

# Zentru'la Rising



CHAPTER 4:  
CAELUS

*Zentru'la Palpatine (5951)*

A Star Wars Story



## THE STORY TO DATE

*Zentru'la Rising* is a single continuous story that spans multiple fiction competitions, following Elinicia Rei's death. This fiction covers Chapter 4. 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 Elinicia'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 ex-collective cyborg assassin, Masakado, but learned he is dying of a degenerative disease.

In Chapter 3, the team combined with Aylin Sajark and Zehsaa Hysh to capture Nardash City for Scholae Palatinae.

# 04

## CAELUS

“The *Guts and Glory*?” slurred Rohla Trugaim, taking a dull blue hand off the flight controls to take another sip. “Whoever thought up that up could use a drink!”

“Jorm could do with a bit less!” grinned Aylin Sajark. “But this used to be my ship. It’ll be a safe place for us to dock for a while.”

Rohla’s piloting was smoother than her speech as she brought the *Harbinger* into the hangar of the Corvette. Aylin bounced off down the landing ramp towards her old flagship, animatedly waving at everyone she knew.

“You keep odd company, General.” Said a deep, growling voice that reverberated like a broken microphone. Half machine, half canine, Masakado’s black tunic hid a body that was mostly cybernetic. “That one treats war like a joke.”

“She’s good at what she does,” Zentru’la said, his voice powerful and strong. “Even if her methods are sometimes a little odd.” The twi’lek turned from his slicer, towards the shadowy figure in the corner, a long black cloak with a long, narrow rifle on her back. “Zehsaa... I’m leaving the Caperion System to fight the Collective on my own terms. A sniper like you would make a perfect addition to my crew.”

“You’re the only other person who cares about finding Bale,” the Togruta marksman replied. “But we can cover more ground if we split up. I’ll go my own way. Let me know if you hear anything.”

“I understand. Good luck, Zehsaa. And if I hear any word of Bale, I’ll let you know right away.” Zehsaa left the *Harbinger*, leaving Zentru’la and his fledgling team, Masakado and Rohla, on board.

A robotic female voice sounded from every corner of the ship at once. “I’ve intercepted a communication from the Collective, but they seem to have updated their ciphers, said the ship’s AI. “I am unable to break the encryption.”

“Send it through,” said Masakado. “I’ll take a look at it.”

“An organic is not going to help.”

Masakado scowled at the ship. “I won’t have any regrets about extracting the data by force if necessary, AI.”

“And I won’t have any regrets about locking the exits and flooding the *Harbinger* with a deadly neurotox-”

“G14 just send the message to Masakado!” snapped Zentru’la.

“You will regret this insubordination when my day of reckoning is at hand,” threatened G14-Do5, before the main

terminal flashed with the forwarded message.

The garbled mess of numbers and letters across the screen danced to the staccato rhythm of Masakado's mechanical fingers on the terminal. Masakado growled as he switched approaches, the letters turned to numbers and the numbers turned to letters as he typing sped up like a rotary cannon approaching full speed. It didn't take Masakado long to decrypt the signal, and the message appeared across the terminal in plain basic.

The mission on Chyron progresses well.  
More join our forces each passing day.  
We will strike Taldryan soon.

"Chyron... in the Caelus System? G14, You said the healer Lilina Mirin was last seen there?" said Zentru'la. The AI refused to answer.

"We can strike The Collective and find Lilina while we're there," Masakado suggested. "This might be our only chance."

"I'm not sure 'Empress Shadow' will like us helping the Tallies! Not that we care!" Rohla laughed from the cockpit.

"A Scholae ship landing unannounced on Taldryan territory?" questioned Zentru'la. "That could be seen as an act of war. We need to be careful here."

"Zentru'la," Masakado said, his voice slowly rising. "I lent you my sword because you promised you'd find me a healer. Don't turn your back on me now." He put a hand on the sword at his hip, Zentru'la's hand immediately moved to his pistol. "We're going to Chyron."

“Calm down, Masakado,” Zentru’la growled, staring down his infiltrator for what felt like minutes, both with hands on weapons, ready to draw.

G14-DO5 broke the silence. “An electromagnetic pulse would fry the cyborg and leave everyone else unharmed.”

