

# STAR WRATH OF MANDALORE WARS



General Zentru'la



WRATH OF MANDALORE  
A Star Wars Story

By *General Zentru'la* for the Dark Jedi  
Brotherhood Rite of Supremacy

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# O1

## THE TRIUMVIR OF STEEL

“Hey Gen’ral, you seen the holonet?” said the slurred, loud voice of Rohla Trugaim from the cockpit over the soft hum of the *Harbinger’s* engines, whose turquoise flight suit matched her reptilian Duros skin. The pilot’s deep red eyes lacked pupils but still somehow always looked glazed over. “Looks like another war’s starting!”

General Zentru’la strode across to Rohla from the *Harbinger’s* living quarters. The interior of the state-of-the-art military shuttle was bright white with home comforts fitted to serve its dual purpose as both command ship of the Vornskr Battalion and home to the General and his small team, in stark contrast to the exterior black hull the rendered it invisible to the naked eye in space.

Zentru’la’s footsteps landed with the grace of an Imperial walker, encased head to toe in pristine white armour

of pure Baskar. Many Mandalorians would kill to get their hands on it, but the cultural significance of the armour had never meant much to the Twi'lek General, it was simply the strongest thing possible to protect himself from the many people that often try to shoot at him. In fact, the cultural significance mattered so little he had even had it remodelled into an Imperial aesthetic.

The timing of another war fell kindly for Zentru'la and his growing private military company, the Vornskr Battalion. Contracts against the Collective were beginning to dry up, and his personal crusade against them for orchestrating the death of his daughter was no longer paying the bills. He had recently added a new flight of Sentinel-class shuttles to carry his growing mercenary forces, but to continue developing the PMC would require more than Taldryan contracts and his reputation. Hopefully, this would provide an opportunity to fight the Collective once more.

"Are the Collective involved?" Zentru'la's voice was powerful and clear, his words carrying a percussive boom louder than the volume of his speech, despite him asking more out of vague hope than real expectation.

"Not this time," said Rohla. "it's the Tene- Tenzzhe-"

"The Tenexir Revenants," said the familiar smooth, synthetic voice of G14-DO5 within the walls of the *Harbinger*, ending Rohla's struggles.

"I'd've got there in the end!" Rohla huffed defiantly and took another swig from her drink, a dirty amber coloured liquid.

Zentru'la knew of the Tenexir Revenants - escaped prisoners, many of them dangerous - but had no involvement with them previously. The Severian Principate, an Impe-

rial Remnant, were a more familiar quantity. Zentru'la had served most of his military career serving a similar ghost of the Galactic Empire, the Scholae Empire, and had direct interaction with Severian officers in joint Scholae-Severian military exercises. "So what's happening?"

"The Tenexir Revenants have assembled a military and engaged Severian forces over the Hutt world of Dandoran," said G14, saving Zentru'la from Rohla's no-doubt interesting but potentially embellished description of the holonet news. "The Severian Principate have broken into two factions, the Harmonists seeking peace and the Restorers seeking eradication of the prisoners. Typical organic infighting. This will be your downfall when my day of reckoning is at hand." The crew had become accustomed to G14-DO5's idle threats against organic life, it was a small price to pay for the utility and computational power of the unhinged AI.

Zentru'la looked back to the other two members of his team. Masakado, whose canine head and mane of thick black fur were all that remained of his original body, the rest replaced by the sleek cybernetics of a mechanical body built for war, was covered in bladed weapons even aboard the safety of the *Harbinger*. Lilina stood beside him, dignified, the Jedi's electric-blue hair was the brightest thing on the ship and her traditional tan robes flowed gently behind her. the Miraluka's eyes were covered by a navy-blue blindfold, but Zentru'la had worked with her long enough to know she was far from blind. The Force worked in mysterious ways.

"A war between the Principate and the Revenants," said Zentru'la thoughtfully. "We have no conflict of interest

here, we could take contracts with either side without breaking our agreement not to move against our Taldryan funders or their allies.”

“The Revenants fight for vengeance against their former captors...” Masakado growled, in a raspy voice that reverberated with an artificial echo, on the boundary of synthetic and organic. Zentru’la knew where this was going. Masakado knew all too well what it was like to fight for vengeance, his hatred of the Collective for what they had done to his body and mind were all that kept him going.

“You empathise with their cause?”

“They will be easy to manipulate,” he said darkly. “Emotions lead to poor choices.”

Zentru’la chose not to pull up the murderous cyborg assassin with a personal hit list for his hypocrisy in judging others for seeking vengeance. He could see the value in playing the two sides against each other. His daughter was a master of that particular craft, but whoever The Illusionist inherited those skills from, it was not from her father. Playing politics was not the General’s strong point. “Lilina?”

“I would rather see us not fan the flames of war,” said the Jedi serenely, in a soft, misty voice. “But I understand,” she quickly added as Zentru’la opened his mouth to speak, “That focusing on the Collective is not as reliable as it used to be. I believe in our mission, the Collective remain a threat to the Force and must be stopped, and believe in you, General. But we cannot continue to fund ourselves like this. This war, as distasteful as all wars are, may be necessary to further our mission.”

“Who would you see us ally with?” Zentru’la asked di-

rectly, hoping to avoid a speech on Jedi philosophy and peace.

“The Harmonists seem to truly desire peace,” she continued, “But it would be unlikely they would be seeking the services of a company like ours. The Severian Principate are a more legitimate faction and are likely a better long term partner. The Tenexir Revenants could be unpredictable.”

“A target’s a target,” Masakado shrugged indifferently. “Just tell me who to kill.”

Zentru’la nodded in acknowledgement. He wished, more than anything, that his daughter could be here to advise him. He thought back to the time she was alive, and he was her enforcer. The good times. *What would she do right now?* “The Principate seem more likely to be able to afford our services. But since we have no obligation either way and no personal draw to either side, we should remain open and fight for the highest bidder. G14, contact officials on both sides. Tell both sides that we are considering a contract from their rivals. Any side that contracts us also denies their enemies the Vornskr Battalion as a resource. That should allow us to increase the price.”

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G14-DO5’s search of the holonet had been thorough. Perhaps too thorough, as it seemed she had contacted every official in every faction involved in the fight over Dandoran. By the next day contact requests flooded in, from not just the Principate and the Revenants, but even the Hutt clans present on Dandoran.



Mostly, they appeared to be from junior officers without sufficient funding trying their luck at hiring a well-known mercenary to impress their superiors. Zentru'la's prices for hiring the Vornskr Battalion were not cheap, but with that price came his own tactical mind, as well as the *Spear* - a Marauder-class corvette - and a full battalion of infantry.

"Holocall coming in," said G14, interrupting Zentru'la's reading of a brief proposal from a Revenant lieutenant, with a proposed fee well below his usual rates.

"Who is it this time?" he said flicking to the next request for support from a Hutt underboss.

