

“How is he?” Arcia’s voice held an unusual note of sentiment as she approached the reinforced entry to the patient’s psyche ward.

“He hasn’t had any more violent episodes since she arrived, though he still remains unable to recognize her or anyone else who has come to visit him.” Ernordeth stepped aside, giving Arcia the opportunity to look into the room. Uji lay restrained on a stretcher, exhaustion and confusion evident on his features. Satsi sat beside the bed, talking to him, appearing nearly as exhausted as her brother.

“What the hell did they do to him?” Arcia leaned forward, her tone holding a note of curiosity alongside regret as her mind raced through what could have happened to her subordinate.

“When they found him he was being held by locals and kept sedated by a mixture of spice, norbutal and kik-dust. Heavy enough doses that not even with his capabilities could he resist the effects. From the reports, it had become somewhat of a game as to how far they would be able to push his limits before he wouldn’t be able to take any more.” Ernor shook his head as he flipped through the most recent report from Rulvak and the Nighthawk.

“Rulvak stated that when Uji recovered consciousness he attacked his crew: he injured several Arconans until Mako and Zakath restrained him.”

“Will he recover?” the Quaestor asked, though her appearance left little doubt to her limited expectations.

“As of yet there have been few signs of improvement. Physically he will be capable...But his memories? His mental health? Only time will tell.” Ernordeth’s shrug didn’t offer much help.

“Very well. Inform Rulvak that he has been promoted to Captain. Discharge any standing orders Uji had in effect and place him in the hospital’s care. If he manages to recover, he knows where to find us.” Dismissing her Aedile first, Arcia looked back into the room and considered for a moment going in, but seeing her former Executive Officer staring blankly into void made her reconsider.

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“You going to sit there staring off into the space all day, dear?” Satsi stretched out in her chair, trying to eliminate some of the fatigue she felt. She’d spent the last few days by his bedside waiting for her brother to wake up. Physically, he barely slept, while mentally he would fade for hours at a time without a word, without any sense of his surroundings.

“Take that as a yes,” Satsi muttered and stood up, exasperated, angry. Angry that the people coming to visit him had slowed until they now received few visitors other than Kordath when

he wasn't responsible for being aboard the Nighthawk. She had hoped that a steady stream of those he was familiar with would jog something in his memories.

"No!" Uji's sudden shout made her turn back. Her brother's features were suddenly savage as he strained against the straps holding him in place. The entire frame of the stretcher warped, the restraints cutting into his arms. Satsi rushed to the bedside, grabbing him and trying to push him back down.

"Uji! Uji! Stop! You're hurting yourself! FRAK IT, UJI, STOP YOU DUMBASS!"

"Get away from me! You aren't her! You aren't real! She wouldn't let this happen..." Uji slumped back against the bed, blood forming around the restraints where they had cut into his arms. Satsi's eyes traced up from his wrists to the tracks of every needle the Cartel had used when injecting him. His arms were a pattern of needlework on both sides, veins bruised and collapsed from repeated use.

"Uji, it's me, it's Satsi, can't you see that?" she plead, brushing his hair away from his face as she leaned over him and looked for any sign of response.

"They kept telling me the Devil's Doll was dead... They killed her, I couldn't save her." The hurt in his voice nearly broke Satsi's heart as she tried not to scream in frustration. Her brother's mind was so warped that he couldn't see what was right in front of him.

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Uji opened his eyes and saw the familiar haze of smoke, choking as he tried to breathe in. He felt the familiar steel of the cuffs holding him in place, and looking down he saw the newest set of punctures in his arm. The familiar burn of the chemicals in his body brought a sense of peace: he knew that soon enough the drugs would lull him into another bout of sleep.

An unfamiliar face suddenly appeared next to him, a woman's face, so twisted and horrible that it sent a shiver through his body. Scars covered her entire face, deforming her into something barely recognizable. Drops of crimson rolled from her eyes as she spoke, bloodied tears falling from her eyes.

"It's me Uji! Can't you see that?" the voice of the Devil's Doll echoed in his mind. Every muscle in his body clenched as he tried to pull away from her, closing his eyes as he tried to ignore her.

"Uji, this is what they did to me... because you failed..."

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Satsi slumped back into her chair as she listened to her brother's screams echo throughout the room. Moments later, one of the hospital's staff came in and inserted another dose of medication into his IV.

Satsi leaned forward, resting her head in her hands.

"What nightmare are you trapped in, *Kyodai*? please wake up..."