

The War is Coming

General Zentru'la

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1 Introduction

Bale Andros had outdone himself this time.

Zentru'la didn't want to know how the blacksmith had ended up acquiring so much pure Beskar alloy, or where he learned to work with such an exotic material, but the results were incredible. The armour, shining white with a sharp black pauldron on the left hand side. He had reworked the shape to fit the colossal twi'lek's frame, and reshaped the helmet to give a more imperial aesthetic. It was a fantastic piece of work, but the new armour was not the only new asset he had acquired.

The pure black, curved blade of Arcturus hungered for blood even as Zentru'la held it sheathed. Donated to the Vornskr Battalion by an unknown benefactor, Zentru'la could only assume it was a gift from Clan Taldryan following his defection from the Imperial Scholae Army. Regardless, the acquisition of new weapons and armour couldn't have been more timely.

Tensions flared across Brotherhood space. Zentru'la's Vornskr Battalion skirmished with Collective cells, the Brotherhood found itself engulfed in the conflict between the Tenexir Revenant and the Severian Principate, and any alliance between the Brotherhood clans was always tenuous at best. War was coming. The Vornskr General could always feel when a war was coming. He didn't understand the politics to know when, or why, or who they would be fighting, but war was inevitable. That much was certain. Preparation was imperative.

"We all know what's coming," the General said to his team. The infiltrator Masakado and the Jedi Lilina Mirin stood in front of him aboard the Harbinger, its passenger space hollowed out into a more spacious meeting room. Lilina's electric-blue hair was the brightest thing in the room, while Masakado stood in the shadows, an amalgamation of Shistavenan and collective cybernetics, black fur and dark metal. "We don't know who we're going to be fighting. But there will be war."

"It doesn't matter," Masakado said darkly. "A target's a target."

"We still need to prepare to deal with a variety of threats," countered Zentru'la. "Luckily, we have a variety in the squad. An Imperial general, a Collective assassin, and a Jedi. So I propose a duelling contest. We'll spar with each other to learn to prepare against people like us."

“You know how much I abhor fighting,” said Lilina, pensively. “But I’ve felt the tremors in the Force. The Collective are on the move once more. We must be able to fight them.”

“Masakado, you should take this,” Zentru’la handed Arcturus to the cyborg. “I’m not a big fan of blades.” Lilina eyed the weapon with visible repulsion as Masakado took it in a metal cybernetic hand and felt the desire to kill course through his soul. It matched his dagger, and himself.

“Rohla, take us to the Caelus Spaceport,” Zentru’la ordered to his pilot. “I’ve booked a landing bay for our competition.”

2 The General and the Jedi

The landing bay Zentru’la had booked was a simple room. With the Harbinger docked, there was a good twenty square metres free for their duelling competition.

Zentru’la sank his hips into a stable, powerful fighting stance, arms raised high as Lilina circled him slowly, her double-bladed lightsaber angled diagonally across her body, covering everything. As strange as it seemed fighting a blind woman, Zentru’la had seen first-hand how capable the Jedi was in combat. She matched the General’s movement, stepping back as he advanced with a swift slide forward. A half twirl of her staff set up a tentative strike at the side of Zentru’la’s head. He swiftly raised a colossal armoured forearm to his ear, and the lightsaber bounced harmlessly off his bracer.

He could feel that his ally used barely twenty percent for her power in the attack. The armour did its job, and held up without a scratch, but his old armour might have done the same against such a low powered strike. Zentru’la pressed the attack, stepping forward with a left handed jab. Lilina’s defence was tight, parrying the punch with a solid, clean parry, keeping her weapon central to block the general’s follow-up cross with the other blade. This was the test he was looking for. He would have lost both his arms with any other equipment.

Lilina seemed to move before he did, always sensing where the attack was coming from and having her weapon already en-route to intercept. She knew exactly when to dodge, when to parry and when to circle to avoid being cornered, as Zentru’la advanced with powerful, fast, simple strikes. It was the basics that won fights, he always said, but Lilina’s expertise in using the double-bladed lightsaber defensively and ability to see things before they happen was proving a difficult challenge. In a fair contest of skill, she was every bit his equal.

Zentru’la lowered his stance, raised both his hands to cover his face, and charged. Lilina sharply turned her lightsaber into the monstrous charging pile of muscle and metal, but his momentum was just too much for her. He battered through her defence with brute force. Once he forced his way inside the range of her staff, the fight was won. He grabbed Lilina by the shoulder, stepped behind her and slammed her onto the floor, shoulders first. Were this a Whiptree contest, the crowd would have gone wild.

Zentru'la extended his armoured hand towards Lilina. There was no point in continuing. Lilina held his hand and he pulled her back to his feet.

"You've never fought a man in armour before, have you?" Masakado growled derisively.

"Not like that," Lilina said with unerring calm for somebody who had just been unceremoniously thrown to the floor.

