Double-Edged Dagger

by ptw30

Summary

It isn’t easy being the only human in the Galra Empire. After Shiro’s human father and Galra stepmother leave he and his half-Galra brother, Keith, to fend for themselves, Shiro resorts to the worst-case scenario time and time again to survive. And now that Keith is sick and in desperate need of medicine, Shiro has no choice but to proposition a high-ranking Galra official. But this time, it might not be GAC he receives – but salvation.

i.e. How Shiro becomes the only human member of the Blade of Marmora
The lean but built Galra kept glancing over at Shiro with clear intent, helping to make the decision that much easier. The Galra’s face was lavender, pretty and smooth for the race, and dressed in a black suit of the empire’s armed forces, he held a high rank and therefore, received the best medical attention. He was most likely clean.

Shiro could do worse.

He had done worse, but Keith’s cough now sounded wet. He’d carried a fever for the last three days, and the little money they’d gotten from Shiro’s last “odd job” ran out when he brought the tickets to the skyway. He figured they had another hour or two before the conductor kicked them off, but the warmth and long benches gave Keith a comfortable and relatively safe place to sleep.

It was a restless slumber, though, with loud, guttural hacks and delirious mumbles. The eight year old was getting progressively worse, his purple fur matted with sweat, his large cat ears drooping, and his face scrunched in pain. Even his tail was tucked between his legs.

When Keith coughed again and moaned, he resituated his head on Shiro’s balled up jacket, his own covering his upper body. The noise and motion drew the Galra’s attention again, and though Shiro’s stomach plummeted, one job would get him enough money for a room, some soup, and probably a few pills for Keith.

Shiro only hoped this Galra didn’t have a marking kink like that bastard Sendak.

With a resigned sigh, Shiro stood, pressed a tender kiss to Keith’s burning forehead, and started toward the Galra soldier. Shiro’s undershirt was prefect for solicitation, tight across his growing muscles and cutting off at his sculpted shoulders. In a few years, he’d be built, able to protect Keith and himself without fear against even the fiercest Galra. For now, they needed just to survive, and sometimes, that took extreme measures.

With his taller form, the Galra could stare straight into Shiro’s eyes even while sitting. His own were bright, almost a cheerful amber, so Shiro stuffed his hands in his back pockets and said evenly, “Services start at 500 GAC.”

The Galra’s eyes shot wide and turned toward the bench where Keith rested, and Shiro immediately shut that down, stepping back into the Galra’s eyesight. “Hey, now it’s 750, and if you glance that way again, I will kill you.”

He’d done it before; he’d do it again.

The Galra stood then, towering over the still growing Shiro. Great, this Galra had to be a super creep, but Shiro set his shoulders. He wouldn’t let anything happen to Keith.

The Galra didn’t look toward Keith again, only bent to scrutinize Shiro’s eyes. “You’re fully human. Out here? I didn’t think that was possible.”

Most lifeforms in the Galra Empire felt that way, unfortunately. “Are you interested or not?”

“Hm.” A wandering hand ghosted down his back, caressing his firming muscles and sliding over his smooth shoulder blades. Shiro bit back a bitter laugh because of course, this Galra was interested. Any pervert in the general vicinity noticed he was human and loved nothing more than to feel his vulnerable skin and mark it as their own. Just like Sendak.
“How did you find yourself all the way out here?” The Galra’s voice grated a bit, like it was used to scream commands during battle. “We’re hundreds of lightyears away from Earth.”

“Money upfront. Discussion to the minimum.”

“You must be an undocumented citizen, or are you owned by the little one back there?”

Shiro bristled, though he shouldn’t have. It wasn’t a new question, and his little brother being half Galra helped them to survive after their father drank himself into a stupor and Keith’s Galra mother left for…wherever she was. With the Galra regarding every other lifeform as property, Shiro managed to navigate his cruel caste in Galra society thanks to Keith, even if the Galra in question knew nothing of his privileged status.

Shiro stepped out of the Galra’s hold, hands curling into tight fists. “Look. Are we doing this? If not, I’ve got places to be.”

Despite not wanting more scars, Sendak would probably give them a room for a few days and medicine for Keith’s illness in exchange for a few favors. It was a worst-case scenario, but they were there if this Galra wasn’t willing to help.

Help? Shiro snorted. The Galra Empire had a way of twisting words to have dark connotations.

When the Galra pulled his head back and revered Shiro with a long, stringent gaze, Shiro huffed and turned, only to stop at the Galra’s next words.

“What happened to Ryou? He did not return to Earth?”

Shiro swung around, eyes trembling, mouth agape – this Galra knew his father? – when the Galra lunged. His hand swept across Shiro’s lower back and freed the dagger he kept hidden there, a luxite blade adorned with a glowing purple symbol.

“Give it back!” Shiro demanded – it was the only thing he hadn’t sold, including his morality – but the Galra simply snatched Shiro’s wrist. With his opposite hand, he pressed two fingers against Shiro’s neck, and a sudden crack engulfed Shiro’s world in darkness.

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“Takashi?”

Shiro’s head thumped in a painful beat, almost the exact same rhythm of the tiny tugs on his shirt.

“Taka-SHI?”

He shifted, neck stiff and sore, and a heavy weight settled upon his stomach.

“TAKASHI!”

Shiro woke up, fully alert and shooting to sit up. On instinct, his arms wrapped about the smaller Galra who had been huddled against his side, but he immediately sought the tiny, duel amber eyes gazing up with a clarity he hadn’t seen in over a week.

“Keith! Are you okay?”

“Yeah, Ulaz gave me some medicine. Said you needed some time to recover, too, but – ”

Who the hell is –” Someone shifted just over Keith’s head, and Shiro pulled Keith closer, as if protect his brother from the large Galra who now stood in the corner of the room. Dressed in a black suit with a large dagger peeking up from behind his back, the Galra sent fine tremors through Shiro’s body, though he put on a strong front with narrowed eyes and a grating tone.

“You!” It was the Galra from the train. “Where are we? Who are you?”

“We are currently in the Thaldycon System –” The Galra bowed, fist over his heart. “– and as your little brother informed you, I am Ulaz.”

That explained absolutely nothing. “Why did you bring us here?”

Ulaz stepped forward, purposefully but steadily, as if not to further frighten an already hissing cat, and then sat on the bed just beyond Shiro’s bent knees. He placed a hand upon Keith’s head, much to Shiro’s distress, and ruffled the soft locks.

“Kolivan will not like a human in our ranks, but I will not give him a choice. If we do not fight for our families, then what are we fighting for?”

Shiro agreed to that, especially when Keith began to purr. “What does that mean?” he asked in a strangled scream.

Ulaz smiled and lifted up the dagger for Shiro to accept once more. “It means, welcome to the Blade of Marmora… *Paladin*.”
Adoption

Chapter Summary

As Shiro and Keith settle into the Communication Base Thaldycon, thanks to Ulaz, other members of the Blades of Marmora take offense to the brothers’ intrusion, and Shiro has to decide what’s more important - keeping his brother or saving him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At first, Shiro wasn’t sure what to make of Ulaz. The Galra’s gruff voice and incandescent amber eyes betrayed his kind and nurturing disposition. He worked out on the base’s training deck with deadly, precise motions, but with those same bloodied hands, he ruffled Shiro’s hair and petted Keith’s mane. He fed them, listened to them, and cared for them, but Ulaz was a double agent, trained to lie and court trust.

Shiro spent the first few months fearing every time Ulaz left, that he’d return with Galra sentries – or worse, Sendak. And Ulaz went away many times – leaving for weeks and coming back for only a few days. The Blade of Marmora’s Communication Base Thaldycon was quiet and lonely, Shiro would admit, but compared to where he and Keith came from, it was paradise.

Though he and Keith received separate rooms – complete with beds, a viewer screen, and a bathroom – they ended up living in the same quarters. Shiro placed Keith in the alcove of his bed and protected the young Galra with his own body when they slept, while Keith curled his tail about Shiro’s waist and pressed his forehead against his brother’s back.

Every time Ulaz returned with supplies – clothing and food, enough to last Shiro and Keith until his next visit – he also brought “gifts.” A book for Shiro to read or a new game for Keith to play. Sometimes, he brought treats from certain systems that tasted almost exactly, but not quite, like Swedish Fish or chocolate.

As the months passed, Shiro accepted the offerings with a smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. As he watched Keith jump into the Galra’s open arms and wrap his tail about Ulaz’s wrist, an uneasy knot twisted in his stomach. It wasn’t that he distrusted Ulaz, and perhaps that was what worried him the most. He began to wonder what that would mean for him and Keith. Would they live out the rest of their lives here in isolation? Would they ever see their father or mother again?

Would Ulaz eventually tire of bringing them supplies?

Shiro couldn’t trust Ulaz to always be there. Though he was hesitant to leave the sanctuary of the communication base, especially with no money or no legitimate way of earning any, Shiro began to pack a few things Ulaz gave them, so the next time Ulaz returned, he could transport Keith and him to the nearest transportation hub.

At least they were out of the Galra Empire’s capital city, Drule Central.

“I thought I made myself clear,” Ulaz admonished a few days later, arms crossed, eyes hard. “You are welcome on this base for the foreseeable future.”
“We can’t stay here forever, Ulaz,” Shiro insisted and motioned toward the two duffle bags filled with clothes and snacks. “You have been so generous, but we really have to be going – ”

“I meant what I said earlier, Shiro,” and his old nickname from Earth sounded so foreign to his ears, even after all this time. Ulaz had truly known his parents. “We must protect our family, and you are my family now.”

Tears welled up in Shiro’s eyes. Family? The thought sounded too good to be true.

Ulaz’s hand upon Shiro’s shoulder felt steady and firm, unrelenting in its conviction and comfort. “Please. I urge you to stay until I figure out how to introduce you to Kolivan and the Blade of Marmora. I could not – I cannot bear the thought of what happened to you…happening again. And I will not let it happen to Keith. I swear it.”

Shiro glanced away, completely nonplussed and trembling with immense relief. He was no longer alone, struggling against the poverty and prejudice his kind endured in the Galra Empire. Now, he had someone to help, to lean upon, and a place he could call home.

But Shiro still feared.

“I – Thank you, Ulaz, but the Blade – aren’t they Galra?” So was Ulaz, though he certainly didn’t act like most of the Galra Shiro had met. “Aren’t they – They won’t like – ”

“Not all Galra are like Zarkon,” Ulaz assured, motioning for Shiro to sit on his bed. He followed a moment later. “The Blade of Marmora actively fights the empire’s claims and its prejudices. And one of our members left a blade to you. She wanted you to be part of our fight.”

Shiro’s eyes slipped shut at the thought of Keith’s mom.

“I must admit, I do not want you to fight for the Blade. I would rather you stay here, safe and content. I – I look forward to returning here and seeing you and Keith every few weeks. It…gives me purpose in a way that not even the Blade and its missions have.”

Ulaz looked forward to seeing them and wanted Keith and him here? Shiro had been so worried about imposing, he never realized perhaps Ulaz needed he and Keith almost as much as they needed him.

Warmth spread through Shiro’s chest and dried his eyes. “Can I help you in any way?”

“You already do, just by being here.”

“But – I want to do something, not just read and work-out. I want to help you and the Blades.”

“Shiro, I assure you that Kolivan will not care that after all you’ve been through, that you –”

“Maybe I can help with base maintenance?” Shiro offered, eyeing the pouches on Ulaz’s belt. “You always work on the – the gravity generator, right? It’s what keeps the base hidden.”

Ulaz nodded. “And keeps the xanthorium clusters from destroying it.”

“So…maybe I can help with that? Can you teach me how?”

Ulaz stared at Shiro, scrutinizing, until a proud smile overtook his face. “Let’s start in the main command chamber. I’ll show you how to shut off the generator, so you don’t short-circuit it during the reprogramming sequence.”
Shiro fell into a new routine, and though Ulaz went away longer – now that he had help on the base – he also stayed longer, sometimes for weeks at a time. Shiro enjoyed their discussions and movies and meals, a semblance of a normal life. Ulaz showed him more than just the basic maintenance on the ship and even began to teach him fighting techniques used by the Blade.

When Ulaz wasn’t there, Shiro continued to train and work on the base, shutting down the gravity generation or boosting it depending upon the position of the xanthorium crystals.

Keith began to assist, and as Shiro lay underneath the command chamber’s console, hand out for a zaserflap, a sudden, insistent beeping startled them both. Keith reacted first, bounding toward the hanger. “Ulaz is back, Shiro! He came back early!”

Ulaz never surprised them. He always sent a transmission before entering the space pocket, which meant whoever came to the base wasn’t Ulaz.

“Keith, wait!”

He pushed up from under the console and tore after his excited little brother, and if not for the opening of the airlock and the sudden appearance of two intimidating warriors, Shiro wouldn’t have caught up with Keith. But Keith’s full-out dash slowed to a stop about ten feet away from the warriors, who wore outfits like Ulaz’s Blade of Marmora uniform. Only these fighters wore masks Shiro never saw on Ulaz before, complete with three glowing purple circles and dark hoods covering their heads. The ceremonial swords of the Blades peeked out from behind their defined shoulders.

Shiro immediately swept his brother behind him, keeping one hand on Keith and the other up in front of him. “We mean you no harm. We’re just – ugh!”

“Shiro!” Keith’s terrified shout rang in Shiro’s ears as the teen found himself thrust against the wall, foreign hand clutching his throat, and on instinct, he retaliated. He stabbed his attacker just under the arm, hitting the pressure point to release him, and then kicked. But the Blade was faster and stronger, eluding his attack, seizing his shoulder, and ramming him face first into the wall. The Blade twisted his arm unnaturally, searing pain through his shoulder and stopping Shiro’s struggling instantly.

“Who are you, and how did you get in here?” a rancorous voice demanded.

Shiro shifted, just enough to see his brother held firmly by the other warrior. Not painfully, but the warrior kept Keith in a headlock at his hip, tightening his grip just a bit in warning.

The warrior holding Shiro hit him once in the back, accosting his attention. “Answer my questions!”

“I’m Takashi Shirogane, and that’s my brother Keith. Ulaz brought us here.”

“He has one of our blades,” the other warrior announced, and then Shiro felt the weight at his lower back disappear.

If possible, the warrior holding him grew fiercer, his voice more biting. “Where did you get this!”

Shiro remained silent until the dagger’s sharp blade pressed against the side of his throat.
“It was given to me – by – by my mom—s-stepmother!” he added quickly, before the warriors could call him a liar again.

Shiro’s eyes squeezed shut as he remembered the older Galra woman standing over him, her eyes strong and bright, and sad, too. Even now, he could feel the warmth of her lips against his forehead.

“She told me to use it to protect Keith and me, that I shouldn’t show anyone the marking on it.”

One beat passed. Then another. And another. Shiro stared back into those all-consuming purple irises, trembling and fearful as the blade remained pressed against his vulnerable neck. Then, ever so slightly, it recoiled, but the hard grip upon his arm remained.

The warrior never said anything or returned the blade. Instead, he gripped Shiro by the scruff, hand still clutching his arm, and tugged Shiro down the corridor.

“Takashi! Ugh! Let my brother go!” Keith yelled, to which Shiro returned, “It’s okay, Keith! It’s going to be – ah!”

Pain shot through his arm.

Ironically, the warrior opened the door to Shiro’s room and dragged him inside – and froze, taking in the knickknacks and books and open bag of snacks on the desk. Then he tossed Shiro onto his bed without another word. Shock and fear kept Shiro still as he waited for the worst – only for the door to swish shut, leaving him alone.

When he went to the door panel, pressing his hand flat against it, the door refused to open. “Hey! Hey! Where’s my brother?” he yelled, banging on the hard metal surface. “Hey! He’s only eight! Let him stay with me! Please!”

But no matter how many times he slammed his fists against the door or demanded to see Keith, no one came. Shiro eventually retired to his bed, pressing his back against the alcove of the bunk, legs pulled to his chest to wait. Dobashes turned to vargas, and finally, the bigger of the two warriors entered, carrying a tray of food.

“Where’s my brother?” Shiro beseeched, not caring that desperation tinted his voice. “Is he all right?”

The warrior stared at him, and with the mask and glowing eyes, Shiro couldn’t tell what he thought.

“Please. I just need to know he’s all right.”

Not that he could trust the word of a warrior who attacked his brother and him, and now kept them as prisoners in what had become their home, but – he had to try.

The warrior turned and stomped toward the door, so Shiro scrambled to his feet. “Please. He’s all I have left. He and Ulaz, and – please don’t hold this against Ulaz. He was just trying to save me and Keith. He knew my dad – and maybe my mom. Stepmother. And-And without him, I would have gone back to –”

“Your brother is unharmed,” the warrior spouted, his gravelly voice a welcome comfort. “He is confined to his own quarters.”

“Can – Can I see him?”
“No.”

The warrior exited then, shutting the door behind him again, and Shiro sighed. But he felt better knowing that just a wall away, his brother slept, hopefully peacefully.

The wall panel by the door kept time, so Shiro watched as the quintaints clicked on. A week, then a week and a half passed, and Shiro only saw the larger of the two warriors when he brought meals. He said nothing other than to assure Shiro that Keith was fine – and he might have left extra goo or a piece of candy. And once, maybe twice, there might have been a data-pad. The communication functions were disabled – not like Shiro had anyone to contact – but someone uploaded a few well-known shows and even a couple of books.

It didn’t take long for the nightmares to start, for him to remember the warm crimson coating his hands, the dagger’s cloth soaked in the same bright color. Shiro remembered Sendak’s firm claws upon his hips, his warm, wet tongue on his neck, and the pain that came when claws tore through his face, forever claiming ownership upon his person. Shiro fought every day to prove Sendak wrong, and yet for more than two years, Shiro went back to the Galra commander for food and medicine and a “safe” place to stay.

An adamant hand shook his shoulder, luring him from his troubled slumber, and yelping, Shiro scrambled away. A fine trembling seized his body as he pushed his back against the bed’s walls, and his eyes sought the person who woke him up – the large warrior. He knelt near the edge of the bed, hand still lifted where he helped to stir Shiro.

“You were having a nightmare,” the warrior said in that growling voice.

Shiro clutched his shirt, heart threatening to pound out of his chest. His eyes were blown wide, searching, fearful, and his breath refused to relent. Blood thumped in his ears.

The warrior stood then, forcing Shiro to crane his neck to still see his masked face.

“You are safe here,” the warrior promised, his voice rough and unrelenting in its conviction. “You need not fear us.”

“Your leader put a dagger to my throat,” Shiro breathed, still curled in on himself. “You’ve kept my brother and me apart and confined like prisoners. I don’t even know your name, so how can you – hey. Hey! Where are you going?”

Shiro blinked as the warrior left, and when the door shut, darkness once more blanketed the room. He barely managed to slow his breathing and relax against his alcove’s wall when the door swished open again.

“Takashi!”

Shiro’s arms opened instinctively as a warm, furry bundle of energy leapt into them. Keith’s arms latched onto him, his body quivering, and Shiro rested his cheek upon his little brother’s head, eyes slipping shut in relief. He indulged in Keith’s warmth and smiled when his brother curled his tail about his torso, holding him close. The last week and a half – the terrible nightmares, the isolation, the constant fear – faded with his brother’s simple presence.

All too soon, Keith squirmed, but Shiro refused to let his brother go, quivering hands seizing Keith’s cheeks to inspect his eyes and face for himself. “Are you okay, Keith? They didn’t harm you, did they? Are you—”

“I’m fine, Takashi. It’s just been so boring. When is Ulaz coming back? You think he’ll bring us
more chewy fish? Or maybe – ”

“Antok.”

Shiro blinked, reacting at the sudden, raspy intrusion and tugging Keith close again.

“Takashi,” Keith whined.

“My name is Antok,” the warrior repeated, bowing slightly from his place in front of the door. “Our leader is Kolivan.”

The infamous Kolivan Ulaz spoke about.

“Do not fear. No harm will come to either of you.”

Despite his hoarse voice, Shiro believed Antok this time. He returned Shiro’s brother to him, and for that, Shiro would always be grateful.

Antok left shortly after that, causing Keith to grumble, “They talk weird, and what’s up with that guy’s face? He looks like a cyclops or something.”

Shiro couldn’t stop the tiny laugh from escaping his lips and ruffled his little brother’s mane. “Just go back to sleep, kiddo.”

Keith grumbled and crossed his arms in an adorable pout, but he eventually relented, curling up next to Shiro and rubbing his cheek against his brother’s shoulder. His tail wrapped about Shiro’s forearm, the tip dusting back and forth across Shiro’s elbow.

Sleep struggled to take Shiro. He couldn’t relax, reunited with Keith after fearing the worst, and seeing his brother safe and unharmed – despite their imprisonment – kept Shiro from surrendering completely. He jumped at every sound, waiting for one of the Blades to return and take Keith away from him, but he wouldn’t let them. Now that he had his brother’s warmth against his side again, he wasn’t going to let it go.

Shiro must have drifted off because he woke up to a heated exchange. He couldn’t hear the entirety of the verbal battle, but Kolivan did not sound happy. Shiro checked to make sure Keith still slept before creeping to the door. With his ear pressed against the cool, metal surface, he managed to decipher Antok’s muffled reply. It was grave but thoughtful, as if to pacify his leader, though Kolivan remained bitter.

“…together? …working against us…You should not have…”

“…cubs, Kolivan…can’t be older than two decafeebs…”

“…could be working with the Galra…”

“…not the empire…cruel to keep them separated…”

“But…human. Human! …he could be a problem if…”

“Is Ulaz back yet?” Keith’s tired voice sounded from the bed.

Shiro sighed and pushed to his feet, returning to his little brother’s side. “Not yet, but don’t worry. Ulaz will come. He’ll get us out of here.”

And Shiro believed that. As he settled back on the bed and drew Keith close again, he held no
reservations about how Ulaz felt about them. The moment he discovered they were in trouble, the
Galra warrior would return here, and Shiro reveled in that simple thought, that someone cared
about he and Keith enough to help them.

His thoughts wandered, and he wondered not for the first time just where Keith’s mom was. If she
knew that Ryou had left them to go…wherever, she would have returned. He just knew it.

When the door opened the next morning, Kolivan entered this time. He waited in the hallway for a
full minute, and though Shiro couldn’t see his face behind the dark, glowing mask, he felt the
Galra’s callous gaze scrutinizing every part of him.

Kolivan’s gaze wandered to Keith, who peeked over Shiro’s shoulder, his pointed tail tight around
Shiro’s bicep this time, and without a word, the leader placed a tray of food on the desk.
Maintaining his silence, he retreated to the hallway.

“Thank you,” Shiro said, stopping the massive warrior from exiting, “for returning my brother. I
know you didn’t want to, but he’s the only thing I – ”

“You shouldn’t be here.”

Keith’s claws scrunched Shiro’s shirt and hissed over his shoulder, but Shiro calmed him with an
affection pet of his cheek. “We didn’t ask to be here. Ulaz – ”

“– was a fool to divulge this location to you. He has a penchant for ignoring orders and following
his impulses. It will get him killed.”

“He saved our lives.”

“For what purpose? You have no place in our world.”

“Then why don’t you just let us go?” Shiro’s fists clutched the bedspread underneath him. “You
obviously do not want us here, so – ”

“Ulaz brought you here for a reason, and I want to know what that is.”

Keith’s hiss was biting. “He brought us because of the blade. Mom gave it to Takashi – ”

“Keith!”

“No, half-breed, that is what you were told. That is not why you are here,” Kolivan insisted, voice
steady and firm, “and I will discover just what that is.”

“Ulaz called me a paladin,” Shiro wondered out loud before he blinked, catching himself. Kolivan
froze, movements stiff and shocked, so Shiro continued. “Do you know what that means?”

“It means I was right.” His announcement sounded forced, and Shiro thought, perhaps even pained.
“You have no place in our world. The empire will devour you whole.”

The door swished shut after that, enclosing the small room in darkness. Shiro stood to turn on the
lights as Keith jumped off the bed to inspect the food left for them. “I don’t like him,” he muttered
before shoving a handful of green goo into his mouth. “He sounds like one of those Galra jerks at
the train station.”

“Don’t chew with your mouth open,” Shiro admonished with little heat, coming to hand his brother
a napkin. “And he’s just…cautious. We’re trespassers here.”
“But Ulaz brought us! So we’re not really –”

“But Kolivan owns this place…in a way.”

“Are…” Keith glanced up, mouth green as he spoke, “are we going to have to leave?”

The fearful tone in Keith’s voice cut Shiro to the quick. “I don’t know,” he answered and dragged his fingers through Keith’s disheveled hair, “but don’t worry. We’ll be fine. If we have to leave, I’ll find us a new place to stay.”

“I don’t want to go back to Drule Central,” Keith whimpered, ears drooped, eyes downcast.

Shiro wished he could tell Keith that wouldn’t be the case, but as a cold shiver spread through his body, Shiro resigned himself to the fact that he would return to Sendak if need be. The Galra commander offered his home to Shiro and promised to put Keith into a good school in Drule Central. Maybe – Maybe he should have taken the commander up on it, even if he dreaded the reality behind the superficial sanctuary. What would Sendak force him to give in exchange for such stability? His freedom, surely. His body, undoubtedly.

But he couldn’t continue to ask Keith to live in such horrendous conditions. Eventually, they’d find a Galra they couldn’t escape from, and then – Shiro dismissed that thought immediately. He’d never let anything happen to Keith.

Ulaz returned three days later in a terrible fury. His vehement shouts easily reached Shiro’s bunk, urging Shiro to the door.

“They are cubs, Kolivan! Our cubs. Ryou and Moira’s sons, and you –”

“The half-breed is their son. The other is completely human.”

“If anything, that means he needs our protection even more.”

“We are not in the business of saving people, Ulaz, especially those who cannot be of any use to us.”

“They are the Paladins of New. I am sure of it. Haggar confirmed –”

“A human? A paladin? You are mistaken. There is no way –”

“I am certain.”

“Nonetheless, he is weak. I will not have his blood on our hands.”

“He will die if he returns to the streets. You do not know the horrors these boys –”

The door to Shiro’s chambers suddenly swished open, startling Shiro, and he tumbled face-first into the hallway. Keith fell on top of his back, and after glancing back at his hissing brother, Shiro met Antok’s expressionless mask.

“Go,” Antok urged. “Plead your case to Kolivan.”

“My case?” Shiro echoed. “Antok, I don’t have a case. I just –”

Antok lifted Keith off Shiro’s back and then fisted his hand in the back of Shiro’s collar, effortlessly picking him off the ground. He snatched Shiro’s hand then and placed something flat in the middle of his palm – the blade his stepmother gave him.
"Go. Now."

Shiro’s fingers wrapped around the shimmering hilt; he clutched the dagger close to his chest, his heart. Moira’s words slide along his cheek as if she stood right next to him again.

“You are strong, Takashi. A son of mine could never be anything but. Do not let anyone else tell you differently.”

Shiro nodded once to Antok and took off toward the hanger. There, Shiro found Ulaz and Kolivan in a makeshift stand-off. Both had shed their masks, and now Shiro saw the stern, relentless expression upon the demanding leader’s face. The chain about his neck was actually a braid, and his glowing amber eyes and jagged scar lent him a rough, vicious demeanor.

“– not allow a human to be a Blade. He’d never pass the Trials.”

Ulaz’s face was more furious than Shiro had ever seen it. “You will not know that until he tries.”

“And if he dies?” Kolivan interjected. “Are you willing to sacrifice that boy for your baseless theories?”

Ulaz paused, mouth agape, but then he slowly shut it. With a fierce growl, he glanced away, and Shiro felt all his own righteous anger dissipate. Ulaz didn’t believe in him? He really didn’t think Shiro was a paladin – whatever that was – and could survive these…Trials, whatever they were.