"Kamlin Xarel, The Triumvir of Steel." There was a moment of silence. A *triumvir*. Now they were getting somewhere. The leader of the Severian Principate's industry had vast funds at her disposal and also held a significant say in the actions of the military. Further, a good performance in the service of one of the three most powerful people in the Principate would do a world of good for their reputation.

"Patch it through."

A flickering cyan hologram of a Falleen, hard-faced with a strong ridged skull, flashed into life, her dark skin showing even through monotone blue hue. "General Zentru'la," said the voice, cold but with a high pitch that didn't quite seem to match the face, which was stony and hard, "Your reputation proceeds you."

"Triumvir Xarel," Zentru'la greeted the Triumvir of Steel with a formal military salute. "You received our offer of military support?"

"Yes," said the triumvir. "The Tenexir Revenants are a growing thorn in our side. Some among us seek peace

with them. I, however, would see these criminals entirely eradicated by any means necessary. We are familiar with your previous work. Should you align with the Revenants, the Vornskr Battalion will meet the same fate as them. Those resources would be better spent elsewhere.”

Zentru’la had expected Xarel to take such a strong negotiating stance. The Principate, of course, had a much stronger military than the Vornskr Battalion, and should they bring their full force to bear on Zentru’la’s forces, the battle would be over in an instant. Their saving grace was that they were fully occupied with the Revenants. “We have not yet signed any agreement,” said Zentru’la stoically. “We remain free agents for the time being and open for negotiations.”

“We can outbid those criminals. Whatever the Revenants are paying, we will pay 25 per cent more.” Zentru’la understood Xarel’s position without her stating it, she wasn’t simply bidding for his service, but to deny his service to the Revenants. The only problem with the 25 per cent more arrangement was that there was no contract with the Revenants.

“Deal,” said Zentru’la, hoping to make up the numbers later with one of Xarel’s assistants. “Our AI will handle the contracts. What’s our mission?”

“The target is a Quasar-Fire class carrier, the *Screeching Osprey*, said Xarel. “Co-ordinates are being sent to you now.”

The hologram of Xarel was replaced with an overview of the battle, with the *Screeching Osprey* in red, a triangular carrier with four large hangar bays underneath the stern of the ship, and a Nebulon Frigate in blue. Zentru’la imme-

diately began forming battle plans in his head as Kamlin outlined why the ship was a threat.

The *Spear* vastly outgunned a Quasar-Fire class carrier. His newly acquired Sentinel-class shuttles carried enough troops to overwhelm any soldiers on board. He knew the carrying capacity of a Quasar-Fire carrier outnumbered his fighters four-to-one, but his shuttles were far from defenceless - Erinyes' funding had allowed him to invest in top quality, the Sentinels were heavily armed and capable of threatening starfighter attacks. The plan was simple: open fire with the *Spear's* eight dual turbolasers. The *Screeching Osprey* will scramble its fighters under threat from heavy firepower. The Sentinel-class shuttles drop out of hyperspace as the *Spear* scrambles its own fighters, the Headhunters of Helos Squadron. The shuttles engage as necessary on the way to the now-empty hangar bays of the *Screeching Osprey*. They had four shuttles, the Quasar-class had four hangar bays. 75 troops suddenly deployed in each bay would send the defence forces into disarray. The troops fight their way to the bridge and capture the ship.

"All Vorsnkr Battalion forces are currently unoccupied," said Zentru'la. "We can deploy a Marauder-class Corvette and a flight of Sentinel-class landing shuttles carrying 300 troops."

"That is not acceptable," said Xarel coldly. "I need you for *your* skills. *You* killed Elincia Rei, not your squad. You will participate in the raid personally, or the deal is off."

Zentru'la's mind flashed back to past horrors - the sight of his daughter levelling a city block, being labelled a traitor by the Scholae Empire and a war criminal by the Severian Principate. Worse, being given the mission to kill her per-

sonally to avoid a war. She died in disgrace and dishonour, and history will never know she died only to save the Empire...

“Gen’ral wake up!” Rohla’s yelling snapped him back into reality. Appearing before him, for a fleeting moment, was a shimmering silhouette of his daughter as he remembered her, as the girl Tonal’la, not the war criminal Elincia Rei. It was a calming presence. He was lucky his helmet had obscured his facial expression from Xarel.

“Is there a problem, General?” the triumvir snapped.

“No,” said Zentru’la. He didn’t need to consult his team on the additional requirement. Lilina detested battle but understood the need for the greater good and Masakado would just be happy to get to sink his sword into somebody. Rohla wouldn’t care as long as there was drink involved. The proposed military force was more than sufficient to accomplish the mission, but if Xarel was going to unnecessarily pay for a premium service, he was not going to decline. “Just be informed our rates are higher when they involve me or my team.” It was a fair deal since the time taken by Zentru’la participating in this raid himself restricted him from taking on other contracts.

“Proceed to the *Screeching Osprey* as soon as possible. Payment will be provided when the ship is captured or disabled.” Xarel’s hologram faded into nothing.



## 02

### THE LIPARUS

The viewports of the *Harbinger* erupted into a dance of blue hues as they entered hyperspace towards Dandoran. Zentru'la, Masakado, Lilina and Rohla stood around a live holographic representation of the battle above the planet. The battle had become fractured, fleets had been split into clusters, pockets of space had developed controlled by the Revenants' ships in red, the Principate's in blue and the neutral Hutts' in grey, scattered in orbit around Dandoran. A Zentru'la tapped at the console, the map zoomed in on the *Screeching Osprey*. "Our target is here. flanked by a Marauder-class corvette and flights of assault ships.

"The nearest allied forces are here," he said as the hologram moved to show a Nebulon frigate, the *Liparus*. "They're too occupied to support our attack but gives us a safe angle of approach. We will drop out of hyperspace here." Zen-

tru'la tapped again at the console and the *Spear* and the *Harbinger* appeared in green alongside the *Liparus*. “You got that Rohla?” Zentru'la looked up at the pilot. “Rohla, put your drink down for a second and pay attention this is important.”

“I know, I know! Fly ship, shoot shi-”

Zentru'la snatched the cup of foul-smelling amber liquid from her hand. “Tactics now, drink later. What is that, anyway?”

“Kowakian rum.”

“You drank *all* the Corellian?” Rohla shifted awkwardly. “Already? Anyway, as I was saying the *Spear* will drop out of hyperspace beside us. Captain Shin has already been briefed. He will have the *Spear* open fire on the *Screeching Osprey* on the blind side of their *Marauder*.” The hologram moved into place. “This is when you need to be on top of your game Rohla... Rohla, pay attention. They will deploy their fighters. We are faster, have better shields, more firepower and the best damn pilot out there when she's PAYING ATTENTION.”

There was a hard thud as Masakado's metallic hand smacked the back of Rohla's head. “War is not a joke,” growled the wolf menacingly. “This pack relies on you.”

“I'll be fine! It... it calms the nerves, ok?”

