



Brotherhood Origins: Rohla Trugaim

General Zentru'la

Chapter 1 - The Battle over Lyra

37 ABY - Lyra Colony

The engines of Rohla's TIE Defender screeched as she weaved between waves of X-Wings. They flashed past in a blur, and not just because of the speed of the TIE Defender. Her crimson Duros eyes were not operating at peak efficiency, but that was nothing new. The percussive blasts of missile strikes and the melody of laser fire felt like they took place inside her head.

The Collective had come out in force over Lyra. Or something like that. Listening to the mission brief was for people that weren't Rohla Trugaim. She had been more interested in the half-empty bottle of Correllian Rum she'd left behind to make the brief on time and then trying to stay on her chair throughout Colonel Dorecu's drawl. There were Collective X-Wings in the sky, something something complex political situation something something, and they had to take them out.

She rolled her TIE into an erratic corkscrew around the hull of an enemy shuttle, dodging a proton torpedo that thundered against it. Her erratic flight pattern had broken synchronisation with her wingmates. It was just her, her TIE Defender, and swarms of enemy ships. That was just the way she liked it.

Dodging around the crippled shuttle, she broke line of sight with the trailing X-wing. In the moment of opportunity, she spun her TIE on the spot and obliterated the X-Wing with all six of her ship's laser cannons when it re-emerged. With the creativity afforded by her mild inebriation, innate talents, and the superior firepower of the TIE Defender, the Collective ships fell like flies.

Rohla returned to the *Retribution*, her ship swaying gently side to side as she entered the hangar upside-down. She rolled the ship in an awkward spin, almost scratching the ship's wings on the ceiling before setting down.

She stumbled out of the fighter to rapturous applause from her squadmates. A hand clasped her shoulder. People were cheering. They were all a blur. She stumbled and placed a hand on someone for balance.

She wasn't *that* drunk. It must just be the effect of having her feet on solid ground after flying in battle for so long. It happened to everyone.

She waded through the surviving pilots. There would have been far fewer of them if not for her. She escaped the crowd to find a man in an immaculate officer's uniform. Colonel Dorecu's tall, broad-shouldered frame towered over Rohla. His brow was furrowed and his jaw clenched.

"*Why* can't you just go *one* battle without getting drunk, Captain Trugaim?" His voice was low and menacing, as he spoke through gritted teeth.

Rohla opened her mouth to make the wittiest comeback without thinking about what she was going to say. But before she even had time to say anything, Colonel Dorecu seized her by the shoulders, yanked her around and locked her wrists in cuffs.

Chapter 2 - The Dogfight

21 ABY - VSD *Excidium* - Judecca Orbit

Being eight years old made the famously small interior of a TIE fighter feel quite spacious. The downside was Rohla could barely reach the controls. A towering metal bulwark and parked starships flashed past her as she guided the ship through an active construction yard. In the distance was a crescent of a planet, with emerald fields and sapphire waters. It could have been Correllia. Maybe even Alderaan.

It didn't matter which orbit Rohla was in. Only one thing really mattered – blasting her opponent out of it. The trail from the engines gave away his position. He weaved between parked ships in the distance, flashing in and out of Rohla's sight. He was good. But Rohla was better. She cranked the power to the engines, chasing her prey into the shipyard.

As he danced between obstacles, Rohla matched him step for step. Her shots missed the target, hitting parked ships and buildings, but there was only so long he could hide behind obstacles. She chased him through the entire shipyard, until there was nothing between her and her prey.

I win again! Rohla's shot connected with the back end of the fighter. Flames shot out the back of its engine as it spiralled out of control, crashing into the shipyard and disappearing in a ball of fire. Rohla smiled broadly, pumping her fist in celebration.

"Game complete," said a robotic female voice. "Winner: Player two. Score: ten to nil."

Rohla opened the cockpit of the TIE fighter and jumped out of the simulator, into the training room of the *Excidium*. An adult human in a Scholae navy flight suit, with shaggy black hair and an unkempt beard, got out of the next simulator. His shoulders were slumped and his eyes drifted towards the floor. He let out a definitive huff.

“How are you this good, you’re about ten!”

“Eight actually!”

“Yeah Jared!” Another Scholaean pilot appeared behind him and slapped him on the shoulder. “You just got your ass beat by an eight-year-old!”

“Oh shut up Garan.” Jared pushed him away in retaliation. “What’s the kid even doing here?”

“Hey, I have a name, loser!”

“And it’s probably one you know,” said Garan. “She’s the Trugaims’ kid.”

“Oh.” Jared paused. “Well, she still shouldn’t be here. This isn’t a nursery. The... Aliens... could strike any time.”

“You’re just bitter ’cause you’re a noob and you lost!”

Jared made a sudden move towards Rohla, but Garan grabbed him around the shoulders. “You’ll get used to the oddities around here Jared. Rohla is part of the furniture on the *Excidium*.”

“Children don’t belong on wars-”

“Try telling that to engineering,” Garan cut across her. “The eggheads down there love her.”

“I get in all the small spaces! The other day th-”

“Well why don’t you run along back there then?”

