial Scholae Army stationed on the ground. The lights of the Scholae camp brought some visibility back to the viewports.

"There! Between the AT-ATs, bring us in slow," ordered Zentru'la. The *Harbinger* swooped between the lumbering walking tanks, before decelerating down to a slow glide.

The boarding ramp opened and a cold chill rushed through the ship as the front was suddenly exposed to the midnight air. On the ground, Zentru'la saw the explosives expert. A dark shade of green, long tentacles, and an excited grin on her face, Aylin waved vibrantly to the *Harbinger*. Activating a jetpack, she boosted herself up to the landing ramp from the ground, almost landing on Zentru'la as she did so with a bright "Hey Zen!"

"Good to see you again, Aylin." Aylin Sajark was crazy, but damn good at what she did, a gifted mechanic, slicer, and demolitions expert. The last time they worked together, Aylin had dressed him as a battle droid and pretended she was bringing him for servicing to gain access to a research facility. It was a stupid idea, but he couldn't deny it would work. "Now all we need is Zehsaa Hysh."

"I'm already here, Zentru'la." Zehsaa, the tall, slim rust-orange Togruta with hazel eyes, needed no help from technology to make the jump from the ground to the shuttle.

"Good. Masakado will infiltrate Nardash alone and bring down the shield generator. Aylin, get ready to blow an army sized hole in the wall when the shield goes down. Zehsaa and I will provide cover fire."

“Oooo!” Aylin said excitedly as she saw the infiltrator, covered in cybernetics and knives.

“I wouldn’t tinker with this one, Aylin,” Zentru’la warned as Masakado walked towards the open landing ramp.

Without a word, he drew his sword and jumped from the ship, landing smoothly into a roll. From the ship he almost seamlessly blended in with the black of night as he ran towards the city wall. Running at full tilt, he drew a grappling hook and launched himself up the city wall, and on to the other side. He jumped from rooftop to rooftop as he glided over the city of Nardash.

“I’ll go set up the explosives!” Aylin grinned, using her jetpack to get down to the ground safely.

Zehsaa turned to Zentru’la as Rohla brought the ship back up into the safety of the clouds. “So now everything hinges on the random ex-Collective assassin you’ve just hired. What’s stopping Meraxis from just paying him off? I’m sure they can outbid you.”

“He hates the Collective as much as we do, and if he was going to betray us he’d have put a knife in my back by now,” Zentru’la growled. “Besides, he isn’t working for credits.” Zehsaa tilted her head slightly. “He’s dying unless we can find him a healer. Collective tampering has caused a rare brain disease. I promised I’d find him one if he fights for us.”

“Wouldn’t be the first bounty hunter manipulated into working mission gratis,” Zentru’la knew she referred to Elincia using Bale Andros’ daughter’s life as a bargaining chip to secure his services.

“There are very few people in the Galaxy that can track someone like he can. When I sought him out, he already

knew I was coming and what I was planning. If there's anyone that can help us track down Bale Andros, it's Masakado."

"If he helps us find Bale, I'll help him find a healer," Zehsaa said reasonably. "And if he takes down that shield generator, he'll have proven his talents."

With that, Zentru'la heard a bleep in his ear and a rasping, hollow voice. "I'm at the main generator, General. I'll cut power to the city in 2 minutes."

"Acknowledged, Masakado. Good work," Zentru'la said before switching channels. "Aylin, are you in position?" She replied with a typical, cheery affirmation. "Alright Rohla, bring us back closer, keep us as steady as you can." The mountainous Zentru'la rarely needed a support for his blaster, but today was a rare occasion. He reconfigured his repeating blaster into the precise, powerful sniper configuration and mounted the tripod on the edge of the boarding ramp. He kept low for balance as every movement the ship made threatened to throw him a long way to the ground, and kept his weapon aimed towards the city. Zehsaa kept prone behind him, observing the world through a sniper scope. "Keep us very very steady Rohla."

Right on time, the lights of a large, central section of the city went black. The protective cyan glow of the shield generator flickered and vanished. There was shouting in all directions. Seconds later, a series of colossal explosions on the near side of the city reduced a large section of the wall to rubble.

"I did it Zen!" shouted Aylin down a commlink. "I'm coming back!"

"Excellent. Now we need to get Masakado back out, they'll know this was an inside job." Zentru'la scanned the

area through his rifle's scope. The Meraxis army fanned out across the city as they attempted to simultaneously find the attacker within and barricade the breach to the city wall. Zehsaa had proven her reputation as a legendary sniper many times over, but her skill never ceased to amaze Zentru'la. Rohla strafed the ship left and right, firing the heavy laser cannons of the *Harbinger* at the city, but even from the moving platform she struck down target after target with pinpoint precision.

"I've found him, near the large park," murmured Zehsaa. Zentru'la swiftly zoomed out, for a panorama of the city, found the park and zoomed back in to locate Masakado. The cyborg assassin ran from shadow to shadow, chopping down Meraxis security and military as he went. As Meraxis forces attempted to surround and cut off Masakado's escape room, they were eliminated one by one by Zehsaa and Zentru'la.

As Scholae forces were alerted to the destruction of the shield barrier, Imperial Scholae Stormtroopers began to assault the wall breach and artillery began to rain down on the city. Masakado's sheer speed as he vaulted over buildings, walls and other obstacles got him to a section of city wall a safe distance from the battle that had erupted over the hull breach. With the aid of a grappling hook he vaulted over the wall.

Aylin landed back in the ship via her jetpack, almost knocking Zentru'la to the ground as she did. "Sorry," she grinned. "Still learning to use this thing." Masakado joined shortly afterwards, latching his grappling hook to the boarding ramp and swinging aboard the ship, landing silently. The boarding ramp closed behind him, protecting the cabin

from the elements.

“The Army can finish this fight without us,” said Zentru’la. “Let’s get out of here. We have people to track down.”