They fought over him, not Keith, which meant –

“You’ll keep Keith, right?” Shiro interjected, walking into the room. His jaw tightened, sudden fear gripping him utterly, and he struggled to speak every word. “You’ll protect him and teach him how to survive in the Galra Empire. I’m the problem.”

“Shiro, you are most certainly not –”

“Yes,” Kolivan interrupted Ulaz, taking an imposing step toward Shiro. “The half-breed is welcome in the Blade of Marmora. You are not.”

Kolivan’s harsh words were a cold splash of reality, forcing Shiro to accept a truth he tried desperately to ignore. No matter what Moira had said, Shiro wasn’t strong enough to survive in the Galra Empire. He couldn’t protect Keith, never truly had. He’d sold himself to the nearest pervert in order to scrape by, and even then, only luck and greed kept them alive.

“Surrender the blade,” Kolivan negotiated, a vicious edge sharpening his voice, “and we will safeguard the half-breed.”

An easy exchange, compared to everything else Shiro had been forced to give up. Shiro glanced at the last thing his stepmother gave him – mother, really, because Moira had loved him like her own cub – and couldn’t stop his hand from shaking.

“Takashi?” Keith. “Why are you crying? What’s wrong?”

Tiny hands tugged at the hem of his shirt, and Shiro’s soul wept. Though he’d lived ten years without a brother, he somehow couldn’t imagine a life without a tail wrapped about some appendage of his – like Keith’s tail currently clutched his thigh – or seeing those amber eyes gazing down at him in the morning, urging him to wake.

More importantly, he didn’t want to imagine a life without Keith. He loved his little brother with
every fiber of his being and was willing to give his own body and soul to keep him safe. He’d do anything for Keith, give up anything –

Including Keith himself.

“Takashi…?”

Shiro’s hand fell naturally to Keith’s head, and then he followed, dropping to one knee and staring up at his little brother’s troubled face. “I have to go away for a while.”

“We have to leave?” Keith asked, tears shimmering in those crystal eyes. “We can’t stay? But why would Ulaz – ”

Shiro gripped Keith’s shoulders, committing his searing heat to memory. “You’re going to stay, Keith, with Ulaz and Kolivan and Antok. I just have to go away for a while.”

Forever.

“What do you mean?” The kid didn’t understand, and why would he? He never knew a life without Shiro.

“I have to go away for a while.” Hot tears coursed his cheeks; silent sobs choked his throat. “But I’m going to miss you, kiddo.”

“You can’t leave!” Keith screamed, and Ulaz stepped forward, placing a hand upon Keith’s shoulder.

“Cub, it’ll be all right. Shiro isn’t going – ”

“No! You have to stay here!” Keith dove forward, gripping Shiro’s hand between his two. “You can’t go away, Takashi! You can’t!”

He sounded hysterical, and Shiro was a moment away from his own complete meltdown. “I can’t stay here, Keith. I don’t belong here, but you do. Ulaz and Kolivan and Antok are going to teach you how to survive in the empire, okay?”

“Why do you want to leave?” His tiny body trembled, resentful. “Why does everyone always leave! Why doesn’t anyone – ”

Kolivan took a step forward, face hardening in a stern reproach, but Shiro put a hand up, stopping him from interrupting.

“Hey, hey, hey.” Shiro drew Keith close, hands running up and down his brother’s slender arms. “Come on. Stop that. You know I don’t want to leave, but I can’t protect you like these guys can. And it’s going to be okay. You’re going to be with Ulaz. You love Ulaz.”

“But I want you.”

Shiro engulfed Keith in a warm embrace then, tucking the cub under his chin. “Oh, kiddo, I want to be with you, too, but I can’t right now. And one day, you’ll understand. I promise. I’ll see you then, okay?”

If he survived that long.

“When?” the boy demanded in a weak, frightened whimper.
“I don’t know, but this is right for you. I know it, so – do well. Listen to what these warriors tell you, and – and…” The tears flowed freely now, blurring Keith’s stubborn countenance. “Remember me, okay? That’s all. Don’t miss me. Don’t…Don’t worry about me, okay? Just…remember me. And here.”

Shiro fought to detach his hands from Keith’s arms and held the dagger flat across his open palms. “It’s Mom’s blade. She gave it to me, but I think she would agree with Kolivan. This belongs to you. So Kolivan’s going to teach you how to wield it, and you’re going to be strong, Keith. So much stronger than me.”

“Kolivan,” Antok growled from behind Shiro, obstinate and accusatory.

“Take it, Keith,” Shiro urged again. “Take it and remember me – what?”

Before Keith’s furry hand touched the blade, the emblem on the back glowed a fierce purple hue, and then a bright white light engulfed the hanger.

“Impossible,” Kolivan gasped, voice strangled with wonder and uncertainty. “You’ve awoken the blade.”

Once the light faded, Shiro started at the now slender but extended sword upon his palms.

Keith blinked and reached down to pick it up, and immediately dropped it to the floor, the increased weight too much for him to carry.

Shiro looked up, taken back by the sudden smile upon Ulaz’s usually blank face. “What just happened?”

“The Blade reacted to you,” Antok answered, coming to wrap an arm about Shiro’s waist and lift him to his feet. “It means Galra blood must run through your veins.”

“Or you are the first human to be worthy of the blade,” Ulaz rejoined, ruffling Keith’s hair as the boy struggled to heave the sword off the floor.

“What does that mean?” Shiro whispered, hope stirring within him.

Ulaz and Antok both looked to Kolivan, whose eyes and tone still disapproved, despite his nod. “It means, the blade has chosen you, Takashi Shirogane, to be a member of our organization. So I will adhere to its wishes…for now.”

When Shiro blinked, still worrisome, Kolivan added with a resigned sigh, “It means you can stay.”

Shiro gasped, scooping his little brother into his arms and dusting kisses across his crown.

“Takashi! Takashi, that tickles,” Keith complained, but Shiro didn’t care. Looking around at the smiling face of Ulaz, the expressionless mask of Antok, and the stern but stoic countenance of Kolivan, he thought – Moira might have been wrong, but with the right training, he could prove her right.

He was as strong as the Galra, and maybe one day, he’d earn a place alongside them.

Chapter End Notes
If you like this series, I write drabbles and ficlets for Blade!Shiro on Tumblr - since I'm trying to post this here in sequential order. (Yeah, that probably won't last long.) If you're interested in reading the drabbles, check out the [Blade!Shiro masterpost](https://example.com/blade-shiro-masterpost).

Thanks!
Thace rarely ventured to the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters anymore. In his youth, he lived there, roomed with Kolivan and later Antok, helping to groom the latter for field work, comforting the former after he emerged from his cryogenic sleep.

With his position just underneath Commander Prorock, Thace endured long hours and little rest, but when Ulaz messaged him to “read the latest report,” e.g. “come to the Blade of Marmora’s main base at your earliest convenience,” Thace complied. He took his leave less than ten quintaints later, a restlessness settling underneath his fur. For Ulaz to risk sending him a message—though they were both soldiers for the Galra Empire, their positions rarely crossed—the situation must have been serious.

He never expected to step into “The Hilt,” the command center for the Blade of Marmora, and see a young human and a half-breed. The half-breed was a ball of energy, wanting to see and touch everything, and the human—a human, here?—barely kept him in check, hand permanently latched onto the half-breed’s scruff. When the half-breed managed to wiggle away—during a moment when the human had turned toward Ulaz and Kolivan—the human lunged for the boy, gripping the half-breed by the tail.

The half-breed yelped and hissed, but didn’t strike out at the human. Instead, his ears drooped, and he retreated to the troubled human’s side.

The human, himself, was barely old enough to care for the half-breed, though his trembling charcoal eyes spoke of horrors no cub’s ever should. His dark hair contrasted his pale skin, and he wore the casual outfit of a civilian—gray and black pants, boots, and an over-jacket.

And he was familiar.

Less than an annual ago, Zarkon ordered Sendak and his fleet to fell a resistance on Pollux, and likewise, the Blade of Marmora tasked Thace to find out when and how. Thankfully, Commander Prorock was on leave in Drule Central, allowing Thace the time and access to Sendak. Like all commanders, Sendak held his personal quarters in the empire’s capital city, and with the Blades’ decryption, he gained access to Sendak’s penthouse easily.

The quarters were extravagant, as was a commander’s due. The first room consisted of a sitting area—a couch, seats, and a coffee table with a viewer screen—plus a long dining table, perfect for conducting meetings with his subordinates or lounging during the few days the commander received rest. A quick glance denied Thace what he sought, so he continued onto the bedroom, a large chamber with an expansive bed. The only light came from under the door on the far end of the room—the master bath, no doubt, where rain clapped loudly on the shower floor. He ignored the ruffled sheets and lumpy comforter, instead focusing his eyes upon the bedside table.

The datapad. Where was Sendak’s standard issue datapad for Thace to hack?
Thace hurried to the bedside table and ripped open the drawer – only for the bed sheets to shift. He immediately whirled, dagger brought to bear, and froze. In the bed, naked save for a pair of tight black briefs, trembled a human – barely the empire’s legal age – with blown-wide eyes and a muscular but lithe body. He bore scars upon his torso. Not many – a tear upon his hip, another across his shoulder – but they were old and shallow, barely deep enough to decorate. His stomach contracted with rapid, frightened breaths, though he kept his head, waiting, surveying, looking for an opening to attack.

He was practically a cornered lamor, and Thace’s heart ached at the thought. He lowered his blade immediately, swearing under his breath, “The sick vykarz.”

Commanders took advantage of the undocumented citizens and even kept some as property, but Thace thought Sendak, arguably the third-highest ranking member of the Galra Empire, was above such violation. Apparently not.

“Come,” Thace urged, hand raised toward the trembling boy. “You shouldn’t be here. I’ll help you escape.”

He might lose his ranking. He might lose his life, but he wouldn’t allow Sendak to debase this boy a second longer.

“I-I can’t,” the human muttered, gripping the covers and tugging them over his scarred skin. “Sendak paid for my services through the end of the week, a-and he got my brother the treatment he needed. I have to stay.”

Thace couldn’t decide if that made it better or worse. In any case, he was going to be sick.

“You shouldn’t be here.” The human sat up, bedding shifting as he crossed his legs under the blanket. “What are you looking for?”

“It matters not.” He couldn’t tell this boy, this body seller, what he sought, but he blinked, realization dawning. “You said you are here until the end of the week.”

The human nodded. “Yeah. That’s how long Commander Sendak paid for—for… me.”

So the attack on Pollux wouldn’t come before the end of the week.


Thace eyed the perceptive human, watching as the boy recoiled slightly at the skepticism that must have shone in Thace’s gaze. Or perhaps the revulsion. Or the pity.

And yet, despite having a brother to take care of, despite lying almost completely naked in Sendak’s bed, despite being cursed to the position of property in the Galra Empire and forced to offer himself to a commander for payment – this human offered to risk his life to help Thace complete one of his most dangerous missions.

“Why?” he demanded.

The boy jerked his head toward the dagger. “I knew someone once who carried a knife like that.”

An immense sadness swept through Thace, and he could only imagine how the human would have met a Blade, probably similarly to how Thace did. And the Blade must have saved the boy in some way for him to be willing to help Thace now.
It was wrong for him to take advantage of the situation. He should have tried to convince the boy to leave Sendak’s room, payment or not, but when the shower knob squealed, Thace yielded.

“I’m looking for Sendak’s datapad. It has information I need.”

The boy leaned back, allowing the covers to slide off his taut torso, and his hand disappeared underneath the massive, fluffy pillows at the end of the bed. His mischievous smile was oddly precious and sweet.

“Sendak lets me borrow it sometimes to watch the latest serials.”

Sendak allowed the boy to use his government-issued datapad?

No matter. “I need to download the latest orders from Central Command, but –”

“– that will take longer than we have,” the human finished.

There was absolutely no we in the situation, but before Thace could convey that, the human snatched the tiny chip from Thace’s palm and shoved it into the datapad’s port.

Scratching and a heavy sigh echoed from the bathroom.

“Go. Now,” the boy urged as the software downloaded. “I’ll return the chip to you before I leave.”

“But –”

The bathroom door opened, flooding the once dark chambers with light, and as the human slipped the datapad back under the mountain of pillows again, Thace ducked under the bed. From the space between the comforter and the floor, Thace eyed Sendak’s wet, furry paws that led to the plush cloth of a thick robe.

As the commander approached, he hummed with sensual approval, voice thick with tender affection. “You are awake. I expected you to sleep until morning.”

Though Thace couldn’t see exactly what Sendak did, he could imagine the commander’s massive claws brushing against the human’s exposed neck before resting upon his cheek.

“I-uh, I heard the shower running.”

Sendak laughed, rich and deep. “If I would have known, you could have joined me.”

The human’s voice shivered. “Do you – Do you want to take another one?”

And give Thace time to escape. The boy wasn’t stupid; that was for sure.

“Hm. Perhaps later.” The bed dipped as Sendak sat, his paw now inches from Thace’s face. “You must be hungry. You haven’t eaten since you arrived. Well, not a proper meal.”

A shift on the bed – the boy probably sat cross-legged now, hands fisted in the comforter on his knees. “I’m all right.”

“Nonsense. You need to eat, my little kzelz.”

Thace barely held in his shocked gasp. Lover? Sendak revered this human his lover? But—But that was impossible. The Galra may have multiple partners throughout their youth, but they mated for life. For Sendak to speak to this human with such affection, with such concern – but the human
lacked the proper decoration.

So while Sendak might wish to make the boy his partner, he certainly hadn’t yet.

The boy shifted, uncomfortable and distressed. “I-I don’t have anything to – to pay for – ”

“Eat with me. You did last time as part of your services.”

“I – yes. I did, but that was only because – ”

“You liked the fresh zebu, yes?” Sendak stood, retreating to the communication deck in the next room.

“…yeah, but – ”

“Then I shall have it brought up. Take a shower in the meantime.” It was a gentle command, almost an offer. “I left a robe for you.”

If Thace had any doubts, Sendak extinguished them. The commander treasured his little human and not as his property – almost certainly as his lover and mate.

Even if Thace could help the boy, he feared to what lengths Sendak would go to reclaim what he believed to his.

“Wait!”

The unexpected shout startled Thace – and Sendak as well. The foot of the bed jumbled with the sudden weight as the boy came to kneel upon it. “Uh…before we eat, w-why don’t finish your first meal? Y-You don’t want it to get cold, do you?”

Sendak’s eyes narrowed then, so suspicious and vicious in their skepticism that Thace counted the moments until the commander lashed out. But instead, Sendak’s expression softened and grew tender and indulgent. When the robe slipped from his toned body, Thace averted his eyes. Sendak’s paws scratched the floor with every step, his stride soft but ominous, treading forward in a firm pace. Once he climbed upon the bed, the sounds of carnal lust and pleasure followed. Soft moans and choked kisses assaulted the once calm silence.

When Thace heard the bodies tumble to the front of the bed, he slid out from the bottom and glanced up to make sure that yes, Sendak was preoccupied, his massive body covering the human’s smaller form. Though his mouth kneaded the poor boy’s malleable neck, the human managed to raise his eyes and meet Thace’s with a pitiful mixture of desire and embarrassment, sensuality and affection.

Despite his apparent abhorrence of the situation, the human found some way to enjoy himself as well. Thace took selfish comfort in that, loathing himself for placing the young human in such a precarious position. He needed to do something before –

The human nodded once and mouthed, Go.

So Thace went.

Thace wondered about the boy throughout the week, especially during meetings between Sendak and Prorock. But Sendak never gave any indication that he hid a human lover – or any lover – in his quarters. As always, he was professional, caustic, and brutal. Thace began to worry, guilt gnawing him. Had he damned that boy? If Sendak found out about his betrayal, no doubt the boy
would be punished, if not killed.

Not to mention, the rebellion on Pollux would be destroyed since Sendak’s fleet received their orders to leave. Thace had yet to find any useful information to stop them, and he debated trying to sneak into Sendak’s quarters again when a knock sounded at his door.

“An order for you, Lieutenant,” a page for the Command’s facilities announced, and frustrated, Thace tore open the door.

“I didn’t order anything – ”

“Fresh zebu,” the page offered, lifting up the tray. “Commander Sendak’s guest requested it sent to you.”

Once alone, Thace lifted up the dish’s cover to find a half-eaten zebu dish – and the encrypted chip the boy had placed on Sendak’s datapad.

The stolen files gave Thace the information he needed – Sendak’s fleet size, the battle strategies, even the attack times, plus the resistance location on Pollux. It allowed the Blade of Marmora enough time to reach out, secure an alliance with the rebels, and help them to continue their crusade against the empire.

Thace didn’t see Sendak’s human lover again – until he stepped into the Hilt and saw the boy standing between Antok and Ulaz. Kolivan pointedly kept a few feet away, arms crossed, face unsettlingly stern. He wanted no part in a human becoming a member of their organization.

The boy was different than Thace last saw him, and as Thace stepped up to greet him, his eyes fell to the boy’s face, where he carried the sins of his past for all to see.

No wonder Ulaz called for Thace. He wanted to know just how much the lieutenant knew – and how dire the situation was.

How far would Sendak go to reclaim his chosen mate?

Unfortunately, Thace couldn’t say, but he doubted Ulaz or Kolivan would like the answer. He dismissed the thought for the time being and instead, met Kolivan first, nuzzling the leader’s chin and shoulder in a proper pack greeting. The leader relaxed perceptively, his hardened expression melting into a kinder glower, if possible. Then Antok stole Thace away, followed by Ulaz, who whispered with his greeting, “Thank you for coming.”

The human wasn’t quite a member of their pack – Thace wasn’t sure if he ever would be – so he offered the nervous boy a hand and a comforting smile.

“I’m Thace,” his voice said. I won’t be reveal your secret, his eyes relayed. “Welcome to the Blade of Marmora.”

With Ulaz’s hand upon his shoulder and the half-breed’s tail wrapped about his knee, the human visibly relaxed and accepted the proffered hand. “Takashi Shirogane – and this is my little brother, Keith.”

“It is as you believe,” Thace informed Ulaz later, in the privacy of their own quarters. “The boy bears Sendak’s mating mark. He is the commander’s lover and property.”

“Hm.” Ulaz poured himself a drink and offered one to Thace as well. “That is unfortunate but perhaps it is to be expected. Life is not kind to his breed.”
“Oh?” Thace let out an incredulous laugh. “I was unaware that humans are prone to joining our organization, unsettling our leader, and taking commanders as lovers.”

Ulaz focused upon his drink as he spoke. “That boy is a Paladin of Voltron.”

Thace’s glass slipped from his hand and shattered upon the floor.
First Mission

Chapter Summary

Shiro gets his first mission with the Blade of Marmora, and he’s not happy with Kolivan’s choice for his partner.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“You’re with me, little one.”

Dressed in his uniform of the Blade of Marmora, Shiro glanced up at his new, monolithic partner and tried not to gulp. “Little one? Antok, you know I’m eighteen.”

“And I am 463. That makes you an infant to me.”

Shiro sighed. Why couldn’t he be paired with Ulaz or Thace? Why did Antok have to be his partner on his first mission as a Blade?

Antok patted him on the head like a cat. “If you can’t keep up, let me know. I’ll carry you.”

“Kolivan!”

The leader never even glanced up from his datapad. “You will go with Antok or not at all.”

What did he do to deserve this punishment?

“They want to protect you,” Thace murmured at his side. “So Kolivan placed our largest warrior with our smallest. It is nothing against you, Shiro, but we’ve never had a human in our ranks before.”

Ulaz would add later, “It will get better once you have been with us for several missions.”

For now, though, Shiro had to endure a tail wrapping about his waist and tugging him back. “Hm. That should keep you close,” Antok muttered more to himself than to Shiro.

Shiro just banged his head against the nearest wall.

Chapter End Notes

If you’re interested in reading more Blade!Shiro, check out the Blade!Shiro masterpost.

Thanks for reading!
Chapter Summary

Kolivan tries to save Shiro the only way he knows how - and Ulaz is not pleased.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Neither spoke of the situation, perhaps a shared character flaw of leadership, but when Kolivan and Shiro returned from a mission to the Yggiz Galaxy, Kolivan’s reservations about their human member vanished. He wasn’t warm to Shiro by any means – Kolivan could never be warm – but he was accepting and tolerant. He no longer avoided Shiro and opted to stand next to their youngest warrior. He listened to his thoughts on the battle strategies as he would every other Blade. He welcomed Shiro into the Hilt at night to decrypt and complete random tasks needed for their members in the field, almost as if Shiro’s presence was a welcome comfort during the long, isolated nights the Blades’ leader endured.

And when Shiro grew out of his old Blade uniform and needed a new one, Kolivan oversaw the transition. Gone were the glowing dual lines of purple translucence and the tight jumpsuit, replaced by a robe-like cloak. Long, curved shoulder pads added extra armor and yet managed to accent Shiro’s smaller but muscular frame. A thick, lavender strap crossed his chest, tucking into a second line of cloth at his left hip, which wrapped around his waist and back. Held together by a brown, heavy belt, the overcoat hung below his bottom and scooped behind his knees. Sturdy but flexible boots, the glowing mask, and the all-encompassing hood remained from his previous attire.

Ulaz started the next time he stepped into the Hilt and saw Shiro in his new uniform. “Is Shiro wearing the cloak of the Son of the Blade?”

“Yes,” Antok hissed.

“Does Shiro know what it means?”

“I do not believe so.”

“Kolivan!” the Galra researcher bellowed, making quick work of the command center’s space. This was a travesty, a violation, and Ulaz would not allow it. “This is unacceptable. You cannot make decisions for him without his knowledge.”

An intense beat passed, Ulaz snarling at their leader while Kolivan simply responded with a tolerant glare. Shiro shifted from his position, less than six inches away and stranding between both. He glanced at Ulaz, then Kolivan, back to Ulaz, and then to Antok, who shrugged, before looking back at the rest of the Blades in the Hilt.

He truly looked his age – nineteen, the youngest Blade, their smallest Blade, and currently, their most confused one.

“You’re all dismissed,” Kolivan relented, to which Shiro let out an infinitesimal sigh. He started away, only for Ulaz to fist the back of his new cloak and keep him close. Other than a grunt of
surprise, Shiro sighed and resigned to his fate.

“You are not to speak to me again in that manner,” Kolivan replied, cool and reserved, “especially in front of the others.”

“And you cannot bestow marks of death upon others without their knowledge.”

Kolivan scoffed, “I bestowed a privilege.”

“It is a suicide mission.”

“You’re being melodramatic,” Kolivan dismissed with a roll of his eyes. “I am simply appealing destiny, and in any case, it is not for you to disapprove, Ulaz.”

Ulaz dealt with Commander Sendak on a daily basis, and yet in those frustrating times, he never felt such rage. “Are you actively trying to kill Shiro now?”

“Huh?” The boy in his grip wiggled, but couldn’t twist away.

Ulaz ignored him. “Our collective goal should be to save the Paladins, not to – ”

“What makes you believe I am doing otherwise?” Kolivan’s voice sounded restrained, vaguely offended.

Ulaz halted, the air stolen from his lungs, and he glanced down at the being still in his fierce grip.

Shiro writhed again and tugged once, twice for his freedom but to no avail. “Do I need to be here for this?”

Ulaz held firm, though, and his grip was perfectly placed, directly between Shiro’s shoulder blades where the young warrior could not reach. Shiro looked like a cub held by the scruff of his neck, and by his pitiful expression, he must have felt like one, too.

Unlike Ulaz had ever seen, Kolivan relented, his expression surprisingly open and haggard. “Reality became...distorted upon Dvask. Impossibly so. When a sentry shot at me and Shiro, the blast passed right through us.”

Ulaz froze. His heart stopped, and the air caught in his chest burned with vicious realization. His hand tightened and trembled in the back of Shiro’s cloak, enough so that Shiro twisted in his grip to look up at the Galra researcher.

“Ulaz?”

In that moment, Kolivan and Ulaz shared the harrowing truth in their gaze, and it weighed heavily upon their souls.

“There is most certainly a suicide mission, Ulaz,” Kolivan divulged in a strangled murmur, “but it is not mine to impose.”

No, it wasn’t, and by the way Shiro whipped around to stare at Kolivan, Ulaz knew the leader’s melancholy tone was not imagined. Like the rest of them, Kolivan ached – feared – for their youngest warrior, and instead of reacting, Kolivan decided to fight the turbulent course that destiny set.

As if he had any say, as if there was a different path for the chosen, as if by Kolivan choosing Shiro to be the Son of the Blade, he could safeguard Shiro from the dangerous road ahead. But he
knew the undeniable truth – Shiro, and most likely Keith as well, would be swept up in the brutal war that was to come, and though Kolivan could not stop it, he could make sure every resource was made available to their youngest warrior. Every training was tailored to his developing skills and talent, every tool made available for his disposal. The Blade of Marmora would set the firm foundation needed for Shiro to undertake the impossible task presented to him.

For the one who challenge the ruler of the known universe, Zarkon himself, they could do no less.

"Ulaz? Kolivan?” Shiro asked, squirming again. He started to unhook his belt to shed his cloak. “Is everything alright?”

Kolivan let out a shuttering breath, and Ulaz jerked Shiro back against him now, arms folding over the boy’s shoulders from behind. “Shiro, Kolivan has something to tell you.”

Kolivan’s eyes grew comically wide before narrowing in a wordless admonishment, and if the situation wasn’t dire, Ulaz would have chuckled. Instead, he glanced down to see Shiro staring at Kolivan, anxious but patient. Thankfully, Kolivan didn’t make him wait long.

“What? Kolivan?” he said, calm, collected, though Ulaz could tell Kolivan was apprehensive as well, his hands gripped tightly behind his back. “It designates you as next-in-session for the Blade of Marmora’s leadership.”

Shiro blinked, obviously shocked, mouth open and dry, before he said slowly, “You chose me to be your apprentice?”

“…yes.”

“Why? I thought – You don’t even…” like me.

Kolivan shifted, looking equally uncomfortable and unhinged, before he reached out, gripping Shiro’s cloak by the front wraps and straightening the robe. “I have been the leader of the Blade of Marmora for almost two decafeeb, and in that time, I found no other worthy.” Not giving Shiro time to accept, Kolivan continued, “Your training will intensify. You will spend more time with me in the Hilt, mastering strategies and other necessary skills. Every mission, you will join me, and you will watch. You will learn, and you will survive.”

Because there was no other outcome. The Blade of Marmora wouldn’t allow it.

Chapter End Notes

If you're interested in reading more of this series, check out the Blade!Shiro masterpost. I have two more stories that hopefully should be up this week, most likely on Tumblr first. Thanks!
Sometimes the hardest battles are the ones we fight against ourselves, but they are winnable if we have the right weapons, which in Shiro’s case is his new, eccentric but caring family.

Every family was unique, but Shiro truly believed the Blade of Marmora took the food goo.

Antok was that favorite older brother who always teased Shiro and Keith, ruffling their hair and calling them out on the training deck, but he also sneaked them snacks after the kitchen closed. He took them out of the headquarters when he wasn’t supposed to, and while Shiro still hesitated leaving his new home, Antok always watched out for him and Keith, sticking especially close to Shiro to make sure another Galra couldn’t claim him as their own.

Thace was that awesome uncle who never came around often enough but brought the best presents, like new weapons to try and awesome moves to use on your mortal enemies. Keith took an immediate liking to the older Galra, and though Shiro initially feared Keith alone in any Galra’s presence, Thace easily won his trust after Keith mistakenly found himself on the training decks and Thace saved him from being harmed during a sparring match.

Shiro would never admit it out loud, but Ulaz was his and Keith’s mother figure. Strong but doting, demanding but supportive, Ulaz eased Shiro’s discomfort with his reassuring presence. But Ulaz went away for weeks at a time as a research scientist for the empire, and Shiro missed him greatly during his absence. Like Thace cared for Keith, Ulaz took a special interest in Shiro, and the older Galra made Shiro feel a sense of belonging as a member of the Blade of Marmora.

