

## Zebulon Backstory

**'Species:'** Sentient humanoid robot; silver robot/machine

**Sex:** ♂

**Age:** Early 30s

**Height:** Undetermined

**Weight:** Undetermined

**Siblings:** None

### Cultural Notes

Robots in this universe are metallic golems, and are humanoid instead of being dragons. Most if not all of them live on Robot Island.

Robots do not eat. Instead they require fuel, oil, and maintenance services to stay alive.

They were created by the Almighty to act like angels to fight for the Almighty, and were invested with a heart, mind, and soul and their own intelligence, consciousness and free will. Usually they fight to defend the world and the helpless people who live on it.

Robots are armed with magical laser guns and cannons.

Most of the robots in this society are peaceful guardians. An aggressive personality is considered a rogue trait and frowned upon.

Robot reproduction is asexual: a robot that wishes to reproduce builds a new robot. It is therefore impossible for a robot 'baby' to be unplanned, as the parents have to obtain a kit of parts and assemble their baby over many months. The general pacifist approach to life that most robots have also means that orphans are rare. As robots are made of metal so cannot grow, a 'baby' robot is full-grown from the very beginning. When they are first switched on they have no life experience so are utterly naive, and must be taught everything, usually by their parents or caregivers.

Robots can and do develop wear and tear, and the more they accumulate, the less efficiently they function. When a robot can no longer function its soul energy is released and it returns to the Almighty.

Due to the robots' capacity for free will, some decide against serving the Almighty and take their own paths. Some make their own creations, such as Mecha-Dragons.

### *Mecha-Dragons*

These are essentially imitations of biological dragons – invariably inferior to their biological counterparts – and are usually if not always evil in nature. In many ways these Mecha-Dragons are seen as fallen angels.

Zebulon is an original character who appears in *The Chronicles of Drakonia*. He began life as a tyrant and tried to end it that way, but found at the end that there is no substitute for missing out on the love and affection of others.

### **Trust & Confidence**

*(newborn)*

Zebulon was built by an emperor and empress, both of whom were robots who ruled over a commonwealth of other robots. The commonwealth was overwhelmingly loyal to them. They were excited to have a child and planned from the very beginning to treat him like a king and give him everything he could want.

He sensed his parents' eagerness to provide for him from the moment his mind was activated. Despite their royal status, after they switched Zebulon on, his parents cared for him themselves. They managed his maintenance needs competently until he was able to manage them himself.

Due to the nature of robot reproduction, Zebulon did not have an under-developed mind, but one fully capable of rationality. The nearest he got to the rawness of biological infant experience was his sheer naivete. As a result he had no context for how else he might conceivably be treated, so being prioritised above all others quickly became his norm.

He learned the behavioural patterns of his parents quickly, and learned what he must do in order to trigger specific reactions from them. Such was his parents' excitement about having their own offspring that they relished this early stage of his life and only moved on to the tasks of educating him when they felt ready. This provided Zebulon with a period of time in which nothing was demanded of him but that he could make demands of them. They indulged this due to their own excitement, which meant that his first experience of life was that others were not only compliant, but eagerly so.

In addition to this, his parents did not distinguish between 'wants' and 'needs', which meant that he didn't consider the distinction important either. As far as he was concerned, if he wanted something, the matter was just as important as if he needed it.

## **Freedom & Self-Determination**

*(toddlerhood)*

Zebulon graduated quickly from being a naive infant to a young robot with a little bit of knowledge and a lot of questions about how the world worked. He wondered how much he could get if he became as demanding as possible, and he discovered that the answer was: everything. His parents were eager to give, and though it was done out of love, their generosity was not received in the same spirit.

Most young robots might sometimes be told 'no', perhaps because their parents cannot give them what they want. This didn't happen to Zebulon, as his parents had everything a young robot could possibly want, and it was all easily available. The fact that they were keen to groom him to feel as if everything he could see or imagine was rightfully his only encouraged them to ensure that anything he might demand was already in stock in the castle.

He became possessive, not only of things that were already his, but of anything he saw that he wanted – including playmates.

Zebulon became unflinchingly sure of himself, even in situations where he lacked the knowledge he would need to really warrant his confidence. To him, the solution to any problem was simple: demand that things go his way, and they would go his way. As far as he was concerned there was no need to know the fine details of any situation if this was all he needed to do, so he never really developed an interest in learning.

As a result of all this, Zebulon failed to develop robust problem-solving abilities.

## **Ambition**

*(young childhood)*

The first time Zebulon was told "no" was by one of his sitters. His sitter was a non-robot dragon, and the results were lethal. Zebulon liked his guns even at this age, and he used them to punish his sitter for denying him something he wanted. His parents did not discipline him for this. Indeed, they had predicted that this type of incident would happen and had set this situation up to groom him to feel powerful, even over other beings who would otherwise be considered authority figures.