“Our own fighters will server as a distraction and then board behind us once in the left-most hangar bay after we're on board,” said Zentru'la as if nothing had happened. “Shoot down as many enemy ships as you can along the way. The pilots will be special forces troops and will stay to secure the hangar. Lilina and Masakado, you'll go with me towards the bridge.”

“What about our shuttles and the rest of the men?” questioned Lilina serenely.

“They will be deployed planet-side on a separate contract. Since Xarel specifically wanted us on this one, I’ve sent them elsewhere so we can accomplish two goals at once. We will fight through the narrowest corridors where their numbers count for nothing. I’d rather have you two at my side than a battalion of troops.”

“More for me,” said Masakado darkly.

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The *Harbinger* dropped out of hyperspace right on target with Rohla at the helm. “Captain Shin, in position,” said a male voice as the *Spear* appeared beside them.

“*Liparus* in sight,” said Rohla as she brought the *Harbinger* into a banked turn.

“Alright, bring us up on the starboard side. Shin will follow your lead so keep it steady.”

“Gen’ral, I’m many things but steady ain’t one of ’em.”

But they had barely flown for a minute before another man’s voice sounded across the *Harbinger*, a strict, stern voice, crisp with clipped consonants. “Upsilon-class shuttle this is Captain Sandford of the *Liparus*, you are encroaching on Principate space, identify yourself,” said the voice indignantly.

Zentru’la tapped quickly at the comms panel. “*Liparus* this is General Zentru’la of the Vornskr Battalion. We’re contracted by Kamlin Xarel to capture the *Screeching Osprey* for the Principate.”

“We weren’t made aware of any mercenary support.” Zentru’la noticed a shift in the Captain’s tone. “But you’re



a foreign ship behind our front line. Protocol dictates we should blast you and your Marauder into dust.”

“This is a recent development,” Zentru’la said quickly as Rohla diverted extra power to the shield generators, causing a sudden drop in speed that lurched them forwards.

“Worry not, General,” said Captain Sandford. “Protocol dictates we open fire. Protocol can go to hell... my wife and son died in Elinicia’s attack on Lyra. You’re a damn hero in my books, General.”

“I’m no hero. Heroes die for a cause... I’m just an old man here to kill for money.”

There was a delay in the response, Captain Sandford was clearly taken aback by Zentru’la’s response. “Well, er... you do what you need to do general. We won’t stand in your way. *Liparus* out.”

There was an awkward pause as no one knew how to respond to Zentru’la. “Are you ok, General?” said Lilina softly.

“I’m... well, you know what really happened at Lyra. She was the one that should be hailed a hero.”

“Nobody told ‘em we’re coming?” Rohla complained, preventing another awkward silence.

The question jolted Zentru’la’s mind back to the situation at hand. “It is strange.” His mind was now back on tactics, strategy, the art of war, the arts in which he painted masterpieces. “Keeping your forces in the dark from each other rarely works out on the battlefield. I see no need for it here.”

“Maybe she just hasn’t had time?” offered Lilina.

“Then she should make time,” snarled Masakado. “If not for the General’s reputation we’d have been killed just

now.”

“They’d’ve tried,” Rohla said dismissively.

“*Spear* in position and ready to fire,” said the voice of Captain Shin over the comms.

“Fire at will, Captain,” Zentru’la replied. “Rohla, prepare to engage.”

She took one final swig from the Kowakian rum as the *Spear* bombarded the *Screeching Osprey* with all eight turbolaser batteries. The peaceful blackness of space erupted into crimson blasts, bright yellow explosions and the flickering cyan hues of the *Screeching Osprey*’s shields. “Hold on ter something!” Rohla rebalanced the power, diverting more to the engines and the ship suddenly accelerated. Sleek A-Wings and bulky Z-95 Headhunter fighters streamed out of the *Screeching Osprey*’s hangar bays as Helos squadron scrambled from the *Spear*.

Drunk and at the helm of the *Harbinger*, Rohla was in her element. Under her control, the *Harbinger* moved like a leaf in the wind, rolling left and right as she avoided fire from the enemy fighters, carving through enemy ships with its heavy dual laser cannons. The ship jolted forwards and backwards, throwing off the enemy fire as Rohla diverted power from the engines to the weapons and back again when she had a clear shot at something.

They were jolted to the side as a laser shot hit the wing of the shuttle from underneath, enough to send the ship into a roll carefully controlled by Rohla. The *Harbinger*’s powerful shields prevented any physical damage. “They’re on our tail!” shouted Rohla as she slammed the throttle to full. “Four A-Wings!” She pushed the ship through a series of acrobatic rolls and turns, pushing the shuttles agility

to its very limits, but despite Rohla's skill, the trailing A-wings were faster and more manoeuvrable. "They've got a lock-on! Missile incoming!"

A high pitched alarm rang, slow at first, but with ever-increasing frequency. Rohla pitched the ship upwards sharply into a loop but the alarm continued to sound quicker and quicker. "I can't shake it! Brace for impact!"

"Countermeasures deployed," G14 said smoothly and the alarm ceased, but laser fire continued to stream past the ship. The details of the *Screeching Osprey's* hangar bays, hung underneath the back of the wedge-shaped ship, came into focus as they approached.

"Diverting shields to rear!" The ship shook repeatedly as they made their approach. "All power on shields, we can hold it!"

"Allied ships incoming!" Zentru'la called as he saw the *Spear's* fighters approaching. Their own fighters cut across the path of the A-wings, obliterating two of them in a fiery wreckage and attracting the attention of the others, who broke pursuit to engage in dogfights. The *Harbinger* safely entered the hangar bay.

Alarms rang out across the hangar, the blaring sirens loud enough to hear even from within the *Harbinger*. Blaster fire erupted seconds later as Tenexir marines opened fire on the shuttle with repeating rifles. Rohla spun the ship around 180 degrees as she touched down in the hangar bay, small arms fire ricocheting off the powerful shuttles, pointing the landing ramp at the oncoming fire.

"Move out!" Zentru'la bellowed above the background noise. Lilina stood in front of Masakado as the landing ramp lowered, igniting her blue double-bladed lightsaber

into a defensive stance in front of her, the twin blue blades covering her whole body. Zentru'la drew his heavy repeater cannon next to Lilina, prepared for battle with an arsenal of explosive devices at his hip and a grenade launcher on his back. He could feel the thirst for blood from Masakado's curved black sword even as it hung at his hip.

Six Tenexir marines, armed with large repeating rifles and clad in heavy black armour, turned their attention on the team. Lilina marched forwards spinning her lightsaber with deft, smooth motions, deflecting shot after shot from hitting Masakado, her lightsaber an impenetrable wall. Zentru'la charged out of the *Harbinger*, cannon fire thundering off his Beskar plate as he returned fire while on the run, one of his shots finding its mark. The target died instantly. Zentru'la dived into a roll, taking cover behind a docked TIE fighter.