Kolivan was the disapproving father. No matter what Shiro did – whether it be champion the trials or help Antok secure new information from Thace or Ulaz – Shiro could never earn praise from the leader. On the training decks, Kolivan pushed Shiro harder than the rest, always criticizing his technique and strength, despite the fact that Shiro barely reached Kolivan – or any of the Galra’s – shoulders.

“Battling the empire is not a fair fight,” Kolivan chastised when Shiro wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, “so you will not be afforded the luxury of one here.”

Kolivan never showed Shiro any comfort or offered him a kind word.

Except.

Almost every night, Shiro woke drenched in a cold sweat, a strangled scream caught in the back of his throat. He gasped for air, clenching the front of his shirt as the nightmares – no, the horrific memories – resurfaced. A few moments passed before he recognized the dark surroundings, found his little brother’s sleeping form on the bed across the room, and managed to gather his bearings.
The datapad next to his bed read 3:53, and rubbing his hands down his slick face, Shiro muffled a thick groan. He wouldn’t be getting back to sleep anytime soon.

As his trembling faded, Shiro threw off his covers and padded his way to Keith’s bed. The young half-breed let out a strained whine when Shiro heaved the limp form into his arms and cradled Keith’s bottom with both arms.

“You are getting too old for me to carry, kid,” Shiro grunted.

Keith’s slender arms just wrapped around Shiro’s neck as per routine, cheek snuggling against Shiro’s chest, hair and fur tickling Shiro’s chin.

When a soft hum rumbled in Shiro’s chest, Keith fell back asleep, and Shiro carried him through the quiet halls of the Blades’ headquarters.

Despite the blue sun, the base had no set day or night, but late into the universal standard time, most of the Blades either slept or were finishing their night’s activities. By now, the main command center would be empty, so Shiro detoured to a smaller chamber just off of it. Purple and violet lights brightened the dark interior, while a small, square table occupied the center of the room, complete with 3D-computer capabilities. A leather control area sat just to the left of it, but a large, three-screen console captured every member’s attention the moment they entered.

The room was unofficially known as “The Hilt,” a strategizing area for the highest-level Blade members, and by placing his hand upon the side panel, Shiro gained entrance.

Only Kolivan remained in The Hilt at this late hour with Antok out and both Thace and Ulaz back in their roles at the Galra Empire’s Central Command. Kolivan glanced up from his datapad, speaking to someone in his earpiece, and he barely kept eye contact with Shiro for a full second. With a sharp nod of acknowledgement, the leader resumed working.

Shiro said nothing, only cradled Keith close as he took residence at the smaller console. The bench had been made to fit a large Galra fighter easily, and thanks to his and Keith’s relatively smaller bulk, they managed to occupy it comfortably. Keith burrowed against Shiro’s side, legs folding onto the bench. His head lay upon Shiro’s thigh while his tail curled about Shiro’s waist with the tiny tuff brushing back and forth against Shiro’s hip. Shiro rested his hand upon his little brother’s crown and ruffled his hair until Keith settled once more.

Without saying a word, Kolivan uploaded the first set of files from his datapad onto Shiro’s console, and the transparent violet screens popped up in front of Shiro. He went to work, decoding the files as per the Blades’ decryption. He compiled a few schematics, made notes on entry points and exit routes, security protocols. When he finished one set, he move on to the second, third, fifteenth. Anything Kolivan needed, Shiro completed, keeping his mind focused and on task. With Keith’s warmth against his side and Kolivan’s firm voice in his ears, Shiro clung to sanity.

But eventually, the past snuck up on Shiro, seizing him by his remaining bearings and dragging him down into the abyss of despair. Shiro’s body curled in on itself. Blood pounded his ears. His breathing hitched. His hands shuddered, and despite stuffing them in his elbows, he couldn’t stop the trembling from spreading to the rest of his body.

He ducked his head, eyes unseeing, the world fading, but before the memories swallowed him whole, a sturdy hand palmed his head. Large, thick fingers stretched from his forehead to the curve of his neck, and the steady weight tugged him back to present.

Kolivan’s fingers dug into Shiro’s mop, his fingertips massaging Shiro’s scalp and trailing through
the soft strands. He repeated the motion, claws sharp but not painful, relaxing and kind as they carded through Shiro’s bangs and along the crown.

*Petting*. There was no other word for Kolivan’s ministrations, and it grounded Shiro to the here and now, welcoming him back from the depths of Hell.

“Breathe, Shiro,” Kolivan advised, voice pitched not just to soothe but also to command, and Shiro listened.

When Shiro’s chin ducked, Kolivan forcibly lifted it with an admonishing hand. Shiro’s passage ways cleared, and the tension in his chest slowly began to uncoil.

“You are here, a member of the Blade of Marmora, safe and away from the empire,” Kolivan continued in a gentle rumble. “No harm shall come to you here.”

Yes. Ulaz saved him. Him and Keith. Keith, his little brother who currently warmed his side, whose tail tightened subconsciously about his waist. The Blade of Marmora took them in – Ulaz and Thace and Antok and Kolivan – and they protected them with a fierceness only rivaled by his stepmother.

Strong, overbearing, demanding Kolivan ruffled the tiny strands on the curve of his neck, sucked in deep breaths to help Shiro steady his own breathing, and swept away the screens from in front of the console. He then settled before Shiro and locked eyes with him.

“Tell me about your home planet,” he encouraged. “Tell me what you remember.”

With his fingers submerged in Keith’s ruffled mop, the other hand gripping Kolivan’s, Shiro did. He spoke of the deserts and the willow trees. He spoke of his biological mother’s home country and the cherry blossoms. He spoke of mac and cheese and pop-tarts and lattes.

Shiro spoke of his stepmother and how she refused to leave Keith and him on Earth. She kept them safe and sheltered, even in the Galra Empire, until she left.

At first, his voice was tight, brittle, and hoarse, but moment after moment, it grew in strength and conviction.

Keith woke up briefly during Shiro’s muttering, shifted and yawned. After he climbed into his brother’s lap, he brushed his face against Shiro’s shoulder to spread his scent once more and then abruptly fell back asleep. But the motion brought Shiro completely back to the present, and he went boneless against the seat, cheek resting upon his brother’s crown.

“I am interested in this…pop-tart,” Kolivan offered, firm hand still resting upon Shiro’s shoulder. “One day, we must travel to Earth to try it.”

Shiro couldn’t imagine Kolivan’s face after trying the sweet flavors of the pastries. “I-I would like that,” he managed, pressing a gentle kiss to the top of his brother’s head.

Kolivan’s eyes remained steady, locked with Shiro’s, and once he saw whatever he needed, he rose and resumed his duties. But he spent the rest of the night close to Shiro, leaning upon the chair’s arm when necessary, working on his datapad and speaking to those in the field, while Shiro completed what was asked of him.

Like usual, Shiro wouldn’t remember falling asleep, but he’d wake up in a large chamber with plush bedding and a minimalist décor, Keith shifting next to him, tail tickling Shiro’s exposed skin. A blanket and pillow lay across the room’s couch, where Kolivan must have spent what was left of
the night. Rain clamored on the floor from the bathroom, signaling the start of a new day.

Shiro would take the morning brew from the side table, where Kolivan left a mug for him, and return to his own quarters to shower and change. Twenty minutes later, Kolivan’s stentorian voice would echo against the training deck’s walls, unrelenting and condemning. He’d push Shiro to his limits and then demand he exceed them, and when Shiro faltered, Kolivan would snarl at him to try again.

During the day, Shiro would never be good enough, could never meet the leader of the Blade of Marmora’s unrealistic expectations, but at night, Kolivan refused to let Shiro be swallowed by the sins of his past.

Because the leader of the Blades of Marmora was a double-edged dagger, one Shiro carried with him into every battle, even the one against his own mind.

Chapter End Notes

I originally didn't want to post back-to-back Shiro & Kolivan chapters, but then - well, I didn't have any ideas for stories in between. Of course, now I have one with Keith and Antok, so that might be coming up in a few days. If I end up posting it, I'll make sure to let you know in later chapter notes.

Check out the Blade!Shiro masterpost for more stories on Tumblr.
Introduction to Galra Culture

Chapter Summary

Shiro can’t leave Keith with Thace for five minutes without something happening to the kid.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Takashi! Isn’t it cool?”

He was gone for five minutes. *Five minutes!* He just went with Antok and Kolivan for a quick reconnaissance mission, and this happens?

Shiro pinned Thace with an incredulous glower. “You gave my brother a mohawk?”

Thace looked confused, glancing down at the lively Keith, who now sported a thick but single line of black hair from his bangs to the curve of his neck.

Thace blinked. “What is a… mohawk? I simply gave the cub the customary hairstyle of our kind.”

The ridged hair of the Galra wasn’t genetic but rather a grooming ritual?

“You wish to live among us, but you do not want to learn our customs? Or your brother to learn his culture?” Antok’s gruff voice sounded offended.

Shiro sighed and held out his arms, welcoming the energetic Keith into them. “Come on, kiddo. If we can’t beat ‘em, we might as well join them.”

“You gonna cut your hair, too?” Keith asked, tugging on Shiro’s long bangs.

“Nope.” Shiro allowed himself a mischievous little smile. “I’m going to dye your hair purple and then take some pictures.”

Keith wrapped his tail about Shiro’s wrist and cocked his head to the side. “Why?”

“Because one day, you’re going to be old enough to give me some serious hassle, and I’m going to need all the blackmail material I can get.”

Of course, after Keith took on Zarkon, Shiro threatened to show Lance the pictures. Keith hasn’t taken an unnecessary risk since.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve written a few metas on Tumblr thanks to some awesome peeps and questions on
Tumblr, and hopefully, I've have a longer story up, either tonight or tomorrow based on one of the inquiries. You can find the posts here - Blade!Shiro masterpost (but you probably know that already). Thanks!
Chapter Summary

While Keith is accepted into the Blades’ pack, Shiro is not, and the future Black Paladin is forced to come to some difficult realizations.

Chapter Notes

Beware of feels; Shiro-angst (SFW)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shiro noticed it during his first night at the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters. Thace greeted Kolivan with a gentle caress, his cheek brush against the leader’s strong jaw, and he watched after every mission, every parting, every intimate encounter. The Blades nuzzled – in groups. Only Kolivan, Thace, Ulaz, and Antok touched as such, while other members of the Blades offered the pack an arm clasp – hands upon elbows, an equivalent of a human handshake, Shiro gathered.

Shiro kept to himself, continued to observe and wonder – until Thace returned after a rather long period away. When Keith greeted him, leaping into the older Galra’s arms, Thace brushed his cheek along Keith’s jaw in a tender embrace.

Shiro took notice and waited until they were alone.

“What was that?” he asked, sitting at his designated console in the Hilt and moving through the security protocols.

Thace continued his work on his datapad without looking. “You need to be more specific.”

Shiro searched for the correct word. “That…caress you gave Keith earlier, across his jaw. I’ve seen you and Antok do it to Kolivan and Ulaz a few times.”

“Ooh. The traditional pack greeting,” Thace supplied. “It’s how familiar Galra greet one another. I assume humans have similar affirmations with their mates and chosen kin.”

Shiro made quick mental notes. Packs equated to families, and the embrace mirrored a hug or a kiss, which meant…

“You’ve accepted Keith into your pack,” Shiro concluded, schooling his face to remain neutral, open.

Thace blinked, taken back by the declaration, but nodded nonetheless. “…yes. Galra adopt familiars into their pack as they see fit. It is not something that needs to be said, so much as demonstrated. Is permission needed in human customs? Should I have asked you for it?”
Actions required; words redundant. Check.

“N-No. Humans tend to voice important decisions and...affections, I guess.” Wow. This was a conversation he never thought he’d have. “But no. You didn’t need to ask my permission.”

While he might have been Keith’s “guardian,” per se, the Blades – Kolivan especially – took a parental role with Keith, and Shiro welcomed sharing the responsibility of his little brother with such strong and protective warriors.

“I’m—I’m glad you have welcomed Keith into your—your pack.” And Shiro meant it. “He needs others to rely on, not just me.”

That came out harsher than he meant it to, but it was the truth. He wanted Keith to have a family and a life. Ancients forbid something happened to him, Keith would be able to find solace in the other members of the Blade and carry on. A measure of relief swelled within Shiro, and he used it to drown the absurd distress that simmered in his gut.

While Keith had been accepted into the Blades’ pack, Shiro had not.

He banished the screens before his console with one desperate swipe and rose to his feet.

“Excuse me, Thace. I have to—uh—check on Keith. I left him with Antok, and the last time that happened, he ended up stuck in the flux cluster range for three vargas.”


Shiro shrugged, allowing that to serve as his reply, and started out when Thace called, “Are you all right, Shiro? You seem...distracted.”

“Fine,” Shiro followed, perhaps too quickly. “Just—want to check on Keith.”

He left without another word and made quick work of the empty halls of the Blade of Marmora headquarters, finally reaching the small observatory room just beyond his and Keith’s chambers. It barely fit a half-circle couch and a small minibar with various snacks and drinks, but the screen that spread along the far wall drew Shiro time and time again. The stunning space-scape, including the blue star just outside the Blades’ headquarters, soothed Shiro’s turbulent emotions, and if only to himself, Shiro called the space his “treehouse.”

Instead of taking a seat on the plush cushions, he slipped into the tiny space between the couch and the wall, pulling his knees to his chest and dropping his chin to the top.

He thanked the Ancients for the Blades every day. They saved him and Keith where their own parents wouldn’t, taught them how to fight and how to survive in the Galra Empire, but Shiro wanted to be part of their pack.

He wanted to accept the nuzzles and affection, to know he was wanted and accepted like Keith. And he understood why he wasn’t. Keith was Galra, part of Kolivan and Ulaz and Thace’s own species. Shiro was human – different, foreign, tolerated not celebrated. Though he’d been given the rank of Son of the Blade, it was a formal position in the Blade of Marmora, not in Kolivan’s pack. And while Ulaz called them family – family was a human term. Perhaps he didn’t understand just how deep those bonds ran, believing “family” meant friends.

It was times like these Shiro missed his parents.

He missed Moira’s warm embraces, her towering height and firm muscle cradling his smaller form.
He always felt comfortable and safe in her arms. He missed his father, how he used to place Shiro between his bent knees on the roof of the desert shack and point out the sparkling constellations in the night sky.

He even missed his birth mother, with whom he spent the first six years of his life. When she was chosen for a prestigious mission by the Galaxy Garrison, she left him with Ryou, who knew nothing about Shiro prior to that. A one-night stand. Attraction, not affection, led to Shiro, and perhaps that was why she never came back for him. Perhaps she never wanted him, either.

Perhaps no one ever wanted him.

A sudden wave of light-headedness swept over Shiro, and – and – were his arms and legs...fading? They appeared transparent with a white outline that positively glowed in the darkened treehouse, and he squeezed his eyes shut, throwing his hands up in front of his face. As the smooth leather of his gloves slid down his wet cheeks, Shiro opened his eyes – and gasped.

Before him lay a translucent ground of infinite space, and draped across the heavens twinkled brilliant red and blue stars. An inky black moon ruled overhead, reminding Shiro of a solar eclipse, but instead of burning yellow light, a pulsating purple glow outlined its massive frame. The lovely color spread across the entire landscape – from the feathery clouds stretching across the sky to Shiro’s own body. He no longer encompassed a physical manifestation but rather took a metaphysical one, the same color that accented the landscape.

Shock kept his body still, though he flinched when a resounding roar tore through the plane. His head snapped up to see a black lion – all fierce and majestic – prowling toward him in a slow stride of control and prestige. It stopped mere inches from Shiro’s still form, and Shiro should have been frightened. He should have trembled and ran or played dead. Instead, a sense of remorse whittled his gut. This lion, with its sharp eyes and loud growl, reduced him to more than a sniveling child, and he bowed his head in reverence.

Of course his thoughts were irrational. Of course others wanted him. Keith all but worshipped the ground he walked on, the foolish cub, and Shiro selfishly indulged in his affection. But it didn’t change the truth. Keith was stuck with him, thanks to blood and their parents’ abandonment. Kolivan first denied him the right to join the Blades, simply because of his race. And Sendak – Sendak sought to own him.

Shiro wasn’t wanted by anyone in the universe.

He jerked when a thick, warm tongue dragged over his cheek, lapping up his tears. Shiro stayed perfectly still as the lion continued its ministrations, its teeth gleaming at Shiro’s eye level, but the lion never strayed, never threatened. It simply attended to Shiro until his cheeks felt clammy and tight, and then – and only then – did it lower its head and brush its velvety mane across Shiro’s jaw.

In a traditional pack greeting.

All the lion’s hard work was for naught as Shiro dove forward, arms wrapping about the lion’s head and neck like a vice, fingers knotting in the lion’s mane. Ugly sobs wracked his being, and he didn’t try to control them, didn’t try to stifle them, his heart burning with the desire to release. Instead, he just pressed his face into the lion’s mane and allowed it to sop up all the pain and heartache he had carried.

After what seemed like an eternity, his tears dried, and he regarded the lion, who simply repeated the traditional greeting before leaning forward to press its forehead against Shiro’s. The lion’s
warmth swept up Shiro’s soul, cradling it in its consoling hold, and through their new bond, Shiro heard one word, thrummed over and over again.

Mine.

“Takashi?” a tight, worried voice called to him. It sounded like a whisper but echoed across the star-scape. “Takashi?”

The lion bowed its head, offering Shiro one last embrace before allowing his departure, and suddenly, a tiny hand clutched Shiro’s wrist. It tugged, demanding he return to reality, and at first, Shiro thought it would never be powerful enough to break the plane. Then it yanked with all its might, and the desperate tug dragged his soul back into its own body. When his eyes snapped open, soft strands of Galra fur caressed his jaw.

Keith.

Keith offered him the traditional pack greeting.

Tears stung in the corner of Shiro’s eyes again, but before they could fall, Keith chastised him, yellow eyes blown-wide with concern. “Takashi, what happened! One minute you were like – I don’t know – a ghost or something. Antok couldn’t even see you!”

Shiro glanced over Keith’s head to see Antok standing less than ten feet away. The Blade waited, just out of hovering range, watching closely as Shiro came to his senses.

“Are you all right?” he asked, tentative and soft, as if he feared to know the answer.

Shiro wasn’t sure he could explain what happened, only that he found a piece of his soul somewhere on an astral plane. Even with the newfound peace in his heart, Shiro didn’t know if he’d ever be whole again, but he belonged somewhere, even if it wasn’t in reality. And that – that gave him the strength to ruffle Keith’s hair and smile.

“I’m fine,” Shiro finally admitted, sighing for what felt like the first time in ages. “Just…tired, I guess. Been a long few years.”

Skeptical indigo eyes studied him, but before Keith could call bullshit, Antok stepped forward and hoisted Shiro to his feet. The Galra’s massive hand encompassed Shiro’s shoulder to steady him, and then something brushed against the top of his head – not quite a traditional pack greeting but a soothing gesture nonetheless.

“Come,” Antok commanded, leading Shiro from the darkened chambers. “Kolivan has returned. He wishes to see you.”

Shiro nodded and allowed himself to be led away, only grunting when Keith rammed into his side and latched onto his hip.

Maybe he wouldn’t ever be accepted as part of the Blades’ pack. Maybe he couldn’t be as a human, but these Galra warriors cared for him and protected him just the same. And with Keith’s warmth against his side, the Black Lion’s soothing lifeforce in his soul, and Antok’s firm but steady presence at his back, Shiro forged ahead.

Kolivan waited.
If you're interested in learning more about Shiro and Keith's parents, I did a meta about it. Hope you enjoy!
Chapter Summary

In which Kolivan loses his "universe's best Galra!dad mug."

Chapter Notes

Warning: Past sexual acts are implied but not explicitly discussed.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three Annuals Ago

Sendak’s lips quivered with barely restrained rage. His teeth gleamed in the dim light of the bedroom, and the vicious countenance of his usually reserved features injected a heavy dose of fear into Shiro.

“Enough excuses,” the Galra commander snapped, voice resounding with sharp reproach. “I have been generous with your freedom for far too long. It’s time you learned your place.”

Frustration and fear fueled the violent trembling of Shiro’s fists, and no amount of sheer will could stop them. “You don’t own me, Sendak. I can’t –”

“You just killed someone, Takashi. A soldier, no less, a lieutenant who served under Commander Marvok.”

The truth cut low and quick, as did the desperation. “He was going after Keith. I-I couldn’t let him –”

Sendak paused, amber eyes averting to the small being asleep upon the couch in the next room, swaddled in a mess of blankets and his brother’s large jacket. Shiro watched the commander closely. The Galra’s dark but casual dress of a simple black over jacket with maroon accents added a level of intimacy Shiro struggled to accept. Even now, Sendak’s face remained fierce and protective, and Shiro refused to acknowledge the commander’s immediate actions after finding Shiro next to Marvok’s bloody and lifeless subordinate.

“Do you know what this could cost me?” The commander’s harsh voice shook Shiro from his daze. “If anyone discovers I helped clean up your mess –”

Shiro’s fingers fidgeted with the soft creases of the plush robe. “I’m sorry. And thank you. You know I’m grateful for –”

“I do not want your gratitude. You will come live with me. Your brother will be sent off to the appropriate school –”

Shiro’s chin snapped up. “No!”
Sendak continued, undeterred, arms crossed. “He will be given the full rights of a Galra cub, assimilated into the empire as one of its potential recruits – ”

“You can’t do that! You have no right – ”

“It is you who has no rights.” Sendak’s cruel snarl pierced Shiro’s gut with pure panic. “You are an undocumented citizen, a lower lifeform, and as such, you will surrender completely to me.”

Shiro never felt so weak, so frightened, so enraged. “I’m not yours! I’ll never be yours, and I won’t ever surrender to – ”

Sendak’s attack came swift and effortlessly, teasing Shiro’s long bangs and brushing across the bridge of his nose. It reminded Shiro of the tender caresses and sweet poison the Galra commander embraced him with.

Until a warm sensation slid down cheeks and nose; pain rushed after it.

Shiro’s fingertips swiped across his face and came away wet and red.

“You have no choice in the matter,” Sendak sneered. “Your delusions of freedom end now.”

Now

“And only the commanders have access?”

Ulaz responded to Kolivan’s earnest inquiry with a nod, fingers tapping across the screen keypad to highlight the empire’s compound in Drule Central. The unbelievably tall building stretched high into the velvet sky, curving like a sickle and aglow with the eerie purple light of the Druids’ awesome power.

“Zarkon ordered his highest commanders back to Drule Central to discuss Haggar’s newest project,” Ulaz continued, voice altered and grating behind his Blade mask. “Sendak has been attending daily, along with Prorock, Morvok, Throk, and even Lotor.”

Antok shifted, arms crossing over his burly chest. “For the prince to attend means Zarkon believes the entire empire’s future resides upon this.”

“Which is why we need to find out what it is now,” Kolivan proclaimed. “Thace, has Prorock indicated the nature of this project?”

“Nothing.” The lieutenant sighed. “He has been returning more…reserved than usual. I might even say scared.”

“Sendak has been abnormally quiet as well,” Ulaz added, “but once he returns, he scours over schematics of Zarkon’s Central Command System. Perhaps the project means to transforms Zarkon’s command ship into a weapon in and of itself.”

Kolivan’s mask face gave away none of his emotions, and though his shoulders tensed, his hands rested perfectly poised in the center of his back. “What kind of weapon?”

“Any idea would be conjecture.”

Shiro listened patiently from his usual spot, a step to the side of Kolivan, eyes roaming about the
detailed schematic above. The Blades wore their masks, as per protocol, though that order never made sense to Shiro, especially when strategizing with Ulaz, Thace, Antok, and Kolivan. They all knew each other intimately, having worked together and lived together for almost three years, so there was no need to hide their identities from one another. But Shiro held his irrelevant reservations to himself, shrugging it off as another eccentric Galra custom, while Thace and Ulaz explained the difficulties of obtaining access to the infamous meeting chambers.

With magical wards, secret clearance codes, and limited assets, breaking into the Galra’s Central Command sounded like a suicide mission, so the better option would be to gain access through old-fashioned methods.

Seduction, and if that didn’t work, coercion.

“I’ll get in,” Shiro offered, pointedly ignoring the downward glower Kolivan’s slow head tilt indicated. “Can one of our techs rig an encryption key to send the data back here automatically?”

Antok’s grating voice echoed through the chamber’s silence, “And how do you plan to get in?”

Shiro swallowed the sudden bile that poisoned his voice. “It doesn’t matter. I can gain access to the room, but once in, I’m not sure I’ll be able to extract the information myself – ”

“You can gain access to one of the empire’s most guarded points, and you haven’t thought to tell us this before?” Kolivan admonished with more than a little incredulity.

Shiro briefly closed his eyes, the venomous thoughts threatening to buckle his knees. He didn’t want to acknowledge it, didn’t want to think about his past if he didn’t have to, though he did every time he looked in the mirror.

His stomach roiled as the bitter memories flashed before his eyes, and he appreciated the mask that hid his shameful emotions from the Galra whom he respected the most. He glanced away, briefly making eye contact with Thace and Ulaz, and the pity hit him hard. He forced himself to keep from fidgeting, from showing weakness in front of Kolivan, who scrutinized him with laser accuracy.

He was the Son of the Blade. Kolivan bestowed that honor upon him. He would be worthy of it.

“It wasn’t of any concern,” Shiro replied, proud of the firm edge in his voice, “and I can only use this strategy once.”

Sendak would never let him go a second time.

“Explain,” Kolivan ordered.

Shiro relented, jaw tight, anxiety and dread burning low and deep in the pit of his belly. “I know Sendak from…before,” as he referred to his time prior to the Blades. “He will see me if I request an audience.”

Kolivan’s shoulders bunched, and his head ducked until it hovered inches before Shiro’s shorter form. “How do you know?”

“He’s never said no to me before.” Three years had passed since their last meeting, but Shiro held no doubts that Sendak wouldn’t want to see him, even if only for less-than-innocent reasons.

Shiro shuttered at the thought, unable to hide his visual reaction from Kolivan, but the lapse of composure lasted less than a moment as Shiro hardened his resolve. If he needed to sacrifice himself to save the universe from the empire, then he would do what was necessary.
“Why would Sendak want to see you?” Kolivan all but accused, prompting Ulaz to step forward.

“Kolivan, we should talk – ”

“I did not ask you, Ulaz.”

“Dismiss the cub,” Thace agreed. “Shiro should not be part of this mission. There are other avenues to explore.”

The leader of the Blade of Marmora refused to yield, massive claws wrapping about Shiro’s shoulders. “What don’t they want me to know?”

Shiro trembled, but Kolivan persisted when Shiro’s chin dropped, claw tenderly tapping the bottom of the mask. Their glowing violet eyes met again, and despite the snarling disputes behind him, Kolivan remained firm. This, he would attain – like everything he had in life – through sheer determination and devoted concern.

Kolivan wanted nothing more to understand, and perhaps, that hurt Shiro the most.

“Tell me,” the leader demanded, and Shiro found his every defense crumbling. He could never speak of his physical transgressions, especially not to Kolivan, but he could give the leader a glimpse into his past without saying a word.

Though keeping his hood raised, Shiro deactivated his mask and traced his scar across the bridge of his nose. After a moment of absolute silence, the claws upon his shoulders contracted in a desperate, painful motion that twisted Shiro’s entrails.

“Kolivan – ”

Kolvian tore away then. Trembling hands tumbled off Shiro’s shoulders before he swung toward Ulaz and Thace, voice raw and shrieking in a way Shiro had never heard it before. “This – Right here. This is why we do not allow lower lifeforms in the Blade of Marmora!”

