



SUBMITTED IN ENTRY TO AGGRESSIVE EXPANSION PHASE
2: MULTI-OBJECTIVE FICTION PROMPT

Naliah

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NOTES: Objective Ostara chosen

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1 Introduction

The Vornskr Battalion had grown in stature over the last six months, as had their list of regular clients. Outside of the *Harbinger* viewport Zentru'la observed the *Spear*, in brilliant white emblazoned with a Vornskr Battalion crest. Once under the command of Bale Andros, it now served as the largest warship in his private military company.

“Captain Trugaim, prepare to jump to the Bepin system,” the General said to the cockpit. “Lieutenant-Commander Sun, follow our lead,” he added in a commlink to the *Spear*. The plan was simple: a crime syndicate had taken control of a Tibanna gas mining platform from the local government, and they wanted it back. The *Spear* and the docked *Helos* squadron would launch a full frontal assault and carry 80 assault troops to the platform, while the *Harbinger*, would carry Zentru'la, cyborg assassin Masakado and Jedi sage Lilina round the back undetected.

However, before Rohla could launch the jump to hyperspace, a smooth, synthetic female voice sounded from within the walls. “Message incoming from Appius Wight.”

“Our existing contract with the Bepin government takes priority,” Zentru'la said dismissively. As the Vornskr Battalion grew, it had become common for the General to balance numerous clients at once, subcontracting companies of his private military company to different factions. However, he reserved his own personal squad *Harbinger* and the *Spear* for the bigger missions, and the Bepin mining raid was certainly one of those. Besides, while the Vornskr Battalion had grown to nearly 1000-strong, the *Spear* could only carry 80 into battle at a time.

“Message incoming from Appius Wight.”

“We're too busy for that right now G14, we don't have any spare units.”

“We had an agreement with Erinyes,” said the soft, mystical voice of Lilina to Zentru'la's right. “That we would prioritise Taldryan business above all others.”

“Erinyes isn't the one trying to contact us right now,” said Zentru'la flatly.

“Appius commands Ektrosis, a sub-unit of Taldryan... as Imperium was to the Scholae Empire,” Lilina added, framing the Taldryan structure in terms the General was familiar with. “It's likely Erinyes expects our agreement to extend to Ektrosis too.”

“I disagree,” growled the harsh, coarse voice of Masakado to his left. “Cancelling our contract with a local government is bad for our reputation.”

“I'll follow up with Wight after the mining platform has been liberated.”

“Appius Wight is irritating me,” said G14-D05. “If he keeps this up I might accidentally flood the *Harbinger* with a deadly neurotoxin.”

“Fine,” said Zentru'la, almost as irritated with Appius' repeated contact attempts as his onboard AI. “The Bepin government can wait. Patch it through.”

Suddenly a tumultuous racket of blaster fire echoed across the *Harbinger*, punctuated by the unmistakable sound of lightsaber slashes. A hologram emerged of a figure in Manadlorian armour with a double-bladed lightsaber, crouched behind cover. “We’re getting hammered!” shouted Appius over the chaos in the background. “The Unchained have attacked Ostara! We need reinforcements!”

“We are currently already under contract with the Bospin government,” Zentru’la responded. “We can spare two line companies. G14 will handle the subcontracting.”

“We need more than that! We need Tavros! We need you!” Appius shouted back before the call was cut.

“He sounds in distress,” said Lilina with a hint of apprehension.

“I’d still rather we let him die,” growled Masakado. “But placing him in our debt could be valuable.”

“We’ll place him in debt alright,” Zentru’la flashed a rare smile. “He’s not going to check our standard rates. The price G14 will charge him, we’ll be able to afford a flight of Sentinel-class shuttles.”

“Lieutenant-commander Sun,” Zentru’la said into a commlink to the *Spear*. “Change of plan. Rendezvous at Ostara ASAP. Prepare for combat.”

“Here we go again!” Rohla slurred from the cockpit, jerking the ship into a U-turn as the familiar cyan hues of hyperspace filled the viewports. “One day we’ll have a day where we can just find a cantina and drink all day.”