"Striking his plate armour is a waste of time," the assassin said as he pulled The Silencer from his hilt, spinning the dagger around his wrist in a performance act as he spoke, advancing towards Zentru'la. "You need to go where his armour isn't."

3 The Assassin and the General

Maskado twirled the dagger into a reverse grip, holding it by his side, approaching Zentru'la with his arms down, and no guard whatsoever. Zentru'la readied his guard and settled himself before throwing a jab at the cyborg. Masakado slipped the jab. And the follow-up cross. He ducked the hook. Sidestepped the uppercut. Whatever angle he attacked from, Masakado wasn't there, constantly ducking, waving, spinning away from contact.

Zentru'la changed his attack, reaching for Masakado's shoulder. It was exactly the moment he had been waiting for. Masakado slashed his dagger towards Zentru'la's open hand, avoiding the Beskar plate and landing a glancing blow to the inside of his armoured glove. Zentru'la flinched and Masakado pressed the attack, slashing at the joints of his armour. The general grabbed and clawed at Masakado's wrist, trying to control his knife hand, but he moved too fast, striking the plate of his armour many times but each barely leaving a scratch.

Zentru'la tried to change things up with a kick, but he jumped clean over the colossus with the grace and athleticism of a Jedi, flipping to land behind him. When Zentru'la turned his whole body into a kick at the cyborg, he was no longer there. Masakado was as evasive as he was dynamic. From behind the General, he dropped his whole body towards the ground. Zentru'la could barely move his leg in time to avoid the slash to the back of his knee, as The Silencer ripped through the under-armour, dangerously close to slicing his cartilage.

Zentru'la turned and finally managed to grab Masakado by the waist, lifting him off the ground with brute force and slamming him to the floor. Masakado grunted in pain. He positioned his hips on top of Masakado's, using his weight to keep the assassin pinned to the duracrete, His left hand holding Masakado's dagger hand to the floor Using only the power of his wrist, Masakado flipped his dagger to the other hand as Zentru'la postured up to throw a strike with his right. The assassin slid his dagger under Zentru'la's armpit.

Zentru'la stopped dead, feeling the point of the dagger poke through the under-armour and into his flesh. If the assassin wanted to, he would have stabbed all the way through to the neck.

"Expensive armour doesn't make you invincible," Masakado said as Zentru'la got back to his feet, admitting defeat. "Especially against a blade like this," he

continued, twirling The Silencer straight into its sheath at his hip. “Lilina.”

4 The Jedi and the Assassin

“Are you well enough to continue?” Lilina said serenely.

Lilina raised her lightsaber, with only one blade active, and twirled it down to her right hand side. Zentru’la watched on with curiosity: he recognised the duellists form, but had never seen Lilina use it before. Masakado approached her with his Sith Sword held high above his head in two hands.

His movement was precise and snappy with the blade, wielding it as he would his katana. With only one hand on her own weapon, Lilina parried every attack with smoothness, fluidity and grace, redirecting the sword without ever actually blocking it. Masakado attacked with a fury, a blur of black movement, spinning, jumping, leaping to change angle.

A spinning kick bypassed Lilina’s calm, smooth defence, striking her in the abdomen with a metal foot. Lilina’s lightsaber clattered to the floor as it fell out of her loose grip. Masakado wasted no time, pressing the attack with a slash to Lilina’s neck.

The Jedi was unfazed, and stretched an open hand towards the oncoming blade. The sword stopped dead upon connection with her invisible barrier. With her other hand, she recalled her lightsaber to her hand.

She activated both blades, and waited for Masakado to attack again. With her staff activated and settling back on her completely defensive approach, Masakado couldn’t find a way through, her twirling double blades constantly covering all the angles he wanted to strike through and making a kick too dangerous. He attacked and attacked for what felt like hours, but the Jedi’s defence was impenetrable.

“Alright that’s enough,” Zentru’la’s voice boomed over the clashes of lightsaber on Sith Sword. Lilina deactivated her lightsaber immediately. Masakado growled as he aggressively slammed the Sith Sword into its scabbard.

5 Conclusion

“We’re preparing for war. War is messy. You don’t have time for a long, drawn out duel. Lilina, you need to be more aggressive in combat.”

“It’s is not the Jedi way,” she said serenely.

‘I’m a machine,” Masakado growled. “I won’t die if you cut my hand off.”

“And you need to be better at getting around a lightsaber,” Zentru’la addressed Masakado.

“The General is right,” said Lilina. “Soresu is popular among the Jedi of Odan-Urr. They will be hard to break down.”

“You two should train together in your spare time,” Zentru’la ordered. “For when Lilina fights a Collective assassin, or Masakado fights a Jedi. On the upside, we know our new weapons work. Your sword and my armour can block

lightsabers. And you're the only one that remained undefeated, Masakado. You fought well today."

"That is not a victory," Masakado growled. "My body is a Collective machine. We're about to go to war... with Collective machines. We need to do better."