

Zentru'la Rising



CHAPTER 7:
The Vornskr Battalion

General Zentru'la (5951)

A Star Wars Story

THE STORY TO DATE

Zentru'la Rising is a single continuous story that spans multiple fiction competitions, following Elincia Rei's death. This fiction covers Chapter 7. The full story can be found **here**, but this chapter is self-contained.

THE VORNSKR BATALLION

This mission had gone from bad to worse to strange to stranger for the rogue Imperial Scholae Army General. What started as a mission to bust Taldryan healer Lilina Mirin out of a Collective prison on Chyron and add her to his growing team had led to a skirmish with the Taldryan military who mistook them for the Collective. While on the run, a chance the first man Zentru'la would have recruited if he didn't believe him to be dead, Bale Andros, led to Zentru'la and his team joining forces with Bale's Battleteam Tavros to attack a space station on behalf of Taldryan.

Zentru'la didn't care about Taldryan's station, but this was a blow against the Collective - a step towards avenging his daughter. Tonal'la sacrificed her life and her honour to save the Scholae Empire, Zentru'la himself had fired the shot to the heart, but the Collective were the ones be-

hind it all and now, in his advancing years he had one goal, to do as much damage to them as he could in the time he had left.

Building his own team and fighting the Collective on his own terms had been far more productive than continuing to serve the stagnating Scholae Empire.

"Holo-message incoming." said a female, synthetic voice from within the walls of the ship. "From the Caperion System."

"Whatever, patch it through G14," Zen said dismissively.

"General Zentru'la Palpatine," said a soulless, monotonic male voice. "News has broken of your participation in the Taldryan raid of Sentinel station. For providing military aid to a hostile clan, you are hereby charged with treason against the Empire. You have twenty-four standard hours to report to the Caperion System for a formal hearing. Failure to co-operate will result in an automatic guilty verdict, and the loss of all ranks and titles. The same applies to Captain Rohla Truga-."

"Ha! I was already discharged for flying drunk!" Rohla laughed from the cockpit over the end of the message. "Welcome to the club, General."

"We never served the Scholae Empire anyway," he said, the Scholae insignia still emblazoned on his heavy white armour. "This was always going to happen when we went rogue. And I have no intention of giving back the *Harbinger*. This is our ship now."

"And because I'll flood the ship with a deadly neurotoxin if you tried," said the synthetic voice within the walls that they had become so used to ignoring.

"So what happens now?" growled Masakado's voice

from the shadows, an amalgamation of man and machine, canine and cybernetic, a gaunt, dark canine face framed by a thick black mane, and the rest a mechanical body built for combat.

Zentru'la stood tall in front of his team. "We're soldiers without an army. I guess that makes us a band of mercenaries now. We can fight alongside Bale Andros and his team, earn credits where we can and continue to take the fight to the Collective on our own terms."

"We better get on it soon!" Rohla shouted across the ship. "We're almost out of booze!"

"Wait, you nearly finished *all* of it?" said Zentru'la, incredulously.

"You try spending a week quality time with a psychotic AI for company!" she said defensively.

"We'll get you some more after the next job," Zentru'la assured her. "Right now, we need to *find* the next job."

"Taldryan could help us," said the peaceful, deeply meditative voice of a Miraluka with long, electric-purple hair and skin that almost glowed. "We should contact Erinyes. I'm sure you two can work something out between you."

"Good idea, Lilina," said Zentru'la. "Let's make the call."

Zentru'la and Lilina proceeded to the holoprojector in the ship's lounge. A member of Taldryan since they began to accept Light Siders in their ranks, Lilina was intimately familiar with the clan's communications protocols and set up a holocall with Erinyes across a secure channel.

"General Zentru'la," said the Consul, whose flickering cyan hologram masked the colour of her bright pink skin and flowing scarlet hair. "Or *former* General as I hear these days."

"Consul Erinyes," Zentru'la returned the formal salutation with a military salute, ignoring her follow-up.

"I've read Bale Andros' report of your team's exploits on Sentinel Station," Erinyes cut right to the chase. "And the fight between you. What I don't know is your business in our system. What do you want with Taldryan?"

Zentru'la completely understood Erinyes' concerns over a high-profile foreign war hero turning up in Taldryan territory unannounced. In the circumstance, she was being more reasonable than he would have been had the situations been reversed. "We fight a personal vendetta against the Collective, wherever we can hit them hardest," said the General. The Scholae Empire has grown stagnant. We're more effective following our own path."

"But now you're off their payroll," said Erinyes, seeing straight through the general and mercifully advancing the conversation. "And you need credits to continue your little vendetta."