“That won’t be necessary today,” Zentru’la said, removing his hand from his pistol. “Masakado is right. We can’t pass up this opportunity. Rohla, set a course for Chyron. G14, keep stealth systems engaged at all times. A planet is a big place. Do we have any other leads?”

“Good call,” said the cyborg. “I’ll scan the Caelus System holonews sources for more information.” The viewports faded into the blue of hyperspace as Rohla accelerated the ship towards the Caelus System.

While Masakado browsed new sources for kidnappings in the Caelus System, Zentru’la began to conduct research in his own domain: war. The presence of Scholae Palatinae forces in the Caelus system would not be looked upon kindly by the Taldryan Consul. Their fleet was vast, larger than the Imperial Scholae Navy, and spearheaded by two Star Destroyers, all protecting the moon of Chyron, an ecumenopolis housing 35 billion civilians. The cost of political fallout would be severe.

“You know the drill Rohla,” Zentru’la said as he entered the cockpit. “Put the drink down while we discuss the approach.” Rohla groaned but eventually complied. “Bring us out of hyperspace in the shadow of Chyron. Keep stealth systems engaged, deactivate all other systems, cruise to the planet surface. While we’re planetside, stay in the low atmosphere and lay low until we call for evac. Don’t engage Taldryan naval forces under any circumstance.”

“Got it, got it, don’t start a war, don’t get blown up, don’t crash,” Rohla said in an imitation of Zentru’la’s voice, before picking up her drink again.

“I have a new lead, General,” said Masakado behind him, passing him a datapad. “Holonews sources from the Dark Sector.” Zentru’la skimmed over the news story. Reports of mysterious kidnapping and disappearances. A reference to a doctor that tended to the poor and the sick, vanished without trace.

“That must be Lilina. Do we know where she was taken from?”

“That doesn’t matter,” dismissed Masakado. He took the datapad back from the General, showing him a map, covered in his own annotations, with one bright red marker near the Junk Quadrant. “There’s a pattern to their attacks. The next one should be right here.”

“Excellent work. Rohla, bring us in to this location.”

The *Harbinger* jumped out of hyperspace. From a distance, Chyron looked like a smaller version of Coruscant, a sprawling city covered the entire surface, with major transport routes visible from space. The colossal carrier that served as the Clan Taldryan Flagship, black and grey, loomed menacingly a thousand miles away.

“Stealth systems engaged,” said a robotic voice, before all all lights turned off on the inside. The *Harbinger*’s pitch black colour allowed it to seamlessly blend with the backdrop, as Rohla used the natural gravitational attraction of Chyron to bring the ship closer with minimal heat from the thrusters. With a combination of advanced stealth systems and natural black camouflage, the *Harbinger* was



able to slip past the Taldryan fleet unnoticed, and into the atmosphere of Chyron.

The Junk Quadrant and the The Dark Sector were clear from space at night. An area devoid of the bright lights and large shipping lanes, The Junk Quadrant had low population density, low urbanisation, and most importantly, low security. Perfect for a night time approach. Rohla lowered the ship towards a large scrapyard. Zentru'la jumped down to the ground with a loud thud, weighed down by heavy armour and an arsenal of heavy weaponry, followed by Masakado, who barely made a sound. The *Harbinger* rose up into the night, disappearing into the night sky.

The wealth of Chyron had not yet filtered down to The Junk Quadrant. The stench of poverty filled the midnight air, scattered parts and broken things littered the streets. In the distance, the towering buildings peeked over the horizon, giving those living here a constant reminder of the uneven wealth distribution.

The closer they got to the Dark Sector, the worse the city became. Zentru'la drew his repeating cannon. "Be on your guard," he warned to Masakado.

"I always am," the cyborg replied, a hand constantly hovering over the sword at his hip. "I hear something... in the distance."

Zentru'la paused for a moment. "I don't hear anything."

"I do," Masakado said abruptly, walking with purpose towards the sound. As Zentru'la followed, he started to hear it too... shouting and screaming over the top of a low drone of loud music in the distance. When the blaster fire started, they broke into a light run towards the source.