Zebulon's parents continued the grooming by introducing him to outsiders: peasants, dragons and other non-robots, and anyone else who counted as 'lower' than a prince.

This proved an interesting development for Zebulon. Anybody who was not a member of his parents' staff (or not clued into what his parents were trying to do, or perhaps understood only too well and wanted to counter it somehow to prevent Zebulon from becoming too much of a monster) acted in their own interests. This was often frustrating to Zebulon. He became enraged when he experienced people persuading him to experiment with other ways of thinking, or trying to get him to empathise with them, or using the rules against him. When this happened he became panicky, and when that happened he quickly got angry. Soon, he found that he couldn't feel fear any more, and instead defaulted immediately to rage.

He found that some of these situations could be resolved by raging, while others could not. For the latter, he learned how to cheat. When people tried persuading him, he became dogmatic and stubborn. When they attempted to make him empathise, he would invent an even worse story of his own. When they used the rules against him he would make a new rule, because he was a prince and as far as he was concerned, he could do that. Once he'd started doing that he became addicted to it and looked for better ways to cheat. Whenever he prevailed as a result of cheating, he felt clever and believed that he had outsmarted his opponent. Ultimately he learned that these outsiders were far less belligerent than him (the very few who tried standing up to him found themselves quickly silenced by someone else within the court), and that his aggression was often the quality that won him his victory.

This was how Zebulon learned to not just be mindlessly aggressive, but to be clever with his aggression. He continued to hone his skills from here.

His desire to win and to dominate in any situation helped to crystalise his ambition for life. He looked at his parents' empire and decided that he wanted it. He liked getting his own way, but had noticed that sometimes his parents had to step in for him. That was the power he wanted: ultimate possession of everything, and power over everyone in the empire. For Zebulon, all of this meant one thing: control.

He was unprepared for his parents to refuse to give him the kingdom, but that was what they did. He escalated from demanding to fighting, but they escalated further in order to keep the upper hand. They were so swift, decisive, and extreme about this, that before Zebulon knew what had happened, he had been imprisoned.

However, they were careful about how they did it. Being imprisoned with other criminals would have given Zebulon the chance to network and to form allegiances with other criminals, which was something his parents did not want, so they ensured that he was put into an isolated environment.

They went further even than this. Isolation may have been a psychological torture, but they decided to torture him physically as well. They chose to do this with neglect. They prevented him from accessing oils, lubricants, and body maintenance services.

His parents' reasoning for torturing him in this way was this: it was clear enough to them that if Zebulon was only enraged by his prison sentence then he would attack again soon after his release. If he was made to fear further incarceration however, then the fear of potential failure may prevent him from attacking again.

Zebulon went rusty, and his internal moving parts began to grind.

He was not provided with fuel either, so he soon ran out and became unable to move. At first Zebulon was furious about this, but after a few days of complete stillness he began to panic that he would be left like that forever. He also began to hallucinate due to the resulting sensory deprivation.

### **Productivity**

*(older childhood)*

Eventually however, Zebulon was released.

He felt ecstatic to be free! He was indeed cowed by the idea of being imprisoned again, but only just. His parents could see how much rage he had within him. They decided to deal with it by sending him to school, which they believed would serve partly to distract him from his anger, partly to humble him by showing him that they considered him closer to the peasants he was going to school with, than as an equal to the emperor and empress themselves, and partly to expose him to others so that he learned more about living among, and with, other beings.

Zebulon hated school, but one of the other peasants caught his attention: a red and gold humanoid robot named Maximilius, or Maxi for short. Maxi wanted something better for himself than just the life of a peasant. Whenever he saw Zebulon, he made it clear that he wanted to be as rich and powerful as the prince.

Zebulon found this a curious thought. So far he had believed not only that the peasants were stupid and practically worthless, but that they understood and accepted this. It seemed odd to him that a peasant would imagine themselves in a better position.

Maxi seemed to brush off Zebulon's disdain, and between Zebulon's haughty curiosity and Maxi's determination to have a better life, Maxi made it clear that he would be happy to ally with Zebulon to get it.

From here, Zebulon went from seeing peasants as barely even worthy of being sneered at, to thinking that there were some "good ones".

In time, these two robots became close. The relationship could not have been described as a true friendship however, more of a 'leader and side-kick' arrangement with Zebulon leading, but it was enough for these two to stay together.

Zebulon's teachers and parents kept trying to nudge the prince in baby-steps towards being less vengeful against his parents, peasants, and anyone else who denied him what he wanted. For a while they all believed that Zebulon's friendship with Maxi would help them achieve this goal, but they didn't quite recognise what was happening between the two as they only saw the outside of the friendship rather than experiencing what was going on within it.