2 Ostara

This was the team’s first visit to the new Taldryan headquarters, which towered above the trees of the endless Ostara Jungle, visible from the low atmosphere as the *Harbinger* swooped in from space. Bulky duracrete walls surrounded the facility which served as a base of operations for all aspects of Taldryan. Fittingly, a landing zone had been designated for military shuttles, a large open area held a large portion of the clan’s ground military vehicles, and attached on the south side was a Jedi temple. “That’s some serious fortification,” Zentru’la observed as the details became closer. “But a jungle is a foolish place for a military fortification.”

“Agreed,” said Masakado. “Poor visibility. Approaching the walls undetected would be all too easy. They run the risk of infiltration. And why build a temple next to it.”

“The temple looks like it has Jedi and Sith influences,” said Lilina serenely “It will help harness the power of the Force users.”

“A waste of time,” said Masakado. “Religion means nothing in war. Information and subterfuge wins wars.”

“We’ve both seen what a skilled Jedi can do, Masakadao,” said Zentru’la, gesturing at Lilina. “I don’t understand The Force, but I’ve seen powerful Dark Jedi dominate the battlefield. I fought alongside some of the best. Now prepare for combat, because we’re about to fight some.”

Rohla landed the *Harbinger* in its designated landing bay. “General!” a stormtrooper saluted as Zentru’la disembarked in his shining white Beskar armour that had become a symbol of not just his own fortitude, but the Vornskr Battalion. The *Spear* landed next to the *Harbinger*, the Marauder-class frigate dwarfing the shuttle in size, yet it was the *Harbinger* that attracted the most attention. “Quaestor Wight is holding the front gate.”

“Vornskrs!” Zentru’la barked at his 80 assault troopers, who had deployed from the *Spear* in formation. “Our mission is to protect this base from the Unchained attackers! We have little intel about their composition, but we know they have Dark Jedi among them. This is what our training was for! You all know what to do. If they catch you alone, you’re dead. Stay in formation! Move out!”

“Rohla, stay on the ship or find a bar to drink in until we’re done. Masakado, we need you as a scout. Patrol the forest and report back with intel on enemy movements. Lilina, stay with me on the front lines.”

3 Front Lines

Appius was locked in lightsaber combat outside the main gate. The Quaestor was unmistakable, clad head to toe in bright red armour with a double-bladed green lightsaber, fending off two Sith in black cloaks, armed with crimson lightsabers.

“Why don’t you invite more friends, make it an even fight?” Appius taunted as he spun away from a vicious, full-blooded attack, blocking the next attack on his lightsaber. Zentru’la drew his pistol and shot one of them in the back of the head. Appius seized his moment, stabbing the other in the chest.

“Glad you’re here General!” Appius shouted with a tone of excitement. “Thought you were gonna leave us for dead!”

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” said Zentru’la. “What’s the situation?”

With that an artillery shell exploded against the duracrete wall behind Zentru’la, the explosion a percussive complement to the high pitched staccato rhythm of blaster fire all around. “Well there’s that,” said Appius. “Artillery attacks from within the jungle, and regular waves of Dark Jedi and Sith troops.”

“General, I’ve found a camp deep behind enemy lines.” said Masakado in Zentru’la’s earpiece. “Heavily guarded. I think the commander is present.”

“Masakado’s found the commander,” Zentru’la relayed. “Stay with Appius and hold the line Lilina. I’ll help Masakado.”

Zentru’la reloaded his repeater and marched into the jungles.

4 Boop and Naliah

Zentru’la fired a barrage of shots from his repeating blaster. The Sith’s lightsaber repelled every one. Blaster bolts ricocheted into the jungle behind him, setting trees alight, before one hit Zentru’la square in the chest. The Beskar plate stopped the shot but the impact forced him to stumble backwards as the Sith charged, his lightsaber high above his head.

Zentru’la threw his repeater to one side and dropped into a defensive stance. Blasters were useless against him. It was time for some old-fashioned unarmed combat. His enemy would have no idea that his armour would intercept a lightsaber strike. This gave Zentru’la a huge advantage. He opened with a heavy, downwards attack. Zentru’la parried the attack to the side. The Sith clearly hadn’t anticipated any result other than his lightsaber cleaving into Zentru’la’s head, and the moment of confusion gave him the chance to throw a punch. His fist connected squarely on the Sith’s jaw, sending him stumbling back several paces.

Before Zentru’la could capitalise on the opening, the Sith flung forward his left hand. An invisible force sent the general flying backwards through the air, landing on his back on the jungle floor. Zentru’la shifted backwards on one arm, raising the other, ready to intercept the crimson blade on Beskar plate once more.

