



SPYFALL

*General Zentru'la*

# Chapter 1

## Electric Ambition

### Pendroh-I - Padawan Rhuna Yalma

The young Padawan's slender frame was thrown to the floor once more by a wave of energy from her Master. Not for the first time that day, Rhuna had landed uncomfortably, this time grazing her knee on the hard stone floor of the training hall. She suppressed the pain in a cage made of her own willpower. Rhuna could not afford to give into such worldly chagrins, not if she was going to become a Jedi Knight, and especially not in front of Master Sterion.

She rose to her feet, flicking her bushy brown hair out of her eyes once more and wiping blood off her lips. Sterion stood a foot taller than her and twice as broad. His sapphire lightsaber, held high in a powerful grounded stance, glowed strongly and illuminated his unkempt black hair a midnight blue.

"Again, Rhuna." Sterion's words carried a percussive tone. Rhuna called her lightsaber back to her hand, igniting its yellow blade once more and flourishing acrobatically as she skipped towards her master. Mere seconds later, Rhuna yelped and recoiled as Sterion's blade passed through her wrist. Luckily they were using training sabers. That marked her tenth defeat in a row.

It just wasn't fair.

To land a hit she had to extend further to overcome her smaller frame, leaving

her open to the counter-attack. Every time their blades met, Sterion had more power and she needed twice the effort to accomplish half as much.

Sterion deactivated his lightsaber. "Enough."

She wanted to train more, to try again, to prove her worth to her master, but that wasn't going to be achieved by ignoring his instructions. She deactivated her own lightsaber.

"Sit, Rhuna." With a wave of Sterion's colossal hand, a table and two chairs floated towards them, setting themselves in place. Rhuna took her place at the table opposite her master. "Introspection is a vital part of Jedi training. To truly master the lightsaber, you must be able to identify your own mistakes. Why do you think you can't win?"

The answer was painfully obvious to Rhuna, if unhelpful. "I'm always at a size disadvantage. You can always hit me before I can hit you."

Sterion shook his head with disapproval. "Size matters not, there is only the Force."

*That's easy for you to say, thought Rhuna. You're not the one at a disadvantage.* She wondered if Sterion had *ever* been in her situation. He always meant well, a gentle giant, but he just didn't understand what it was like to always be the smaller fighter, and always have to be the one working harder.

"Let me tell you about a legendary Jedi Master called Yo-

"Yes I know about Yoda." Rhuna's temper was beginning to rise, although she tried to keep it in check in front of her master. "But legends, stories and tall tales aren't going to help me if I have to fight a Sith from the Brotherhood."

"They're. Not. Just. Legends." Sterion had begun to enunciate every word. "Master Yoda was two feet tall and duelled the most dangerous Sith Lord the Galaxy had ever seen to a stalemate."

"But I'm not Yoda. Maybe in thirty years but the war with the Brotherhood is happening now. I need to be useful now."

"Patience is the Jedi way, my Padawan."

"I don't have time for patience. I'm always going to be playing catch-up in a

saber fight. I've read stories of Jedi that can fire lightning from their finger tip-

Master Sterion's hand hit the table, perhaps harder than he meant it to.

"Rhuna..." She locked eyes with her master. "This isn't the first time you've expressed interest in the Dark Arts. Let me make myself *very, very* clear. Such ambitions are not tolerated within The Lightbringers. If this persists, you will be reassigned to the Shadowseers. And trust me when I say they will be much less tolerant of your failures in combat."

"I understand you're angry." Rhuna guessed Sterion's words were supposed to show some kind of sympathy. She stood up and turned her back on him, leaving the training hall towards her quarters. "Return to me for further training when you have forsaken your dark ambitions."

She would return. But she would not let this slight go unpunished. She would have her revenge.

## Chapter 2

# The Wolf Leashed

### *The Harbinger* - General Zentru'la

“How do we know she can be trusted?”

Zentru'la, like everyone else aligned to the Brotherhood, knew very little about who the Lightbringers were. One moment he was contracted to investigate a Sith Cult and the next this turns out to be only a third of the organisation. Everything had moved so fast, intelligence gained so contradictory, it was difficult to know who was friend and foe.

The holographic figure of Idris Adenn, encased as he always was in black and crimson armour, shrugged his shoulders apathetically. “We don't. But we'll find out either way.”

“And if it turns out we can't, then I lose the operative,” Zentru'la said, thinking out loud.

“Pick one that can handle it or pick someone expendable. Your choice. Idris out.” The hologram faded into nothing, leaving Zentru'la and his small team contemplating the mission: infiltrate the Lightbringer home of Pendroh-I, pick up a datapad of valuable intelligence, then get out quietly. There was no possibility of backup or extraction in the event of capture. Failure would equal death.

