***The Citadel - Courtyard***

***Estle City, Selen***

***Dajorra System***

A cluster of beings gathered around a trio of datapads lazily placed on the ground, studying a number of documents as they huddled together, minds working overtime. Eight of them working together could piece together the problem that lay before them, two of their usual number currently missing.

This was the battleteam of Clan Arcona that served aboard the warship known as the *Nighthawk* - but their ship was currently impounded, potentially permanently. Thanks to the actions of their Captain and team leader, Rulvak Qurroc - who, for all official record, was following the orders of his Proconsul - the ship had been taken off them and the man himself jailed for delivering the traitor Wuntila Arconae to Clan Tarentum in the wake of his assassination of Krath High Priestess Telona Murrage. Also currently not present was Ood Bnar, once Praetor and now Special Magistrate to the Headmaster, who was on official business relating to the Shadow Academy. In the shade of trees and surrounded by the freshness of the gardens about them, the battleteam worked in earnest, emotions and senses refreshed by the power of the Force that flowed around them.

The warriors gathered knew that they couldn't steal back their vessel from the clutches of the drydock - chances were the stealth drive that helped power the menacing warship was being stripped from the hull and it would be swarming with engineers. Eight of them could not pilot and maintain that vessel solo, even as a skeleton crew, nor did they possess the right knowledge to do so. What they *could* do, however, was rescue their Captain from the brig, or even get the team out and serving the will of the Clan on some other type of vessel. They had to do *something*. Smarting from being de-fanged in the eyes of the Clan, the team had only one true recourse: recover from the loss and deal their enemies a crippling blow to prove that *they* and *they alone* were the First Team, of the First House, of the First Clan. They were very much supposed to be the best of the best. How were they supposed to prove that without a ship and without their leader?

The Executive Officer, Shawnathan Do'Urden, still but a Hunter in the aegis of the Brotherhood's ranks, relied heavily on the Equites around him to provide good advice in the face of danger. Amongst those ranks were a number of seasoned war veterans and scholars alike - from the Mandalorian Battlelord Mateus Kelborn, to the sage Vivibelle Baenre, to the ex-Imperial commando and sharpshooter Kharoc Garrlan. Shawn was a powerful hand to hand combatant and possessing strong will, meaning that he had his own place aboard the ship. Perhaps he was not the most powerful, but his team acknowledged his word. It was enough for him.

"Ideas," he said commandingly, casting a gaze around them. For a moment, nobody stirred.

"We wait for the Shadow Lady to hand him back and *then* we go wreak havoc," piped up the Mystic only known as Mac. Freshly elevated to the ranks of the Equites, Mac was something of an enigma, even to his own team.

"Patience is a virtue we can't afford right now, Mac," snarled the Mandalorian warrior named Mateus. A champion of Arcona he may have been, but a bloodthirsty and vicious one - most people had thought him of gentle nature, until the beast had been unleashed for the first time and all such presumptions were dropped. "The longer we wait, the more time our ship is taken away and the longer we rot here doing nothing. No. We must act now."

Shawn was inclined to agree with the Mandalorian, personally. "Everyone else? Opinions?" He wasn't going to make a decision without more input.

"If we break out the Captain from the brig, we'll be branded as traitors. There's no way around that."

"So... let's not break out the Captain. We take a ship and we go about our mission. It's not the first time in recent Arcona history that has happened and the Shadow Lady was quick to forgive that particular slight, it seems," said Vivibelle. She was referring to the actions of her sister Rhiann - House Qel-Droma had played host to a team of pirates known only as Tyrant Sword, led by Rhiann and her husband Mirus. "We might be in trouble, but nonetheless we need a vessel."

"With the political climate the way it is now I'd be surprised if we were allowed to leave the planet," grumbled Kharoc. "Things are pure chaos right now."