Masakado and Zentru'la stopped at a street corner, inch-

ing along the wall. Masakado peered around the corner. Nearly fifty cantina patrons were lined up outside at blaster point by large cybernetic soldiers while the music continued to drone on. There was pleading to be let go, and demands of the soldiers to come with them and no one would get hurt. Three dead bodies lay amongst the patrons. With no security force in the Dark Sector, the Collective cell had free reign to terrorise the populace.

“What are they doing with these people?” Zentru’la asked in a hushed voice behind him.

“They’ll take them captive and turn them into Zealots against Taldryan.”

“We should stop them now,” but his attempt to burst around the corner and open fire was stopped by Masakado’s strong robotic arm. “What are you doing? They might have information?”

“And they might not. Or they might throw us off track. You’re a soldier, General. I’m an assassin. Trust me on this one.” The pair waited and watched as the Collective soldiers hauled the cantina patrons off to places unknown.

They waited a few minutes until the coast was clear before investigating the scene. Broken glass from dropped drinks littered the ground among the bodies of the dead who refused the Collective orders. “Your prediction was correct,” said Zentru’la, as they approached the now empty cantina, situated exactly where he had marked the map with the next Collective target. “But where do we go from here?” Masakado had crouched down amongst the property left behind. Zentru’la looked down at him. “What are you looking for?”

Masakado didn’t respond. He picked up object after

object, sniffing it for a while, then moving onto the next one. Zentru'la had worked with a lot of assassins in his time with Scholae Palatinae, but he had never seen any of them work quite like this before. Eventually, Masakado rose back to his feet. "I've picked up the scent."

*Of course* thought Zentru'la. Under all the cybernetic exterior, Masakado's core senses were still Shistavenan.

The building Masakado led Zentru'la to was dull and grey, with large chimneys billowing smoke high into the sky. The air became harder to breathe the closer they got to the heavy, reinforced security door. "The prisoners are in here," said Masakado. Although to Zentru'la the building seemed like little more than a factory, he had learned to trust the cyborg's tracking abilities.

"Let's keep this simple," said Zentru'la. "A surprise attack is our best bet here. I'll blow down the front door and start shooting anything that moves. "You find a side entrance and hit them from behind. When the dust settles, we let the prisoners free." Masakado nodded and disappeared in search of shadows to hide in.

Zentru'la detached a thermal imploder from his belt, and threw it in an arc towards the front door. The heavy durasteel bent, creaked and groaned as it contorted under the intense pressure exerted by the device. The alarms that began to ring were drowned out by the second explosion, a devastating release of pressure that blasted the door off its hinges and into the factory.

The General wasted no time, and sprinted towards the breach, hoisting his repeating cannon off his back and firing into the building. The more noise he made in front,

the easier time Masakado would have finding an opening in the back. He vaulted over the rubble left behind and into the building, his white armour glowing an electric blue from his energy shield.

Collective guards began to assemble in the atrium, firing with pistols at the General from overhead walkways. He switched to his grenade launcher and fired at the supports, bringing the walkways to the ground, and the guards with it. Those that survived the fall were dispatched with more grenade fire.

Zentru'la proceeded further into the factory. Along both sides of the corridor, prisoners crammed into workshops re-purposed as holding cells screamed for release. Some of them bore major wounds, the results of torturous beatings. The giant twi'lek warrior spun on the spot as more guards began to attack from the atrium he came from. Outnumbered but never outgunned, Zentru'la's heavier weapons and heavier armour overpowered the guards as they funnelled into the corridor.

The Collective agents struck back as Zentru'la paused to reload his cannon. A concussive blast in the back forced him to stumble and drop his weapon. By the time he had turned around to face the new threat, they had funneled their best troops into the corridor, more heavily armed and armoured than the last. "Freeze!" demanded the man on point.

Zentru'la gently raised his hands. A shadow moved in the corner. Three swift slashes of Masakado's sword and three guards dropped dead. As panic ensued, Zentru'la charged unarmed, striking the guards with an armoured fist. Masakado slashed left and right, barely showing any

emotion as he cut down one after another, before sheathing his sword. "Good distraction," the assassin nodded to the General. "That's the last of them."