Zentru'la looked towards Masakado. Even just standing by on *The Harbinger*

his dark visage blended with the background. The darkest corners were the wolf's dominion. The maths was easy, the solution was trivial: send Masakado to get it. He knew that, he knew with absolute certainty that Masakado was the optimal choice for this mission. And yet, as he caught sight of Lilina's bandaged hand, he hesitated to make the call.

"What is there to think about?" Masakado's words carried an undercurrent of aggression.

In truth, there was plenty to think about. His armour still bore the scratches of the wolf's sword. Lilina took the blame, of course, the Jedi as always. It's not Masakado's fault, it's hers for not anticipating The Children of Mortis would leverage his negative emotions against them. It's not Masakado's fault, it's hers for failing to purge the hatred within him. Yet, whoever's fault it was, the fact was Masakado had turned his sword on them. Were it not for Lilina's counsel, Masakado wouldn't be standing.

From the day he was born the Galaxy had never stopped trying to cut Zentrula's life short, yet sixty-four years he had lived. He had made mistakes along the way. Mistakes are a part of life. Failure to learn from them is inevitable in death. He could not risk losing Masakado to the Children of Mortis. He took a deep breath and looked into the wolf's blood-red eyes.

"I want you to continue your training with Lilina. I'm selecting Vornskr Seven for this task."

"Very well." Masakado's words and tone said opposite messages.

## Chapter 3

# Holovid and Vibes

### Port Kasia - Orson Trent

*Blaster fire hurtled down the corridor like lashes of rain. The spy ran at full tilt away from the firing guards, interrupting his run only to spin and land three quick-fire headshots from his silenced pistol.*

*As the spy turned the corner, he came face to face with a colossal battle droid, which smashed him to the floor with a swing of its mechanical arm.*

The violet young twi'lek beside Orson Trent gasped.

“He’s fine, he’s the main character.”

*The spy fired a grappling hook, tangling the droid’s legs together and sending it falling to the ground before continuing his dramatic escape, stopping to grab the girl and blasting away with her in a supercharged swoop bike.*

Orson took another sip of whiskey, his other arm draped across Orphelia’s shoulder, his fingers slowly stroking her lekku. “That’s why I love these old holovids. The good guy always wins and gets the girl.” *Just like in real life.* A strong drink in one hand, a cute girl in the other and a good holovid and this was shaping up to be Orson’s kind of night.

Orphelia snuggled up tightly against Orson as the holovid reached its climax. He had picked the right twi’lek to take home for the night. She wrapped her arm

around his waist and **bzzzzzzt**.

The comms device ruined it all. Just as one twi'lek looked to make his night, another seemed hellbent on ruining it.

Orson ignored it, hoping it would go away, but in truth he knew it wouldn't as the device buzzed incessantly on the coffee table. The General never went away.

"Vornskr Seven, do you copy?" The General's booming percussive voice meant different things to different people. To the Vornskr Battalion foot soldiers, it was the voice that assured them of their victory, that they would return home to see their families when the battle was done. To Orson Trent, it was the voice that meant more work, and that the spy in the holovid, now in a state of undress, would be the only one having fun that night.

"Sorry babe, I've gotta take this." Orson walked to the opposite corner of the room so Orphelia wouldn't hear the General's bass tones on the comms device. "Vornskr Seven."

"Do you *ever* maintain a secure environment, Vornskr Seven?"

It was lucky The General couldn't see him roll his eyes. "You've got six other Vornskr Agents for that, General."

"Well this mission requires your particular skills. It comes from the Voice."

"My skills? There another cute Zeltron you need seduced?"

"No. There's a human girl but she's a Jedi, they don't form attachments."

"Fine, I'm in," said Orson as Zentru'la finished explaining the mission detail. He took another swig from his drink and walked back towards the sofa. He hated it when The General forced his hand like this, but it was only The General's salary that allowed nights like this on the regular in the first place. Besides, there are plenty more fish in the sea. "Sorry Orphelia." He tried to sound apologetic. "Night's over. Work called."

She eyed him suspiciously as if she could tell that Orson was holding something back. "You never actually told me what you do for a living."

"You wouldn't believe me if I did."



## Chapter 4

### Meditation

#### *The Harbinger* - Lilina Mirin

The General was right. Masakado needed more training.

Lilina had made a mistake unbecoming of a fully trained Jedi Knight - she underestimated the darkness. She made this mistake not once, but twice, first underestimating the darkness within Masakado's spirit and second underestimating the Sith ability to use pull at that darkness like a puppet's strings.

"That fool isn't up to the task," Masakado growled.