"We operate as mercenaries," Zentru'la responded. "Looking for jobs that fit with our mission."

"Our motives are aligned," Erinyes flashed a smile. "We could do with someone like you. A company of mercenaries that work on our behalf... and someone to lead them."

"We're done with following clans and brotherhoods," said Zentru'la flatly. "We follow no leaders except ourselves."

"Oh no, you misunderstand," said Erinyes. "I'll offer contracts, not give orders. And pay handsomely for them, with funding for your own battalion, and the honorary title of General."

Zentru'la furrowed his brow. "What's the catch?"

"You can't take any contracts against Taldryan or its

allies. Beyond that, we won't interfere in the daily interests of the company. We've received reports of a new pro-Caelus group in the Imperial Sector. They've been a constant thorn in the side of our Community Outreach projects. Find them, eliminate them, and consider it a done deal," Erinyes' hologram flashed into nothingness.

A mere few seconds later, G14 announced the arrival of an encrypted message and a Taldryan transponder code from Consul Erinyes. Zentru'la and Lilina moved back to the cockpit, where the dossier on the target was displayed to the lightning fast staccato rhythm of Masakado's mechanical fingers on the control panel. A holographic model of the Imperial Sector slowly rotated above the control panel.

"We can use the spaceport over here and begin our search from there," Lilina said softly, pointing to the southern border of the Sector. "I've worked with Community Outreach before. The pro-Caelus groups are loyal to the Chancellor, but a peaceful approach has always worked well in the past."

"If Erinyes wanted a diplomatic solution, she would have hired a diplomat, not a soldier" said Zentru'la, noting the disappointed-but-not-surprised face of Lilina as Masakado nodded in agreement, his hand never far from his sword. "But we'll keep civilian casualties to a minimum. These people will have families. Rohla, take us to the spaceport and activate the Taldryan transponder code." The Duros took a swig of her declining liqueur supply and commenced the *Harbinger's* descent towards the ecumenopolis of Chyron while the ground team read over more of the dossiers sent by Erinyes.

The plan was simple. There were reports of a female

human spreading anti-Taldryan rhetoric from behind the bar of a local cantina, due to close in an hour. She would be apprehended on the way home, interrogated to find where the group meets, and the group eliminated by blaster, sword and saber. Rohla would keep the *Harbinger* in low orbit, ready to provide emergency evacuation if necessary, despite her complaints that they were going to a bar without her.

The spaceport itself had been briefed on the arrival of the *Harbinger* and accepted the Taldryan transponder code without a fuss. Zentru'la didn't think he would ever truly get used to Chyron. Having spent most of his life on the Judecca, the towering buildings of Chyron that touched the midnight sky were always disorienting for a few moments after landing.

By neither appearance nor name was *The Randy Mynock* a classy establishment. One didn't need a hyper-sensitive canine sense of smell like Masakado's to follow the stench of alcohol, sweat and drugs. "I never liked this part of town," said Lilina quietly as the squad lay in wait in the shadows, directed by Masakado to stay out of the light and out of sight. They waited as the hoardes of drunkards flowed into the streets, staying well away from the crowds as Zentru'la released a small, black probe droid into the air, monitoring the situation away from line of sight.

Shortly after the cantina patrons had vacated the area, the spy droid identified a solitary human female, walking alone at night down a dark alleyway in an old, tatty jacket and trousers with rips and holes, about to turn directly towards them. She matched the description in the dossier. It was the perfect moment to strike. A tiny whoosh of

air from Masakado's wrist and a small dart buried itself deep within the neck of the woman. Zentru'la was already in position to catch the unconscious body before she hit the ground, lowering her silently before checking through her possessions.

Except one thing stood out as out of place, a datapad in an inside pocket, brand new, immaculate, clearly not belonging to her. "Password protected," Zentru'la muttered as he tried to gain access, but had barely even finished the words before Masakado took the device from his hands.

"And poorly at that," the cyborg investigated the datapad and found his way into the system within a matter of seconds. Another few seconds and he had hacked into the datapad's tracker signal and traced it back through time. Child's play. "They meet in a safehouse about a 10 minute walk from here."

"Acknowledged," said Zentru'la. "Masakado, scout ahead. I'll walk with Lilina. Find a back entrance and stay hidden. I want to know what we're walking into." Masakado nodded and was gone in a heartbeat, silently, seamlessly blending with the shadows leaving Zentru'la and Lilina.

"Masakado's condition is troubling," Lilina said serenely as they made their way towards the safe-house. The words came out of nowhere, but as if they had been on her mind for quite some time. Zentru'la didn't blame her for waiting until he was out of earshot to raise the topic.