“Someone had to show you how to fly!”

Rohla smiled and walked off. Whenever any new TIE pilot joined the Corps, she always had to make sure she beat them on the simulators. The grown-ups never expect to lose to a kid, but she had all the top scores on all the hardest levels. And it was fun to join in with Garan in teasing people when she beat them.

It was funny how all the grown-ups said the same thing. They totally weren’t

going to lose to a kid. They've been flying longer than she's been alive. Bla bla bla. Then after she beat them, the *Excidium* was no place for children. Maybe it wasn't. There were no other kids here to play with. But Mum and Dad were important people and one day she would be an important person too. For now, she was having fun helping in the places the grown-ups couldn't get to, and beating them in flight sims.

Chapter 3 - Captain Trugaim

Satisfied with her victory over Jared, Rohla checked her chronometer. Mum should be due for leave soon.

She passed the hangar full of real TIE fighters. There were loads of different types. The standard TIE. Some TIE Bombers. Those were slow and ugly, she didn't like those. She knew all the TIE types, what weapons they had, how fast they went. Her favourite was the TIE Defender, and she dreamed that one day she'd get to fly a real one and shoot bad guys for real.

She towered over the man across from her desk. Rohla's mum was tall and slender, with dark blue skin and deep red eyes, eyes that gazed intently on the man opposite, who stood with his hands clasped in front of his waist, fidgeting awkwardly while she stood at full height with her shoulders back, showing the medals across her grey-green navy officer's uniform in full display.

"And does the intelligence report say *when* this attack will take place?"

"Negative, Captain Trugaim." The man shifted his feet. "Only that the aliens are gathering forces-

"Then stop wasting time here." Rohla's mum cut across him, her voice soft and smooth, yet with a firmness that left no room for insubordination or answering back. Rohla had learned that lesson more than anyone else. "I want a full maintenance check on every weapon and shield on the *Excidium* and every ship in the hangar, immediately."

"Yes, Captain Trugaim." The man saluted. Rohla stepped aside as he hurriedly evacuated her mum's office. "Oh hey sweetie," said Rohla's mum, finally noticing

her.

“Is there going to be a battle?” This was her chance. She had beaten everyone in a TIE. Now, she could beat the enemies of the empire too!

“You don’t need to worry about that.” Her voice softened considerably when talking to her daughter. “We have it under control.”

“I’m not worried!” Rohla shouted. “I want to fly in the battle! I want to be a Captain just like you!”

She walked around the desk and knelt before Rohla, softly putting a hand on her shoulder. “You’re too young to fight sweetie.”

“But I’m the best in a TIE! I even beat Garan yesterday! Please let me fight in the battle please mummy!”

Her mum took a long, deep breath. Her face had an all too familiar serious tone, that made Rohla nervous. “That’s in a game. War isn’t a game, Rohla. There are no second chances. No respawns. If you los-

“I won’t lose!”

“You might, Rohla. War isn’t like a simulation game. Things can happen that you don’t expect. It’s not all about how good you are. One day you’ll get to fly for the Scholae Empire, and I will be the proudest mum in the galaxy. For now, you need to focus on learning.”

Rohla looked down at the floor. “Ok mum.”

“Now why don’t you see if they need anything in engineering? They’re pretty busy right now. You can help in the battle that way.”

“OK mum!” It wasn’t the same as being able to fly in the battle. Mum didn’t understand just how good she was. She could handle the aliens. But being able to help in engineering was nice. Usually, they just made her run and hide.

Chapter 4 - Code Red

21 ABY - VSD *Excidium* - Judecca Orbit

After taking a turbolift down to the lower level where Engineering were based, Rohla trotted through the corridors. There were more soldiers patrolling the ship than normal, in white imperial stormtrooper armour, carrying blaster rifles. Men rushed to their muster points as Rohla's excitement grew. A battle was coming, and she could finally help.

“CODE RED! CODE RED! WE HAVE BOARDERS! ALL CREW, MAN YOUR BATTLE STATIONS.”

Alarms blared through the ship. The crimson lights pulsed through the corridors. The marching soldiers quickened to a run. Rohla did too. She quickened to a sprint as she turned a corner.

The first thing she saw was the glowing red eyes and the wide, lipless mouth, a sharp elongated face with dark leathery skin, staring down at her. Rohla froze. The alien warrior towered over her. Its serpentine polearm was bigger than her, and slithered around in its hands. They both stumbled as the *Excidium* was rocked by a forceful blast.

Rohla screamed and ran. It was the only thing she could do. She ran, and ran, and ran. Some Scholae stormtroopers came the other way, and she slalomed between them. She could hear hissing, snarling, blaster fire, screaming, and then silence.

She kept running. She ran to her favourite place - the hangar. She always felt

safe there, surrounded by TIE fighters. It was her happy place, and the only place she could think of going.

The *Excidium* began to slowly roll. Rohla turned into the hangar. All of the TIE Defenders had been taken. One standard TIE fighter was left in the hangar. She didn't know if she was allowed to take it. She looked over her shoulder. One of the aliens had entered the hangar. There was no escape.