Lower lifeforms? Shiro flinched as if hit. Kolivan hadn’t referred to him with such disdain since that day he woke the blade at the Thaldycon base.

Ulaz stepped forward, hands rising to calm their leader. “Kolivan, you do not understand what has transpired – ”

“You knew of this when you brought him to the Thaldycon base,” Kolivan accused, scorn choking his words. “You knew of his connection to Sendak, and yet you still sought to allow his admission?”

“The Blade chose Shiro,” Antok offered, stepping between the advancing Ulaz and the snarling Kolivan. “He awakened it. He has every right to be among our ranks.”

“And he is not loyal to Sendak,” Ulaz added, ignoring the hand upon his shoulder. “He doesn’t even know what the mark – ”

Kolivan growled, “Regardless, he proposes to serve the empire once more in exchange for these plans.”

“Yes,” Thace agreed, “but it is out of his sense of duty to the Blade that he is willing to – ”

“ – fall to his knees like a proper mate? As if that makes it any less revolting, Thace.”
Nausea crept up the back of Shiro’s throat and spread a terrible taste over his tongue, and he only managed to retain any semblance of sanity out of sheer confusion.

“Mate?” he echoed, voice raspy and dry. “What do you mean by ‘proper mate’?”

Kolivan spun toward Shiro, and with the mask effectively shielding Kolivan’s features, Shiro could only imagine the incensed glare that would have burned his face and soul. “You were marked by Sendak and do not know? How is that remotely possible?”

Shiro kept silent, utterly abashed by the response that came a moment later, sputtered in a fit of pure rage.

“Galra mate for life, and when they choose their lover, they mark each other with a scar, generally across the face to ward off other Galra from courting their chosen one.” Disgust tainting his voice, Kolivan proclaimed, “Your scar marks you as the mate of Sendak, but as a lower lifeform, it also deems you his property.”

Shame slammed heard into Shiro’s gut, robbing him of air, but Kolivan continued, undeterred.

“We accepted you so young, I thought the scar to be superficial, but that is how you survived after your parents left, isn’t it? I am aware that lower lifeforms generally do not have the luxury of monogamy, but this! To be claimed by the highest commander of the Galra Empire – truly an abhorrent accomplishment, Shiro.”

Shiro heard Kolivan’s sardonic roar, but it sounded far away, almost as if Kolivan spoke to someone else. Shiro’s entire body flashed numb as the entire room went silent except for the heavy pounding of blood in his ear. He stood there, muscles locked and frozen, humiliation burning his face and spiking his stomach.

“Kolivan,” Antok admonished, and Kolivan hit off his mask, the tiny buzz echoing like a horn in the still Hilt.

Then Shiro saw a fate worse than anger – pity. It enveloped Kolivan’s crestfallen expression, and that one look severed the thin tether to sanity Shiro had managed to cling to.

Kolivan took a step forward, claw reaching toward Shiro. “Takashi – ”

But Shiro did the only thing he could do – activate his mask and flee the command chamber.

To Be Continued...

Chapter End Notes

xblackpaladin did an awesome photo set of Blade!Shiro. OMG! Make sure to check it out! And I’m holding a 653 followers giveaway on my Tumblr. Feel free to come by, follow, and send me a prompt. Thanks!
Chapter Summary

After Shiro’s former life is revealed to Kolivan, the youngest Blade copes with “help” from the Black Lion and Keith.

Chapter Notes

Special Thanks to Chris White, whose thoughtful review led to a great exploration into pack dynamics.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shiro’s chaotic thoughts threatened to pull him asunder as he dashed through the halls of the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters. He eventually came to the silent observation deck on the fourteenth level, and a quick scan found the room empty. He kept the deck dark, the wall-length viewer screen creating the only light. It showcased the blue star directly outside of the headquarters as well as other breathtaking space-scapes, and Shiro used its light to find his hiding place – the small alcove between the couch and the wall where no Galra could fit. Shiro managed to squeeze into the space, knees to his chest, face pressed against them, and while Keith could fit in the area and be completely consumed by the shadows, Shiro managed to blend into the scenery where someone would have to know of his presence to find him.

Quiet, raw, wounded, Shiro watched the star-scape scene shift to an outer galaxy with brilliant purple and blue stars, and glowing amber and turquoise planets. The calming colors soothed his aching soul for only a few minutes before the sucking void returned to his chest.

His first name. Kolivan called him by his first name. He’d never done that before.

Panic pulsed deep and true in Shiro again, and he clutched his legs tighter. His face bore a mating mark. Sendak had carved his ownership into Shiro’s skin and across the bridge of his nose for every Galra to see, which meant every Galra he ever encountered, every member of the Blade, knew he had been claimed.

Shiro vaguely remembered the scar across his father’s eyebrow, the one he’d gotten less than a year after Moira crash-landed on Earth, and Shiro’s heart ached.

He guessed he should have felt anger towards his parents – for leaving him and Keith alone in the middle of the ruthless Galra Empire, for giving him no other way to make a living, for forcing him into sexual chattel. Instead, he trembled at the thought of them finding out. Of Moira discovering just how weak he was, of Ryou discovering just how far his son had fallen. Of his birth mother back on Earth, from whom he received his charcoal eyes, pale skin, and name. Did she ever miss him or wonder where he went?

And Keith…What would his little brother say if he knew what Shiro endured to ensure their survival? Would he shun Shiro for his sordid past, or would he cry for his brother’s sins?
Shiro’s eyes squeezed shut as sorrow bubbled up his throat. Sobs threatened to choke him, and he blinked as a warm glow of something fierce and powerful, wise but uncertain, brushed against his side. His eyes snapped open, and he no longer occupied his treehouse. Instead, he gaped at a soothing indigo star-scape upon a bed of cosmos – the astral den of the Black Lion.

Shiro kept huddled upon himself, knees to his chest, back pressed against a rock formation. He wasn’t sure how he kept falling into the den, but during the few and far between missions when Kolivan left him back at the base, he came here, to his own little sanctuary in the middle of hell, to be with the one being who wanted him.

He wanted to hide from the universe, and he suspected this was the best place for it. No one could access the plane as far as he knew, and if his body disappeared from reality, so be it. Kolivan thought him a lower lifeform and would no doubt rescind Shiro’s position as Son of the Blade. He’d probably eject Shiro from the Blades for putting them all at risk.

Maybe Kolivan wouldn’t let him see Keith.

Shiro’s cheeks burned with fresh tears. His fists trembled, locked about his knees, and he wanted nothing more than to grab Keith and leave. They were older now, Shiro trained and able to fight any commander in Zarkon’s fleet to a standstill – but Keith would be safer here, away from the Galra Empire’s influence and safeguarded by the Blades. Shiro couldn’t take Keith from the only stable home he’d ever known, from his pack…could he?

A soft rumble of welcome sounded just over Shiro’s shoulder, followed by a warm caress of his jaw. The Black Lion’s concerned face hovered in Shiro’s vision, wondering, demanding what had hurt the other half of his soul. Shiro responded by brushing the lion’s mane and petting the side of its face, and despite being a majestic, metaphysical beast, the lion flopped into Shiro’s lap and panted with pure delight.

Shiro couldn’t help the wet smile he felt crinkling his face. He loved the Black Lion, and it adored him in return. Though his times with the majestic beast lasted only a few minutes each visit, Shiro longed to lay next to him, using its velvet mane as a pillow and enjoying the true affection they shared.

Why couldn’t he just stay here forever?

“Takashi?”

Keith. Right. Part of him wished to bring his brother to the astral plane and introduce Keith to the Black Lion, but Shiro couldn’t even control his own visits, let alone bring someone with him.

“Takashi?” Keith sounded more desperate now, just on this side of panicked, and then a hand snatched his glove, tugging him back.

Not yet. Shiro wasn’t ready to face reality – and Kolivan – but when Keith called, he came. He would always come, so he latched onto Keith’s soul once more and allowed it to lead him back. Suddenly awake and there, Shiro blinked at the irritated glower upon Keith’s baby face only inches away.

“You did it again,” his little brother accused.

Shiro sighed as feeling returned to his arms and legs, which were heavy and stiff from his time away. He wanted to tell Keith he wouldn’t do again, but he cherished his time with the Black Lion, perhaps the only being in the universe that actually sought his company.
Keith’s amber eyes glowed in the darkness of the treehouse, scrutinizing Shiro. Then he plopped onto the floor before his brother’s boots, crossing his legs and wrapping his tail loosely about Shiro’s ankle. “The Blades are looking for you.”

Shiro tensed. “You didn’t tell them where I am, did you?”

Keith’s gaze darkened. “No, but they seemed pretty pissed. What did you do this time?”

More like whom he did, though Shiro refused to follow that train of thought. “It’s-It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“Yeah, right.”

Keith reached to hit off Shiro’s mask, and without thinking, Shiro seized his wrist. Keith’s eyes immediately rounded before shifting to his hand, which shook in Shiro’s grasp. Shiro released him immediately but couldn’t stop his hands from shuttering. Kolivan’s shouts, Ulaz’s pleas, Sendak’s soft, velvet fur swiping across Shiro’s cheek – everything surfaced at once.

“I’m…” Keith hesitantly started to get up, tail whipping nervously. “I’m going to get the pack.”

“No!” Shiro’s hand shot out again, seizing Keith’s tail and stopping him from leaving. “I’m fine. Really. I just – I just need a minute, okay?”

Skepticism crept into Keith’s gaze, interrupted by a healthy dose of fear, and Shiro cursed himself but couldn’t stop shaking.

Keith sat again, ears drooped, tail lethargic. “Takashi, why can’t I get the pack?”

Sixty seconds. He asked for sixty freaking seconds of peace. “Keith, not now, okay?” His fingers slid back to knot behind his hood.

“But…you won’t take off your mask.”

Ancients. “Keith!”

“But Kolivan and Thace and Ulaz can – ”

Even as the heated words rushed from his mouth, Shiro cursed himself, but he couldn’t stop them from sounding. “They’re not my pack!”

Keith flinched; Shiro swore.

Silence reigned in the treehouse for a good three seconds before Shiro recoiled. The words that followed rose no louder than a sacred prayer. “I’m glad they accepted you into their pack, kiddo. I am. I want you to be loved and celebrated and – and to embrace Mom’s side. But Ulaz and Kolivan and Thace and Antok are your pack. I’m your family.”

“But you are pack,” Keith argued.

Shiro sighed and dipped his head back against the wall. “No, I’m not.”

“…yeah, you are.”

“No, Keith, I’m not.”

“Yeah, you are.”
“No, I’m not.”

“Yeahyouare!”

He couldn’t handle this right now. “Keith!”

“Then why do you smell of pack!” Keith challenged, tiny claws clutching Shiro’s knees as he hissed in his brother’s face. “If you’re not part of our pack, why do you smell like it?”

That wasn’t the response Shiro expected. “I-I smell like...”

“Like pack,” Keith insisted again, tail squeezing Shiro’s calf. “Thace said Galra packs mix their scents until it becomes one, and then they use it to mark each other. You smell like our pack.”

Shiro was done hoping for an inevitability that would never, could never be. Perhaps the Blades scented him for territory. Perhaps they scented by accident. Whatever the cause, he ruffled Keith’s hair and tried to keep the tears from his voice. “Keith, I-I’m not. I can’t be part of your pack.”

“You’re being stupid! Of course you can be pack,” Keith hissed, tail lashing behind him as he reached for Shiro’s mask, only for Shiro to catch his hand again. “Why can’t you be pack?”

Oh, wow. That hurt Shiro more than he ever thought possible. He’d been fortunate so far with many of the Blades accepting him in the ranks and as the Son of the Blade with very few questions and minor resistance. The fact that he was human was not an issue – other than with Kolivan – and outside in the empire, Shiro and Keith always accompanied one of the Blades. He might have worried, but he never feared he would need to fight for his freedom as a lower lifeform and an undocumented citizen. And Keith had been too young before to understand the power dynamic of the empire and how low Shiro was revered as a human. Now, though, older and more mature – Keith needed to understand Shiro’s chaste and how it differed from his own, even as a half-breed.

But Ancients – that smarted.

“Takashi,” Keith asked, low and wondering, hand still held in Shiro’s grasp, “what’s wrong your face? Why can’t I see it?”

As if burnt, Shiro let go of Keith’s hand.

In all truth, the mark across his face meant one thing – just another chaste to be trapped in. First, lower lifeform and now mate.

Shiro might not have been able to explain that tidbit yet – maybe he never would be able to – but he could address one of Keith’s questions, even if it was the second hardest thing he’d ever have to do.

“K-Keith …listen…it’s…there’s something you need to know…about me and the empire and – ”

“Ah, Keith. You found him,” Ulaz greeted, tone fond and indulgent as he entered the treehouse. He no longer wore his mask, his eyes fluffed out and twitching as he came forward. “Shiro, you ran out of the meeting before we could finish our discussion.”

So Kolivan could kick him out of the Blades faster than a Galra cruiser could make a hyperjump? No thanks.

Ulaz didn’t seem menacing at least. As he approached Shiro and Keith in a calm, reserved stride, he typed a few quick keys into his gauntlet before resting a gentle hand upon Keith’s nape.
“Cub, would you mind giving us for a few minutes alone? We have some developments to discuss.”

Shiro would have snorted if his heart hadn’t jumped into his throat.

Keith glanced up from under his dark curtain of bangs. “Does it have to do with Takashi’s mask?”

“Keith!” Shiro shrilled, but Keith just rolled his eyes – or the Galra equivalent.

“What.”

Shiro forced himself to remain still as Keith trotted out, though his frayed nerves remained raw. Would this be the last time he saw Keith? No, no. He was stronger now. He could fight and he would fight for his brother. The Blades couldn’t separate them.

Ulaz took a seat on the couch, far enough away not to intrude on Shiro’s personal space but still close enough to be of comfort. His hood bunched upon his shoulders, allowing Shiro to see the complete look of pity on the Galra’s face. It wounded him in ways he didn’t want to admit.

“Kolivan handled the situation wrong, Shiro,” Ulaz began, soft and soothing. “You deserved better, but please listen to him. He cares very deeply for you.”

But not enough to make him part of the pack. Not enough to accept him into the Blade as an equal. Not enough to overlook his past as a body seller.

Shiro strained to keep his voice steady, and somehow, it still came out tight. “Ulaz, I appreciate all you’ve done for Keith and me, but please don’t patronize me. How long do I have until Kolivan kicks me out?”

Ulaz jerked, eyes rounded and shocked. “What!”

“You know he’s not going to stand for this. I’d appreciate at least a transport for Keith and me, maybe to one of the Faraway Systems? And maybe I can take a change of clothes with us, if that’s possible.”

“You’re not going anywhere.”

Kolivan’s caustic voice thundered through the small treehouse and fueled Shiro’s trembles again. The Blades’ leader stood in the doorway, flanked by Thace and Antok. The three newcomers all shed their hoods and masks, and perhaps that made the situation worse. At least with the masks, Shiro faced an emotionless continence that relayed no judgement. Now, he had to endure the silent apology in Thace’s eyes and the fierce protective glint in Antok’s sharp features.

But Kolivan was furious. He wore the harsh expression of a leader damning his subordinate for a failed mission, and Shiro, despite all the strength he possessed in order to survive in Drule Central, couldn’t hold that gaze for long. When he averted his eyes, he felt the weight of Kolivan’s heavy, condemning glare upon his shoulders, pressing down upon him with extreme disappointment. He ducked his head, teeth clenched, hot tears coursing his cheeks, and he appreciated his mask once more for hiding his shameful reactions.

He didn’t want to leave. Even if he wasn’t part of the Blades’ pack, he liked living in the headquarters, safe and protected with Keith at his side. He no longer worried about food or clothing, or where they’d spend the next night – if he could sleep at all. Out in the empire, alone, he always needed to make sure Keith was safe, but would they ever be safe again?
Perhaps he shouldn’t have indulged, but Shiro enjoyed hanging with Antok, doing nothing but sharpening their daggers or playing a round of hide and hunt. He looked forward to greeting Ulaz in the hanger when the Galra scientist returned from Central Command or learning new hacking techniques from Thace or accepting Kolivan’s hand upon his shoulder during meetings when he’d devised a good battle strategy. He wanted so hard to be accepted by the Blades, and he never wanted Kolivan to find out about his past life. And to think all this time, he’d carried on his face the evidence of it, exposed and unveiled for everyone to see and judge.

Ancients, Kolivan and the pack knew he’d *fucked* Sendak.

Booted claws stopped in front of his knees, and Shiro wanted to sink back into the astral plane, fleeing Kolivan’s bitter disappointment.

Never, in his wildest imagination, did he expect Kolivan to fall to the ground before him and sit there cross-legged and unassuming, waiting for Shiro to look up at him. When Shiro refused, tugging his legs closer to his chest and hiding behind his bent knees, Kolivan took a sharp inhale and reached out, his large claw all but encompassing Shiro’s boot.

It took a long moment for Shiro to gather whatever courage he retained, but Kolivan didn’t rush him, just sat there painfully patient and understanding. Shiro thought he could wait him out, but as the ticks continued and Kolivan sat motionless, Shiro snuck a sideways peek at the leader.

Kolivan ruthlessly refused to let Shiro escape his gaze again.

*To Be Continued…*

Chapter End Notes

I'm working through the 653 Followers Giveaway ficlets (I have about 20 left), and a few were/are Blade!Shiro prompt-fills. I'll make a masterpost of all the ficlets as well as post the corresponding ones here once I finish writing them. But if you want to read the ones I've written and posted, you can find them [here](#). Thanks!
Scar Tissue - Part Three

Chapter Summary

“Destiny must find a new victim to extort.”

Chapter Notes

Potential Trigger Warning: Please read here for the details/explanation. If you just want to skip it, please stop reading at "Three Annuals Ago." Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Takashi,” Kolivan began, and Shiro’s head shot up at the use of his first name. It was the second time that day – and ever – Kolivan said it, and Shiro was struck dumb at the look of remorse upon the usually reserved Kolivan’s face. “I…misspoke earlier in the Hilt. It was cruel to –”

“You didn’t misspeak,” Shiro interjected, though perhaps he shouldn’t have. But Kolivan had never lied to him before. Their relationship was based upon mutual respect and trust, and Shiro wanted to know he could rely upon that.

Kolivan halted, blinking and thoughtful, before nodding. “No, I didn’t. The Blade of Marmora has a history of exuding those known as ‘lower lifeforms’ from our ranks. They were deemed weak and untrustworthy, and until you joined the Blade, I believed that to be true.”

Kolivian’s claw lifted to clutch his knees; the leader sucked in a cleansing breath.

Shiro’s arms tightened about his legs, and his stomach churned as he forced himself to speak. “So this proves your original thought true, right? You shouldn’t have let me into the Blades.”

“What makes you say that?” Ulaz asked.

“Shiro believes his mating mark and his earlier life deems him unworthy in Kolivan’s eyes,” Thace explained for Shiro, but his chest hurt just the same.

To his credit, Kolivan fought the wince that Thace’s harsh words meant to inflict. “Yes, well, I can see how Shiro might have misconstrued my meaning.”

Antok scoffed, to which Kolivan rolled his eyes. “All right. Yes. I could have phrased my words less vindictive, but a mating mark in and of itself is not something to be ashamed of, Takashi.” His voice lightened. “In fact, it is something to celebrate, a joining of two lovers in a bond for eternity.”

Shiro then noticed the scar over Kolivan’s right eye before his mind retreated to the desert shack back on Earth and the scar that one day appeared through his father’s right eyebrow.

“I understand how distressing it must be to learn what the mating mark means, especially when one is etched across your face in such a predominant manner. Ulaz and Thace also led me to believe
that you acquired it without consent, for which I cannot express the depth of my sympathy or my revulsion. But you need not hide, not from us. Whatever Sendak has done to you – it does not change what we – how I – feel about you.”

Shiro ducked his head but found no words to form a reply, exhausted beyond belief and yet somehow still wire-strung. He couldn’t adhere to Kolivan’s insinuated request to take off the mask. He wasn’t sure he could ever face any of the Blades ever again.

“What truly alarmed me in the Hilt was not the mating mark or to whom it belongs but your willingness to return to such a station. Every member of the Blade is willing to sacrifice their life in our unending war against Zarkon, but this – it is a violation of the highest level. For you to be willing to give yourself to Sendak in exchange for information – it is unconscionable and I cannot –” Kolivan’s claw upon Shiro’s knee shuddered, and for the first time, Shiro saw the leader at a loss for words. “– no Galra would be willing to give themselves to another in such a manner.”

Of course. Shiro was weak, a human, a lower lifeform. He would be willing to do things the strong members of the Blades of Marmora could never contrive.

“Do not misunderstand me again, Takashi.” Kolivan words tumbled from his quivering lips as his eyes glowed with an imploring glint in the shadows of the treehouse. “What you offered to do is braver and far more honorable than anyone could ever imagine. It is generous in a way few could ever be.”

“I’ve…” Shiro swallowed hard, his own knees falling open for him to sit cross-legged in an exact replica of Kolivan’s position. “I’ve not like I haven’t done it for more selfish reasons.”

“Feeding your brother and you, and finding yourself a safe place to stay is not selfish,” Thace admonished.

“You survived in terrible situations when others would have given up,” Ulaz praised, coming to crouch next to Kolivan and clasp Shiro’s shoulder in a reassuring embrace, “and you didn’t. You managed to keep yourself and your brother alive until we met, and we – all of us – are grateful.”

“The universe continues to demand more from you.” A venomous rage infected Kolivan’s words. “First, your parents, then your innocence, and now your right to choose a mate. It already has taken your future, Paladin. No more. Destiny must find another victim to extort.”

Shiro blinked, and he finally found the courage to speak years’ worth of confusion and uncertainty. “Ulaz called me that when we met all those years ago. What does it mean? To be a paladin?”

Kolivan, Ulaz, Thace, and Antok sent each other offended glances, and it was Antok who finally spoke with an incredulous gasp, “You have not heard of the legend of Voltron?”

The word struck Shiro’s very soul, thrumming along a tether he never knew existed until that moment. It led to a thunderous roar that echoed in his ears, from the Black Lion. He called to Shiro, demanded his attention, and a rush of foreign power flooded Shiro’s very being, surging through every nerve. His soul expanded, transcending his physical form, and it stretched across the immensity that was space. In a single blink, Shiro found himself back on the astral plane, starting at a pleased and proud Black Lion, and then a flaming sword, glimmering amber eyes, and a large, fantastic being greeted him.

Voltron, the Legendary Defender.

As quickly as Shiro left, he returned to the treehouse, the steady, pulsating rhythm of Voltron and
the Black Lion fading until it all but remained.

The Blades noticed nothing.

“He is from Earth,” Thace reminded. “The planet was never part of the great coalition King Alfor created all those centuries ago.”

Kolivan jerked his head for the side in contemplation. “Hm. Perhaps ignorance is truly bliss.”

“You know that phrase?” Shiro wondered, shocked that his voice still worked, before waving a dismissive hand. “Never mind. It doesn’t matter. What is this Voltron, and what does it have to do with me?”

“Right. Yes.” Ulaz cleared his throat, though his face brightened, smile gentle and soothing. “It is a legend of five metaphysical robotic lions that combine to form the greatest warrior the universe has ever known.”

“Each lion chooses a pilot, who earns the title paladin,” Antok added.

Kolivan nodded. “We came to learn that there was a lion on Earth, and your mother – Moira – went to find it. Instead of the lion, she found you.”

Kolivan knew Moira? “Mom…told you about me?” he asked in a muted scream.

A sympathetic gaze enveloped Kolivan’s usually stoic features. “You used to sleep-walk into the desert, first alone and later with your brother. You found a cave with ancient markings that would illuminate when you were there.”

Moira told Kolivan all this?

“When she realized what you were – a Paladin of Voltron – she feared what would happen once you found the lion. Would you instantly be conscripted into the war against the Galra Empire? Would Haggar or Zarkon go after you? You were a cub at the time, Shiro. You still are. Moira sought to protect you, which is why she took you off planet.” Kolivan’s claw hardened its grip upon Shiro’s knee. “It’s why she eventually left you. Moira had been a commander in the Galra Empire before she joined the Blade. She hoped to stop the inevitable war and went back to the Galra Empire to gut it from the inside.”

Shiro had always hoped Kolivan or one of the Blades would eventually speak of Moira, but he feared to ask, in case she had defected to Earth. But now – “Do you…Do you know where she is?”

Even after all these years, he missed her with a fierce longing that tugged at his soul and left him hollow inside.

Kolivan hesitated but eventually nodded. “She is far from here. It would be dangerous for you to see her. Potentially deadly, for both of you.”

Perhaps now, but if she was still in contact with the Blade, that meant one day, Shiro could see her again.

He glanced up to meet Kolivan’s concerned gaze. “I-I miss her.”

Ulaz’s expression softened, claws tugging at Shiro in a comforting manner. “She misses you
greatly as well, but she would do anything for you, even sacrifice her own happiness to keep you safe.”

And she was failing. “I see him. The lion. There’s an astral plane, and – ”

“You are the Black Paladin, Takashi,” Kolivan announced, tone skirting between sorrow and pride. “The decisive head of Voltron, and that is why I took you as the Son of the Blade.”

Of course it was. “So I would learn how to lead a team.”

“To hopefully give you a different destiny.” The sorrow won, flooding Kolivan voice with melancholy. “Takashi, Zarkon was the original Black Paladin. If you continue down this path, you’ll be pitted against the emperor of the entire universe, and I do not want that for you. I never wanted that for you. I wanted to give you an option and teach you how to survive if you are, in fact, beckoned by destiny.”

Destiny, lions, a large robotic warrior, and an epic showdown with the emperor of the universe – that was Shiro’s fate, and all this time, the Blades knew?

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Shiro demanded.

Kolivan sought strength from all the Blades, who shared similar expressions of despair, before finding Shiro’s gaze again. Shiro gaped at the helpless resignation he saw.

“How does one tell his cub he is fated to fight not just for his life but also the freedom of the entire universe?”

Something deep in Shiro’s chest, buried underneath layers of hurt and denial and shame, broke.

“What are you talking about? I’m not your cub! I’m not even part of your pack, so you have no right to act like you care what happens to me.”

Kolivan immediately swung toward Thace, exasperation infiltrating his voice. “I thought you explained this to him.”

“I told you he asked about Keith,” Thace rejoined, equally as irritated as Kolivan, “and if you recall our conversation, I said you needed to address it. You are the leader of our pack.”

“It is not something that should need to be addressed.” Kolivan scowled. “Galra only demand demonstrative affirmation.”

Ulaz motioned toward Shiro. “You do realize he is not Galra.”

They remembered he was in the room, right?

“Shiro is as good as one. He has lived among us for years and prior that, in the empire’s capital. And in any case, he is to come to us once he accepts our scent and is ready to join the pack. It is not for me to – to claim him like Sendak.”

“Hm. Perhaps he misinterpreted the scent-marking,” Antok offered.

Yup, they forgot about him again. They did this all the time – talk about him like he wasn’t in the room. Shiro was honestly getting frustrated over it, but at least his anger toward Kolivan’s apathy dwindled as he observed the Blades’ soothing blather. He’d fallen asleep in the Hilt more nights to it than he could count.
“There is no way to misinterpret scent-marking,” Kolivan continued, unfazed, “and Ulaz, you should have spoken with him –”

“Yes, because in the last two cycles, Ulaz and I have not been away in the Galra Empire, toiling to secure information for the mission.”

“I did not ask your opinion, Thace.”

“Oh, you need not worry, Kolivan. I’ll give it unsolicited.”

One particular mention caught Shiro’s attention. “Scent-marking?” he echoed through Kolivan’s warning snarl. “Keith mentioned something about my scent being different, but I don’t – do I smell different to you?”

All four Galra froze and stared at him in various levels of alarm and distress.