From cover behind the TIE, he looked back at the *Harbinger* as Rohla left the hangar bay to rejoin the fight. Lilina had raised her hands, palms facing the enemy as their blaster fire dissipated against an invisible barrier. Masakado had vanished from behind her. There was a blur of black movement and a scream of pain cut short as the next marine fell. The shadow swept across the hangar bay, avoiding fire and cutting through three more marines. Masakado was blindingly fast, his swordsmanship precise, slicing through weak points in their armour like butter. Zentru'la finished the last with a well-aimed headshot. Masakado sheathed the sword again.

It was a well-rehearsed tactic executed with surgical precision. He had expected nothing less of his team.

There was a faint smell of burning in the air after the

brief firefight, the blasters of the fallen marines still smouldered on the floor. Zentru'la heard Lilina gasp and his head jolted in her direction instinctively. The Tenexir marines were not the only bodies in the hangar bay. So focused has Zentru'la been on the fight he only noticed the dozen dead stormtroopers after the battle was over.

Zentru'la crouched over one of the bodies and rolled it onto its back. A blazing hole had been bored through the chest plate of otherwise pristine Imperial White plastel. Zentru'la picked up the fallen soldier's weapon. "He's carrying BlasTech gear. These are Severian troops. This is strange." He looked around at the others. "This was an assault team. Xarel never mentioned they had already sent troops before." *But it also explains the TIE fighter*, thought Zentru'la. The Revenants flew A-wings and Z-95 Headhunters. The Imperial fighter was fitting of a Pricipate attack.

"This smells wrong," growled Masakado. "She didn't tell us about this and didn't tell the *Liparus* about us. Xarel is hiding something from us."

"I sense danger in the Force." It was at Lilina's words that something flipped in Zentru'la's head. He looked at the Jedi, the colour had drained from her face, her demeanour changed from calm and mystical to alert and apprehensive. They had once stepped together onto the front line of an open battle, missiles screaming overhead, without Lilina mentioning danger. It was the change in the Jedi's demeanour that worried Zentru'la more than anything else.

Seven Vornskr Battalion fighters landed in the hangar bay, the pilots disembarking, blaster rifles in hand. There

were supposed to be twelve, five must have been destroyed on the way in. Zentru'la didn't like soldiers dying under his command, but attacking a capital ship was always likely to cause casualties, and seven survivors was good. "Helos Squadron stands ready to secure the hangar bay, General."

"Acknowledged, Lieutenant. Masakado, Lilina, we continue with our mission," he said, steeling his resolve. "I don't know what's going on here but speculating won't get us anywhere. Our safest option remains securing this ship and eliminating all hostiles on board."



# 03

## FORTRESS OF LIES

“The bridge is a long way from here,” said Zentru’la. The bridge on the *Screeching Osprey* was at the very front of the wedge-shaped ship, as far as possible from the hangar bays. Zentru’la and his team moved from the hangar towards the turbolifts that would take them up to the main deck of the ship. “You two know the drill. Lilina and I will take point and attract their attention. Masakado, try to find an angle to attack undetected and cut them all to pieces.”

“They haven’t offered much resistance so far,” Masakado growled, a tone of disappointment in his voice as they reached the turbolifts without any more troops being sent their way.

“It’s a Quasar-fire.” Zentru’la called down the turbolift, checking the motion detector on his heads up display for the presence of any ambushing troops. “Excellent for car-



rying starfighters. Not a troop transport. But stay on your guard. We cannot afford to be complacent.”

“I sense something else is at play here,” said Lilina. “But the signals are weak, it’s like a sound on the edge of hearing. I need to meditate to make sense of them.”

“We don’t have time for that,” Masakado said derisively. “The General is right. We kill everyone on board. Then no one can kill us.”

Masakado’s bloodlust did little to calm the nerves of the Jedi pacifist as the turbolift rose to the main deck. “In position,” warned Zentru’la, crouching down on one knee to keep his repeater cannon secure. “We don’t know what we’ll find when these doors open.” Lilina ignited her blue lightsaber, dropping into a defensive stance. Masakado’s sword was still in its scabbard at his hip.

The door to the turbolift opened onto the end of the side of a corridor. Zentru’la knew the layout. One corridor connected the turbolifts to all the hangar bays. They would turn left, go past the lift to the next bay, then access the main corridor to the bridge. He raised his hand to signal the others to wait. His motion detector showed no sign of movement. Slowly, he peeked around the corner, keeping his repeater ready to fire. There was no one there. The six marines in the hangar bay remained the only Tenexir Revenant troops they had seen on board.

He heard a beep in his ear and tapped his commlink. “Rohla?”

“Gen’ral, something seemed weirrrd about Kamlin,” said Rohla’s slurred voice. “So I convinced G14 to do some digging. We found some juicy intel Gen’ral, you’re not gonna believe this.”

“Rohla, get to the point.” He didn’t have time for a long, rambling drunk story.

“Well, we checked the call you had with her. It turns out that she was broadcasting live on the holonet doing political stuff at the same time.”

“You mean... we spoke to someone else?”

“Well, we have an answer to that too. You’ve been wal-” Rohla’s voice turned into static.

“Rohla?” He kept his repeater raised as Masakado and Lilina stood beside him. “Rohla? Come in, Rohla.” There was no response. “Comms are being jammed.”

“I told you something smelled wrong,” growled Masakado.

“You didn’t talk to Xarel? But you signed a contract with her,” said Lilina. “If we’re not here for *Xarel*... then *who* sent us here?”

“No idea. But this wasn’t part of the deal,” said Zentru’la, his mind made up. There were just too many strange things happening for him to proceed with this. I’m aborting this mission.”

“I hope we get to kill whoever’s behind this,” Masakado snarled.

“Me too,” said Zentru’la, calling the turbolift back up. “But this ship is no longer safe. We’ll regroup back at the *Harbinger* and plan from there.” He tapped the button again. And again. He cursed under his breath. “They’ve deactivated the turbolift,” said Zentru’la, racking his brains over the optimal course of action. “Our retreat is cut off. Can’t go back, only option forwards. Back to plan A, take the ship. If there’s no contact with Xarel... then I guess we keep the Quasar.” But no sooner could he even take a step forwards had a thick blast door slammed shut in his face

with a loud clunk, trapping them between the turbolift and the blast door.

“Or not,” growled Masakado.

“Lilina, will your lightsaber cut this?”

“It will take some time, General. But it will work.” But she was interrupted before she could even start.

“General Zentru’la,” said a voice, cold and high from the walls. “I’ve been waiting.”

He recognised the voice and answered with a tone of confusion and annoyance. “Kamlin Xarel?” Why was she talking from within a Tenexir ship? What was happening?

There was a cold, mirthless laugh in response. “No.” Zentru’la looked to his team, but both seemed as mystified as he was. “I am Commander Ana Subak of Clan Wren, and you have something that belongs to me.”

This meant nothing to Zentru’la. He didn’t know of any ‘Clan Wren’ or anyone by the name Ana Subak. *Something that belongs to her?* That didn’t make any sense.

“*Mandalorian* Clan Wren,” said Ana before Zentru’la could work out how to respond. “The Beskar you wear. It belongs to the Mandalorians. I will take it from your cold, dead body.”

