

**Selen, The Citadel**  
**Throne Room**  
**37 ABY**

“Welcome back, Lord Scion,” Captain Bly’s familiar yet gruff voice greeted Uji Tameike as he entered the Throne Room, his cane tapping softly with each step, while being escorted by two members of Bly’s guardsmen. The two escorts split off, leaving the former Proconsul with the Captain to take up positions near the entrance.

“While I appreciate the sentiment, Bly, you are very aware that I am no longer the Proconsul of this Clan.” Uji nodded to the Captain, a small smile showing at the corner of his lips as they walked together past the monolithic pillars of the Throne room.

“Twice you’ve held that title and twice things went to hell when you left, Tameike. I can’t figure out if you’re to blame for holding it together, or pushing things to the breaking point each time. Either way, the title still suits you.” Bly gave another sideways glance with a hint of a grin before the two stopped at the dais leading to the Throne itself.

Bly’s sharp salute to the Consul was as crisp as it was the day he assumed his position. Uji marveled at the man’s perseverance, considering the number of Consuls he has served. Looking up, he found Kordath Bleu, Consul of Clan Arcona, the Shadow Lord of the Clan of Shadows seated upon the Serpentine Throne, emitting an aura of pure misery.

“Kordath.” Uji nodded up at the man who seemed to come awake and look down at the two men waiting.

“Uji! About time, old man!” The Ryn smiled playfully down at his friend.

Uji shot his close friend a look of irritation as he tapped his cane.

“Oh, right.”

“What do you need, Kordath?”

“Everybodies bloody gone mate, even Satsi and Zuj.”

“I’m aware of that.”

“Well, I can nae imagine ya have much ta do with that bein’ tha case.” Kordath smiled again, reaching down beside his throne and lifting a bottle, already half empty, and shaking it.

Bly let out a barely audible groan as Tameike actually laughed.

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## **Two Hours Later**

Kordath's laughter echoed throughout the chamber as he sat on the top step of the dais, passing the newest bottle to Tameike and lounging back.

Tameike accepted the bottle, sitting below the Consul on the next row, leaning back on his elbows and stretching out. The Consul's guardsmen stood throughout the chamber. many of them intentionally looking anywhere but at the two men proceeding to drink their worries away.

"Should've seen it, mate, every freakin 'one of em just yappin' at one another. Mav could barely contain 'imself as every Consul just went at each other."

"So you mean exactly how it was under the last poor bastard then?" Uji smirked, taking a long draft from the bottle before passing it back up.

"Ugh, do mae remind me. Tell me though, ya hungry?" Kordath stood slowly, trying to find his balance and nearly stumbling down the stairs.

"Could eat, yeah." Uji's slightly slurred voice was a fair sign of his intoxication.

The Consul reached down, offering a hand to help the other. The two of them managed to make it down the stairs from the dais, albeit unsteadily. As they approached the doorway to the Throne Room, it was opened and a number of guards fell in behind them, the two men leaning heavily on one another as they stumbled through the nearly empty Citadel in search of the Mess Hall.

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## **Mess Hall**

The staff of the mess hall avoided the single occupied table, having served the two drunks upon stumbling in, their guardsmen flanking the room and purposefully ignoring the poor behavior of the two as they continued drinking, eating and complaining about "being left behind" and about being "liabilities".

The large cafeteria was nearly empty save for the two diners and the kitchen staff, only two guards standing within the room with the rest remaining at the entrances. The normally noisy, bustling room was quiet with so many of Arcona's forced away serving the war front. Even the Citadel itself seemed a remnant of its normal self with nearly every functionary, agent and soldier serving in some capacity within the fleet and only the remnant crews left within the Citadel.

"Ya hear somethin'?" Kordath murmured through a mouthful of food.

"Hmm?" Uji slumped slightly, wavering over the tray in front of him.

Both entrances to the mess hall slip open, a half dozen cleaning crew coming in with separate carts, barely drawing attention from the drunks or their guards as they spread out to begin cleaning the area around them.

"Hey, remember that time... that time the giant robot showed up in Estle?" Uji mumbled between bites.

"Hehehe... no wait, that did naet happen, was that nae a holo?" Kordath blinked several times as something caught his confused attention. He glanced across the room as one of the cleaning staff turned and fired a dart from a wrist mounted launcher, catching one of the guardsmen in the throat. The man immediately slumped beside his companion sporting a similar wound.

"What the..." both men turned as similar weapons were leveled at them, a heartbeat passing as each of them burst into awkward movement. Uji simply fell backwards onto the bench, rolling under the table as several darts struck the metal bench where he had just been.

Kordath, far more used to their inebriated condition, grabbed the metal tray his meal was on and, as he threw himself back, managed to deflect one of the darts in the process, the sharp point puncturing the tray becoming imbedded only a few inches from his nose. The two men looked at one another for a moment as they lay flat on the floor, sobered somewhat from the rush of adrenaline.