"Any progress made on curing him? Do we even know what's wrong yet?"

"It's not just a disease of the mind... but the spirit," said the mystic. "Whatever the Collective did when they made his body... it's affected more than just his physical

mind. I don't think he has long left to live. Possibly less than he thinks."

"Can you do anything?"

"I don't know," she said honestly. "But we must allow the Force to guide us. For now, the best we can do is slow his decline until we find a cure for his disease, and perhaps his bloodlust too."

Zentru'la heard a bleep in his ear followed by the quiet growl of Masakado down the commlink. "I'm in, General. They've got heavy support. Collective commandos on security. They weren't in the dossiers."

Zentru'la didn't know much or care much about the politics of Caelus, but if this group had enlisted Collective support, that gave him even more reason to fight. "What's the situation? Where are you now?"

"In the darkest corner with the best view." Masakado cut the call as Zentru'la approached the safehouse

Zentru'la locked and loaded his giant repeater cannon. "Usual tactic," he said to Lilina, who drew a double-bladed lightsaber. "We go in the front, Masakado strikes from behind." It didn't matter if they were outnumbered in there. They had the element of surprise, superior firepower and He took two running steps towards the front door to propel his huge, heavily armoured frame into a kick that blasted the door off its hinges. Alarms began to ring across the safehouse, but they were soon made redundant. Almost before the door even hit the ground, Zentru'la had thrown a smoke bomb into the atrium and released a barrage of fire into the ceiling, sending the non-combatants running for cover in a frenzy of yelling and panic.

Dust and smoke filled the air as the pro-Caelus fight-

ers assumed defensive positions with their Collective allies. The bright blue glow of Lilina's double bladed lightsaber pierced the smokescreen, forming a shield in front of Zentru'la, flashing left and right to block the incoming crimson blaster bolts, sending them back to where they came from. The smoke grenade tactic worked perfectly with a fighter that never relied on her physical sight anyway.

Zentru'la returned fire with surgical precision, using the flashes of the enemy blaster rifles as an indicator of their positions until he was forced to reload. With all the attention on Zentru'la and Lilina, Masakado picked his moment to strike. Obscured in the smoke, armed with only a sword in the midst of the enemy, the infiltrator cut down one after another, cyborg and organic alike until the blaster fire rang silent. The surviving members of the security force threw their weapons to the floor in surrender.

"Nobody move!" barked Zentru'la as the smoke finally began to clear, panning the room with his cannon. "Masakado, secure the back entrance." Masakado and Zentru'la ensured that nobody was able to escape the building while Lilina called in support from Community Outreach to take the hostages.

"Community outreach arrive in 5 minutes," Lilina said serenely. Although outnumbered, the element of fear kept the prisoners in line until the Taldryan Community Outreach officers arrived to take away the prisoners.

Masakado stood still, vacant. Without warning, the cyborg coughed up a black, oily fluid and stumbled forwards. Zentru'la caught him before he fell to the ground as Lilina rushed in. "He's having a seizure!" she said with a rare moment of panic in her voice. Masakado had lost

consciousness.

"He's not breathing!" Zentru'la said as he held onto him. "Do something!"

She grabbed his mechanical lower jaw and forced a packet of Bacta gel down his throat. She closed her eyes and ran her hand across the Shistavenan's face. Slowly, he began to breathe light, shallow breaths once more. "I can't keep him like this forever."

"Rohla, come to my position for evac, ASAP," Zentru'la said urgently.

"You..." Masakado growled, slowly waking up on the med bay of the *Harbinger*. Lilina's electric-purple hair was the first thing that came into focus. "You saved my life." It was one of the first times he had actual reason to thank someone. "What happened to me?"

"You suddenly fell unconscious," said Lilina, back to her usual calm, soothing voice by the bedside, holding a scanner to his temple. "The Force kept you alive..." she said, reading brain recordings on the scanner. "You'll feel fine by tomorrow. But there's something not right about your brain scans. It's not a normal Shistavenan recording. Like there's some artificial interference. This might explain why you're so good with technology."

"I'll kill the ones that did this to me," Masakado snarled as Zentru'la walked in.

"Good to see you awake, Masakado," said the General.

"Lilina says I'll be fine tomorrow," Masakado breathed, his voice even hoarser and pained than normal "So what now?"

"Erinyes stayed true to her word," said Zentru'la. "She's

sent enough funding for a battalion and a capital ship. Welcome, all of you, to the Vornskr Battalion. So you'd better rest up, Masakado. We need to start recruiting soldiers."