Zebulon did not work well with his other class-mates. His rust and the quiet grind of his inner parts all served as reminders that he had been in prison, which put them off from wanting to interact with him too much. For this reason (plus Zebulon's general demeanour), the other peasant youngsters kept their distance from Zebulon just as much as he did with them, and the dynamic of his class stabilised like this.

### **Child to Adult Transition** (*adolescence*)

Maxi and Zebulon continued to be friends, and Zebulon continued to avoid everyone else, beyond the few relationships he had with female robots. His in-group was Maxi, and that was it. He considered himself the nucleus of that group of two.

Despite this, Maxi was not entirely single-minded about spending his time with Zebulon. Whenever Zebulon was with a female robot, Maxi would find himself alone so had the

opportunity to find other robots to spend his time with. In this way he continued to develop his social skills while Zebulon's stagnated.

Most of the female robots that Zebulon knew were wary of him and kept out of his way. However a few saw Zebulon not as a danger, but as an opportunity for access to money and power. This worked out just fine for Zebulon, as far as he was concerned. He had nothing but contempt for the concept of romance, and it seemed natural to him that his status and wealth would be the magnet that drew girls to him.

Aside from all this, puberty was a non-issue for Zebulon and most of his class-mates, given that they were robots, so he had no awkwardness or physical changes to contend with.

It was only natural that Zebulon would mark somebody out as his enemy. He came to despise the teacher for being both a peasant and an authority figure. That isn't to say he became pleasant to his class-mates. They too were peasants and he made it clear that he thought nothing of them. Indeed, so severe was his hostility towards them that Maxi dissociated himself with the other peasants and made sure to only talk with richer folk.

Zebulon had no role model except for himself, and that meant that he guided himself entirely by his own desires and emotions.

### **Closeness in Relationships**

*(young adulthood)*

By the time Zebulon turned 18 he had his courage back. His time in prison felt like a distant memory and he had devised a new plan to get dominion over the kingdom: to dismantle his parents.

This was unheard of in the robot kingdom so it simply didn't occur to his parents to ensure that he wouldn't do it.

Maxi helped him commit this act of murder. One night, while the king and queen were powered down for recharging, the friends took them apart.

Their parts were discovered by servants and it was quickly ascertained that the pile was them. After that it didn't take long for news to get around that the emperor and empress had been assassinated.

Zebulon tried to take the role of emperor in their place, but his subjects refused to accept him as their leader. Even the royal guards refused. All together the guards and citizens forced him out of the palace, and he and Maxi were forced to flee.

Zebulon decided to make it his life's ambition to build an empire of his own, with his oldest friend Maxi by his side. They reached an uninhabited piece of land, and Zebulon decided to found his empire there.

At first he was ecstatic to be able to genuinely call himself an emperor, and Maxi supported him by making connections with merchants and rich citizens of other empires and kingdoms. In this way he set up several income streams to himself and Zebulon, which allowed Zebulon to build defences and machines, pay a workforce of servants and guards, and enjoy a few luxuries.

Royalty in the neighbouring areas became aware of his presence, and the situation became something of a strange stalemate. Zebulon felt certain that they would try to stop him, but all they did was to keep an eye on him by using scouts and sentries.

Zebulon believed that the most important thing to do was to hire himself some guards. He appointed Maxi as his personal guard, and hired the occasional gullible individual with a talent for sentry-work who visited his empire. He remained vigilant against attacks.

Slowly he became aware that something was missing from his empire. He had no subjects, no civilians, and he came to realise that an empire with no subjects was incomplete. He began to wonder what the use was of being an Emperor without subjects to rule over.

Between them, he and Maxi decided to use the promise of money to lure citizens from other kingdoms to the empire. They announced that anyone who came to their empire could become rich! They also offered legal asylum for those who sought power in other kingdoms but were restricted by certain laws. They also opened up routes for asylum-seekers, not out of a sense of charity, but to create a pool of citizens that the rich could exploit.

At around this time Zebulon began to get unwanted attention from a prince from one of the other kingdoms. This was a dragon named Percival and his group of supporters, who collectively called themselves the Defenders. Percival was intent on driving



Zebulon back, reducing his power and influence, preventing attacks, and rescuing kidnapped individuals. He became a perennial thorn in Zebulon's side.

From Percival's perspective, he feared that Zebulon would only become more destructive the more power and influence he got, so constantly cutting streams of income and influential relationships, plus rescuing hostages who may be forced into helping Zebulon, became a vitally important task for him and his team.