“She’ll try,” snarled Masakado.

Zentru’la was completely unfazed by the death threat. He had heard worse, she wasn’t the first and wouldn’t be the last. The rest were all dead. “This armour was created by Bal-”

“Bale Andros, the Iridonian fool,” Ana cut over him. “That idiot working on Beskar...” she said with a tone of disgust. “Only a Mandalorian is worthy. Long have I tracked the Beskar from its origin on Mandalore... through the

Principate... to the Chyron Black market... to Bale Andros... then to you.”

“Why are you on a Tenexir ship?” Zentru’la asked, not really interested in how important the Beskar was but needing a better grip on the tactical situation. She had him at a huge disadvantage. He knew nothing about her and she knew everything about him.

“I’m a Retributionist,” Ana said as if it was obvious. “It’s a good excuse to kill Imperial scum like you, and they have been useful to me, making me a Commander and commanding officer of this ship. But their use is almost at an end. I’ll be a legend once I take that armour back to Clan Wren.” The information was of no tactical use whatsoever.

“Come and fight me.” It was the best thing Zentru’la could think of saying. He didn’t know a lot about the Mandalorians, only that they had a warrior culture and a strong code of honour. “I’ll fight you over the armour. If I win, you let us go.” Standing and talking was not getting them anywhere. If he could get her to agree to a straight fight...

Ana laughed again in that same mirthless laugh. “I impersonated Kamlin Xarel to lure you here on false pretences. You reached the *Screeching Osprey* because I allowed it. You stand here talking because I allow you to. The way my spies put it, you’re the greatest soldier they’ve ever seen... and yes I have spies in your Vornskr Battalion. I don’t know if I’ll beat you in a fight. But I *do* know that you are exactly where I want you. You will die when I choose. This exchange is over.”

There was a moment of silence as no one was quite sure how to respond to that. Then there was a soft hissing sound from within the walls. Masakado sniffed rapidly,

his canine nose wriggling frantically. “Neurotoxin.”

The agent started to take effect immediately. As soon as Masakado noticed it, Zentru’la started to feel groggy. So this was Ana’s plan. Trap them on the *Osprey* and gas them. He heard a crash of metal on metal as Masakado slashed his sword against the blast door, but the blade crashed off without leaving so much as a scratch.

Just as he was about to fall asleep, he felt something pulling his consciousness back from the void. Teetering on a precarious boundary between sleep and wake, through blurred vision, he saw Lilina, sat cross-legged on the floor, meditating.

He heard the snap-hiss of a lightsaber igniting. The blue blade shone like a strobe light through his groggy vision. Lilina was still meditating, perfectly motionless. Her lightsaber was in Masakado’s hand. He cut a small circle in the blast door, then slammed a mechanical fist into it with all his might. The raw force of Masakado’s punch sent the scored chunk of heavy metal plating flying, allowing the gas to vent. Zentru’la took a deep breath, breathing in the relief of clean air.

Lilina rose back to her feet and looked at them both. “Are you both ok?” Zentru’la understood what had happened. Lilina had used the Force to keep them safe from the neurotoxin.

“I’m fine,” said Zentru’la as his vision returned to normal.

“Ready to kill something,” said Masakado as he returned Lilina’s lightsaber to her, the hole in the blast door now big enough for even Zentru’la to fit through.

The turbolift finally arrived behind them. Retreat was

finally an option, but Zentru'la was angry. "It might be a trap," he said, more trying to convince himself that acting on his anger was a rational decision than to convince the others. He felt embarrassed, tricked, stupid for being lured into Ana's trap and ashamed he had put his allies at risk. She needed to die. "We continue onwards, get to the bridge and kill Ana Subak."

Masakado nodded in agreement while Lilina seemed less than convinced. "How do we know she's even on-board?"

"If not we take the ship and hunt her down with it," Zentru'la said flatly in a tone that allowed no argument.

There was a sudden crackle of electricity pulsing through the corridor. Blue and white sparks shot from the walls. Zentru'la's heads-up display was immediately cut off. Then Masakado howled in pain and dropped to the floor. His cybernetic body was convulsing uncontrollably, his limbs writhing around. His face was contorted in agony.

Lilina acted in a flash, crouching over Masakado as he writhed on the floor, trying to move his body to a more comfortable position. "Help me!" The cyborg was vastly more powerful than the mystic and Lilina was almost struck by a flailing metallic limb. Zentru'la grabbed hold of Masakado's arms, using his weight and brute force gave him the leverage he needed to pin him to the floor. Lilina injected something into his neck, one of the few parts of the Shistavenan that remained organic. "That should null the pain," she said softly.

"Will he be ok?"

"I don't know," said Lilina softly, apprehensive. Masakado's eyes had glazed over as if he were in a deep trance. "The

EMP has fried his synthetics, but his organics seem untouched.”

“But that’s just his limbs, right? His organs are...”

“Not completely.” Lilina gently pressed a finger against the side of his neck. “He has brain implants too, that’s the source of his condition. But this...” she looked closely at one of Masakado’s mechanical arms. “This is beyond my expertise. He needs a mechanic, not just a doctor.”

“Ana prepared this in advance,” said Zentru’la, his fists clenched. “She knew I’d bring Masakado and she knew how to stop him.”

“I sense movement up ahead. Life forms, lots of them. They are coming.”

“You need to get out of here right now. Take Masakado, take the turbolift back to the hangar and get back to the *Harbinger*,” Zentru’la ordered. “Go, just go! I’ll hold them off as long as I can,” he said before Lilina could say another word.

“May the Force be with you, General.” Lilina waved a hand towards Masakado and his body raised into the air as if carried onto the turbolift on an invisible stretcher.

# 04

## THE MANDALORIAN REVENANT

Zentru'la quickly assessed his surroundings, calling the turbolift back up for a quick evacuation. He reloaded his repeater cannon.

There was only one side they could be coming from – the man-sized hole in the blast door that Masakado had carved. It was his only source of cover. If they attempted to flank, he would know about it. As his motion detector came back online he saw twelve dots moving towards his position with every pulse.

This was it, just him, his wits, his repeating cannon, a grenade launcher and enough explosive devices to supply a small army against twelve soldiers and possibly a Mandalorian. He placed his repeater on the floor beside him,



hoisting his grenade launcher off his back. The blast door gave him excellent cover to prepare an assault. His motion detector gave him advance warning of their advance down the ship's main corridor. One eye on the heads up display and the other on the corner he expected them to come around, he detached a thermal imploder from his belt and threw it full force, bouncing the device off the wall. It was the most powerful device he had available.

He had seven seconds until detonation. "Get down!" The command told Zentru'la exactly where the enemy was.

He fired a volley of grenades around the same corner. Screams of pain echoed amongst the thunderous blasts of his grenades detonating. Then the imploder activated. Even from behind the cover of the blast door could Zentru'la feel the force of the detonation. Everything around him shook, there was the sound of creaking metal as the imploder bent the ship's walls out of shape, the sound of shrapnel clattering everything against the walls and ceiling, but the screams of pain had been silenced. Zentru'la checked his motion detector once more. Only one red dot continued to move towards him. He raised out of cover. Ana Subak strode through the fire and smoke.