There was a blur of black movement in front of him. Snarling and screaming. An animal had charged the Unchained Sith to the ground. Zentru’la rose to his feet, drawing his pistol. The Sith was already dead. Blood flowed like a river from his neck onto the jungle floor. The Vornskr turned to face Zentru’la with blood pouring from its mouth. His battalion’s namesake. Zentru’la had never seen one on the flesh before. He took a step back, his pistol still at the ready, prepared to fire at the first sign of movement. However, the Vornskr just laid down in front of him.

“Boop!” a young girl shouted. Zentru’la turned to face the source of the voice. So did the Vornskr. The Zabrak barely looked fifteen. A rounded face of maroon and black patterning, expressive of innocence, was framed by long, dark purple hair through which small white horns barely poked through. A primitive bow whose wood colour matched the surrounding trees was clutched in her small hands, a hunting knife at her hip, her body covered by a robe of animal hide. She stopped dead when she saw Zentru’la.

“Boop! Come here!” The girl notched an arrow into her bow, pulling it back at full draw and aiming at Zentru’la, her arms trembling. The Vornskr bounded over to

the young girl then sat by her feet. Zentru'la holstered his pistol, raising his arms in a non-threatening posture.

"This is no place for a young girl," he said sternly. "Run and hide."

She simply backed away, keeping her bow at full drawn, her stance low to the ground. Her Vornskr circled her, alert. It was at that moment, Zentru'la saw them. Two cloaked figures behind the young girl. In a flash, he swiftly drew his pistol again, striking them both dead with two clean head shots before he was struck in the chest by a sharp, blunt impact. The girl's arrow ricocheted harmlessly off his Beskar plate.

"I'm not an enemy. Calm down!" said Zentru'la, lowering his pistol once more. The forest was swarming with Unchained reinforcements. He didn't know who the girl was or where she came from, but he couldn't abandon a child to fend for herself on the battlefield. "You should stay close."

The girl continued to back away, but Boop stayed where he was. He looked at the girl and barked softly before walking to sit next to Zentru'la. It was all she needed. She followed the Vornskr, her arrow still notched, standing close to Zentru'la. He picked his repeater off the floor, loading it ready for more combat as dark figures emerged between the trees.

Luckily, they were not Dark Jedi, merely Unchained soldiers. Zentru'la's heavy repeating blaster, the girl's arrows and Boops teeth and claws made short work of the grunt soldiers. "That was some good shooting," Zentru'la said, once the only remaining sound was the background ambience of the Ostara jungle. The girl was now sat down with Boop, petting the vornskr's neck. "Who are you?"

"I'm... I'm Naliah. I live here," she said, not making eye contact with Zentru'la, focused more on the vornskr that had now rolled on its back in front of her.

"You live here in the jungle alone?"

"Not alone. I have Boop!" she said, smiling at Zentru'la for the first time. Boop rolled over towards Zentru'la, looking up at the enormous warrior. Zentru'la crouched down to pet the beast with an armoured hand while Boop began to bounce around excitedly. "We don't really... talk to other people," she said, her eyes glancing down at the forest floor. "But I think Boop trusts you."

Masakado's gravelly voice then sounded in Zentru'la's ear. "I killed the commander."

A couple of seconds later was the excited, elated voice of Appius. "The Unchained are retreating! We've won! We should do this more often!"

Zentru'la turned to the young girl. She had excellent control of her Vornskr. Naliah and Boop made a powerful combination. "How old are you Naliah?"

"Fifteen," she said, still not making eye contact with the General. "Boop has been my only friend for ten years."

Still just a child. He didn't need to ask where the girl's parents were. This system had been ravaged by war for decades. For as much as the kids of the Dark Brotherhood spoke of the glory of battle, girls like Naliah were the harsh reality. Had she been living isolated from the world from age five? Would she know anything about the galaxy? Zentru'la threw her a commlink. She caught it with cat-like reflexes, then stared at it like it was alien technology.

“Stay here in the forest, Naliah. Stay with Boop. And if you see any strange people, press the button. I'll come as soon as possible.” She was far too young for the Vornskr Battalion. But she knew the forests better than anyone in Taldryan's new jungle headquarters. She would serve as an excellent scout, an advanced warning should enemies of Taldryan be lurking.