“He cannot smell it,” Antok announced, shocked and dismayed.

Shiro lifted the front of his cloak to sniff it. “Smell what? Is it bad?”

“By the Ancients – Ulaz, I thought you did a full work up on the cubs when they first arrived.”

Ulaz let out an exasperated sigh. “Perhaps if you read it, Kolivan, you’d know that scent is one of a human’s five senses but is not particularly strong. No doubt, he has no idea he’s been marked.”

“You marked me?” Shiro shrieked. “Like Sendak?”

What the fuck was wrong with the Galra? Didn’t they realize not everything belonged to them?

“Oh, for the love of – take off your mask, Takashi.”

Shiro bristled immediately, drawing his legs back up, knees pulled to his chest. He couldn’t. The mating mark – it was still there, and now what else did the Blades do to him?

“It’s alright, Shiro,” Ulaz insisted, voice pitched to mollify. “We’re not going to harm you.”

The silence threatened to choke Shiro, and as hot tears spilled down his cheeks again, he shook his head.

Thace knelt behind Kolivan, reaching over the leader’s shoulder to grasp Shiro’s hand. “Shiro, we have fought side-by-side for hundreds of battles. You’ve shared your greatest gift with us, and we’ve even seen you at your very worst.”

Not that Shiro needed a reminder of that.

“Why do you not trust us now?”

Because he’d been violated. Because his face told a story of pain and misery and broken promises, and though he relived it every time he looked in the mirror, he’d never realized that everyone saw it, too, every time they looked at him.

It was Kolivan – it was always Kolivan – who ducked his head to be lower than Shiro’s, a distinctive motion that gave Shiro control over the situation.

“You have a destiny far greater than any mating mark can deter,” the leader began in a low admission. “It has not defined you, and it will not define you, not unless you let it.”
But Sendak had carved it into his skin – without Shiro’s permission. He proclaimed to anyone who saw Shiro that he had been mated, no longer a free being but one owned by a strong Galra warrior who could maim him in the most profane way.

“You’re not his,” Kolivan insisted, “and a scar does not prove that you are. Only you can decide that.”

Though it was an internal struggle, Shiro didn’t flinch when Kolivan cradled his cheeks between his massive claws.

“I had hoped you would eventually find your place in the universe by defining yourself through us.”

“Oh? Shiro echoed.

“Family,” Ulaz clarified. “Moira said humans call their pack family.”

The word stole all the breath from Shiro’s lungs and left him quivering in its wake. All this time, the Blades already thought of him as family, as pack, and it left him feeling exposed and wrung out. When he glanced away, Kolivan’s thumbs caressed his cheeks, drawing his attention back and urging him to listen to the wordless command.

Shiro’s resistance crumbled, and when the mask dissolved, he surmised he must have looked pathetic – tears staining his cheeks raw, eyes glassy and bloodshot, snot dribbling down his nose. Kolivan’s eyes lightened, tender and open, a stark contrast from his usual stern exterior.

“If words are necessary on your home world, then I shall adhere to your customs,” Kolivan explained in a barely audible whisper. “May I officially claim you as part of our pack?”

Shiro surprised even himself when he replied, “You’re not going to tear another scar into my face…right?”

Kolivan, the leader of the Blade of Marmora, flinched. “No. It is a simple gesture with no permanent markings.”

Somehow, Shiro doubted that, but he nodded nonetheless. When Kolivan still hesitated, he added in a shaky voice, “Yes.”

And he was right. When Kolivan ducked his head and his soft fur tickled Shiro’s sensitive neck in a traditional pack greeting, Shiro felt something he hadn’t in a long time.

Whole.

Kolivan continued for a few dobashes. He first ran his jaw and white hair under Shiro’s left cheek, spreading the pack’s unique scent of lavender and pine with a hint of vanilla, before turning his head and pressing against Shiro’s opposite cheek. He bowed his head to rub against Shiro’s shoulders, the familiar scent enveloping Shiro in a reassuring embrace that smelled exactly like Keith.

Like his pack.

When Kolivan pulled back but refused to release Shiro’s cheeks, a silent moment passed between them, a level of understanding and acceptance Shiro hadn’t known possible. Then Shiro lunged. His arms clamped about Kolivan’s torso, clinging to the leader like the cub he perhaps was. He wanted to be strong, act his twenty-one annuals and reflect the decorum of his position as the Son
of the Blade. But after all these years alone and isolated – abandoned by everyone he’d ever known – Shiro savored the affection Kolivan and the Blades offered.

Kolivan, at first, grunted and tensed but after a few moments, relaxed against Shiro, long arms wrapping about Shiro’s back to engulf him in a secure embrace.

Pushing back Shiro’s hood, Kolivan brushed the top of Shiro’s hair with his strong jaw. “This is why I cannot allow you to surrender yourself again, Takashi. Your lower chaste in the empire has taught you to sacrifice – for your parents, for your brother, and now for us. It cannot continue. You must learn to value yourself as we value you.”

“But I’m not –” Shiro’s gloves formed tight, quivering fists in the side of Kolivan’s cloak. “Kolivan, Sendak will take me back, and the fate of the universe may be at stake. If the commanders are scared, we need to act now because we lose whatever intel we have.”

“We will but not in a way that will cause you further harm.”

“But –” How could he make Kolivan understand? How did he not already? “My…body, honor, whatever you want to call it – it’s not worth the fate of the universe.”

Different expressions of pity hit him all at once, and then Antok came forward, bending down on one knee to seize Shiro’s hand in his own. “You are to us.”

Shiro wasn’t sure what to say, what to feel. Emotion constricted his throat and spilled more tears down his cheeks.

Ulaz came forward then, taking hold of Shiro’s cheeks for himself and dragging the human from Kolivan’s grip. He repeated the traditional Galra greeting, spreading his scent in the soothing ritual but finishing with a tender kiss upon Shiro’s forehead. Thace followed suit but pressed his forehead against Shiro’s to whisper, “Don’t let Kolivan boss you around after this, Shiro. Make sure to still give him hell.”

“Thace!”

The Galra slapped Shiro’s shoulder before Antok engulfed Shiro in a bone-crushing embrace, holding him like a stuffed teddy bear and refusing to let him go even after he finished the ritual.

“Hey, are you guys done in here?” Keith demanded, peeking inside the treehouse door.

As Antok reluctantly placed Shiro upon the ground, Thace beckoned Keith inside. “Come, cub. Welcome your brother into our pack.”

When Keith leapt into his arms, Shiro sighed and rested his cheek on his little brother’s head.

Kolivan’s claws dipped into Shiro’s hair. Thace patted Keith’s shoulder. Ulaz rubbed circles against Shiro’s back, and Antok just swept both brothers into his massive arms.


Finally.

In the back of his mind, the Black Lion purred in the delight, and for the first time, a second lion, feminine but fiercer, joined him.

Three Annuals Ago
Crimson stained Shiro’s hands, slicking the dagger’s fine edge and soaking through the bandages wrapped about the hilt. Sendak arrived then, dressed in casual gear Shiro had never seen before. Shiro barely acknowledged the commander as his hands refused to stop shaking, the body cooling less than ten feet away. Shiro sat with his back toward it, tears coursing his cheeks as he saw the anguish upon Sendak’s face.

“I-I didn’t want – He went after – I couldn’t let h-him – but – I – ”

Ancients, he just killed a man, a Galra! A lieutenant serving one of the most feared commanders – and he’d seen the amber light fade from his eyes, felt the life slip from his body, heard his last breath as it released.

He thought he’d hear it forever – every time he closed his eyes, every time he tried to sleep, every time he breathed, but then a warmth engulfed him from behind, Sendak’s strong arms surrounding him in a consoling embrace. The commander’s heartbeatounded against Shiro’s back, drowning out the dead Galra’s last sound. Silent sobs wracked his being, and Sendak never tried to shush him, only fit his soft face in the crux of Shiro’s neck and offered soothing caresses.

Sendak spread his warmth, his scent, his presence, and then he murmured over and over, “It’s going to be all right, my little kzelz. I’ll make it so.”

Later, Sendak would bring Shiro into the next room, where Keith waited, anxious and bleeding. Shiro would watch as Sendak attended to Keith himself, spreading his scent upon the cub’s cheeks and shoulders. Then he lifted the yawning Keith into one arm while tucking Shiro against his opposite side. After they settled he exhausted cub upon the couch, Sendak waited in silent vigil as Shiro cleaned up. Then the commander would confront Shiro, demanding he finally submit to Sendak as a lower lifeform and his mate.

They’d fight. Shiro would leave but at that moment, kneeling in the lieutenant’s blood and listening to the soothing rhythm of Sendak’s heart, Shiro accepted the truth.

The highest-ranked commander of the Galra Empire loved him, and he’d think later, seeing Keith’s head resting his upon Sendak’s arm, that perhaps he might love the commander, too.

To Be Concluded…

Chapter End Notes

Short epilogue to this story will be coming up, which jumps to the Castle of Lions and Allura’s reaction to Shiro’s mating mark.
Chapter Summary

Shiro can’t escape his past, but his pack won’t let him drown in it.

Chapter Notes

Though not necessary, the end scene might make a bit more sense if you read "Out of the Blue" first, which introduces Lance in this series.

“Take off the mask.”

Shiro glanced over his shoulder at Antok, who approached in a measured stride. “Excuse me?”

“We told you. The mark does not matter to us.”

But it did – to Shiro. Even if his pack ignored its presence, Shiro could not, shame and embarrassment writhing under his skin. It had been almost three weeks since he’d been accepted into the Blades’ familial unit officially, and yet he couldn’t help how his eyes wandered to the scar upon the bridge of his nose every time he looked in the mirror.

Back when he’d thought little of it, he brushed off the awkward glances and hostile expressions as nothing more than Galra vanity. But now he understood – they loathed the mark upon his face, whether out of spite for being claimed as a mate or because they knew to whom he belonged.

The latter was something he couldn’t face.

But since only Kolivan and Antok occupied the Hilt at this late hour, he hit off his mask and pushed back his hood. “The others – I didn’t – I didn’t realize why they stared at my mark before.”

“The Blade of Marmora relies upon secrecy and trust,” Kolivan explained, coming to stand before Shiro’s console. “Since your mate is not of the Blade, some have wondered to whom you belong as an undocumented citizen.” He left out “lower lifeform,” for which Shiro was grateful. “It is nothing you need concern yourself with.”

“But – But Kolivan, they don’t – I never realized they don’t trust me.”

“If they did not trust you, I would not have kept you in the Blade,” Kolivan explained with ruthless logic. “I would have sent you back to Drule Central the moment it became an issue on missions.”

“Thanks…I think…”

“You are interpreting their reactions differently now that you are aware of the meaning of your scar, but they have always watched you with such interest.”

Shiro sighed and leaned his chin upon his propped-up hand. “So they were always sending me
dirty looks?”

“They have made their jealousy known, yes,” Antok supplied, which made Shiro even more uncomfortable.

“Jealousy? Why would they be – ”

“Speak to Ulaz about it when he returns to the base,” Kolivan interjected, suddenly finding the report upon his datapad fascinating. “As a researcher of all types of lifeforms, he would be the one best suited to explain the carnal behaviors of maturing Galra.”

“Carnal behaviors of – ” Shiro’s eyes widened; heat burned his cheeks a pale pink twinge. “Wait. Are you – are you saying that they…want me…?”

Kolivan let out a disparaging sigh and rolled his eyes, shoulders heaving with the terrible burden. “You are an…intriguing species, Shiro. Your facial features are not undesirable, and your unique size is quite alluring for a larger mate with certain…tastes.”

Kolivan’s own features darkened as he shifted uncomfortably, and Shiro was tempted to activate his mask.

“They assume since your mate is not part of the Blade, you are able to be claimed once more, especially since you are not Galra. They do not believe humans mate for life.”

Which was…true, in some instances. Ancients. This was disturbing on so many levels.

Antok’s massive hand clamped down upon Shiro’s shoulder and half his back. “You need not worry, little one. As a member of your pack, I have alluded to having first rights should you desire to mate once more.”

Shiro pinched the bridge of his nose. “Please stop. Just – stop.”

Kolivan crouched before Shiro’s console. “Takashi – ” When Shiro moved to reactivate his mask, Kolivan swiped away the screens and seized Shiro’s gloved hands, cradling them in his massive claws. “Do not pay them any mind. Only you control your destiny, and whatever you decide – whenever you decide it – your pack will support you.”

Shiro wasn’t sure what to feel or how he felt – about Sendak, the mark, the Galra seeking him, or his own desires for a mate – but there was one thing he knew for certain. He leaned forward to rub his jaw along Kolivan’s in the reassuring motion of a traditional pack greeting. He was human, but he was also pack. And he reveled in that simple fact.

Still, no matter how many times he did it and no matter how many times Kolivan and Antok returned the gesture, his entrails entangled and wrung, and his raw nerves stung. He couldn’t shake the horrible shame and humiliation he felt by having his past exposed and his body sought as some sort of challenge or prize.

“Is it reinforcement you require?” Kolivan asked. “Would you like me to decree to the Blade that you are not seeking a mate?”

“No!” Ancients, that would so much worse than this quiet desolation. “I – I just – it’s there, the mating mark. And I never – it still…hurt, in a way, when I thought it was just a scar, but now – ”

“You know the meaning behind it, and you cannot forget that.”
A solemn nod.

Kolivan shared a look over Shiro’s head before grounding Shiro with a firm grasp upon his shoulders. Kolivan’s golden eyes glimmered, unnerving Shiro with their severity. “Nothing will be done today. I would not allow you to make such a significant decision emotionally compromised, but I know of an archaic gesture that was used during Galran adoption and courting rituals. It may bring you some comfort.”

“Are you going to scent-mark me again?” Shiro wondered.

“No. Packs include different races and species,” Kolivan explained. “This is strictly a Galran ritual.”

Shiro cast a questioning look to Antok, who simply redirected his eyes to Kolivan. So Shiro replied truthfully, “I don’t understand.”

“You’ve seen the different races that identify themselves as ‘Galra.’ It is because before the empire, we were an accepting race. Anyone who was strong enough to survive, we welcomed.”

Shiro opened his mouth, but no words came out. He still wasn’t a hundred percent sure he understood Kolivan’s words correctly, but if he did – Shiro wasn’t sure how to answer.

Kolivan took pity upon him. “Do not answer now. Do not answer today. Think about it. Give yourself time to adjust – to accept the truth about your scar and this suggestion. When you are ready, we will discuss it.”

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Five Annuals Later

The absolute rapture in Allura’s eyes the moment she realized her baby brother caught her a step out of the cryopod vanished the moment she saw Keith at Shiro’s side. Lance, Ancients bless his soul, tried his best to deescalate the situation –

“Allura, Allura! You don’t understand. Keith isn’t like the Galra we fought. He’s against the empire.”

– but Allura refused to listen. “Lance, how you can believe that? You of all people should know you can never trust a Galra.”

Shiro stepped in front of Keith the moment Allura’s face twisted with an incensed scowl, ignoring his little brother’s grunt of protest. Keith could protect himself, especially if he’d survived the Trials of Marmora, but big brother instinct died hard and sometimes not at all.

“Perhaps you have forgotten about our father, our planet, our people,” the princess growled, eyes inflamed, lips curled in a vicious snarl, “but I have not. All Galra are vile creatures.”

Even though he didn’t turn, Shiro could imagine Keith’s response, his brother’s ears drooping, an off-putting expression upon his face that those closest to him would read as crestfallen.

Shiro instantly combated, “Not all Galra are evil. My little brother is not evil.”

“Takashi,” Keith murmured, tail snaking about his brother’s waist to reassure and hold.

But Shiro wouldn’t relent. He wouldn’t allow this princess, Altean or not, to speak ill of his brother or the Blades.
“The Galra have done terrible things,” Allura bit back unkindly, ignoring Coran’s hand upon her shoulder and Lance’s attempts to dissuade her. “You must know, human. The marking upon your face proves you have endured cruelty at the hands of the Galra.”

Since she believed he was not one of them.

“Takashi?” Keith called again, his tail tightening.

Shiro sucked in a sharp inhale, steeling his nerves. Perhaps even after ten thousand years, the Galran culture hadn’t changed all that much, so Allura knew what Sendak had done, even if she didn’t know the commander himself.

“If you know what the scar across my face means…” He uncurled Keith’s tail from his waist, ignoring his little brother’s whine of protest. When he unzipped his vest and began to peel away the top portion of his jumpsuit, he’d expected the shocked gasps and unshed tears from Pidge – she was the youngest and Shiro had saved her brother – but he didn’t expect the flat-out bawling from Hunk.

He refused to look at Keith, knowing his little brother’s eyes would widen and his mouth would drop. His expression most likely mirrored Lance’s, the Altean prince still in his human form as his hands lifted to cover his mouth, shock mingling with sorrow and dismay in his eyes.

In perhaps the longest moment of his life, Shiro feared what his brother would think. Would Keith think less of him for failing so many times? Would he shun his brother for his horrible disfigured skin, but he needn’t worried. The moment passed, and Keith’s tail wrapped about Shiro’s thigh, allowing him to reveal even more of his scarred chest and shoulders for Allura to see.

A glistening taint of pure quintessence.

Allura’s eyes grew with wonder, with astonishment, but she sobered as he spoke.

“…then you must know what this is.”

If she truly knew Galra traditions, then the Altean princess knew the significance of his taint.

“You – You’ve been adopted by the Galra,” Allura gasped, utterly mystified. “You allowed them to claim you as one of their own?”

“This is the Galra I know. The ones who took Keith and me in. The ones who trained us to fight against Zarkon.” In a softer tone, Shiro admitted, “The ones who refused to allow the empire to own me. I survived the gladiator games because of the Blade’s training, and I’m free today because of the courage they lent me when I had none.”

“Blade?” she accused, though the heat fizzled in her words. “The Blade of Marmora still exists? How is that possible?”

“I do not know, but this is the Galra I know. This is the Galra that saved me, so I can’t let you label my pack and me as evil.”
Allura broke away when Lance then, approaching Shiro in a slow and hesitant stride. She kept her
staunch posture, eyes firm and unrelenting as they glared directly into his soul. She sought
weakness, but she would find none. She sought dishonesty, but that, too, he could not give her.
With a tail wrapped about his leg and the taint decorating his skin, he met the Princess of Altea’s
gaze unflinchingly, even when her eyes directed to the scar across his nose.

In her eyes, he found no malice, only curiosity and – hope. Her lithe fingers traced his scar, sending
shivers up his spine.

“Do you love him or her?”

His mate. Sendak.

Shiro blinked, taken back, but he answered honestly, “I-I don’t know.”

But he wanted to find out.

Allura nodded, accepting his answer as truth, then sought the shimmering ink upon his shoulder,
upper chest, and back. Her warm fingertips followed the grooves of his muscles and the lines of
quintessence, and for a brief moment, the insignia glowed a light sky blue – and then Shiro stood
before the projection screen in the Hilt, Kolivan standing across from him. They were in the
middle of discussing an exit strategy for a scouting party in the Menozix System, routine for a
fourth quintent of the Spicolian movement, when Shiro spouted, “I want to undergo the ritual.”

Kolivan stopped in mid-swipe of the screen, amber eyes seeking Shiro’s through the transparent
purple screens. “Are you sure? Sendak cannot touch you – ”

“This isn’t about Sendak,” Shiro explained, arms crossed, though his eyes averted. “I – I still don’t
know how I feel about him, but this – this is about me. I – I may be human, but Earth is no longer
my home. The Blade of Marmora is, and – I define myself through my connection to it and my
pack. I want to embrace that. I want to become Galra.” As if an afterthought, Shiro added, staring
straight into Kolivan’s unwavering gaze, “Will – Will you let me?”

He’d felt like a child asking permission, and when Kolivan deactivated the screens between him,
Shiro readied himself for a lecture about species and strength and how Shiro, through the years
with the Blade, had proven Kolivan’s originally assessment correct. He could never meet the
criteria to become a Galra.

But Kolivan spread his arms, welcoming Shiro into the circle of them. As Shiro pressed his face
into Kolivan’s muscular shoulder, Kolivan swiped his jaw along Shiro’s head, marking him once
him. The motion never ceased to soothe Shiro’s turbulent emotions.

“If that is truly what you desire, then the Galra Empire will rejoice,” Kolivan murmured. “For
today, it will claim that which it never deserved.”

As his taint settled into its usual violet glow and Shiro’s mind returned to the castle, he saw fresh
tears sparkling in Allura’s now serene eyes.

“This is the Galra I know as well. I would like to see it again.”

He bowed to her before falling to knees like Kolivan showed him years ago, tucking his fist to his
chest and paying proper homage to the Princess of Altea.

“Then I will show you.”
He waited on the floor for ten full seconds before taking hold of Keith’s tail and tugging him down, too. Though Keith growled, he eventually ducked his head as well, spurring tingling laughter from Allura, from Lance and Pidge and Hunk, and Coran, too.

His pride.

*End Scar Tissue*
Mutual pining Shendak? Glad you asked!

“Did I do something wrong?” Shiro asked, chin propped upon his fist as he stared at the large security screen split into various scenes. “Am I being punished?”

“What makes you say that?” Kolivan used his I’m-only-going-to-growl-orders-today-not-snap-them tone, so Shiro surmised the Blades’ leader must have been in a good mood.

“Why am I forced to watch the monitors of this dingy bar while you guys get to do some real work?”

“You don’t exactly blend in, Shiro, and you have an important part to play.”

“Oh, yeah. I get to knock out one Mall Cop reject and then tell you when a certain commander is occupied, so you can grab his credentials. Lots of action here.”

“I could have Antok transmit the feed into the ship’s systems and have you complete your assigned task from there.”

“You do know I’m an adult, right?”

“You’re breaking up.”

Shiro lifted a single finger toward the monitor screen at the exact moment Kolivan glared into the security camera from his spot at the crowded bar.

“How do you do that?” Shiro muttered, but Kolivan refused to answer this particular question — again.

The night continued, unassuming and boring, before a Galra cruiser finally docked at the spaceport. Shiro informed Kolivan and Antok, who scattered about the bar, but when the Galran party arrived, Shiro reeled.

Throk, a commander in the Navlon sector of the empire, entered, as expected, but none of the intel from Ulaz had mentioned a second commander would be with Throk, Sendak especially.

Antok cursed; Kolvian started.

“But I’m-I’m fine,” he stammered, much to his own disappointment. “It doesn’t change the plan. We can still get Throk’s information. I’ll let you know when he’s…indisposed.”

Kolivan’s mouth opened to retort, but Antok stopped him by placing a hand upon his shoulder. Though their voices barely rose louder than a whisper and the bar’s music made it hard to hear, Shiro still managed to grasp, “Let him do this. He’s going to run into Sendak eventually, and it’s
better for him to acclimate to the situation and Sendak while we are here to supervise.”

Shiro was twenty-one, not five. Surely he was mature enough to watch as Sendak received a beer from the bartender without ordering, like he was a regular customer. And it wasn’t like Shiro’s stomach bottomed out as he noticed the fitted undershirt that stretched across Sendak’s muscular chest, outlined by his leather jacket. Those tight, casual pants, too, left little to the imagination, and all too easily, Shiro remembered Sendak’s warmth against his back, his gentle purrs of arousal and comfort, his strong arms caging Shiro’s waist and cradling him during those turbulent times. Perhaps Sendak had been the only semblance of stability Shiro had during those first years without his parents.

But Shiro remembered the payments, too, and the demands for ownership. The blood upon his blade and upon his face.

Just because he knew what the mark upon his face meant now, didn’t change how it was put there – against his will.

“Shiro, where is Throk?”

Shit.

Shiro’s eyes frantically searched over the monitors until he found Throk, pressed against a bathroom stall, a rather vivacious Galra woman keeping him occupied.

“He’s in position – and very, very distracted.”

But so was Sendak, prowling toward a Galra soldier – about Shiro’s age and build – and as he tucked the willing – and quite enthusiastic – soldier against his larger form, Shiro hit on a private channel.

“Antok?”

On the cameras, Shiro saw the Blade standing by the bathroom door, keeping watch as Kolivan disappeared inside. “Yes?”

“Kolivan said that Galra mate for life. Does that…I mean…do they still – are they…y’know, monogamous?”

Ancients, he couldn’t believe he just asked Antok that! Sure, Antok was like that older brother you go to for advice about everything from homework to sex, but Shiro’s face still burned.

Antok took pity on him, sympathy lacing his words, “There are many different type of Galra species. Only the feline species mate for life.”

Like Sendak.

Shiro blinked and focused on the bathroom, where Kolivan currently had Throk’s Galra credentials and was in the process of ghosting them. Against his better judgment, Shiro glanced back at Sendak, whose hands caressed the soldier’s sides. His moves were graceful, sensual in the shared dance as he diverted from the fast tempo of the music to create a slow, elegant glide that captivated Shiro.

“There are exceptions, of course,” Antok continued, mercifully. “As in every species, there are those who are unfaithful. Also, in the event of a mate’s death, it is not uncommon for one to take another.”
Well, which one was it? Was Sendak unfaithful – or did he think Shiro was dead?

He had no right to be jealous, Shiro chastised himself. Sendak offered eternity, and Shiro chose to leave. This was his life now, and – and he wanted to be here, with the Blades and Keith, not the “proper mate” of the Galra’s highest commander.

…but Ancients, those hands were big and powerful.

“Hey! What are you – uk!”

Oh, hell. As Throk came out of the stall to collect his things, he saw Kolivan finishing up the ghosting and lunged. Thankfully, Kolivan had the wherewithal to put up his mask and hood before starting the download.

“Antok! Throk caught Kolivan!”

Antok cursed again and burst into the bathroom, and the thunderous music of the bar drowned out the fight. It took less than a few ticks for Antok and Kolivan to subdue Throk, and his one-time lover fled.

As Kolivan exited the bathroom, he commanded, “Let’s go.” There was no room for debate, and if Shiro wasn’t in trouble before, he was now.

As he stood, he spared Sendak one last glance to see the solider run his hands along the commander’s tight muscles. Shiro’s stomach churned – at one time, that fur belonged to him – and as he turned to leave, a glimmer caught his eye. The solider tugged Sendak down by the shirt collar for a long, thorough discovery of Sendak’s mouth, and it allowed Shiro to see the silver chain about Sendak’s neck. It led to a distinctive charm, one Shiro knew intimately. It was kanji, the symbol meaning "noble, prosperous."

_Takashi._

His birth mother gave him that charm before she left for a Galaxy Garrison mission, but he’d sold it not long after his father left, using the GAC to buy some food and Keith’s favorite red candies for the cub’s birthday.

How the hell did Sendak get –

“Shiro!” Kolivan bellowed, snapping Shiro out of his revere.

“On my way!”

When Shiro fled, he never looked back because if he did, he feared what he’d do.
When Kolivan's hurt and Shiro offers to help him, one of Shiro's biggest disadvantages in battle is revealed.

Author’s Notes: When xblackpaladin was working on this commission for me, he came up with the idea that Shiro received his claw-tipped gloves from Kolivan. Hence, this story. Thank you so much for drawing Blade!Shiro, xblackpaladin, and for giving me such a great story idea!

Warning: Complete and utter fluff. We need that today, right? I'm still reeling after yesterday's episodes.

Shiro blinked, taken back by Kolivan’s disheveled appearance. Where Kolivan always presented a kept image – robe impeccable straight, gloves in place, hair woven tightly in a professional braid. But now, as he entered the Hilt, his robe now swung open. One of his gloves dangled from his pocket, but perhaps what Shiro found most unsettling was the leader’s loose hair that swept across his shoulders.

Shiro blinked and almost dropped the datapad in his hands, but Kolivan cut him off before he could speak, “Don’t say a word.”

“Kolivan – ”

“As you were,” Kolivan bit off, though Shiro stopped listening to Kolivan’s growl some time ago.