Uji remained under the table for the moment with the cover provided, his breathing slowing as he drew on the Force to focus through the haze of the alcohol, ignoring the effects long enough to get a sense of what was happening around them. Six assailants within the room and another half dozen outside, and each of their guardsmen seemed to be downed or disabled. He heard a shuffle to his left as Kordath rolled under the table with him.

"How many?" the Ryn said, an amused smirk on his lips as he reached up, pulling the hefty bottle of whiskey from the table above as several darts struck where his hand had been moments before.

"Six in here with us, at least six more outside securing the primary exits. The guards are down and the kitchen staff are fleeing out the back." Uji's eyes opened and the glazed appearance remained as he lost focus for a moment.

"You stay here, mate, I'll handle this." Kordath rolled out from under the bench again, keeping low to stay behind as much cover as possible as he scrambled away.

Uji laid back for the moment, unsure as to whether he should bother to get up and help or not. It was not really his fight, he had not intended to even visit the Citadel; it was Kord's idea to get drunk anyway. *Why should I have to get shot again?* he wondered.

Turning his head, he counted the feet of the attackers as they stayed to the outside of the mess hall, each of them taking shots at any movement. The darts they used were quiet enough not to draw attention but likely laced with some form of poison or narcotic depending on their goal of targeting the Consul.

*There's a thought.* Uji closed his eyes again, concentrating on forcing out the nervousness of relying on the erratic and drunken Ryn to keep them alive. Instead he singled out the assailant closest to the exit who seemed to be giving directions to the others, focusing on the Umbaran woman's thoughts as he tried to discern her intentions.

Seconds passed as he worked to penetrate her thoughts:

*Capture or kill.*

A loud clatter sounded from across the room as various objects from the kitchen were hurled at the attackers. Kordath's laughter echoed out as a number of the men and women had to take cover from his thrown implements.

*Damn Force Users, Rath is being too lenient in trying to capture them.*

"Well, shit," Uji mumbled as he opened his eyes in time to see one of the Collective partisans kneeling down nearby. The two men locked eyes for just a moment before the agent raised his wrist-mounted shooter and Uji responded in kind, raising his hand towards the man whose movements suddenly became disjointed and then stopped entirely, his wrist partially flexed just a small movement from firing the dart.

A moment later a meat tenderizer flew through the air. The heavy metal mallet struck the man in the center of the forehead, sending him flying backwards.

A raucous laugh echoed from the kitchen area before the sound of glass shattering from darts streaking across the room and impacting the dining hall's serving glass above the buffet line where Kordath was taking cover.

"Uji!" Kordath shouted over the din of noise.

"What!?" the Human responded, still laying on his back, looking up at the table now pockmarked with indentions.

"Ready?"

Uji sighed and squeezed his eyes shut a heartbeat before a bright flash filled the room. He moved in the same instant, rolling out from under his cover, rising to his feet as swiftly as he could, and taking stock of their surroundings as the flash from Kordath tapered off.

The fair-skinned Umbaran held a pistol in one hand her other shielding her eyes, though as Uji and Kordath had both guessed they were avoiding opening fire with any blasters for fear of setting off the Citadel's security systems. The agent closest to Uji whom had encountered the tenderizer was still out entirely. Two more agents in similar attire were closing in while two women who appeared nearly identical flanked the room on either side with their own dart shooters raised.

Kordath rushed from behind the counter towards the nearest of the Huntresses. The woman blinked rapidly and recovered in time to catch the hard edge of the whiskey bottle to her temple. The blow sent her crashing back against one of the tables, knocked senseless for the moment as the Consul moved quickly, never stopping his forward momentum as he slid to the floor, avoiding the next several darts that punched through the air where he'd just been.

Uji in turn closed the distance to the nearest partisan, the man's focus on the far more agile Ryn. He turned in time to see the flash of brilliant blue light as the former Proconsul's lightsaber split him in two with a momentary shout of terror.

All of the attention in the room shifted at the sound of the lightsaber's activation.

"Get in here!" the woman shouted over a hidden commlink, the two doors opening as the rest of her squad rushed into the room. In the same moment, she raised her BlasTech, taking aim at the increasingly angry Human. A tense heartbeat passed as Uji raised his saber in a duelist's stance, knowing it would be nearly useless against the blaster fire and prepared to rush the woman.

Light from the overheads flashed in reflection off the expertly thrown bottle as it passed him and flew towards the Collective leader. Her aim shifted without pause from the Equite, her shot shattering the bottle mid air and sending shards flying. And before any of them could react, the entire mass of Collective agents closed the distance on them.

