**Zoron vs. Restoration Trooper – Combat Writing**

Colonel Kenath Zoron leaned back in his seat at the café, carefully balancing himself on two legs while casually flicking at the primer switch on the thermal detonator in his hand. To all watching, he was relaxed – something of a feat in itself as everyone else around him was frantically firing weapons and taking cover. It was somewhat of a miracle that he hadn’t yet been struck by anything more serious than some bouncing rubble from a nearby explosion.

“Sir! Enemy forces are pushing in on us! We need to re-position!”

Zoron, paused flicking the switch for a moment and looked around calmly. The heavily-armed and well-trained contractors who had accompanied him down to the planet’s surface were sheltering behind half the café’s fallen façade. He could see their composure breaking in the face of the onslaught and sighed heavily to himself.

*Welp, this contract has gone to hell. No time for subtlety anymore – good thing I’m not lacking for targets anymore.*

With what seemed to be an enormous effort, he heaved himself to his feet, using the back of the chair to help him up. Movement caught his eye and his HUD helpfully highlighted the thrown grenade that was arcing towards his position. Shaking free of the feigned lethargy, he easily swung the folding chair up gracefully, meeting the grenade mid-way into the swing. There was a ringing sound as the metal of the chair met the explosive, re-directing it back towards a small group of enemy troops that had been moving up towards his team’s flank. He had a moment to savour the shocked look on the lead soldier before the explosion took care of that threat.

He swung his rifle up to his shoulder and began squeezing off shots with a rapid staccato rhythm. Each shot lanced out from his position and cut down Principate troopers with ruthless efficiency. After a few seconds, Zoron’s unexpected counterfire had completed forced the Principate troops to cease their advance and take cover for themselves.

There was a sudden drop in the volume of the battle as everyone ducked their heads down for safety. In that lull, Zoron heard a strange clinking sound with rhythmic crunching. He dropped into a crouch to give him a moment to check for the source.

Zoron radioed the team channel, “Mr Jawa, do we have any eyes up high?”

The reply came immediately. “No sir, but I can get a drone up.”

“Absolut…” Zoron’s instruction cut off as he saw a shambling shape come into view down the street. It looked humanoid, but the form was twisted and misshapen horribly. He could see a reddish glow as it passed between the shadows of the buildings into the dim light cutting through the dust of battle. He pressed his rifle to his shoulder and looked through the optic to see what the heck it was.

A chill ran down his back as he got a good view of the abomination approaching his position. The red crystals coated its body like spikes, making it impossible for him to even make out what race it had once been. He saw gore dripping from the shards. As the crystalline monstrosity came closer, he saw a Revenant fighter, left out forward of the rest of his comrades and Zoron’s team, stand up and begin dumping shot after shot into its body. The crystals on its body pulsed as it was seemingly unaffected by the withering fire. Zoron watched in rapt horror as the creature altered its course and bore down on the Revenant, who was frozen in place, still firing ineffectually. The creature came on inexorably until it was mere feet from the poor trooper, who was now pulling the trigger on an emptied blaster. Something that resembled a mouth opened in a parody of a smile, the crystals within cutting open the flesh of the host further, adding its own blood to the gore it was covered in. The trooper’s wailing scream could be heard over the din of battle as the crystal beast drove its arm forward, driving a spike of crystal clean through the armour and torso of the poor trooper. It lifted the limp trooper into the air, looking into the dead man’s face. It raised its other arm, with crude claws made from the same crystal, and tore the trooper’s corpse in two, throwing them down with a terrifying casualness.

The creature turned its gaze to Zoron, now feeling mightily silly for having left himself out in the open for all to see. He looked around quickly, sizing up the field of battle and saw an opportunity.

“Mr Bantha, rockets, now. Drop this building on that sithspawn!” Zoron looked at the Revenant fighters and barked commands as well. “Move or you’re going to find yourself like your friend there!”

The Revenants quickly scrambled to their feet and began running back past his position. One of his own men unslung a shoulder mounted rocket launcher while a compatriot dropped his pack, retrieving a pair of rockets. As the pair of them prepared to fire, a few stray laser bolts began sizzling past them again as the Principate noticed what was happening.

With a careful step, Zoron moved to the side to line up a better shot on the attackers, barely noticing the shot that winged through the space his head had been a mere second earlier. He resumed lancing scarlet energy at those foolish enough to pop their heads up, giving his men time to finish unpacking the heavy weapon. Having seen how that creature shrugged off blaster fire, he didn’t bother shooting at it, instead just keeping track of its steady movement towards him.

“Mr Bantha, what is the hold up?” Zoron shouted over his shoulder.

“Sir! Firing in 5!” Zoron broke and ran back towards his troops. “4! 3! 2! 1! Rockets away!”

A rocket whistled past him, striking the sidewall of the café, with a fireball blossoming out and ripping out the remaining support columns for the tower above the dingy café. The tower began tilting, its 40 meters of metal and material leaning forward over the road, but not as fast as Zoron needed.

“Mr Bantha! Hit that thing and slow it down!”

Immediately on the heels of Zoron’s order, a rocket screamed past him, impacting directly into the chest of the crystal creature. Zoron watched as it stumbled backwards, but after a moment, it resumed its pace towards him. Thankfully, as Zoron watched, chunks of the building started to fall and he shifted his eyes upwards, seeing the building finally gaining momentum and collapsing. The monster noticed the falling debris, but was powerless to stop the inevitable as tons of metal and ferrocrete dumped on top of it. Zoron may have imagined it, but he thought he heard an almost-melodic tinkling sound as the crystals were shattered.

As the debris settled, Zoron turned to his men. “Excellent work, Mr Bantha. Like I always tell you, work smarter, not harder.” He clapped the man on the shoulder and saw the other man give a weary smile.

“Mr Jawa, get some scouts out back that way and let’s move out of here.”