“I can help.”

Kolivan let out a tiny sigh as he took a seat at the console, his tense face giving away none of his battle.

“At least let me do your braid,” Shiro persisted, taking a step forward before Kolivan bristled.

“Or…maybe not.”

Kolivan’s eyes shimmered with an apologetic glow before he relaxed. “Grooming is an intimate act between pack mates, Shiro. It’s one of absolute trust because of our sharp claws. One move can cause…”
Kolivan fell silent as Shiro wiggled his rounded tips. “Bunt edges, no risk of hair loss or decapitation.”

The Galra grunted, glancing away, and Shiro huffed, “Come on, Kolivan. I used to do Keith’s hair all the time back on Earth. I can do the standard three-strand braid, the French braid, the Dutch braid, the upside-down braid, the milkmaid’s. Hell, if you want, I can even do a –” At the exasperated look on Kolivan’s face, Shiro relented, “Your usual three-strand braid. Got it.”

A moment of comfortable silence passed as Shiro first carded his fingers through Kolivan’s thick, silken locks before he began to separate the hair. “Keith used to like the milkmaid’s braid, actually, though a French braid is more fun to –”

Kolivan glanced over his shoulder. “Keith used to have long –”

“Eyes upfront,” Shiro snapped with playful scorn, forcing Kolivan’s face forward, “and yeah. Not sure if you’ve noticed, but Keith doesn’t exactly look human. He really couldn’t stray too far from our home in the desert, and he totally couldn’t go to the barber without…y’know, alerting anyone about the existence of aliens.”

“What about your parents?”

“Keith’s hair was too fine for Mom to do, and Dad just wasn’t the best at this kind of stuff.” Shiro shrugged as he began to weave the strands. “He could teach me how to fly a hoverbike at six, but cut hair or cook – they weren’t his strengths.”

“So you were responsible for Keith.”

Another shrug. “When Mom and Dad weren’t able, yeah. But they loved us. Cared for us. Mom was always there when I had a nightmare, and Dad went hunting for us.” He tied off the end of Kolivan’s braid before coming around the front of the console and motioning for Kolivan to stand up. As the leader complied, Shiro resituated his cloak and clasped the belt tightly to hold the jacket in place. “Human packs have different dynamics, just like Galra ones. Ours might have been unconventional, but it worked for us.” And he slipped Kolivan’s glove over his good hand before checking Kolivan’s brace on the hurt one. “I’m sure not every pack is the same.”

“No,” Kolivan admitted, gripping one of Shiro’s wrists and lifting it higher to inspect his gloves. “They are not. Some even have non-Galra members with dull fingers and weak muscles.”

Shiro tugged at his hand, once, twice. “Says the guy with the fractured wrist from our spar.”

“Hm.” Kolivan conceded the point before dropping Shiro’s hand. “Those are a battle hazard.”

“Really? My non-sharp fingers are a battle hazard?” Shiro snorted and retreated to his console for his datapad. “Next you’re going to say my height is a battle hazard, too—hey!”

Shiro spun when Kolivan’s massive claw reached over his shoulder and plucked the datapad from his hands. The Galra held it out of his reach.

“You were saying?”

Shiro crossed his arms, lips tugged in a sharp scowl. “You’re having fun, aren’t you?”

A pregnant pause, then, “You will start to wear claw-tipped gloves.”

“This is childish.”
“If you can get the datapad, I won’t make you wear them.”

“I’m not jumping.”

“Then you will wear the gloves.”

“Then you’ll braid your own hair tomorrow.”

A stand-off ensued with Shiro glaring into Kolivan’s narrowed eyes as the leader of the Blades glared back. When Kolivan bent over slightly, the datapad came within reach, and Shiro’s eyes flicked up. A second later, he jumped, only for Kolivan to lift it high once more.

“Damnit!”

But Shiro caught Kolivan’s tiny smirk, indulgent and teasing, so he attacked, attempting to climb Kolivan’s larger form to retrieve his datapad. He ended up hanging off of Kolivan’s neck from behind, gripping to the leader’s hood when Antok, Thace, and Ulaz walked in.

Both he and Kolivan froze, but Shiro recovered first, pointing to Kolivan. “He started it.”

“Shiro needs to wear claw-tipped gloves,” Kolivan justified as he straightened, voice tight and stern as his usual reserved manner resided.

Ulaz arched an eyebrow. “Yes, that is what’s wrong with this situation.”

Shiro slipped from the back of Kolivan’s back and snatched back his datapad. “My rounded fingertips are not a battle hazard.”

Thace ruffled Shiro’s hair as he passed, much to Shiro’s exasperation. “I’m just surprised you focused on his fingertips. His reach is so short, he leaves himself open with every attack.”

“Allright. I get it.”

“Not to mention his bangs must impede his vision.” Antok rested his elbow on Shiro’s head. “Perhaps if he cut them shorter – ”

“Fine!” Shiro threw up his hands. “I’ll wear the stupid gloves, okay? Geez. You don’t have to all gang up on me.”

But the truth slithered through the tiny smile that found Kolivan’s lips, in the elbow still pressing down his bangs, the hand that came to rest on his shoulder, and the slide of a jaw against his own.

All packs were not the same. Some were unconventional, but as Shiro glanced about the room, he smiled.

This worked for them.
Antok and Kolivan walk in on one of Shiro and Keith’s sibling disputes.

Lovely prompt from voltronspacedaddy on Tumblr: Antok and Kolivan (Reluctant big bro and father figure respectively). What antics of Shiro and Keith’s have they walked in on and stopped or simply said not my problem...

*insert evil laughter here*

When the Blade palmed open the door and entered the Hilt in a frantic haste, it took Kolivan less than three ticks to recognize her agitated hesitation.

“What did they do this time?”

“…apparently the little one got into the human’s herbal tea again.”

Antok muttered an exasperated Ancients under his breath, but Kolivan was already moving. Five levels down, the admonishing shouts and responding hisses resounded loud enough to be heard from the elevator, and when Kolivan entered the cubs’ living chambers, he huffed at the complete state of disarray.

Unfortunately, it was nothing new.

“Keith! Keith! I won’t ask you again! Get down!”

Kolivan wanted to point out that Shiro didn’t quite ask, but he couldn’t blame the young warrior, either. Keith clung to a light fixture in a corner between the wall and the ceiling, an herbal tea packet in his mouth, tail lashing and ears twitching. After a beat, Keith completely ignored Shiro’s command, tearing open the packet to lick and chew the contents with obvious delight.

Shiro growled, sounding suspiciously like an irate Galra warrior – Kolivan was absurdly proud – then stomped over to the cabinets to retrieve a full box.

“You have more!” Keith exclaimed, eyes brightening, nose trembling. “Gimme!”

“Oh, no,” Kolivan muttered. “Antok!”

With a furious hiss – Keith hated being called “kitty” – the cub pushed off the wall, ready to pounce and attack his own brother for the tea packets. Antok met Keith in mid-jump, catching the
cub by the waist, and Kolivan stepped in front of Shiro to stop any further attacks. But Antok easily subdued Keith. Even though the cub scratched and hissed and strained, Antok pinioned Keith’s arms to his sides before deciding to all but sit upon him.

“No! They’re mine! Give them to me!” Keith whined.

Kolivan spun and chastised, “I told you not to bring that into the headquarters again.”

“I put it in the back of the cabinet,” Shiro defended. “I didn’t think he’d find it.”

“Galra cubs and even some mature species react violently to nepeta,” Kolivan explained, taking the box in his gloved hands and picking up Keith’s discarded and empty packet. He placed both in an air-tight bag. “Do not make me check you every time we return from port.”

Shiro huffed and crossed his arms, though his eyes wandered to his hissing and mewling brother, trapped underneath Antok’s massive paws. “Right. I – Yeah. Sorry, and uh, thanks for your help.”

Kolivan cursed under his breath. He knew Shiro had used nepeta to calm himself after intense battles but forbade him from using it after Keith got into the packets the first time. He should have found Shiro an adequate substitute rather than ignoring the problem; he’d have to talk to the medics to synthesize a different tea before the cub’s next battle.

When Kolivan clasped Shiro on the shoulder, the older brother’s lips twisted into a crestfallen frown. The young Blade needed no other encouragement and immediately retreated to his brother’s side, placing his nepeta-laced hand in front of his brother’s wet nose. After two sharp sniffles, Keith’s tongue sneak ed out to lap up the excess essence on the tips of Shiro’s fingers.

“Sorry, kiddo.” Shiro’s regret echoed in his soft voice. “I won’t bring it back. I know you don’t like acting this way.”

Olfactory fatigue eventually set in, allowing the extreme effects to wear off, and when Keith began to purr incessantly, Antok released him. Keith climbed into his brother’s lap and all but collapsed, boneless and content, resting his flushed cheek upon his brother’s shoulder. Shiro hummed along with his brother’s purrs, fingertips teasing the stray ends of Keith’s hair in a tender apology.

Antok stood next to Kolivan, watching the heart-warming scene before them. “When they’re like this, they’re almost adorable.”

Shiro hissed lowly, sounding too much like his brother, “Seriously, kiddo? You’re drooling on me. Is this your form of revenge?”

“Almost,” Kolivan agreed and left before inanity ensued again.
Chapter Summary

Ulaz has an unexpected visitor in his quarters aboard Sendak’s ship.

Chapter Notes

Written for Uliroweek back in June. The prompt was danger or shelter. I think this ended up encompassing a bit of both.

The ship’s corridor seemed longer this night, the steps numerous between the research lab and Ulaz’s quarters. The Galra scientist pressed forward, back straight, expression reserved, as was necessary for one in his position. He kept up the façade until the moment the doors shut and then he all but collapsed, leaning against the wall and letting out a deflating sigh.

Working for the Galra Empire slowly ate away at his soul, and every day was a new struggle for his soul to survive.

A shift in the shadows caught his eyes; Ulaz raised his side arm instantly, pointing it directly at the being sitting upon his bed.

Three violet eyes stared back at him, glowing ominously under a familiar dark hood, and then the mask faded away with a soft buzz. The young face that greeted him bore scars from strife and punishment, and the boy’s expression was lost and vulnerable, despite its desperate attempt to be tough and unyielding.

Ulaz re-holstered his weapon and strode forward, panic seizing his very being. “You shouldn’t be here,” he hissed, gripping Shiro by his bicep and wrenching him to his feet. “You cannot be here.”

“But Ulaz – you haven’t been back to the headquarters in almost –”

“That is not your concern.” Ulaz effortlessly dragged the drastically shorter and less bulky human toward the door. “You are not to come here again. Do you understand?”

“But Ulaz – I thought – Kolivan wouldn’t say anything! I just wanted –”

“Do you understand?” Ulaz gripped Shiro’s shoulders between his trembling hands and shook him twice.

Shiro’s eyes glistened with unshed tears as they raised to meet with Ulaz’s. His expression was so raw, so open, and once again, Ulaz was reminded how young Shiro truly was. Just over two decafeeb, the newest Blade was barely an adult, despite the harrowing events of his young life that forced him to grow up quicker than most his age.

Ulaz lamented to be one of the few constants in Shiro’s life, and he neglected his duty to the young human, being away for almost three months. It must have felt like an eternity to Shiro, who clung
Shiro eventually relented, shoulders slumping perceptively. “I’m sorry, Ulaz. I just wanted – I was afraid that you – I thought – I’m sorry.”

Crestfallen, Shiro tore from Ulaz’s suddenly slack grip and crossed the remaining distance to the door. Ulaz knew he should let him go, angry and hurt, so Shiro would never be tempted to return. The boy didn’t understand the ramifications of his actions, the danger he put them both in just by sneaking onto the ship, even if the cameras didn’t pick up any evidence of his presence. If any of the commanders got word – if Sendak found out – but something insistent and understanding inside Ulaz ached for the cub he saved less than four annuals ago in Drule Central.

“Shiro,” Ulaz called, and Shiro glanced over his shoulder, expression naked and stricken without the mask to hide behind.

The Galra soldier opened his arms, and after a hesitant beat, Shiro answered their beckon, leaping into the circle of them. With a grunt, Ulaz accepted the shockingly strong embrace and rested his cheek upon Shiro’s soft strands.

“I missed you, too,” he murmured.

With Shiro’s face buried in his chest, Ulaz couldn’t see the boy’s reaction, but he imagined the redden streaks upon Shiro’s cheeks and the tender look in his eyes.

He should have let Shiro go then, scolded him once more for showing up on a Galra ship – on this ship, no less – but instead, Ulaz simply held the boy. There would be another time for words and for lessons, but right now, affirmation took precedence. Unlike his parents, unlike every other person except Keith, Shiro needed to know Ulaz wouldn’t leave him, that Ulaz would always be there for him.

And so Ulaz held his young charge until Shiro’s tears dried and the tension in his shoulders melted. Then, and only then, did Ulaz release Shiro but not without a kiss upon his forehead and a promise to return to the headquarters soon.

His outward allegiance might have been to the Galra Empire, but his life would always belong to the Blade and its wayward cubs.
Chapter Summary

Shiro brings Keith’s presents when he’s away more than three quintaints. This time, he brings destiny.

“Takashi!”

Shiro barely stepped off the ship in the Blade of Marmora’s hanger before a bundle of energy slammed into his side and knocked him flat onto his back. Less than a moment later, a heavy being straddled his waist, and sharp but gentle claws hit off his mask. A familiar warmth nuzzled against his vulnerable neck, spreading its scent and welcoming Shiro home with a traditional Galra pack greeting.

Shiro surrendered to the relaxing ministrations, allowing the smaller being to do as it wished, until it sat straight up, tail hitting his side in a quick, fanatic rhythm. “What’d you bring me? What’d you bring me? Huhhuhhuh!"

At all of twelve, Keith was non-stop chaos with a black mane dusting his shoulders, ears twitching in delight, and amber eyes sparkling with mischief. He wore a black overjacket with a red undershirt, and in true cub fashion – no shoes whatsoever, the rebel.

Shiro grinned and slotted his hands behind his head, reveling in his brother’s enthusiastic presence. “It’s good to see you, too, Keith.”

Keith bounced. “Takashi! You didn’t answer my question.”

Though Keith was still a foot and a half shorter than Shiro, he was heavy, and Shiro didn’t need to embellish the groan that slipped through his lips. “Kiddo, you’re getting too big for this.”

“Don’t change the subject! What’d you bring me?”

“What makes you think I brought you anything?”

“You always bring me something back when you’re gone longer than three quintaints, and it’s been a whole cycle.”

He reached up to scratch behind Keith’s ears, which sent the half-breed’s tail thumping again and a contented purr trilling. “Well, do you deserve a present? Were you good for Kolivan?”

“Keith – ”

“I listened, Takashi! I did as Kolivan asked. Promise!”

“Hm, and he pinned you,” Kolivan admonished, though good-natured humor laced his words.
“Perhaps you need more hours on the training deck, Shiro.”

Of course, Shiro responded in a fashion befitting of his twenty-two annuals and his rank as Son of the Blade – he crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue.

Kolivan rolled his eyes – or the Galra equivalent – and opened his mouth to retort when Antok called. The leader left with a passing, “I’ll see you in the morning session, Shiro,” before Shiro groaned and pushed up in attempt to unseat his little brother.

“Come on, kiddo. Get off.”

Keith squeezed his legs tighter against Shiro’s side. “Nope. Not until you give me my present.”

“And if you don’t give it to me, I’m not getting off. So there.”

Shiro was not looking forward to Keith’s teenage years, especially since the kid restrained him perfectly. He could flick up his legs and possibly catch Keith off-balance, but by the claws gripping his shoulders, the tail curling about his thigh, and the knees digging into his sides, he’d end up hurting himself or Keith – if he managed to escape at all.

And he really didn’t want to show Kolivan and Antok his twelve-year-old kid brother bested him. He could only imagine the training session that would result.

“All right, all right, you win – this time,” Shiro warned because Keith no doubt was waking up to his tail in hot water tonight. “Now let go.”

Keith’s claws disengaged, but his knees stayed on either side of Shiro’s hip as Shiro reached down to his belt and produced a red and white handle. Keith’s eyes immediately brightened, his mouth forming a tiny “o” in surprise as he reached for it.

Shiro could relate. He almost gave Antok a heart attack when he stopped before one of the lava pits on Revsayr and something – some energy – compelled him to dip his hand into the molten pool. Without thinking, he complied, and he should have lost the hand. The fire burned at a scorching temperature that could melt bones – and yet he simply touched the bayard and lifted it clean from the burning liquid.

In that moment, with the mysterious energy thrumming deep in his chest, tethering him to something greater than himself, his right arm went numb, and a ferocious roar resounded in his ears. Shiro saw a flash of red – and Keith…? Older. Stronger. Fiercer.

In the present, Keith took possession of the ancient weapon as Shiro explained, “It’s called a bayard. Antok said it was the traditional weapon of a Paladin of Voltron.”

Keith’s eyes rounded, and did they just flicker with flames?

Before Shiro could question it, the bayard shimmered with red sparkles. In the burst of white light, it shifted and transformed. Now in Keith’s hand was a sword, a longer form of Shiro’s ceremonial dagger from the Blade of Marmora.

Perhaps Shiro should have been frightened – or at least unnerved – by the supernatural weapon in his little brother’s hands, but he lived with seven-and-half-foot cats. This was nothing.

“So…what do you think, kiddo?” Shiro asked, taking the opportunity to catch Keith off guard and
sit up. His arms wrapped about the boy’s waist to keep Keith on his lap, and when Keith just stared
at the blade as if in a trance, Shiro jumbled his backside. “Hey, Keith? Earth to Keith. Hey. You
okay?”

Then Keith came back from wherever his mind went, smiling up Shiro with a look of pure mirth. “I
bet I can beat you blade for blade!”

“Oh, yeah?” This contest, Shiro could win. Only Kolivan beat him with a blade. “You’re on. Lead
the way.”

Keith shot up in a flash and took off toward the training deck, Shiro on his heel. Behind them,
Kolivan and Antok watched with twin grimaces.

“Hmmm…so the half-breed is the Red Paladin.”

“And the right arm of Voltron,” Kolivan added with blatant resignation. “Destiny has impeccable
taste.”

“Do you ever wonder why she chose them?”

A beat passed before Kolivan replied, “No. The opposite, actually.”
Crossing the Border

Chapter Summary

Though few and far between, there are missions where Shiro needs to travel through the legitimate space ports and encounter Galra security (i.e. TSA/border control), and Ulaz and Thace upload fake records into the Galra governmental system for those occasions. But as a lower lifeform, Shiro has a harder time passing through these checkpoints than the rest of the Blades...

Chapter Notes

Written for three anon requests. I posted this as two chapters on Tumblr but put it together for one chapter here.

**Warnings:** Immobilization, angst, collars, and inference to prostitution (somehow, though, I think SFW as no sexual acts are actually described or explored in this…)

“Keeper?” Shiro shrieked, storming into the Hilt and shaking a datapad at Kolivan. “You listed yourself as my keeper?”

Kolivan turned from his discussion with two Blades and waved them away. “You are not Galra. You must be registered as a ‘lower lifeform’ in the empire’s records, and as such, you must be assigned a keeper.”

“And - what? You’re going to put a collar and leash on me, too? And if they think I have diseases, I’ll be subjected to quarantine like some - some pet?”

“Now you are just being insolent,” Kolivan snarled, though his voice lacked its usual heat. “You’ve traveled through the Galra space ports before. You know the protocol.”

“My dad always took us through the back channels and used Keith’s Galra appearance to pass us by as his - y’know, never mind about that.” Shiro threw up his hand. “I am not letting you list yourself as my - as my keeper.”

“Because you do not trust me?” Kolivan said as firmly as always. “Or do you not trust me to protect you on this specific mission as I have on all the others?”

That deflated Shiro instantly. “Of course not. You know I trust you with my life, Kolivan.” He added lower, more somber, “With Keith’s life.”

“Then trust me when I say other than a few minor inconveniences, this mission will be no different than all the other ones you have fought.”

He was overreacting. Shiro knew that, but he just couldn’t help the uncomfortable feeling writhing under his skin. But Kolivan was right. He trusted the leader, his surrogate father, Shiro sometimes
allowed himself to acknowledge. There was nothing to worry about; he was just being melodramatic.

The door to the Hilt opened, revealing one of the Blade’s lead technicians. He held what appeared to be a thin loop of silver. “Ah, Leader. There you are. I have the tracking collar you requested, but I’m not sure of the sizing. Will it be going on a neck or wrist? Perhaps an ankle or even a thigh - ?”

Shiro crossed his arms and glared up at Kolivan, who hmphed and snapped, “Do not look at me like that, cub. You should be grateful I do not make you wear one on all your missions.”

Shiro growled and stormed off, but less than a week later, the collar shimmered upon his chest, appearing more like a necklace than a mark of ownership.

Wringing his duffle’s strap, Shiro tried to ignore the side-eyed looks that met him. It wasn’t like he didn’t receive similar wanton glances at space ports and even in the Blades’ headquarters, but somehow he felt more exposed and vulnerable in an entry port at the empire’s capital city.

A large hand draped across his nape, ruffling the longer strands of hair that resided there. Kolivan’s wordless reassurance coaxed a heavy sigh from Shiro, who leaned into the petting with more enthusiasm than perhaps he wanted to show.

“It will be over soon,” Kolivan bit off under his breath. “Stick close to me, and I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Shiro practically huddled at Kolivan’s elbow as they waited for their turn at the checkpoint, never straying more than a step from Kolivan’s side. Shiro hated how much he felt like a pet, but he reveled in Kolivan’s gentle caresses, his sharp claws scraping but not breaking Shiro’s skin. Despite having to play the part of keeper and lesser lifeform, the affection allowed Shiro to breathe.

That was, until they reached the custom sentry, who demanded, “He does not have an implant.”

Kolivan snatched the front of Shiro’s collar, tugging him a step forward. “He has the necessary tagging.”

“But all claimed lower lifeforms must have a tracking implant as per the Galran Hierarchy Code.”

The fist about his collar began to tremble, and Shiro wished his insides weren’t. “Kolivan?”

“He’ll have to be taken to quarantine until he receives the proper documentation.”

Shiro forced himself to remain calm, even as twin guards came about the sentry’s booth. “Kolivan?” he asked again.

Kolivan’s hand came to rest upon Shiro’s shoulder before he ducked his head and nuzzled along Shiro’s cheek. “It’s alright, Takashi,” he whispered. “I’ll see you soon.”

Kolivan was letting the sentries take him? “Kolivan – ”

Kolivan’s fore-claw pressed against Shiro’s necklace, and suddenly, the chain retracted, tightening about Shiro’s throat – just like a collar.

Shiro’s hands immediately went to his neck, and when the duel claws landed upon his shoulders, one from each of the sentries, Shiro spun, ready to stab each of them – only for a hand to free his retracted dagger from the small of his back, right before he could grab it.
Kolivan hid it under his long cloak, much to Shiro’s dismay. He shot Kolivan one last betrayed look – though Kolivan’s warning glare never wavered – before the sentries attached a leash of pure quintessence to Shiro’s collar to card him away.

Shiro grunted, the sentry jerking him forward, and fought to keep his shivers under control. Quarantine consisted of long hallways with tiny porthole windows, each indicating a solitary confinement cell. Shiro stared straight ahead, for the one time he met the gaze of another captive – a bunny-like being with its ears tied back and a glimmering chain about its neck – he saw the sunken, dead eyes of a lower lifeform who’d seen the world Shiro only visited a few times in his life.

_Breathe in, hold for three ticks, then release_, Thace’s calming voice slid through Shiro’s mind as the cell door lock engaged. _Close your eyes, center yourself, and focus upon your breathing._

He’d found himself in a similar situation before, trapped in a hanger’s containment closet, afraid he’d be caught, even more afraid of the walls closing in upon him. Thace talked him through the entire situation, a soothing presence in his ear, teaching him how to breathe through a panic attack and later, prevent one from starting.

But he was trapped in a six-by-eight-foot sterile cell, with a medi-bed against one wall and closet along the other.

In a Galra quarantine at a space port.

Just outside of Drule Central.

Maybe if Shiro escaped and met up with Kolivan, then they wouldn’t have to go through the port again. They could infiltrate Central Command and download the files they sought – and Shiro wouldn’t have to stay here, in the cell, waiting for the proper documentation – whatever that was.

And what if the sentries discovered who he was and Sendak was notified…

Yeah, Shiro needed to get out of there – _now_.

His hand immediately flew to his collar and pressed down upon the control panel, but instead of releasing like Kolivan told him it would, a nerve-searing pulse of energy tore through his being. It rippled down his arms and torso, burning all the way to the tips of his toes. A pain-filled shriek rent the air, and he collapsed face first to the ground, his body twitching with the remnants of the shocks.

He feared to move, feared to breathe, but he even worse – he couldn’t. Short of blinking, he couldn’t even close his mouth to stop the drool from pooling under his cheek.

He was completely vulnerable, and of course, that was when the door to the cell clunked open.

_“Hm. The sentries said it was a bit of a wild one.”_ Claw-toed boots stepped in front of him, and then rough hands seized his shoulders, hauling him onto the bed. From his new position, Shiro saw two Galrans, one with an ear piercing and a sadistic snarl, another with glasses and a lab coat.

Piercing growled again, “Its keeper has been too lenient. It didn’t know its biometrical signature would not release the collar.”

_It?_

Glasses typed upon his datapad. “Yes. I have already made notes. It might have to be reeducated in
class restrictions before being released to his master.”

Shiro gulped, eyes painfully wide as Piercing replied, “We should teach it a lesson first. That skin could use a few more marks.”

Yet he couldn’t lift his head to spit in Piercing’s face.

“It has a keeper,” Glasses reminded with clinical accuracy, finishing up whatever he was typing on his datapad before dipping into his coat’s pocket and extracting a gun-like interjector. “Flip it over.”

Ancients. Ancients! Piercing sneered and gripped Shiro by the shoulder, leaning him on his left side and baring the back of his neck for Glasses.

No. He was a member of the Blade of Marmora. He was the Son of the Blade. He wasn’t a sniveling cub anymore, vulnerable to the whims of the Galra Empire. He could take each of these Galras apart even without his blade.

Yet he couldn’t lift his head to spit in Piercing’s face.

Shiro closed his eyes, the weight of the collar tight about his neck as he swallowed. This wasn’t happening. It wasn’t. Kolivan promised nothing would happen to him. Kolivan never lied to him. He wouldn’t let them harm him. He wouldn’t.

The cool needle pressed against his skin.

Ancients wouldn’t.

Metal shrieked. A fierce, predatory growl. No threats. No warnings. Just the reverberating thumps of heavy bodies slamming to the ground and the sudden absence of metal against his skin. Familiar hands cradled his shoulders, lowering him back against a warm, secure chest.

Three purple eyes gazed down upon him under a dark hood, and Shiro couldn’t stop the tears that only now stung the eyes.

Ancients.

Kolivan came.

Shivering claws first cupped his cheek, and then Kolivan’s jaw followed, nuzzling along his throat. No words were needed, and Kolivan offered none. Instead, he pressed his fore-claw against the collar, and Shiro squeezed his eyes shut, anticipating the debilitating pain once more – only for the chain to give way and fall from Shiro’s throat.

“Never again,” Kolivan said, and Shiro believed him.

Kolivan never lied.

“Kolivan!” Antok’s voice bellowed from the door. “We must go.”

The Blade leader needed no other encouragement. Kolivan slipped one of his massive arms under Shiro’s knees while the other secured Shiro’s torso against his chest. Without even a grunt of effort, he lifted Shiro off the bed.

