

Estle City

Selen

"I haven't been keeping up with the local news lately," the blond haired human stated, a finger scrolling through the Estle times as he gave the man sharing his bench a glance. Small talk with a stranger. His brow quirked above rimmed glasses and he straightened his jacket over his dress shirt, partially untucked to portray a mere common accountant. "It appears Zainab has had an interesting breakthrough."

"Is that so?" the other man asked, crumpling the wrapper of his finished sandwich in his gloved cybernetic right hand. He leaned back against the bench, sun catching the faint stripes of his Selenian heritage on his forearms, and watched his charges play a game of hoverbag — the kids blissfully ignorant to the coded conversation between the pair. Kobign strongly wished they weren't present, a growing protective instinct and distrust in those he was employed by. It took all his will to remain the composed off-duty soldier, the three irregular scars on his left hand burning in his awareness. "What's this big breakthrough?"

"Here, feel free to read for yourself," the accountant asked, or rather Wilrome Dilshay — his assigned handler. The human passed over his datapad, ensuring the screen rested on a specific spot among the text. Hazel eyes skimmed the coded jargon, memorizing the briefing hidden behind it. His throat tightened as any hope the operation would have stalled with the Collective's retreat diminished. It was clear Dilshay was determined to keep compiling intel until something proves useful to the cause. To defeat the Force Users here.

"It appears the scientists and engineers have made a leap in the technology for better energy conversion..." Dilshay summarized the 'news' aloud for several minutes, continuing the cover seamlessly. The conversation did not deter his reading. Blueprints, layouts, anything about the energy infrastructures of Zainab were tasked to be gained. More importantly, he wanted any intel of disrepute much like the events that heralded the disaster of Celeste. The underwater city had fallen under attack and should they have known about it, an attack could have wiped out much of the Arconan leadership. The human's blue eyes briefly caught his gaze as he finished and handed the datapad back.

Reaching out, the faux-accountant grasped Kobign's cybernetic hand and pressed a hidden device flush with it. "Thank the gods for that explosion, how would science have progressed otherwise?"

A sharp static of pain zapped through his arm. But it fell quickly to the intense impact of an explosion, fire coursing through skin as dirt and blood splattered the air. Kobign jumped, standing abruptly from the bench with ringing static echoing in his ears. He jerked his head about, searching for bearings and feeling out of place when the arid, war torn battlefield was nowhere in sight. His breath a heavy huff as he caught sight of the kids, their ball rolling away and one dirty blond haired Selenian boy stared worried shock towards him.

Maxzain... Kobign shook his head, the panic and fire of his burn scars waning as he took in the kid's face. This wasn't his memories, stolen and ripped from the poor kid's dad's last footage, and shoved into his own brain — forced to relive over and over. Deepens the cover, they said, just like setting off the homebrewed PTSD to cover these meetings from those gifted with psychometry. A practice he was okay utilizing, fear and a drive to stop those who are twisted with such power. Now, each and every use has slowly left him more and more frustrated and conflicted while his view on Arcona and Force Users was opened. And there wasn't a damn thing he could do about it, not without resulting his death in either's hands.

The half-Selenian turned to the 'Accountant,' remembering to keep his facade, however deep and layered they keep becoming. He gave the man an apologetic look, bowing his head slightly, "I'm sorry, sir, for my outburst. I..."

"No need to apologize, my fellow," Dilshay replied smoothly, waving him off with a light smile. "I noted your tags earlier and should have been more sensitive with word choice."

He stood, datapad at his side before turning to leave. "Selen thanks you for your service."

Kobign watched him leave before a tug at his shirt drew his attention to Maxzain and reassured the pre-teen he was okay.

Zainab Selen

Wind whipped up a cloudstorm of snow as the LAAt/c landed on the rocky tarmac nestled in the arctic expanse. The hum of its engines had yet to die down before boots hit the ground and orders were barked. Several enlisted soldiers bustled to unload crates from the craft and while others set up a loose perimeter under the orders of one man. The burly Selenian turned and placed the wool lined cap over his shaved auburn hair as he moved towards the tight cluster of buildings. It was one of many that dotted the landscape, housing the engineers and scientists that managed the various solar and wind turbine farms, as well as the geothermal heat transformers.

Kobign stepped forth to meet the man, a smile on his face as he extended a hand. "Sergeant Major Ecan, pleasure seeing you stop in," he greeted, an air of friendly familiarity to the formal title.

"Settgre!" Imizett Ecan grasped the hybrid's hand firmly, pulling him in briefly and patting him on the shoulder. "Didn't expect to see you stationed here."

"Temporary assignment, I assure you," Kobign adjusted his gloves.

"Irked the boss lady, eh?" Ecan chuckled, directing their talk and walking towards the town and away from the soldiers behind them.

"Might of been her husband's transfer requests finally going through," he joked back.

"You dog!" the Sergeant Major's chuckles quieted and, with the act of camaraderie over them, shifted topics. "I'm set to meet with the head engineer here. Apparently there has been concerns over the integrity of the energy plants, what with what happened in Celeste. This is only one of several units they've deployed under the guise of delivering intel."

"But they're here to recon, for signs akin to before," Kobign guessed, hazel eyes flicking to Imizett's green as he nodded. It was precisely why Zujenia Bleu agreed to send him here. The timing was perfect to catch the woman thinking on the recent planet matters. The question is whether her intuition was spurred due to that or what his and Imizett's actions brought. His chest constricted with conflict.

"Aye," Ecan confirmed, the man pausing before hitting the intercom to the main hub building, "Care to join me?"

Zainab Selen

His breath caught as he stumbled over the crest of the rocky hill, staring into the mouth of a cave. The sounds of an explosion echoing across the barren frozen landscape. Hazel eyes widen in shock as his pupils adjusted to the dim light, rock dust, and soot. A flutter of fabric caught his eye and he reached out to grab it without a second thought, flipping it over. The Arconan emblem. Torn from one of the bodies lying unmoving. Did they get caught unaware? Whatever enemy the Clan had feared out in the arctic taking out the squad? There had been signs but...

"**Imett!**" Kobign hollered, dropping the radio pack behind him and preparing to skid down into the cave before a firm grip latched on his shoulder. He spun, breaking the hold swiftly and pivoting to face the individual.

"Kob, ay, I'm fine," Imizett reassured quickly, hands up, and took a step back. The drumming of his heart dimmed slightly, and he was able to take a breath through the adrenaline.

"What," the half-Selenian inquired, a deep dread starting to fill him as he took in the collected look of his comrade - of the man who went through the collective's training and bore their deep conditioning beside him. And it clicked.

"What did you do, Imitt?"