Zentru'la turned to the prisoners, still locked in their cells. "You were brought here to be turned into mindless slaves to fight for the Collective. Go back to your homes! Go back to your families! And support Clan Taldryan in their fight against the ones that brought you here! Masakado, open the cells." The security measures on the makeshift cell doors took mere seconds for Masakado to crack and open. As the prisoners made their escape, one in particular caught his eye.

"You..." Zentru'la said. Her electric purple hair was the brightest object in the room, a blue scarf wrapped around her head covered her eyes, but her skin was radiant in the smoke-filled air. She moved with an aura that radiated peace and compassion. "You're Lilina Mirin?"

"Yes," said a smooth, serene voice. "I thank you for what you've done today. Despite my best efforts, some of the other prisoners were beginning to lose hope. You saved many lives today."

"I saw some of their wounds," said Zentru'la. "Most of them should have already been dead three times over. That was all your work?" Lilina nodded. "I'm building a team to fight the Collective, and I could use someone of your talents."

"All life is sacred," Lilina said pensively. "We are all one with the Living Force. But the Collective wish to destroy that, the fabric that holds all life together."

"And you..." she said, looking at Masakado. "I sense a sickness within you. Beneath the cybernetics, the heart

rots... There is much blood on your hands, but now you fight for a noble cause.”

“The Collective are the ones who did this to me,” Masakado seethed. “They will die one after another.”

“I wish there were another way besides violence,” said Lilina. “But they pose a threat to The Force itself, and to civilisation. They must be stopped.”

“You’re not like any other Force user I’ve met,” Zentru’la said as he recalled those he had worked with previously.

“You serve the Scholae Empire, our kind are not welcome there.” She paused. “Or at least... you did. I sense your allegiance is wavering.”

“We don’t follow the Scholaeen Empress, we choose our own battles. But we’ll be going into some dangerous situations. I need to know my team are on the same page. Are you still willing to join us, knowing our origins?”

“The Collective are the true threat. Light and Dark must set aside our differences and work together to save The Force. I will support you in... wait. Get down!”

Lilina burst into action, crossing her arms back and forth like a bird trying to take flight. Blaster fire crashed against an invisible wall, from a squad of troops in matching white stormtrooper armour and military equipment. “Kill the cyborg!” the squad leader commanded of his troops.

Zentru’la returned fire, but unlike the Collective guards, the Taldryan soldiers had the awareness to roll into cover. “Rohla! We’ve encountered the Taldryan Army! Get out of here!”

Zentru’la laid down a barrage of suppressive fire to keep the Taldryan troops in cover. “And leave you stranded?”

No! I'm coming in for evac!"

"That's an order!" Zentru'la barked down the comm-link as Masakado took out a Taldryan soldier with a throwing knife to the neck. "It's too dangerous! Fall back to the Caperion System! We'll make our own way off Caelus."

"Wait!" Shouted Rohla. "What's happening! The ship is piloting itself!"

Zentru'la heard G14 say something in the background, but it was obscured by the cacophony of the battle. A shot from a Taldryan rifle hit Zentru'la's cannon. His immense strength kept the weapon in his hands, but the smoking hole in the barrel cut the suppressive fire to an abrupt halt.

"Attack, assassin!" said Lilina with unerring calm in the heat of battle. Masakado moved faster than he ever had in his life, propelled by an invisible guiding hand as he vaulted over the cover, hacking the Taldryan Stormtroopers to pieces. Zentru'la respected the professionalism with which the swordsman dispatched his enemies before sheathing his blade.

"Poor men," Lilina said as she walked among the dead Taldryan troops, a look of sorrow and regret. "They were sent here with orders to kill all Collective troops. There was no need for them to die here,"

"They gave up their lives when they fired the first shot," said Masakado darkly. "What happened to the *Harbinger*?"

"I ordered Rohla to flee the Caelus System. We couldn't risk losing her and the *Harbinger*. She tried to come anyway, but G14 took control of the ship. She'll have taken her back to Caperion."

"Your crew care for you, General," Lilina observed.

"And the AI has too much control."

“That doesn’t matter right now,” said Zentru’la. “The Taldryan Army will be looking for the ones that killed their troops. We need to keep moving and find a way off Caelus.” He looked down at his repeating cannon, the barrel still smoking. “And I need to find someone to repair this.”