Shiro’s head rested upon Kolivan’s shoulder, and he let his eyes slip closed, trusting the Blades to get him out. Kolivan refused to release him, even cradling Shiro in his lap once they finally made it back to the ship. His fingers began to tingle, and when Shiro lifted a shaky hand toward Kolivan, the leader placed a dagger in Shiro’s palm, then encircled it with his own claw.
“Partial mobility will return within ten vargas, complete mobility within a full quintaint,” Kolivan murmured, his chin resting on Shiro’s head. “…My apologies, cub. I…I miscalculated. The collar needed to be functional in order to pass the border – ”

Shiro managed to nuzzle his cheek against Kolivan’s chest, stopping the leader’s fumbled apology.

Kolivan came for him. He kept his promise. Nothing else mattered to Shiro.
Chapter Summary

Puberty not only brings hormones but also paladin powers. So I guess Shiro was a late bloomer.

Chapter Notes

This idea came from jackalsmiler, who commented that the BoM would need to keep fire extinguishers around after Keith developed his powers. Yeah, I totally needed to run with that awesome idea! Thank you so much, sweetie - and I’m sorry this turned into an angst fest. Apparently, that’s all I write for this series. *whines*

Shiro first noticed it at the kitchen. He and Keith snuck into the headquarters’ mess late one night after Shiro returned from a mission. It had been a particularly hard one with Antok almost losing a leg, but they’d only managing to secure the name of the empire’s project – the Komar Experiment. So Kolivan called the mission a success.

But Antok would need to spend a full movement in a cryo-replenisher, and just the sight of the burly, strong-willed Galra locked in that hold shook Shiro to his core. He sought Keith in their rooms, questioning his own mortality and what that would mean for his little brother.

What if one mission he never returned? How would Keith take it?

Shiro banished the thought and instead shook his little brother awake, reveling in the shimmering glow of the cub’s amber eyes.

“Hey, kiddo. I’m back.”

“Takashi…” He nuzzled his brother’s hand before shooting up in bed. “Did you bring me anything!”

Shiro sighed and ruffled his hair. “Nothing this time, but I’ll make it up to you. Want to see if there’s any warm goo with sugar sauce in the mess?”

And that’s how ended up in the kitchen with Shiro warming up the cook’s latest sweet creation. Keith leaned against Shiro, practically pushing his brother out of the way to get a spoonful of the goo – when the flames on the stove reached out to him. Shiro lunged, snatching his brother by the waist and swinging Keith away from the lunging flames.

“Takashi! What gives?”

Shiro huffed, glaring at the billowing flames that raged upon the stovetop, still trying to get to his little brother.

“Takashi?” Keith asked again, and Shiro had no answers for him.
Over the next few weeks, Shiro found himself blowing out candles, making sure Keith took his meals in his room, and keeping the cub away from anything that could remotely create embers – until one day, in the middle of training, an explosion rocked the base.

Shiro whirled toward Kolivan, who appeared as shocked as he. Without a word, they both darted toward the door, only to be met by two anxious lower-ranking Blades.

“The – The personal quarter decks. They just – they just exploded!”

A bomb? Perhaps an outside attack?

“Which decks?” Kolivan demanded.

“Five through eight.”

Shiro’s blood went cold; he swung toward Kolivan. “Keith…”

At once, they dashed down the hall, heading toward the elevator shaft. Kolivan’s longer legs crossed the distance quicker, but Shiro managed to keep within ten feet of him. It allowed him to never slow his stride when Kolivan wrenched the elevator shaft open. Shiro jumped, gripping the thick wires and sliding down, the friction warming his gloves but never breaking through the material. Black’s discontented rumble echoed through the back of his mind, warning him, and Shiro’s heart plummeted. Did Black know something about Keith?

But then Kolivan jumped to the tiny ledge of the fifth level, where Shiro and Keith’s quarters were located, and wrenched the doors open. Vibrant flames immediately licked his gloves and flooded the elevator shaft with overwhelming heat.

Another lion – a fierce lioness – roared in Shiro’s mind.

*Red.* Keith’s lion called to him.

Kolivan hissed and reached for the wires again, swinging away from the flames, but Shiro couldn’t back away. Keith was in there.

“Shiro!” Kolivan reprimanded, even as he activated his mask. “You can’t go in there! The flames will burn you alive.”

Shiro had no choice.

Black’s encouraging roar echoed through Shiro’s being, urging him into the intense inferno. *Trust me,* Black insisted, as if he doubted Shiro would. But Black was the other half of Shiro’s soul, so there never needed to be any convincing, just direction.

Lifting two fingers to his jaw to activate his mask, Shiro ignored Kolivan’s pained shriek and swung toward the hungry flames. A sensation crashed down upon him with the force of a powerful ocean wave, like the Black Lion’s very essence permeated his body and spread a tingling sensation through every fiber of his being.

As his boots touched the ground of the fifth level, the flames raged around him, but none actually burned him.

“Takashi!”

Shiro glanced down his gloves, at the flames, and back at Kolivan’s widened eyes. Shiro’s body
lost its presence, only existing as a wrath like when in the astral plane. The Black Lion’s powers transferred to reality.

The Red Lion snarled again, reminding Shiro of his mission, and he took off through the burning corridors toward his room.

“Keith!” he screamed as he ducked through the blown-out doorway. “Keith!”

A fury of fire ravaged their rooms, its heat a mystery to Shiro but its presence alone enough to make him pant and cringe. The couches, the beds, the cabinets burned to ashes as the intense flames scorched the metallic walls. He somehow managed to breathe, even with the billowing black smoke, and as the fire crackled and popped in mini-explosions, he sought the source of it – a tiny being huddled in the corner of the chambers, fire engulfing his entire body, from the tops of his ears to the tip of his tail.

“Keith!”

Shiro’s heart plummeted at the horrific sight of his little brother – his baby brother – swallowed by the furious blaze – but – but he was alive? How in the Ancients was that possible?


Except he wasn’t. The crimson and orange flames swirled up from below Keith’s feet, spreading out from his very core, but Shiro clearly saw Keith’s furry strands swaying with the blaze. He merely unleashed the fire – or bathed in it – and the worshipping flames refused to consume him.

It was the only thing that kept Shiro sane.

“Takashi! Help me! Please! I don’t – I can’t – I –”

“It’s – It’s going to be okay, Keith,” Shiro tried to soothe, rushing to his side and falling to his knees. “You’re going to be okay. I just need you to breathe.”

“I – I can’t! What’s happening! The flames – they’re – they’re all around me!”

At this rate, Keith would have a panic attack and pass out.

Keith reached out to him on impulse, but his tiny trembling claws slipped through Shiro’s transparent arm. “Takashi!”

“Keith, listen to me –”

“Takashi! I – I don’t know what to do! Tell me what – I can’t – I need to –”

Ancients, how had his dad or stepmother calmed him after he sleep-walked and awoke alone in the middle of a desert cavern? How had they brought him back from those panicked moments where he couldn’t quite make sense of it all?

On instinct, the words slipped out of his mouth in a half-bitten growl, “Hush, little kitten, don’t you purr/Mama’s gonna buy you a Puig’s fur.”

“Takashi!” Keith reached for him again, tears sizzling upon his cheeks and turning to tiny puffs of steam. “Takashi, I can’t –

Calmer, more gently, Shiro began again, “Hush, little kitten, don’t you purr/Mama’s gonna buy
you a Puig’s fur.”

It was a song Moira sang to them after they woke in the desert, after a nightmare filled with crimson and pain, after Shiro heard a growl that echoed through the canyon at night, calling to him, demanding he come to it.

Keith sniffled, trying to grip Shiro’s arm again, and Shiro tried one more time, “Hush, little kitten, don’t you purr…” And Keith’s tight, soft voice stammered alongside Shiro’s, “…Mama’s gonna buy you a Puig’s fur.”

Shiro smiled, hand coming forward to clasp his brother’s shoulder, even if Keith couldn’t feel it. The lions rumbled along in their minds, a steady but soothing roar. “And if that Puig’s fur won’t warm/Mama’s gonna buy you a luxite sword.

“And if that luxite sword won’t slice/Mama’s gonna buy you some comet ice.”

Moira took the words from “Hush Little Baby” and changed them to refer to the Blade, to the Puigs’ homeworld in the Faraway Systems, where they’d lived peacefully after leaving Earth. And the comet? What could that possibly refer to?

But Shiro’s wondering thoughts dwindled as Keith’s voice perked up. “And if that comet ice won’t burn –”

Every line steadied Keith’s voice just a little more, and the fire’s once fierce flames began to dissipate. The outer corridor smoldered with dying embers first before the cool air of the fire suppressors brushed Shiro’s cheek. With a tiny, appreciative rumble from Red, the last flames lapped up Keith’s body and fizzled completely, leaving the thirteen-year-old half-breed blackened with soot, his fur terribly dirty and his cheeks wet as he finished –

“And if that fierce lion won’t roar/Don’t worry, my kitten, they’ll be four more.”

Shiro would have gasped – his stepmother had sung about Voltron – if Keith’s last bit of strength hadn’t given out. As he toppled backwards, Shiro lunged. A wave of lightheaded rushed through him once more, leaving him feeling tired and bereft without the Black Lion’s essence, but his body solidified. It allowed him to tug Keith close as his brother pressed his face into Shiro’s shoulder and sobbed.

Shiro allowed himself one, brief moment to close his eyes and simply savor the rise and fall of his brother’s chest, the warm tears that soaked through his uniform, and the desperate claws that clung to his jacket.

Thank the Ancients. His baby brother was alive.

An intense tremble seized Keith’s being, and Shiro let his own wayward thoughts wane to nuzzle the top of Keith’s disheveled hair. “It’s okay, Keith. I have you. Everything’s okay now.”

Fire extinguishers sounded just outside the room, and then Kolivan tore through the door with a bellowing shriek. “Keith! Takashi!”

“We’re okay,” Shiro barely managed to croak, curling about his brother to keep him shielded from the advancing Blades. “Kolivan, can you get a spare cloak?”

Kolivan did one better, immediately shedding his own and draping it across Keith’s exposed back. It effectively covered the younger Galra, tumbling off his shoulders and pooling on the floor next to his knees. Keith’s claw dug into the back of Shiro’s cloak, but they eased slightly when Kolivan
came to kneel by his side and place a comforting claw upon his back.

“You are all right, cub,” Kolivan soothed. “It is over.”

No, Shiro would admit to himself. The war – and the nightmares – had only just become.

“We need to tell him,” Shiro demanded once Keith disappeared into one of the showers on the ninth level. “It’s only going to get worse as he gets older, and he’s going to need help mastering it.”

“Mastering it?” Kolivan countered, still without his overcloak. “You are nearly a decade older than him, and you have not even begun to understand your power.”

“Which is why he needs to start training now.”

“I cannot condone letting one as young as Keith start –”

“My mother took us off planet to try to spare us, yet took one of our nursery rhymes and changed it to include our future. You knew we had been chosen as paladins and didn’t tell me. I – I can’t do that to him, Kolivan. I won’t lie to him. He needs to know.”

“Need to know what?” Keith asked as he exited the shower, draped in Kolivan’s vest, like he refused to relinquish it. “You – You know what happened today? Because all I heard was this lion in my mind, and then all of a sudden –” Keith’s voice fell to a whisper. “…boom.”

Twin roars echoed in Shiro’s mind. His body pulsed with energy that mirrored his own, but even then, he deferred to Kolivan. He wouldn’t go forward without Kolivan’s blissing.

The older Galra sighed. “He is your brother and your Red Paladin. I will not stop you.”

“What’s going on?” Keith demanded.

Shiro met his brother halfway, tucking the cub under his arm and squeezing his shoulder. “Let’s – Let’s go talk in the observatory, okay? There’s something I need to tell you.”

“Wait,” Kolivan ordered before turning to a low-ranking Blade. “I need two fire extinguishers brought to the observatory immediately. Also, double the number throughout the headquarters.”

Keith’s ears drooped; Shiro just laughed and nuzzled the top of his head in silent comfort.
By Omission

Chapter Summary

Keith hopes for some freedom at a swap meet; Shiro hopes to keep his little brother by his side; and Kolivan just wants less grey fur.

Shiro sighed and ran his fingers over his scar in frustration. “Keith, can you just – we’re here for supplies. That’s it.”

“And if we split up the list, we’re get the list done faster.” Keith fluttered about Shiro, his tail lashing back and forth behind him. “Come on. Come on. Comeoncomeoncomeon.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Keith huffed, his pointed ears twitching in irritation as he hustled after his brother. “That’s unfair. That pirate probably tried to pass off a scaultrite lens as a Baku’s pearl.”

“Don’t care.”

“Takashi!”

“Keith.”

They were also one of the few places Shiro frequented with the Blades when not in his uniform. Instead, he donned a black jacket over a jumpsuit, with his blade strapped to his thigh and compression gloves stretching to his knuckles. He pretended not to see the interested stares from the various lifeforms who ignored his mating mark and liked his tight suit.

The Blade of Marmora shopped almost exclusively at the Unilu Swap Meets, bartering food, supplies, and even the latest technologies from Olkarion, so Shiro was used to the attention. He’d learned how to school his features to present an aloof and reserved demeanor. It also allowed him to keep Keith ignorant about the Galran hierarchy for as long as possible.
“Look, I won’t get a tail ring,” Keith added, tugging on Shiro’s wrist with the aforementioned appendage. “Promise.”

Shiro stopped short, shoulders tensing. Ancients, when the kid used that tone, the one that was so sincere and poignant that Shiro’s heart ached, it was hard to deny Keith anything. But Shiro couldn’t let his little brother wander around the meet by himself.

Keith was relentless. “I’ll stick to the list. I’ll keep my head down. I – I’ll even make it back to the ship before you.”

Someone was testing him, Shiro was sure of it, and when he risked a glance down, he saw Keith’s drooped ears, honest eyes, and hopeful expression.

He wanted to give Keith the tiny slack in his metaphorical leash, but space pirates could be just as dangerous as Galra soldiers, sometimes even more so. Some took offense to Galra at the swap meet, believing it to be a safe haven for undocumented citizens and lower lifeforms who had managed to save themselves from the chaste system of the empire. Others took offense to a lower lifeform with a mating mark, holding a grudge against someone who seemingly surrendered to the empire and its devices in hopes of security and prosperity.

Their dynamic worked well – Shiro could protect Keith and give him credence as a Galra among lower lifeforms, while Keith provided cover for Shiro as his Galran keeper.

No matter how much he wanted to grant Keith’s request – Shiro couldn’t, not without putting them both in danger. It was something they’d have to address eventually, though Shiro shuttered to imagine that conversation.

How could he possibly explain his status in the empire to Keith? How could he tell his little brother he was revered as less of a being because of his “weak” biology?

Would it change how Keith viewed him? Keith stared at him with nothing less than absolute affection and hero-worship. Shiro cherished very little in the universe, unable to hold onto anything material from when he was younger, but his little brother and Keith’s reverence would always top the very short list of his prized possessions.

So perhaps it was wrong. Perhaps Kolivan would admonish him later, but he ignored the issue to wrap an arm about Keith’s shoulders and bring him close.

“Hey, tell you what. Why don’t we get through Kolivan’s list fast, then let’s see if we can trade a few langos for some of those juniberries you like so much, huh?”

Keith’s ears remained low and his pout deepened, a terrible frown darkening his usually bright features. Shiro tried to cheer him up, nuzzling the top of his head and hitting his shoulder again, but Keith simply crossed his arms and glowered. Shiro made a mental note to find the juniberries sooner rather than later. Sure, they’d have to barter something else – perhaps some of the infinity vapor they’d brought from the headquarters – but Keith deserved something for his silent acquiescence.

Shiro found the next best thing – a few umvy spice pops – and turned from the stall, searching for a familiar red and yellow jacket.

“Keith?” His eyes danced over the unfamiliar masses of the space port; panic seized him immediately. “Keith!”

But his little brother was nowhere to be seen.
Dread consumed Kolivan the moment he noticed Antok’s tail fidget, and he stepped off the back of the pod with a hand already on his blade.

“What is it?”

Antok’s narrowed eyes set upon the exit of the swap meet. Various space crafts of every size and design lined up toward the large opening, and when the crowds thinned, Antok’s growling voice became graver than usual. “We’re missing a cub.”

Kolivan followed Antok’s gaze to see Keith amble toward their pod with his hands stuffed in his pockets and a surly expression plastered upon his face.

Ancients.

“Where’s your brother?” Kolivan snarled the moment Keith stepped within earshot.

Keith shrugged. “I don’t know.”

Kolivan pounced, claws seizing Keith’s shoulders in a demanding embrace. “Keith, where’s your brother?”

“I don’t know!” Keith snapped. “I left him back by the food stalls! What’s the big deal anyway? He’s twenty-five. He can take care of him – ”

“A bitter growl slithered through Kolivan’s fangs. “You just left him there? Don’t you understand the ramifications of your actions? Right now, your brother could be – ”

“ – fine, Kolivan,” Shiro interrupted, a sharp edge to his tone. “I’m fine – and got the supplies you requested – by myself.”

Kolivan’s eyesight shifted over Keith’s head to see Shiro approach, bags hanging from his arms with the goods he’d been tasked with picking up. But the leader’s eyes narrowed upon the subtle tells – the slight limp of Shiro’s leg, the way his right arm pressed against his abdomen, his disheveled hair.

Keith shifted, trying to break free from Kolivan. “See? You didn’t need – ”

Kolivan physically lifted Keith to his eyelevel, a fierce growl reverberating from his gut. “You are not to leave your brother’s side at a swap meet. Do I make myself – ”

“Kolivan,” Shiro interjected, an eerie calmness settling in his voice. He handed his bags to Antok before turning toward the leader and Keith. “It’s all right. Keith’s fifteen now. He’s practically a full-grown Galra. He can make his own decisions.”

Keith bristled at the cold tone in his brother’s usually good-natured voice. “What’s your problem? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Shiro sucked in a long, bracing inhale. “You knew I didn’t want you wandering alone through the stalls, and yet you still – ”

“I made it back alright. See? All in one piece.”

“Yes, I’m glad this time, no one decided to take out their frustration on the smallest Galra in the known – ”
“I can take care of myself,” Keith defended, managing to cross his arms despite hanging in Kolivan’s grip. “I don’t need you to watch over me anymore. I’m not a cub.”

Shiro’s hands shook as he beseeched, “You’re fifteen, Keith, not –”

“Oh, come on! You were only a year older than me when you started going to these –”

Kolivan watched Shiro’s thin hold on his anger snap. “I didn’t have a choice! Mom and Dad left us, Keith! What was I supposed to do?”

The universe froze; the chaotic sounds of the swap meet filled the space between them. Shiro huffed, face twisted in a horrible, pleading expression of desperation and affection.

“Do you know how long it took me to find a place that would even sell food to us?” he continued. “And you’re lucky a Shafornian Clidehopper never tried to find out why you’re not with your –”

Keith’s fury always managed to exceed Shiro’s. “I can handle them!”

“I didn’t say you can’t.” Shiro’s fingers tugged at his bangs as he let out a hitched sigh. “These meets – they’re not safe, Keith, and I wish I didn’t have to go to them by myself when I was your –”

“What are you talking about? I went with you all the time, but you made me play hide-and-hunt under the tents.”

A desperate, raw plea. “Keith –”

“And you left me there for – I don’t know – like two vargas sometimes. And I was six or seven then, so why’re you so worried now that I’m –”

“Ancients, Keith! I tried my fucking best!”

“Doing what? Shoving me under a table and praying nothing –”

“Enough.”

Kolivan usually kept his distance when the brothers fought, allowing them to work out their problems with minimal interference, but then there were times – when Keith’s tail began to lash and his ears went flat against his head, or when Shiro went pure white and his eyes trembled – that Kolivan gripped one of them by the scruff and lifted them off the ground.

Now was that time.

“Separate, both of you.” Kolivan lifted Keith, who let out a squawked yelp in protest. “Shiro, ride in the front of the pod with Antok. Keith, sit in the back in me.”

Keith hissed, tail swinging and claws gleaming, and Kolivan thought he might get some resistance from Shiro. But his elder cub’s hand drifted his right side while his teeth clicked together with a snap.

“Right. Okay.” He shuttered but didn’t hit off Antok’s hand when it landed upon his shoulder. Kolivan took that as a good sign, even though he made a mental note to not leave Shiro alone that night. No doubt, the cub would be lost in the demons – or alien lifeforms – of his past.
remained frayed, though he dismissed the look of absolute dismay upon his brother’s face during the last moments of their fight.

Takashi used to make him hide all the time at the meets and then go off by himself, so what was so wrong with Keith doing it just once?

Of course, it didn’t help Keith’s nerves that Kolivan said nothing, just sat with his arms crossed and his eyes closed, almost as if he was sleeping. Usually Kolivan’s silence meant he was angry, and when he finally unleashed his rage, Keith would be muttering an apology that wouldn’t spare him from the harshest punishments, including cleaning all 47 bathrooms in the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters, helping Ulaz with his experiments (complete with the nauseating scent of Klanmural vomit), or even washing all the pods in the hanger.

He should have remained silent and wait for Kolivan to calm down and speak with him. That usually yielded lighter punishments, but the uncomfortable atmosphere weighed heavily upon his shoulders.

“I don’t why he freaked out,” Keith muttered, arms crossed almost in a reflection of Kolivan’s pose. “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Kolivan remained unmoving.

Crap. Keith was going to smelling vomit for the next week and a half, wasn’t he? Well, Ancients, if a punishment was what he’d receive, he might as well make it a good one.

“And I’m fifteen now. I’m not some cub who needs to be protected. I almost managed to pin Thace the other day! And he’s a lieutenant in the empire, so that means I can take anyone at a swap meet.”

Kolivan didn’t even budge.

“You and Takashi both said I’m the Red Paladin. I’m going to help save the universe – but I can’t go around a swap meet by myself?”

Still nothing.

Keith sighed and tipped his head back against the wall. “And it’s not like Takashi can’t handle himself. He’s twenty-five, and he’s been going on missions with you guys for…what? Seven – eight annuals now? So what’s the big deal?”

What the Ancients!

“Ugh! Kolivan, why won’t you say anything?”

The ship’s reverse thrusters engaged at that exact moment, jarring the ship a bit – Antok must have been piloting. Kolivan’s eyes opened. In one swift movement, he managed to stand, snatch Keith by the scruff, and drag him out of the pod.

“Kolivan!” Keith yelped, but Kolivan carded him along as if he weighed nothing. They came to the front of the ship where Takashi worked his legs over the edge – and painstakingly slowly slid to the ground. He seemed to be moving at a third of his normal speed.

Before Keith could ask, Kolivan barked, “Ulaz should be back by now. Go see him.”

Takashi’s eyes jerked up. “I’m – I’m fine.”
“That was directive, Shiro, not a request. Antok, carry him if he refuses.”

“That was directive, Shiro, not a request. Antok, carry him if he refuses.”

“Kolivan,” Takashi protested, but Antok appeared at his side, his presence enough to dip Takashi’s shoulders, similar to how Keith’s ears drooped when chastised.

Kolivan waited just long enough to make sure Takashi relented before proceeding further. Keith grunted, along for the ride.

“Kolivan, what are you –”

But all Keith’s protests died upon his tongue when Kolivan tugged him into the Hilt. Thace welcomed them with a warm smile, which immediately fell to a frown once he caught sight of Kolivan’s menacing demeanor. Keith wanted to rush and greet the Blade – it’d been almost a feeb since Thace had been home – but the Blade’s exasperated voice stopped Keith in his tracks.

“What’d he do this time?”

They made it sound like he was a wild cub or something.

“Bring up the footage of the Drule Central customs incident.”

Thace froze, eyes critical and uncertain, before he motioned toward Keith.

Kolivan responded by tugging Keith in front of him and planting his firm claws upon Keith’s shoulders. “He’s fifteen now. He can handle it.”

That was a dig, wasn’t it? Kolivan was getting snippy, which was never a good sign.

“Have you spoken with Shiro about this?” Thace asked as he typed upon the datapad.

“He will not explain the situation to Keith if I do not force my claw.”

They remembered he was in the room…right?

The transparent screens above the console flashed to life, and directly in front of Keith and Kolivan was a paused video. At first glance, Keith recognized the space port customs – and the two figures frozen in the middle, one with his claw wrapped about the other’s necklace.

It was Kolivan and Takashi, respectfully.

Thace refused to concede, however. “Are you sure he would want you to force your claw? Keith is his –”

“Do it, Thace,” and when Kolivan used that tone, every pack member knew to immediately follow Kolivan’s commands.

The tape played.

Keith watched, silent and still, his entire body going numb and his stomach bottoming out as Takashi’s ordeal unfolded. His mouth dropped agape, his claws wringing, when the Galra sentries manhandled his brother and then clipped a – a leash to Takashi’s…necklace? No, his collar.

“What? What are they doing to him?” Keith lunged forward, only for Kolivan to cup his shoulders and pull him back against his chest. “T-They – They’re treating him like a pet!”

“Your brother is what the empire designates a ‘lower lifeform,’” Kolivan explained, his voice
pitched to soothe. “Anyone who is not accepted as a member of the official Galran races is deemed to be of a lower chaste.”

A wave of nausea swept through Keith, bile bubbling up the back of his throat. On screen, his brother seemed to have a panic attack, trapped inside a tiny cell. When he touched the collar, electricity danced across his body, sending him tumbling to the ground. A sentry and lab technician came into the room moments later, and his unmoving, frightened older brother looked so helpless versus the larger Galrans.

The video’s sound only made it worse, and when Keith heard what a sentry wanted to do to Takashi – Keith couldn’t swallow again. The bile burned his tongue, but he forced it back to grit his teeth and snarl.

“What the fuck – they can’t do that to Takashi! They can’t – he’s not – ”

Thace’s hand tightened over Keith’s fist while his opposite claw carded through Keith’s soft strands. Kolivan rubbed the top of Keith’s back in large circles, but he hardly felt it. By the time the sentry lifted his brother onto the table, Keith could only see red.

“What – Why did that do that to Takashi? Why would they want – ”

“Lower lifeforms in the empire are deemed property and thus, must have a keeper who takes responsibility for them,” Kolivan explained, plaintive but not unkind. “They may have a job or even earn a living wage, but only if they receive permission from their keeper. They cannot own any property. They cannot serve in the empire’s military. They are implanted with a tracking device, so they can never escape their detestable chaste.”

“They’re – They’re slaves?”

“Those who have not been liberated and are living within the empire, yes. I believe that is an accurate assessment.”

Years of ignorance vanished as realization settled hard and icy in Keith’s gut – the looks others gave his brother, the murmured promises, the unwanted touches, Takashi’s desperate grip on the back of his shirt.

“Half-breeds, though disliked by pureblooded Galrans, are given full rights in the empire,” Thace whispered, his soft cheek brushing against Keith’s in silent comfort. “Your brother was able to navigate the empire and provide for you both by presenting the front that you were his keeper.”

Keith felt the bile teasing the back of his throat again, and though he relished Thace’s kind touch against his cheek, he downright smacked Kolivan’s claw away. “You wanted to send Takashi back out there. You demanded he give up his blade and return to the empire.”

Kolivan’s eyes widened; his expression softened, stricken. If Keith hadn’t known any better, he would have thought he’d dealt a physical blow to his stoic leader. Kolivan refrained from touching him again, his claws trembling in fists at his thighs. “I – I have made mistakes with your brother, many for which I should not be forgiven. But Shiro has been quite…accommodating after my initial – ”

Metal screeched; blaster fire scoured. Keith looked past Kolivan to the viewer screens, which showed the leader rushing into Takashi’s cell while Antok kept guard.

Kolivan saved Takashi and cradled him in his arms. How many times had he done that, that Keith hadn’t known? Takashi went on missions with Kolivan all the time, and save for twice Takashi
needing a cryo-replenisher to mend broken bones, he’d never been seriously injured.

And Kolivan greeted Takashi more than any other pack member. He offered them both a home free from the confines and prejudices of the empire.