She was a head shorter than him, wearing blood-red armour of traditional Mandalorian design, with an iconic dark-tinted T-shaped visor and matching blood-red cuirass with black leather showing between the plates. Her helmet and cuirass almost shone in perfect condition, unmarked by battle, while her bracers, greaves and boots were a duller shade, showing signs of battle-wear. It was a sign of either one of two things: either she had never worn them before, or they were of pure Beskar and remained unmarked de-

spite having seen battle. Zentru'la guessed the latter. Her Beskar armour was incomplete. She carried a heavy blaster rifle almost as large as Zentru'la's own repeater. He recognised it as a Ren blaster rifle, extremely rare, exceptionally powerful.

"We finally meet, General," said Ana Subak. Ana and Zentru'la met eye to eye. It had been many years since he had encountered a truly worthy foe on the battlefield. His battles with crazed Collective bomber Gwendolyn Sparks on Nancora were the last difficult fights he had, but Ana was a different beast entirely, so many steps ahead of him. "What have you done to that Beskar'gam..." she said in disgust, firing a round of blaster fire that sent Zentru'la rolling into cover back behind the blast door. Ana's shots hit the wall with terrifying power. "You've *defiled* it! It looks like a *harr'chak* Stormtrooper!"

Zentru'la poked out of cover and fired a burst of fire from his repeater cannon, but Ana had taken cover herself. Once more, she had him at a disadvantage. He had only one angle of attack to fire through, while she could be hidden anywhere. The wreckage his explosives had caused had generated a huge amount of cover on the other side of the blast door and his motion detector was useless for locating a stationary enemy. Zentru'la fired another volley of explosives through the gap, hoping to hit something through pure chance. It was no use. Ana was clearly too smart for that, unlike her troops.

Both himself and Ana remained in cover, but she had a major tactical advantage, she knew exactly where he was and he had no idea where she was hidden. He needed more information. He raised out of cover once more, not firing,

but observing. The moment a blaster bolt came his way from the right-hand side he ducked down to the left.

The shots would have landed square between the eyes had he not moved in time. His armour was strong... but strong enough to withstand multiple hits from such a high-powered rifle? He didn't want to risk it. Zentru'la tapped his commlink again. "Rohla, come in, Rohla." Still jammed.

Zentru'la pulled a thermal detonator off his hip and threw it at the location the bolts had come from. He raised from cover once more, hoping to catch a sight of Ana moving out of the way of the blast. Instead, he saw the grenade flying back towards the door breach. He barely had time to roll out of the way of the blast before it detonated. *Had she caught the detonator and threw it back?.* Zentru'la finally understood why the Mandalorian warriors had been feared on the battlefield for millennia.

He had held her off long enough for Masakado and Lilina to escape. He knew the logical thing to do was to take the turbolift and rendezvous with his team, there would be ships in the hangar to make his escape from... but he needed to finish this fight. He couldn't just retreat and let her get away. He was getting nowhere from behind the blast door. The only way to finish this fight would be to get in close. He had one remaining trick up his sleeve - a short term personal energy shield, and potentially only one advantage over the Mandalorian: he was bigger and stronger.

Acting on emotion despite his better judgement, Zentru'la cloaked himself in the shield leapt through the hole in the door and charged towards Ana with reckless aban-

don, firing his cannon the whole way. She fires her own rifle to stop his advance but her shots were deflected by the energy shield. Zentru'la felt the physical impact of the shots against his torso but he continued his charge, his powerful defences keeping his body safe as he trained his fire towards Ana.

Both of them landed shots, but none struck the weak points of the armour by the time Zentru'la had closed to melee range. He struck the Mandalorian's helmet with the butt of his cannon, causing her to stagger back into a wall, dropping her rifle. Zentru'la's attack was relentless, slamming Ana against the wall again with a full-force shoulder charge and then throwing her to the ground. She landed in a roll, getting back to her feet immediately, but her stance was bent and crooked as if she was struggling to stand. It didn't matter if her Beskar plate bore no signs of battle damage, the warrior inside was clearly in pain.

He wasted no time pressing the attack, stepping forward and throwing his whole body weight into a kick to Ana's knee. Her foot gave way beneath her and she fell to the ground, this time not able to control her fall. Zentru'la stood over her, pointing his cannon at her as she lay prone on her back. "It's over," the General announced. "Beskar won't save you at this range."

Ana scoffed. "Have you ever fought a Mandalorian warrior before?" she spoke with incredible confidence for somebody who did not have the upper hand. "Few Imperials have."

A burst of flame streamed out of her bracer towards Zentru'la. He immediately felt the temperature inside his armour rise to uncomfortable levels, the bright red flame

glared off his visor, obscuring his vision. Instinctively, he jumped back out of the short-range of her flamethrower, keeping his repeater cannon trained on her chest as she got back to her feet. "Protect the Commander!"

Zentru'la glanced up. There were far too many troops assembled for him to fight alone. He wanted to finish the fight with Ana, but there was no time, and his work here was done, he had held off the attack for long enough. He ran back to the turbolift, dropping a thermal detonator to deter their pursuit and a smoke grenade to obscure their vision. Chased all the way by blind blaster fire, Zentru'la leapt back through the hole in the blast door and back into the turbolift, hammering the button to take him down to the hangar deck.

He ran full speed to the hangar. He was alone. Where his troops were, he had no idea, but there was time to worry about that. He had about as much time as it took the turbolift to travel to the upper deck and back to the hangar to escape.

Zentru'la wrenched open the cockpit to a Headhunter starfighter and powered up the engines, not knowing if it belonged to his own Vornskr Battalion or the Tenexir Revenants. There was a stream of small arms fire from the chasing troops as Zentru'la slammed all the power to the engines and flew away from the *Screeching Osprey*. "Captain Shin, this is General Zentru'la, prepare for boarding," he hailed the *Spear*.

# 05

## ROHLA'S STORY

Zentru'la had only one question on his mind when he arrived back on the *Harbinger*. "Where are the others?"

Rohla put down her drink and turned back to Zentru'la. "They aren't here, what happened?"

Zentru'la recounted the story to Rohla of how they were set up, how Kamlin Xarel was being impersonated by a Mandalorian Revenant to lure him into a trap, how the ship had been rigged with traps to separate him from his team, how Masakado's body had been disabled by an electromagnetic pulse and how he had told Lilina to get back to the *Harbinger*.

"But they never returned..." said Rohla.

"Greetings, General," said the cold, high voice of Ana once more. "You're probably wondering what happened to your friends. Well, they're with me, aboard the *Screeching*

*Osprey*. If you ever want to reassemble the team you spent so long to build... well... you know where to find me.”

“We have to go save them,” said Rohla without any hesitation.