Several hands grabbed hold of Uji, restraining his wrist, one wrapped tight around his throat from behind and another working to wrestle him to the ground. Twisting and struggling, he was forced to deactivate the saber as it was knocked from his hands.

Meanwhile, it appeared the Consul was faring far better. The Ryn was a blur of movement, having donned two brass knuckles. The man moved between opponents, lashing out with kicks to keep some of them away, and any who got too close found themselves on the wrong end of a Force-enhanced battering of blows.

Those holding Uji pulled him back against one of the tables, restraining him as another began raining down punches to his face and upper torso. Pain spiked through his jaw and eyes, and as he felt the air punched from his lungs, the man holding him from behind only tightened the grip on his neck, ensuring he couldn't replace the lost air. In only a matter of moments he began to see shadows at the edge of his vision as he began to lose consciousness.

And then the Partisan hitting him was suddenly crashing into the pile of bodies as Kordath planted both his feet into the man's back and sent the entire group tumbling to the floor. With the momentary reprieve, Uji took a gasping lungful of air and groped for something to use as a weapon. His hand, surprisingly, landed on his cane which he dragged close to himself as he rolled over.

Just in time to see a particularly ugly man who appeared to have broken his nose along the way wrap two hands back around his throat, pinning him down. Without thinking Uji raised the butt of the cane and brought it up into the man's face. While lacking a significant amount of force behind the blow, he managed to catch the man flush across the eye, momentarily blinding him. As his attacker reached up to his eye, Uji lashed out with his other hand, striking the man in the throat before rolling away.

Kordath was back on his feet. The Ryn appeared to have lost his amused expression as he had apparently taken a fair share of hits himself, though Uji couldn't tell if it was the injuries or the remnants of intoxication that kept him swaying on his feet as he ducked a kick thrown by one of the Huntresses before knocking her out cold.

"Enough!" the Umbaran shouted as she stood a few feet from Uji, the pistol aimed at his head unwavering as she glared at the two men. "This is ridiculous and I sure as hell am not being paid enough for this druk," she stated in an irritated but matter of fact tone. "Now you two can come with us, or I can shoot this one in the face and take my chances with you *Lord Consul*." The title escaped her lips as a mocking slur. Her eyes darted to the last remaining Partisan soldier, giving him a silent signal as the man stopped circling the Consul.

Uji and Kordath shared a look for a moment. Both of them knew the Citadel's sensors would have picked up the shot taken earlier. In a matter of moments, Bly and his guard would be surrounding the room, though that wouldn't be much help if one or both of them were dead.

"Now listen lass, let's just figure out what you want," Kordath said, his hands raised placatingly, no longer the brawler instead turning to tact to try and calm the diminutive woman.

The remaining partisan rushed the Consul from behind as Sencara pulled the trigger, her attention still partially split. Without the momentary warning of the Force, Uji knew he would be dead; instead he reflexively ducked aside as the blaster bolt slammed into the floor beside him. Twisting as he did so, he brought the cane around into the back of the woman's knees, sending her toppling to the floor.

Kordath caught the last Collective's lunge, rolling with the fall as the two tumbled across the crumpled forms of the other assassins sent to collect him. The Ryn came out on top of the tumble, his own reflexes and strength ensuring he straddled the man's chest as he rained down blows from above the hardened brass covering his knuckles, ensuring every blow felt a crack or splintering of flesh and bone under his hands.

Uji scrambled to grab the woman before she could raise the pistol again, holding her arm down. When she couldn't gain the leverage to free the weapon, she changed tactic, lashing out with repeated blows to Uji's face, smearing the blood from his eyes and blinding him further.

With a disgruntled yell Uji placed his weight firmly down onto the woman's wrist, nearly shattering her forearm and forcing the pistol out of her grip. The two rolled apart and Uji quickly wiped his eyes, blinking rapidly to regain his vision in time to see Sencara raise her opposite hand and the brilliant red dot of light from her wrist mounted laser centered on his chest.

Instinct and experience allowed the Augur to raise the barrier in time; even still the impact threw him backwards before he could disperse the force of the close range blast. He felt his head strike one of the bench seats and lost consciousness. The last thing he heard was a yell of anger.

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Uji woke to find himself laying on one of the tables, a technician overseeing him as he came around.

"Stay still, sir, you're going to be alright."

*How many times have I woken up to that line?* Uji wondered as he tried to at least look around.

Bly and the rest of the Consul's guards were escorting the surviving members of the Collective squad away. The Captain of the guard turned and walked back towards them.

"Ye all right then, mate?" Kord's familiar voice came from just behind him, tired and clearly sobered. Glancing back, he found the Consul slumped beside him, his hands resting gently in his lap, covered nearly to the forearm in blood.

"Why is it every time I see you, Kord, someone tries to either kill us or take us prisoner?" Uji grumbled in response.

"What fun would it that was nae tha case?" the Consul laughed.