"Just try to relax," said Lilina serenely over the staccato rhythm of Masakado's breath. His jaw was clenched tightly and his brow furrowed while Lilina breathed smoothly and deeply opposite him, feeling the energies flow through the ship.

"I relax by killing things."

It was a typical Masakado response. But no matter how many people Masakado killed, his bloodlust was never sated. He painted himself as a soulless killer, but Lilina just knew there was something more inside.

"Slow your breathing, allow the Force to flow through you."

"The General doesn't trust me."

Lilina opened her mouth to speak and then closed it again. It was difficult to disagree with that. But the response "That's because you tried to stab him in

the neck' was not going to elicit the correct response. She needed to curtail his bloodlust, not provoke it.

"Forget about the General," said Lilina, trying to move Masakado's focus onto something else. "Allow the Force to flow through you. Control your emotions. Let it carry you away."

Progress with Masakado's training was extremely slow, but despite his outwards disdain for Lilina's teaching and the Jedi way, he sat through each session. For every irritated quip and outburst, there was an hour where he knelt and focused. Whether he was actually focusing on purging the negative emotions within him, or whether he was fantasising about his next murder, Lilina couldn't be sure, but the important thing is that he sat and listened. It was a point she could build from.

It was absolutely imperative that Masakado learn to control his emotions. Not just in the wake of him turning on her and Zentru'la while war seemed inevitable with the Children of Mortis. Lilina had noticed that the more they meditated, the more time he spent just sitting and thinking, the slower his disease seemed to progress. There were still the odd seizure every now and then, and at the current rate Lilina didn't know how much longer he had to live, but it was the first sign of any progress she had seen.

As Lilina herself allowed the Force to take her into another plane, she heard the rasping voice of Masakado.

"I think I understand the General's choice."

## Chapter 5

# Through the Front Door

### Pendroh-I - Vornskr Seven

Orson pulled the mechanic's suit close around his body as the cold air mountain air of Pendroh-I whipped at his face.

The top of the Lightbringer facility finally began to emerge behind the next peak. Orson checked everything was in place - a hydrospanner on his hip and a silenced pistol hidden inside his suit.

"Status report, General?"

"The contact is in position and is ready for your approach. All according to plan so far Orson. Stick to it."

"Acknowledged. Vornskr Seven out."

Built into the side of the mountain, the Lightbringer home was a sandstone structure with spires that reminded Orson of pictures of the Jedi Temple. A heavily armoured security guard stood watch with a bulky blaster rifle in his hands.

Orson approached the guard, twirling the hydrospanner in his hand.

"State your business."

"What does it look like? I'm Orson Trent. I'm here to mend your turboheater."

"Good thing you're here. Damn thing just stopped working this morning." Their insider had done her job. Orson continued twirling the hydrospanner as if

he held one all the time. “Come on in. The generator is downstairs.”

The air on the inside was barely any warmer. The Jedi of the Lightbringers wandered its halls with their robes wrapped tightly around them. Sabotaging the heating systems had provided an excellent entrance as Orson located the nearest staircase.

Rhuna was waiting for him, and Orson’s eyes drifted downwards from her bushy brown hair, past her torso to her long, slender legs. “Right on time, Orson.” His attention jolted back up to her face. “There’s an emergency entrance nearby. Let’s get out of here before my master finds us.”

“One man is all you

They escaped back into the cold mountains of Pendroh-I and Rhuna led Orson up a dangerous-looking trail.

## Chapter 6

### Inner Darkness

#### Pendroh-I - Vornskr Seven

That was the last thing Orson remembered. His head was searing with pain.

He opened his eyes slowly, hoping to find that he was still in his apartment, and that the burning hot knives that dug into his brain were the after-effects of a wild night in Port Kasia. The viridescent shimmering force cage stung his retinas as his eyes adjusted to the brightness of the surroundings.

“Tell me who he is, Rhuna,” said a powerful voice that reminded Orson of The General. As he saw the mountainous Jedi, and Rhuna trapped in the next force cage, he began to put together the events of the previous night. Rhuna’s master had discovered them. Captured and locked up by a big burly Jedi who did not seem to be in the mood to make friends was not how he had envisioned the next morning.

“I told you, Master Sterion, he’s a mechanic!”

Sterion paced back and forth past the force cage. “You are aware that The Harbinger is on the way, aren’t you, Rhuna?”

“*The Harbinger?*” Orson questioned without thinking. “*The Harbinger* is coming here?”

“Oh so you know about The Harbinger?” Sterion rounded on Orson. “What

else has Rhuna been telling you?”

Orson stared blankly. He locked eyes with Sterion, trying to figure out his intentions. He started to get the feeling that Sterion was not talking about The General's ship. “I don't know anything, just the name. And based on your reaction, it might be an important one?” It was the honest answer. The name meant nothing to him except the name of the General's ship, but if Sterion was talking about a different Harbinger, his hopes of escape were drastically diminished.