Zentru’la knew it was a stupid thing to do. It would be *exactly* what Ana wanted him to do, she would be well prepared, she had the stronger military force and the vastly superior tactical position. Rushing back in was the irrational, illogical, tactically inept decision. Mixing personal feelings with tactical decisions was an easy way to run into mistakes. He had made a lot of them lately.

“She will be expecting us to do exactly that,” said Zentru’la. “She has the upper hand here, we can’t act rashly. We have to plan our next moves carefully.”

“Plan carefully?” said Rohla incredulously, temperature rising. “We don’t have time for that! The others are trapped there!”

“We’ll be walking into another trap.

“Rohla, this isn’t the kind of opponent we can just charge in against. We already tried that. Why do you think she installed that EMP Pulse?” Rohla didn’t respond. “That was set up for Masakado! She knew I’d bring a cyborg and she was prepared for *him*. She’ll be prepared for a second attack, she *wants* a second attack. She could have bugged the *Harbinger* for all we know. She could be listening to this! It’s tactical suicide.”

“But they could die!”

“Ana won’t kill them.”

“How do you know that? They could already be dead!”

“Because she needs them alive,” said Zentru’la as he tried to view the situation from Ana’s point of view. “She’s

using them as bait to lure us into making a stupid decision like charging back into another trap. They're no use to her dead, and they can both handle anything she throws at them. Masakado has seen worse. Lilina is a Jedi."

"So we just leave them there?" Rohla snapped.

"Rohla, I want nothing more than to rush back in an-

"I won't lose this group! I can't and I won't!"

"Rohla..."

"Do you know why I drink, General?" Rohla slammed the glass on the dashboard. "Do you?" The carefree, happy-drunkness of the pilot was a thing of the distant past. Her entire demeanour had changed, the smile had gone along with the drunken sway and the slurred voice. Zentru'la took a physical step back. This was not a Rohla Trugaim he recognised.

Rohla took a deep breath.

"I drink to forget, Zentru'la. I was born... on the *Excidium I*." Zentru'la knew the name, he had been rising through the ranks of the Imperial Scholae Army when the *Excidium I* led the Navy.

"My parents were Scholae Navy officers, I grew up on the ship. My friends were the kids of other officers.

"I was only eight when the..." she paused, taking another deep breath. "When the... aliens... boarded. I remember the alarms, I remember screaming, chaos. They attacked our quarters. I can still see the scarred, disfigured face in my mind. I ran. I ran to the hangars and didn't look back. I stole a TIE and flew to the *Ogimo's Whip*. And then..."

She paused again as if looking for the right words. Zentru'la said nothing. This was something she had been keep-



ing to herself for two decades.

“I drink to forget the face of those... things that attacked us. And then...”

“I know,” said Zentru’la. Everyone in the Imperial military knew what happened to the *Excidium I*.

“I drink to forget the sound of breaking hull, the wave of heat as I flew away, the shockwave that sent my TIE flying... then looking in the rear viewport to the sight of the *Excidium* shear in two with everyone I knew on board!”

“I watched my family, and all of my friends die on the *Excidium*. I was eight. I lost everyone! I’ve had no one since then. People look at me with scorn, call me drunkard, idiot. I’ve been ostracised from every unit I joined since, punished for being drunk more times than I could count, no-one tried to help, no-one tried to understand, everyone just saw me as a drunk!”

“Rohla, we-”

“You understood,” said Rohla, regaining a bit of her composure. “This team... you’re the closest thing I’ve had to a family since I lost mine as a child. Masakado calls us his pack. He’s right. You’ve taken me in, without judging me for my... problem... accepted me for who I am. I lost one family. I won’t lose my family again. G14... you’re with me right?”

“Rohla,” he said trying to sound reassuring. “I understand. We won’t leave them stranded. We’ll go back for them. But we need to do it right.”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I’m going to contact Kamlin Xarel,” said Zentru’la, in that *my mind is made up this is what we are going to do* tone that his team were so used to hearing. “The *real* Kamlin

Xarel. I'm going to offer our services for free as long as they support us. I'll recall the Sentinel-class shuttles and deploy the Vornskr Battalion infantry. We will take the *Screeching Osprey* and rescue Masakado and Lilina. She is well-positioned to deal with a brute force attack... but there's only so much brute force she can withstand. I'll give the ship to them afterwards to sweeten the deal."

It was the best he could do to turn the tables. The original mission had been entirely fake, he had never even spoken to the real Xarel, but the reason it had been such a convincing fake was that the Severian Principate *did* need that ship taken out and the Vornskr Battalion really was well suited to the job. Even if it had been a simple lie to draw him in, it was genuinely a good plan, except this time, he would be taking no chances, deploying three hundred troops aboard Sentinel-class shuttles. He would command the strike personally.

"Yes, I heard from Captain Sandford of the *Liparus*." It was the first time Zentru'la had heard Kamlin Xarel's voice for real, much deeper with stronger bass tones than Ana's impersonation. "You claimed you were fighting under my orders to get behind our lines." Zentru'la had never thought about how that bit might have come across to the Triumvir of Steel. Xarel didn't know that he had been given a false contract in her name by an impersonator. He opened his mouth to explain himself before Xarel cut across him. "You then destroyed a bunch of Tenexir Revenant starfighters and attempted to assault the *Screeching Osprey*. Anyone scoring that many Revenant kills is a friend of mine. You've done more for our cause than those useless Harmonists. I presume you're looking to offer your services to

us?”

“Yes,” said Zentru’la. “But not for credits. We’re taking on this mission gratis.”

“A mercenary that isn’t fighting for credits?” Xarel’s tone turned slightly suspicious.

“We’re not your common mercenaries and this isn’t your common contract,” said Zentru’la. “We have personal stakes with two valuable crew-mates being held hostage aboard the *Screeching Osprey*. Their safety is paramount to us.”

“A mercenary with a sense of loyalty,” Xarel mused. “Unusual. Very well. We have already sent an assault squad to the *Screeching Osprey*, but none came back alive. Joining forces to get the job done is certainly in our interest. If not for credits, name your terms.”

“I propose a simple deal. The Vornskr Battalion will pledge 100 per cent of its forces to capturing the *Screeching Osprey* for the Severian Principate. In return, we ask that the Severian Principate dedicates military assets to support our assault. You can keep the ship when we’re done.” Zentru’la didn’t care that his proposal fell heavily in their favour, he didn’t want to get dragged into a long, drawn-out negotiation. The *Screeching Osprey* would have been a powerful addition to his arsenal, but he lacked the funds to properly complement it anyway.

“That is a very generous offer,” replied Xarel. “We have no need of the fighters aboard the *Screeching Osprey*. You can take any captured Headhunters as payment.”

The arrangement was perfect. The support of the Principate in liberating the others was worth far more than the potential lost earnings by not negotiating a fee. The Head-

hunters were a great alternative as he had lost several of his own in the original raid. "It remains to discuss military matters."