He wasn't wrong. There were changes everywhere; in the wake of discovering the murder of Tal'mahe'ra team leader Zakath Agrona, Atyiru Caesura Entar was an irritated Shadow Lady. Arcona was at an impasse; the Dark Council was filling its ranks with bold and brazen supporters of the Iron Throne even as it moved to resist the will of Darth Pravus. Men like Val Cole and Atra Ventus were there to keep the waif upon the Serpentine Throne in check to prevent the First Clan of the Dark Brotherhood from making overt moves against the Dark Lord of the Sith. Braecen Kaeth, in the wake of being investigated, had resigned as Quaestor, to be replaced with Ernordeth Puer-Irae, one of the *Nighthawk's* best warriors and Praetor to the new Fist of the Brotherhood. Teams were investigating murders, the Proconsul was with Clan Tarentum, and the stability of the Clan was rapidly becoming questionable. Despite this, Arcona was strong. It absolutely had to be. Its ties with Tarentum were on the mend, its alliance with Odan-Urr in the form of the Dajorra-Yhi Concordat were still as powerful as ever.

Shawn sat down, glancing at the three datapads below them. One was a report on the military strength of the Clan, provided by the standard military roster. One was the layout of the jail cells of the Citadel, in case they attempted to make a breakout. The third was the ship's roster, devoid of so many names. Names, people, places - some dead, some stricken from record. The team was suffering loss after loss. First Colonel Tarrin, killed in the line of duty. Second was the Captain himself. Then, finally, Erno, taken to serve the Clan in a greater capacity. The *Hawk* was reeling and bleeding rapidly. Yes, Kharoc was right. There was too much chaos around them.

"In chaos there is opportunity," Mateus finally said, slowly, to his team-mates. "It is a lesson we teach in the Shadow Academy." As one of its greatest graduates - and recently one of its Magistrates - he was versed very well in its teachings of warfare.

The Battlelord looked to his commander. "I think Vivi's right. We leave the Captain in place. We prove to the Shadow Lady that Arcona needs us - and we need *him*, in turn. He might be in serious hot water right now but if we can perform well, she might be inclined to release him at our request. With so much chaos around the Clan right now, our enemies draw near. We take advantage of them."

"And then what?" asked Mac, the voice of dissent - or perhaps the devil's advocate. "We steal a ship and go after the Iron Throne?"

Shawn stood up and stretched his arms, feeling the pressure of so many peoples' eyes on him, their expectations weighing heavily on his psyche. "I don't think we even need to go that far. If we can get our hands on an assault ship, then we'll go deal with whatever's cropping up around here. Think about this. We've got pirates, mercenaries, whatever - all floating around the Dajorra system right now. They're going to want to prey on our chaos."

"So?" asked Kharoc in return.

"We kill every last one of them," promised Shawn, and the warriors around him grinned viciously, one by one, their gazes meeting in approval. "We properly secure the Dajorra system for the Shadow Lady. We prove that we're the damn *best*  in this Clan. We get our Captain back and we go slay the rest of the enemies of the Clan in her name. Simple."

"Count me in," pledged Mateus. He turned to Davin Yoll, trainee, mercenary as he had been so long ago. "It is time to make war, my apprentice." The young man nodded.

"Major Garrlan, can we count on you? What about you, Mac? Vivi? Jake, Stang - I need you too. I need all of you," Shawn said, trying to make eye contact with every single one of them individually.

"I'm in, sir. No questions." Kharoc's affirmation was enough for Shawn. Mac's nod was his only response - he was a man of few words.

"You boys and your wars. I'll help however I can," Vivi added, flipping her long hair out of her face and sighing. What else could she do?

Jake and Stang were quiet, but they gave their own affirmations.

The Hunter leaned down to collect the datapads up, handing them back to their owners. "Very well. Gentlemen, lady, we'll re-convene in two days' time. We'll visit the Dajorra Intelligence Agency and find the nearest target. We'll find it, then fix it, then kill it. We may not have our ship, but they haven't removed our talons just yet."

Murmurs of approval. Shawn felt like he may just survive as Executive Officer after all.