While some of Percival's fears were founded – Maxi had a knack for forging relationships with greedy neighbours, and Zebulon's policies for population growth were generating a toxic society indeed – Zebulon's empire was built on weak foundations. The land he had been able to secure for himself was unwanted by the neighbouring leaders due to its inability to support growth, and its poor quality for building upon or mining. Zebulon's people frequently experienced fuel-famine, and Zebulon's selfish attitude towards the distribution of goods only made this worse. Loyalty towards him among his people was polarized. Zebulon and Maxi were capable of overcoming all of this in theory with good, fair leadership and strong trade-links for fuel, but Zebulon's insistence on ruling with an iron fist kept him simultaneously weakened and a heightened threat. Maxi's talent for creating propaganda about the strength and prosperity of Emperor Zebulon as good enough to convince Percival of Zebulon's wealth – or at least cause him concern that Zebulon was more powerful than he really was.

Over the years, all of this became tiring for Zebulon. He was rich and had the power to demand the best fuel, lubricants, maintenance services, space, and stimulation – which he ensured that he got ever since his period of sensory deprivation while imprisoned by his parents. Yet, the longer time went on, the less satisfied he became. The title of Emperor lost its shine. He had long-since stopped having any relationships with female robots, as the combination of his money and the power imbalance had made any such relationships predictable. Maxi appeared to have an interesting, fulfilling life with many contacts and was always making one deal or another, but those were Maxi's, and whenever Zebulon tried to force his way in on those to get the interpersonal contact he craved, he only ever succeeded in annoying Maxi and discouraging the prospect who Maxi had been trying to make a deal with. Maxi was the only friend he had and it developed a distinct sour note as time went on.

Maxi himself had become very comfortable in his position of wealth and power, and felt fulfilled by every aspect of his life but his relationship with Zebulon. The more dissatisfied Zebulon got, the more aggressive, resentful, and often outright aggressive he would become. Maxi recognised this and used his significant social skills to calm

Zebulon down at first, but Zebulon learned to recognise what Maxi was doing, came to resent it, and rebuffed him – once again, often aggressively. Maxi in turn came to resent this, and over time he began to distance himself from Zebulon to avoid his tantrums.

The solitude and repetitive nature of each and every day wore Zebulon down. On occasion he would hear a pair of guards or servants discuss their families and partners, and Zebulon was struck by the warmth with which they spoke about their loved ones. Percival and the Defenders had such a strong mutual friendship that they appeared to have chosen one another as family, and Zebulon noticed this too. Zebulon's initial instinct was to destroy these relationships so that he didn't have to see or hear about them and be reminded of what he was missing out on, but this was one area in which he lacked reach. He could not convince families to stop loving one another, and when he tried talking to Maxi about it, he experienced two things: first, a funny look from Maxi, who seemed to think that Zebulon had lost his mind, and secondly, the unnerving thought that perhaps he actually had lost his mind. He tried to make peace with the loneliness he felt, but once he had noticed his isolation, he couldn't forget it.

He finally reached a decision to make changes one day, after he had overheard a few conversations by young civilians their social lives, and heard things he didn't understand. These were trends and ways of using language that had been developed by the younger generation. He realised that he had grown too old to join in with such a social group.

Zebulon also had more ongoing repair needs than most robots due to his period of incarceration, and often felt old while his rust was being buffed away or parts of his inner workings recalibrated or replaced.

### **Passing on Responsibilities**

*(older adulthood)*

Zebulon looked for ways to turn his life around, but the task felt too big. He had no idea how to learn the social skills that would help him connect better with others, and he wasn't even sure he wanted to: giving up the trappings of his life as an emperor was painful just to think about, and he knew that even if he tried to learn, there would be years of trial and error ahead of him before he got it right. He felt tired and as if he had missed his chance.

Maxi was the nearest to a friend that he had, but dealing with Maxi had become so laced with mutual bitterness that Zebulon often felt as if he was better off alone after talking with him. Zebulon had never taken a wife nor built children, and his body increasingly failed him.

Percival had developed a deeply symbolic meaning for him, especially given that he too was an exiled prince. Yet, despite their similar beginnings, Percival had learned the value of love so much earlier than Zebulon had, and had used the opportunity to learn. Dealing with Percival became painful, and between that sharp reminder of his loneliness, inadequacy, slowness of learning, and his physical inability to take any direct part in countering the dragon team, Zebulon gave up entirely.

### **End of Life**

*(old age)*

And yet, Zebulon could not let himself go quietly into the night. One day while thinking about Percival and feeling gloomy he decided to do a good deed. Then, he decided, he would be ready to let his life come to an end.

He took three actions.

The first was to release his entire wealth so that it was available to the weakest members of his empire.

The second was to head off the inevitable exploitation of the newly-rich poor by the corrupt merchants and other powerful folk by banishing the rich.

The third was to give Maxi a goodbye gift and to grant him his freedom by releasing him from Zebulon's duty, so that he could go and make his own way in the world.

With these three tasks done, he was finally content to die, and he did with a tentative sense of contentment.

### **Credits**

Based on theory by:

Erikson, E., (1951) 'Childhood and Society', W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. chapter 7.

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~Hayley, The Character Consultancy