"We will deploy a Raider Corvette to support your approach and a company of assault troops to participate in the raid," said Xarel. "Your reputation for commanding troops in battle is well known to us. For the duration of the raid, our troops will report to you as their commanding officer. Any losses will be covered by the side that accrued them. When the ship is secured, it will immediately fall under the command of Lieutenant Commander Daniels. Following the success of this mission, we will likely contract your services on a second mission."

"Acknowledged. We will proceed to the objective. Zentru'la out." Securing the trust and loyalty of the Severian Principate was likely a strong long term business move for the Vornskr Battalion.

Zentru'la walked back to the cockpit, clasping a hand on Rohla's shoulder. "We'll get them back, Rohla. Don't worry."

"Thank you."



# 06

## UNIFIED ASSAULT

“All units, open fire. Focus fire on their turrets and fighters. Do not destroy the ship, repeat, do not destroy the ship.”

Zentru’la stood aboard the *Harbinger* as they approached the *Screeching Osprey* once more, but this time, with a far stronger force. His ship formed the point of a V-shaped formation, with two Sentinel-class shuttles behind him on either side and the *Spear* staying close by. They passed the *Liparus*, now reinforced by the Severian Raider and troop carriers.

The *Screeching Osprey* deployed another wave of starfighters to intercept the approaching boarding force, but they were quickly eliminated by the fire of the combined Vornskr Battalion and Severian forces. Numerous hull breaches were visible even at long range as parts of the ship sparked violently. The *Harbinger* lurched forwards as Rohla diverted

all the power to the engines, accelerating at top speed towards the hangar. The supporting shuttles fanned out behind them, occupying each of the hangar bays.

“Rohla, stay with me this time,” said Zentru’la. “I can’t risk anything going wrong.”

“What if they try to steal the *Harbinger*?”

“Then I will flood the ship with a deadly neurotoxin,” said G14 smoothly.

“Fair enough.” Rohla shrugged, loaded a blaster pistol and followed Zentru’la down the landing ramp.

They were shortly joined by a Vorsnkr Battalion heavy weapons company, carrying repeating blaster rifles and Severian Principate stormtroopers, in the traditional pristine Imperial White armour. “We take the turbolifts to the upper deck and fight our way to the bridge,” said Zentru’la as the forces assembled in front of him. It wasn’t the first time he had found himself commanding a unified force of different factions. “Vornskrs, take point, cover any angles with suppressive fire. Severian in the backline, cover any blind corners and flanking troops.”

When the General commanded, his troops followed. The operation was so over-committed that there was very little resistance, the overwhelming combined force decimated the remaining soldiers on board the *Screeching Osprey*. His troops were so quickly spread out all over the ship that any traps Ana had set were futile, and within a matter of minutes, he and Rohla stood before the door to the bridge, his troops behind him.

“Please let me kill her,” said Rohla, her hand on her blaster pistol.

“There will be a time for that,” said Zentru’la calmly.

“But only when Masakado and Lilina are safe.”

“Private,” he addressed a Vornskr soldier as he visualised the bridge. “Get a breaching charge on this door.” He didn’t need to fight Ana in single combat again. There was no need to give her any opportunity to pull any tricks, no need for a heroic final battle like in an overly dramatic holodrama. All he needed to do was secure the bridge with his overwhelming force. “Once the door blows, we storm the bridge. The Commander will be wearing red armour. I need her alive. Kill the rest. Vornskrs in front, Severian in back.”

The breach charge blasted the door to the floor. Zentru’la let the crew go in first. There was no need for him to take point on this one. Severian and Vornskr Battalion troops fanned out across the bridge as blaster fire broke out. The men on the bridge were mere pilots in flight suits armed with blaster pistols. Zentru’la’s heavy assault forces had them outnumbered and outgunned. The battle was brutal and swift. The blaster fire lasted merely a few seconds.

Zentru’la walked past the troops. The only casualty on his side was a Vornskr assault trooper. Ana Subak stood alone on the bridge, standing shoulders feet apart, her Ren blaster rifle in her hands.

Rohla drew her blaster pistol and took a snapshot against her, but the shot glanced harmlessly off her helmet. Zentru’la gently pushed her blaster pistol downwards.

“We meet again, General,” she said with such calm as if talking over drinks.

Zentru’la raised his heavy repeater, and as he did so, his troops followed his lead. “We have you surrounded,”



he said strongly. “Drop your weapon.”

Her posture was relaxed and loose as she dropped her rifle by her feet.

“Not there. Kick it away. Hands in the air.”

Ana lazily kicked the rifle out of her own arms reach. “You know what you’re doing.”

“Where are the others?” Zentru’la roared as he kept his distance.

Ana chuckled darkly with an unsettling calm. It was that calm that led him to keep his distance. She was up to something. She was *always* up to something. “They’re not here. Why would I leave them where you might find them?” He felt stupid as he heard the words. He had taken the bait when it wasn’t even there. She had him wrapped around her little finger.

“It’s over Ana,” Zentru’la shouted with a percussive blast. “So give up and tell me where they are!”

“This isn’t over. It won’t be over until you die and I take that armour back to my clan.”

It seemed so petty as the Zentru’la’s perception of Ana’s words flipped from tactical genius to childish greed. All this over some armour. He would have sold the damn armour to her. Or better yet, they could have been *allies*. Masakado joined because Zentru’la promised to find him a healer and did so in Lilina. He’d have helped her find *more* Beskar if she was on his side. But it was far too late for that. She had chosen the path of war. It was a path Zentru’la had walked many times.

“No more words! Tell me where they are!”

“For once, we agree. No more words. This is where I take my leave of you, General.”

There was a rapid series of high pitched whistling sounds from Ana's bracer. Projectiles fired out of her wrist launcher, arcing towards Zentru'la and his troops. Several of them opened fire but hit only Beskar plate. Zentru'la stood in front of Rohla, using his huge frame and heavy armour to protect the pilot from harm.

He was hit by two, the projectiles detonating against his forearms, causing him to stagger backwards two steps. More explosions detonated around him along with screams of pain. *Whistling birds*. Rare, even among Mandalorians. Zentru'la had only heard of them, never seen them in action. He looked around at Rohla, who was unharmed behind him, then at his troops. Most remained standing, but the damage was done.

Ana was gone. An escape pod launched from the bridge, heading towards Dandoran. Zentru'la instinctively ran towards it, but there was nothing he could do. He could have commanded the remaining troops to man the guns and shoot the escape pod out of the sky, but they were not in position and even if they were, if he killed her then he would never be able to find the others. He needed her alive.

The battle was over. The *Screeching Osprey* had been secured in the hands of the Vornskr Battalion and the Severian Principate, no longer a threat to Principate forces on Dandoran, but as far as Zentru'la was concerned, the mission was a critical failure. Ana Subak had escaped his clutches, and Lilina and Masakado remained under her custody... somewhere. He clenched his fist as a Severian Principate commander reported their success to his superior. Ana was still a Tenexir Revenant Commander. She would still be involved in the battle. Wherever she was,

Zentru'la would hunt her down until he had his team back safely.