“The Harbinger will arrive tomorrow. And here you are, my student, harboring an invader near the Nexus of Light. How do you think he will respond?”

*He.* So this Harbinger was a man, and Sterion's superior. And they didn't want anyone near this Nexus of Light. If Orson ever got out of Pendroh-I he might be able to bring back more information than he intended to.

“I don't care,” said Rhuna in defiance. Orson wasn't exactly sure what her motivations were to stand up to Sterion so resolutely. Surely her stake in this wasn't so big that she couldn't just sell him out? Her eyes burned with resolve.

Her defiance was nothing to do with the Brotherhood, or him, the datapad. This was about her wanting to get one over on her master. She had guts, Orson had to give her credit for that. He was unsure if he would be able to hold out in this situation with The General.

“We don't have time to play around Rhuna. If you will not tell me what I need to know, then I will have to force it out of you. You leave me no other choice.”

Sterion took a deep breath, as if composing himself before a large crowd. “Master, what are you doing?”. The air crackled with the arcane as tendrils of lightning shot forth from Sterion's fingertips, coursing over Rhuna's body. She let out a blood-curdling scream of pain then dropped to her knees, slamming the floor with her fist.

“And you.” Sterion turned to Orson. “Mysterious stranger, trespassing on the Nexus of Light. Will you allow her to suffer? You have the power to end her pain.”

“Don't let him win!”

“Quiet.” Sterion said before unleashing another wave of Force Lightning to-

wards Rhuna, who convulsed violently on the floor, still screaming in pain. He spoke to Orson with unerring calm for a man torturing his student with lightning. "Just tell me who sent you. Tell me who they are. Tell me what they want." Orson looked over to Rhuna, who seemed just about ready to give up, her clothes and hair were singed, her skin blackened and burnt. She got back up to her feet, but looked like she could have been knocked over by a light breeze. "You have the power to end her suffering. Her pain is your doing."

He sent another torrent of lightning towards Rhuna. Her screams reached a climax, and were then cut short. Her body gave out before her resolve and she dropped to the ground, lifeless.

"Good luck explaining that to Mr Harbinger."

"The ends will justify the means. He will understand the need to prot-." He stumbled, slightly unstable, barely keeping his balance. "Toooo proooteec". And then he fell into the arms of a black cloaked figure.

Masakado emerged from the shadows, a tranquilliser dart gun on his wrist. It wasn't a sight many people were pleased to see.

## Chapter 7

### On the Scent

#### Pendroh-I - Masakado

“You couldn’t have got here just a minute earlier to save the girl?”

Masakado growled derisively. “She’s more use to us dead.” He didn’t have the time to mess about entertaining Vornskr Seven’s fantasies. In the time he worked out how to respond, Masakado let Sterion down to the ground silently.

“The General sent you? I didn’t think he cared so much.”

“Failed contracts are bad for business. That, and he thinks you’re still useful.”

“I need a weapon,” said Orson as Masakado opened the force cage.

“No you don’t. We are not here to fight. General’s orders.” Masakado hadn’t even taken his swords with him on this mission. He wasn’t wasting any time hunting down wherever Vornskr Seven had misplaced his little silenced blaster. He was here to pick up the pieces, and they would do it his way.

“Did anyone else see you other than him?”

“No.”

“Good. And where is the datapad.”

“I don’t know. She was taking me to it when we were captured.”

“Fine.” Masakado opened the force cage where Rhuna’s body lay. He knelt down beside the body and started sniffing at it. He didn’t care how it looked or



what stupid jokes Vornskr Seven would be making in his head. There were advantages to being canine. Once he had picked up the scent, he could follow it to the datapad. "With me."

Vornskr Seven followed Masakado through a back passage outside of the training facility that avoided the guards and soon they were out into the mountains. There were two pairs of light footprints in the snow. "That's why you were discovered. He followed your footsteps." It was an amateur mistake.

"Lesson learned. So why are we not killing anyone? That's not normally your thing."

"We must leave no trace behind. The master will be blamed for his student's death. We cannot allow him to deflect the blame to an intruder. It will sow discord in their ranks."

"So that's why you let her die? Can't take her back because they'll know we're here?"

"Yes." Masakado continued the walk through the snowy mountains, where Rhuna's scent and the pairs of led them down the same path, until the footprints suddenly swerved into a cave, and did not come back out. He didn't need to know any more to fill in the gaps. It was clear why Vornskr Seven had been captured and why he had to come out here to save the mission.

The scent led him beyond the cave, and a few more minutes walk he tracked it to a datapad buried under a small mound of snow. "Mission accomplished, General."