Rohla jumped into the ship, fired up the engine, and flew full speed out of the hangar and into deep space. She pulled up, swerved and dived. It was just like in the simulations. A Scholaeon TIE fighter flashed past her viewport, shortly followed by a strange ship that looked like it was made of bone.

Acting purely on instinct, Rohla yanked the ship to the left, tailing the alien ship. Her first three shots hit the mark, the alien ship rocked, but carried on. Rohla uttered words about the stupid basic TIE that would have made her mum mad. She lost track of the friendly TIE, but carried on pursuing the alien ship, landing shot after shot after shot, until finally, it lost control and crashed into the *Excidium*.

Rohla whooped. These aliens had nothing on her. Full of confidence, she chased another one through space, but lost track of it before she could disable it. Then there was a thunderous blast. A shockwave threw every ship in the battle off course.

The *Excidium* was on fire. Not just the engines. The entire ship was ablaze. The shields had faltered. There was one, final blast of energy from the alien capital ship. The *Excidium* was sheared clean in two, cut across the middle. Huge chunks of shrapnel scattered into the battle.

Rohla sniffed and whimpered. "Mum..."

Chapter 5 - The General's Reprieve

37 ABY - ISD *Retribution* - Caperion Orbit

Her cell shook with each percussive beat as the sound approached. The source of the noise stood beyond the bars - a mountain of a man in heavy white armour, a twi'lek with bronzed skin, piercing blue eyes and an upright, powerful posture that belied his advancing age. "Captain Trugaim." Maybe it was just the way he spoke, maybe it was the hangover, but every syllable of his speech carried explosive force in Rohla's head.

Now General Zentru'la was involved? Recently named Zentru'la Palpatine for killing Elinia the Disgrace, famous for his success in battle, notorious for doing everything by the book. Exactly the kind of commander Rohla had always clashed with. How did her flying warrant *this* level of escalation? Rohla groaned at the loud voice as she stumbled to her feet. "You better be here to give me a drink, General."

His expression remained static, as if made of stone. "You were court-martialed for flying *drunk* in the battle over Lyra?"

"Yeah?" She puffed her chest out, challenging the General. Screw the consequences. It wasn't like things could get much worse. "Took out ten of the fwecers too. Then court-martialed and discharged."

"Good. I need a pilot with your talents."

"They aaaaall need my talents. And when they're done with them, they put me here, in this cold, boozeless cell. I'm done with the Navy. I need a drink."

Zentru'la stepped towards the bars and lowered his voice. "This isn't a naval assignment and I don't care how much you drink. I need the best pilot in the navy. Is that you or not?"

"You better have a *damn* good supply of booze. What am I flying?"

"An Upsilon-Class Command Shuttle. The *Harbinger*."

The name of the ship broke Rohla out of her stupor for a moment. "The *Harbinger*? That was Elinicia Rei's ship."

"It was," said the General, showing the emotional range of a man frozen in carbonite. "It was passed to me."

"I'm not flying that thing. I heard it was possessed by a demonic AI."

Zentru'la took a step back. "If you'd prefer to stay here in your cell..."

Rohla huffed. "Fine. I'll come with you. Anything to get out of here." She needed to get out. Needed the next drink. *Needed it*. The booze was the only thing preventing the memories flooding back. The glowing eyes, the spiky armour, the snake-like whip... for a second the General reminded her of one. His voice sounded like the explosion that tore the *Excidium* in half with her mum on board...

"Jailor! Let Trugaim out of her cell." The blast of Zentru'la's voice brought her back in the room, out of the past and into the present. She could smell the Gamorrean jailor before she saw him, who looked at Rohla, then the General, hesitated, then opened the cell.

Newly free and enjoying being able to walk a bit, Rohla followed the General through the *Retribution*. "So what's our actual mission?"

"We build the best team we can find and deal as much damage to the Collective as we can."

Even in Rohla's half-inebriated, half-hungover mind, something seemed off. The General did things through the proper channels, the proper way. Everyone knew that. But this didn't seem like it had been thought through at all, the military top brass never set assignments like this. She had to know. "Who sanctioned this mission?"

“I did,” said Zentru’la, with such focus that he didn’t turn to look at Rohla in his march towards the hangar. “We won’t be flying with the Navy or fighting with the Army. We’ll be fighting with our own team, picking our own missions and our own battles, fighting how we want, and when we want.”

“You’re more interesting than you are in the stories, General.”

“The Collective killed my daughter on Lyra. This is a personal fight. Sometimes, you see things and do things that change your perspective. I hope you never find that out yourself.”

16 years late for that. But Rohla could empathise with the mission. She felt the same way towards the aliens... “So who else is on this team?”

“Just us.” They entered the hangar. The lights of the hangar reflected off the Upsilon shuttle’s metallic black finish. The best shuttle money could buy. “There it is. The *Harbinger*. You know how to fly this?”

“I can fly anything.” Rohla strode up the entrance ramp. “Just get me a drink, and tell me where we’re going.”