The bottle slipped from his grasp and spilled onto the floor. ***Clunk.*** It rolled away on a path of its own choosing aided by the slightly warped floorboards in his office. The Quaestor had drank himself into a stupor in his chair once again. While his left arm hung lifeless towards the floor, the remainder of his body was slumped against the desk. His forehead resting in the crook of his right arm. His hair was in disarray; an obvious sign that he had been working late into the night while getting sauced.

 A single beep chimed. Ignored, it continued to gain volume and frequency. ***Chirp-chirp-chirp!*** The noise was enough to wake the dead. Uncoherent, Braecen fumbled about the desk with his left hand until it closed around the device. He attempted to push buttons and put the device into snooze, but it would not quiet. Groggily, he lifted his head and squinted at the communication device. The image of the Shadow Lady’s seal hovered before his eyes a moment before his brain caught up. He grumbled as he input his command codes to read the private, clan-only communication.

 An image of the Consul popped up before him. “You are invited to join me at The Citadel for refreshments, carols, and holiday cheer this evening. Be sure to arrive by seven o’clock sharp.” The positive demeanor turned to an icy chill, “Or else.” In a heartbeat she flipped back to her positive self. “Merry Sithmas!” The transmission ended and the image faded. Braecen sat stunned for several moments. His jaw slack, an eyebrow arched, and his brain attempting to process what he had just heard.

 A loud bang on the door snapped him from his confusion before the door slid open and his Aedile walked into the room. The Quaestor was sure he had locked the door, but apparently he hadn’t. Uji misread his confusion and dazed expression as a response to his entrance. Flopping down in the chair before Braecen’s desk he kicked his feet up on the table. “I had them install an override on your door last week. That way you can’t avoid me when there is work to be done, you old bastard.” The Elder’s confusion only deepened.

 “And you wonder why I say this is your House? Even the damn security droids sell me out to you.” Braecen stood from his desk and worked his way towards a sink installed at the back corner of his office. He turned on the cold water and let it pool in the sink before he started splashing the water onto his face. The cold stung his sleepy haze, but it did little to make him feel better. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes. One eye turned towards his image in the mirror. His hair was spiked and messy from sleep. He could not even be bothered with it – he pulled his cloak over his head. Relief flooded through him as his eyes adjusted from the bright room to the protective dimness inside his robes.

 “Did you get Atyiru’s message?” Donny inquired. From the look on his face, he was apparently pleased to receive the invite and attend the party.

 “Of course,” Braecen omitted that he had *just* received it. “I imagine you want me to go.”

 The Aedile grinned mischievously. “I had considered it.”

 “Fine,” he grumbled. “I’ll go, but only because I think she would send Marick and Sashar for me if I didn’t go of my own free will.”