Perhaps forgiveness could not be attained, but Kolivan never stopped trying to earn it.

“I would gladly die for your brother, Keith,” Kolivan murmured, and Keith held no doubts that Shiro returned the sentiment. Thace patted Keith’s cheek once more. “Go. Find your brother. I’m sure he’s worried about you.”

Keith nodded, struck numb and still reeling as he stumbled toward the door. He stopped at the exit and glanced back at Kolivan, who appeared crestfallen and agitated. His instincts drew him back inside, and Keith snatched the shocked Kolivan by the front straps of his cloak. Tugging down the significantly taller Galra, Keith ran his jaw along Kolivan’s strong yet tense one.

“Do not leave your brother alone in the middle of a swap meet again.”

Keith needed no other reminder. He nodded once, and Kolivan lowered him to the ground.

“After all, you are not welcomed there, either. As you protect him, he protects you. You have a symbiotic relationship, one that deserves to be protected at all costs.”

Perhaps no truer words had ever been spoken.

Keith wasn’t sure what to say to Takashi, what he should say. The door to the infirmary opened before he formulated a response, but when Keith saw Takashi sitting upon the first medi-bed, a thick gauze adorning his right side, the words came easily.

“What the Ancients happened to you?”

“Ah, it’s nothing. Just ran into some disagreeable Parthenians.” Takashi shrugged, reaching for his black T-shirt in a slow, deliberate manner. “What did Kolivan take you for – crap.” He sighed as his narrowed eyes studied Keith’s appearance. “Kiddo, we really need to work on your poker face.”

Keith’s chin raised. “Huh?”

Takashi tipped his head back and blinked against the bright lights of the infirmary. “Hey, Ulaz. Would you mind giving Keith and me a few ticks?”

Ulaz huffed but didn’t rebuke, crossing the small distance to comfort Shiro and ruffling Keith’s hair. “I’ll be in the Hilt with Thace if you need me.”

“Thanks.”

Once he was gone, Shiro hissed as he attempted to maneuver his shirt over his head. Keith jumped to help, and so close, he could see the honest uncertainty in his brother’s eyes.

Takashi quickly looked away, attempting to hide his apprehension. “How much did Kolivan tell you?”
“He…explained things about the empire,” Keith managed to mumble, “and you. Lower lifeforms and their chaste.”

Another heavy sigh. “Did he yell at you?”

A shrug.

Takashi’s mouth twitched, and he patted the space next to him on the table. Keith obliged, pushing up onto it and letting his legs dangle off the side. They hung just a few inches above Takashi’s.

“Your turn to yell?” he asked, though Takashi jerked a shoulder.

“There’s really no point.” He patted Keith’s knee. “You…You didn’t do anything wrong.”

Keith’s head shot up. He had heard that right, but Takashi refused to meet his gaze, instead staring off at a point straight ahead of him. He looked defeated and tired, circles under his eyes and lines defining his jaw.

“You’re fifteen, Keith.”

Irritation simmered just under Keith’s skin. “I’m not a cub anymore. You need to trust me and –”

The look of pure trepidation upon Takashi’s face silenced Keith, and he held his breath until his brother spoke again. “It’s not your job to protect me, Keith. You should be back on Earth, complaining about homework and thinking inappropriate thoughts about a certain shapeshifting Altean prince. You shouldn’t have to worry about protecting your older brother in the middle of a swap meet.”

“Why not?” That was ludicrous. “You’ve always protected me.”

“And I always will.” A sad but tender smile crossed Takashi’s features. “You’re my little brother. I love you.”

Keith’s head ducked, and his cheeks flushed. His tail immediately sought Takashi’s waist, brushing against it. Takashi answered in a wordless reply as he dropped his hand to the tail and trailed his fingers across its curve.

Eventually, Takashi grunted and stood, heading toward his unpacked bags from the swap meet that had been stacked in the corner of the room.

Keith watched him with a critical eye. “Maybe – Maybe I’m not a full-blown Blade yet, but I’m still…older. You need to stop keeping things from me.”

“It’s – It’s not like I kept this from you,” Takashi groaned as he knelt, rummaging through various items he’d traded for. “I just – didn’t want you to know.”

“But why? We don’t live in the empire anymore. What do you care what it says about you?”

“It’s not what the empire thinks of me, I care about.”

Keith stilled; his eyes widened. His voice rose until it became a shriek. “Me? You think I might look at you differently?”

Takashi sighed as he stood, holding a small plastic zip-lock bag with two white sticks poking out the top. “You’ve been wrapping your tail about me since the day you were born. You’re – You’re the most important person to me, Keith.” He approached, earnest eyes shimmering and sad. “Of
course I care what you think, and – and I was afraid if you knew – you might think – you might not...things would change,” he finally blurted. “And I don’t want them to.”

There was only one way to answer that. Keith wrapped his tail about Takashi’s thigh and drew him close again. “Hey. Human, Galra, you’re my brother. That’s all that matters, and nothing can change that.”

Takashi started at him, liquid eyes searching, haunted from decafeeb’s of worrying about this exact moment – when Keith would realize Takashi’s status as whatever Kolivan called it and think less of him. But Keith couldn’t, would never, think of Takashi as anything than what he was – his older brother and best friend.

“So...you’re going to let me get a tail ring the next time we go to the swap meet, right?”

Takashi’s sullen expression lightened with shock, then uncertainty, before it shifted into a smile that was easy, if troubled. He subtly tried to dry his eyes as Keith pretended not to notice.

“Uh, no.”

“How about upping my curfew?”

“Can I have some nunvil with dinner tonight?”

“...fine, but only when I’m with you.”

“No when I’m with the rest of the pack?”

Takashi let out a hearty laugh. “Good luck getting them to give you nunvil.”

Perhaps Keith should have been offended by his brother’s jovial attitude toward his requests, but Keith couldn’t be bothered. Instead, he tightened his hold upon his brother – his fierce, doting, impossible older brother – whom he loved with all his heart.

“No more secrets between us,” he demanded with a nuzzle of Takashi’s jaw. “I – I know...you had...issues, growing up, but I’m not a kid anymore. You can trust me.”

Takashi eyed him again, face tense and stern. He eventually let out an infinitesimal sigh. “Okay,” he relented, producing umvy spice pops from his bag, much to Keith’s surprise. “No more secrets between us.”

Keith reached for the pop as his tail lashed behind him, but he paused just before grabbing it. After all these years, there was something that still irked him. “How’d you get the scar across your nose? I remember you didn’t always have –”

Shiro shoved the pop in Keith’s mouth with a nervous smile. “Maybe one or two secrets, okay?”
Chapter Summary

Captured by the Galra Empire, Shiro reunites with Sendak and is forced to face some hard truths about his past and his future.

Part One: Shiro learns the cost of awakening a blade.

Chapter Notes

This chapter starts the final arc of the Blade! Shiro main story. I made a post for triggers/spoilers. If you're wondering about what's coming up, I urge you read it, so I do not trigger you.

The post can be found here. Thanks!

Pre-Voltron

The inky, black void of the cosmos reminded Shiro of a siren, its brilliant stars and majesty beauty luring him into its unfathomable depth. He struggled against its beckon and feared what would happened if he surrendered completely. Would he cease to exist, or would you finally become what the universe professed? And whatever that was, would it be worth the cost?

Shiro didn’t think he wanted to find out. Instead, he huddled upon the couch of his treehouse, staring at the viewer screen upon the far wall and trying to lose himself in the natural beauty of the cosmos. When the door opened behind him, the flash of light projected the silhouette of a tall but lithe frame, and without turning, Shiro knew to whom it belonged.

He waited until Kolivan came to stand behind him, his proximity a gift in its own right, yet Shiro still couldn’t raise his voice louder than a whisper. “…I don’t understand. I barely knew him.”

“Kolivan’s heavy claw rested in the crux of Shiro’s shoulder, his thumb brushing along the younger blade’s nape. “There is no great mystery, Taka. Sanrik wished to protect you, so he did.”

“But why?” Shiro threw his arms wide; his legs dropped to the floor. “We spoke a few times over the annuals. We went on maybe a handful of missions together. That’s no reason for him to give his life for me.”

“He gave his life for the Blade, not specifically for you.”

Shiro shot to his feet and spun to confront Kolivan, ignoring the tears that stung his eyes. “It was my mission. That blast was meant for me.”

“And he stepped in front of it.”

“That – That makes no sense. The mission’s most important, not me. Maybe because I’m a
paladin? He thought he should give is life for —”

“Stop,” Kolivan growled, hands tight, eyes furious. “No one but the pack knows you are a member of the Voltron Force. It would be too dangerous for anyone else to carry that knowledge.”

“But then why —”

Kolivan appeared at a loss, hands rising open and encouraging, though a tiny tremble stole Shiro’s breath. “I thought we made progress. I thought you finally understood.”

“Understood what?”

“You are worth the sacrifice, Taka.”

Shiro couldn’t accept that. He couldn’t believe that his life meant more to Sanrik or that he deserved to be standing there instead of his fellow blade. He should have taken that hit. After all, he was the Son of the Blade and the field commander of that mission. If anyone should have not returned to the base, it should have been he.

Kolivan came about the couch to clasp Shiro’s shoulders. Shiro wanted to remain strong, wanted to fight the tears threatening to overtake him, but he eventually lost the battle, collapsing into Kolivan’s cradling embrace. Though he’d lost warriors in battle before, none had actually sacrificed themselves for Shiro.

Except Moira.

Thoughts of his stepmother made Shiro wince, and when he pulled away from Kolivan’s chest, the leader let him.

“Kolivan, you – you’ve spoken to my mom, right?”

Kolivan studied him before relenting with a hesitant nod. “A few times over the years. Why do you ask?”

“If she’s part of the Blade, why doesn’t she ever come to the headquarters?” It had been more than a decafeeb since he’d last saw her, and after his last mission, he wanted to see her one more time, in case… “Ulaz and Thace have positions in the empire, too, but they come back all the time.”

If anything, his question seemed to upset Kolivan, whose expression hardened again. “Your mother is not welcome here anymore. She is no longer part of the Blade.”


Kolivan’s glower remained neutral, and his face gave away none of the truth. “I do not believe now is the time to discuss this issue.”

“Are you kidding me?” Shiro snorted. “I’ve known you for seven annuals! You never thought to tell me in all that time that my mom —”

Kolivan’s voice remained steady, as if he forced the truth from his lips, “When another awakens a Blade, it is a sign that the bond of secrecy and trust has been broken. The original member is no longer welcome among us.”

Shiro silenced. It was his fault his mother was no longer a member of the Blades? Because he awakened her blade, she could no longer return to place she’d called home?
Kolivan refused to allow him to suffer. “Moira gave you her blade because she wanted this for you, Takashi. She wanted you to join the fight alongside us, so do not mourn her loss. Instead, honor her sacrifice by carrying on, by fighting the Galra as one of us.”

Shiro wanted to listen to Kolivan and believe him, but he couldn’t, not with the weight of the blade against his back and the searing ache deep within his chest. Now, he cried not for one loss but for two.

Post Zarkon Command System Attack

The campfire brightened the small area of the desert planet and afforded the gasping Shiro just enough light to make out his brother’s worries features. Shiro wished he could ease Keith’s fears, but the burning, glowing wound upon his torso worsened by the moment. If Coran and Allura didn’t find them soon, Shiro held no doubts about his eventual end.

“What happened between Kolivan and me – it doesn’t have anything to do with...”

Keith’s tail fell limp; his ears twitched. “What do you mean?”

“...I cost Ulaz his position in the empire, and...I – I compromised the Blades’ mission. No other member in its last ten thousand years has caused so much damage to its agenda.”

“But you also helped us find Voltron,” Keith said. “You helped free the Balmera, and behind you, we’re going to defeat Zarkon.”
“…If I live that long.”

Keith’s tail slithered about Shiro’s wrist and tightened in wordless comfort.

They sat like that for a long time, the campfire crackling and casting shadows upon the barren landscape. Shiro tipped his head back against the rock, inhaling through his mouth as his wound stung something fierce. Keith sat by his side the entire time, tail never wavering in its strength, eyes continuously watching him, and though Shiro hated to think it, he could die here, having saved Allura and knowing his little brother would live. He’d done his part, brought Voltron together and readied the Paladins to fight for the universe. The rest was up to them.

Keith would have nothing of it. “Look, I promise to take over as team leader – though you’re going to make it – ”

Shiro snorted and clutched his glowing alien wound.

“— if you promise once we get out of here, we’ll go home.”

Shit. When did his kid brother start drawing hard bargains? In the back of his mind, Black mewed in support of Keith’s decision, and Shiro found the energy to shoot back, *Traitor*.

Sucking in a deep breath, Shiro let out a pained, “Kid – ”

“No.” Keith refused to be dismissed. “We don’t have to fight this war alone, Takashi. You know that. We wouldn’t have escaped Zarkon’s Central Command if Thace hadn’t stepped in.”

“We don’t know it was Thace.”

“You know it was.”

Damnit, he did.

“Takashi.” The tail tightened about his wrist, frightened, pleading. “We *can’t* fight this war alone.”

And they couldn’t. Keith was right, no matter how much Shiro didn’t want to admit it.

With a shuddering hand, Shiro petted the warm curl of his brother’s tail as he sighed. It didn’t matter anyway. It wasn’t like he was ever going to have to face Kolivan again.

“Fine, fine,” he relented. “If the team saves us, we’ll make our next mission to rendezvous with Ulaz. We’ll see if he’s talked to Kolivan and if the Blade is willing to accept our assistance. In return, you have to promise to watch over Black and the team if I don’t make it out. Deal?”

Keith shifted a bit closer, though his tail remained a constant warmth upon Shiro’s arm. “You’re getting off this planet if I have to drag your sorry tail, but…deal.”

Of course, that was the moment a wormhole exploded in the clouds, and the Green Lion soared through.

*Quiznak.*

“I do not like this,” Allura affirmed, less than two days later after Shiro emerged from the cyropod. “The Galra – they are not to be trusted.”

“Your father must have trusted them once,” Shiro insisted, typing coordinates he knew by heart.
into the computer. “Zarkon was the original Black Paladin.”

Lance started. “Wait. What?”

Allura’s shoulders tense as she reared back, mouth agape, though Keith interjected for her, “Didn’t you see how Zarkon stole the Black Lion right out from underneath Takashi or how he could do all that cool stuff with his bayard? Takashi’s bayard? You know, the black one?”

“All I wanted to save you from the dark history of the paladins, so you could have a chance to bond with your lions on your – wait a tick.” Allura’s eyes narrowed in an accusatory glare. “You knew Zarkon was the original Black Paladin.”

Takashi didn’t need to turn to know her eyes bore into the back of his head. “Yes. It is why we must meet up with the Blade of Marmora. We can’t win this war alone.”

This time, Allura remained silent. He was, after all, right. (Thanks, Keith.)

“Besides, you said you wanted me to show you the Galrans you remember, the same people who inhabited Daibazaal all those years ago. Allow me to do that now.”

For a long moment, Allura debated, her stern glare never wavering as she glowered at Shiro. Then, her eyes flicked to Keith, as if to remind Shiro she’d already met a Galran who represented the old planet, but she refrained. Instead, she let out a brief sigh and straightened her shoulders.

“Shiro – the Galra, they’ve done…terrible things. They took my family, but in time, I’ve grown to see you and the Paladins as my family now. I – I cannot let anything happen to any one of you, and trusting the Galra again – it is unconscionable.”

“But you trust me.” Perhaps he should have phrased it as a question, but it wasn’t one.

Though it was slow in coming, Allura agreed with a nod.

“That when I say I would die before I let anything happen to any member of our pride, know it’s the truth.” He motioned toward his shoulder and the inkling that lay underneath his long sleeve. “I cannot fathom what happened to you or Altea, but with the Blades’ help, perhaps we can stop Zarkon once and for all.”

Once he received approval from Allura, Coran brought the Castle of Lions to life. Lance came to his sister’s side, folding his fingers with hers, while Keith bookended her on the opposite hip, his tail encircling her trembling wrist. She smiled not at Lance but at Keith, brushing her fingers along the tuff of his tail.

Not even Allura’s cold disposition could survive the tender warmth of Keith’s adorable purrs.

Her hostile temperament returned, however, when the alarms went off on the bridge about a varga after the team arrived in the Thaldycon System.

“I knew it was a mistake coming here!” Allura bellowed as her hands swiped across the transparent screens, bringing up the castle’s cameras. “There is he! Level five.”

Shiro recognized the lithe build of the intruding Blade and fought against the emotions that threatened to constrict his voice. “Everyone, suit up!”

Shiro snagged Keith before they left the armory and made a quick plan. Ulaz would never suspect that Shiro would use his precious baby brother as a decoy, and if he only admitted it to himself,
Shiro wanted to see just how far Keith had progressed in his Blade training. He was not
disappointed.

Despite Lance, Hunk, and Pidge’s efforts, they were still untested in battle. The few victories they
wedged out came from sheer luck and relentless perseverance, but neither would work against a
trained operative like Ulaz.

Though Keith still couldn’t battle Ulaz to a standstill, he worked in tandem with Pidge and then
continued to attack, refusing to give their pack member a moment of reprieve. His swift, continuous
strikes distracted Ulaz enough to allow Shiro to sneak up behind the Blade, and though Ulaz
noticed him almost immediately, the damage had been done.

One swift movement by both, and Shiro sucked in a swift inhale, Ulaz’s blade mere inches from
his face. Shiro’s weaponized hand hovered just under his surrogate father’s chin.

Shiro feared. Would Ulaz shun him? Did Kolivan explain to Ulaz what hadn’t known about
Shiro’s capture? Would Ulaz hate him for surrendering, for giving into his status as a lower
lifeform and mate to Sendak, rather than dying at the hands of the empire’s most powerful
commander? Did he understand Shiro’s position now, an outsider who had lost the simple luxury
of a place to call home?

But after a moment, Ulaz stepped back, dropping his weapon and dissolving his mask. The
Galran’s calm but joyous smile dismissed all of Shiro’s misguided apprehension, and the Blade
opened his arms in a welcoming gesture.

Before Shiro could fold into the circle of them, Allura slammed Ulaz against the wall with a single
hand on Ulaz’s chest plate, her colossal strength impressive before and frightening now.

“Who are you?” she demanded, but Shiro instantly rushed to her side, hands up in a surrender
position. “Stop! This is the Galran who saved Keith and me all those years ago in Drule Central.”

Despite Allura’s painful grip upon him, Ulaz’s eyes never diverted from Shiro’s gaze. “You’ve
come,” he murmured.

They retired to the lounge for their discussion, Allura not wanting a Galran – any Galran – on the
bridge of her ship. Shiro managed to convince Allura that Ulaz didn’t need to be restrained, only
for Ulaz to mutter, “If I wanted to kill you, you’d be dead already.”

Shiro wiped a hand down his face. “Not helping.”

“Are your Galra threats supposed to win my trust?”

“I’m not trying to win your trust.” He already had Shiro’s and Keith’s. “I’m trying to win a war,
and because of Shiro, we are closer than we ever have been.”

Keith’s tail knocked into Shiro’s side, and he wished he could feel the surge of pride that always
came from Ulaz’s compliments. Instead, all he felt was cold dread. “Ulaz, do you think you could
send a message to Kolivan? We need to find out if the Blade would be willing to form an alliance
with us.”

Utter confusion swept across Ulaz’s expression. “I don’t understand your hesitation, Shiro. Why
don’t you reach out to Kolivan directly?”

“I’m – I’m not quite sure if Kolivan would be willing to listen to any request I make. I’m hoping if
the request comes from you, he might be more apt to –”
“Waitaminute!” Lance interrupted, hands falling to his hips. “Nononono. We did **not** come all the way out here to the middle of space nowhere just to speak with your space ninja mom because you’re afraid to call your space ninja dad!”

Shiro was the Black Paladin, the decisive head of Voltron. He needed to maintain a certain level of decorum in order to expect the other four paladins to listen to his –

“Yup.” Keith thumbed his way. “Apparently, something happened between Takashi and Kolivan on the mission, and Takashi was captured by the empire –”

“Keith!”

“What? It’s true.” He motioned toward Ulaz, eyes glimmering as he crossed his arms. “You did come all the way out here to speak with Ulaz because you’re afraid of Kolivan.”

“I’m not afraid, Keith.” Ancients, he didn’t want to talk about this now, especially in front of everyone.

“Then what did happen, Shiro?” Ulaz’s hand came to rest upon his shoulder, comforting and unnerving at the same time. “What has you refusing to speak to Kolivan or returning to the headquarters? It is your –”

“– it’s not my home, not anymore.” With a disparaging sigh, Shiro struggled to meet Ulaz’s gaze and ended up staring at the taller Galran’s shoulder. “It was my blade Keith awakened during his trials. I’m no longer a member of the Blade of Marmora.”

*To Be Continued…*
Shiro tells Ulaz what happened on the mission that led to his "capture."

Chapter Notes

I've updated the warning post for this arc and will now be outlining triggers by chapter. Please take a read here. Thanks!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shiro’s statement left a deafening silence in its wake. Shock overtook Ulaz’s face, and his once strong hand upon Shiro’s shoulder laxed. Keith gasped at his side, mouth open, eyes wide and trembling. Shiro wished for a few moments to gather his bearings, but Keith was quick in every aspect of life, including recovery.

“That’s – That’s not possible.” Keith’s hand, not his tail, snagged Shiro’s wrist. “You couldn’t have – I couldn’t have – ”

Keith reached for his blade, only for Shiro to cover his hand with his own. “I don’t want – ”

Ulaz interrupted him with a hand upon each brother’s shoulder. “You are not taking your brother’s place, cub. You’re carving your own path, here with the Paladins of Voltron and alongside the Blades.”

“Takashi can’t go home…?” Keith’s ears drooped, voice dreadfully morose as he looked up at Shiro. “Ever?”

The pain reflecting in Keith’s voice cut Shiro deeper than any knife, and he briefly closed his eyes. “Keith, I – ”

“Kolivan is steadfast in his beliefs, but it is not as if he hasn’t amended those before,” Ulaz reassured before turning to Allura. “May I speak with Shiro alone? I believe there is much to be discussed.”

Keith opened his mouth to object, but Lance stopped him with a hand upon his shoulder. “Hey. Come on, Mullet. You can try to beat me on the training deck for a few rounds.”
“I always beat you,” Keith replied, but his indignant voice lacked its usual playful nature.

“Sure, you do.” Lance led him away, arm laying across Keith’s shoulders and drawing him close.

Pidge came to book-end Keith and pet his tail, which he circled about her waist. He glanced over his shoulder one last time to lock eyes with Shiro and lend some strength, for which Shiro would always be grateful. Keith’s support was unconditional and unyielding, even during the lowest points in Shiro’s life.

No doubt, Keith was the only reason Shiro survived their time in Drule Central.

Allura waited until the younger paladins left before turning to Ulaz. “If you harm Shiro, Keith will be the least of your worries.”

Shiro wasn’t sure what to expect – Ulaz was not one for physical confrontations unless provoked or on mission – but he never expected the Galran to thump his fist over his chest and bow, not quite the level of homage Kolivan would have expected from a member of the Blade but a gesture of reverence nonetheless.

“I am honored to call Shiro and Keith members of my pack, your highness, and will protect them with my life.”

Allura’s eyes never melted of their icy glower, but she left, heels clicking in an ominous rhythm.

Shiro crossed his arms and watched her go. “You handled that well.”

“Hm?”

“I was the one who took your arm.”

Shiro’s eyes fell to his right arm, hand clenching in a tight fist. So many emotions bubbled inside his gut, not the least desperation as he remembered struggling against his bonds when strapped to the surgical table. Ulaz ordered him put under, and when Shiro woke, he found himself back in his cell with the new appendage.

Ulaz came to check on his status, and he’d said only one thing. “You cannot die. I will not allow it.”

Shiro wasn’t sure what to say or how to feel. A part of him was stolen by one of the few people he trusted, in such a callous and violent way for the most altruistic reasons. Shiro hadn’t had time to come to terms with it, didn’t know if he ever would, so he reacted to the change in the only way he knew how – adapting to the best of his abilities.

But Ulaz studied him, waiting for some reaction, though Shiro couldn’t offer any other than a disparaging sigh. While Keith’s strength helped him through the darkest of times, it was Ulaz’s compassion and resilience that saw Shiro through them.

All but one.

“Shiro, tell me what happened when you were taken captive by Sendak.”

Shiro blinked, looking up through his long white strands. “Kolivan…never told you?”

“No, and I want to hear the account from you.”
Perhaps that was fair. After all, Ulaz bore witness to everything else during that year. With a heavy sigh, Shiro fell back to the cushions of the lounge and clasped his hands loosely between his knees. Then he launched into the story.

For a race that ruled more than ninety-five percent of the known universe, the Galra were quite paranoid, in Shiro's expert opinion.

The Blade of Marmora had sought information about the Komar Experiment for more than half a decade, and despite Ulaz and Thace's privileged positions, they couldn’t secure more than the experiment's name and a few sets of blueprints for Zarkon's command ship.

No one intelligence system held the entire experiment's purpose, its mechanisms, and its power source.

That was, until Ulaz caught word that a ship from Vox-95X was carrying a potential energy source and information about the top-secret project. Kolivan called for Shiro, and they headed out to intercept the ship.

After seven annuals in the Blade, six as its chosen son, Shiro worked best with Kolivan. They battled with one mind, closer than partners and inseparable as pack mates. Every so often, the thought took Shiro by surprise, when he remembered how Kolivan once wanted to throw him back to the empire’s cruel clutches. Now, the leader put his life on the line for Shiro every day. Shiro would wonder how they came so far. Then Kolivan ruffled his hair and thumped his back, just hard enough to send Shiro stumbling forward. And then Shiro would follow like the loyal cub he was into another life or death situation.

He let his thoughts wane as he stood at Kolivan’s back, keeping a close watch on the door. He only stood a few feet away, yet he still almost missed Kolivan’s stricken whisper, “Impossible.”

“What?”

Kolivan shook his head. “The empire’s high priestess is attempting to create a device that can steal the quintessence from planets.”

Shock bled into dread. “…it can kill entire worlds?”

“And everyone and everything on them.”

They needed to get this intel back to the Blade of Marmora headquarters as soon as possible. If the Galra Empire managed to get such a doomsday device operational, millions – if not billions – would die. The Galra wouldn’t need mining colonies. They would simply destroy the planets for its quintessence, and the empire itself would have almost an unlimited supply. Zarkon would be unstoppable.

“Let’s get moving,” Kolivan ordered and extracted the external drive from the computer. As he handed it to Shiro, who tucked it inside his cloak, the door to the small chamber slid open.

“Hey! You’re not supposed to be in – uk!”

The guard slammed against the far wall of the hallway, dazed and silent. When the sentries appeared about the hallway bend, lasers blazing, Kolivan snagged Shiro, who stood over the officer’s prone body, by the scruff and pushed him down the corridor.

“Move. Now!”
Shiro didn’t need to be told twice and flung his dagger, burying it in a charging sentry. He dove into a forward roll, tugged his weapon from the fallen robot’s chest, and sliced through three more. Kolivan raced about him, jumped off the wall, and tore through two more. Shiro spun, blocking two blasts from hitting Kolivan, and yelled, “We need to get out of here!”

They couldn’t be cornered. This intel was too important to lose.

As the sentries continue to attack, Shiro tried his best to cut a line to the hanger, and relief swelled within him when the large bay doors came into view. Beyond those, Kolivan and he could use an escape pod to flee to the nearest planet and from there, find their way back to the Blade headquarters.

But when Kolivan overrode the hanger’s lock and the doors parted, Shiro’s heart stopped. His blood stilled. There, awaiting their arrival, stood Sendak.

He’d changed since the last time Shiro saw him. One of his arms had been lost and replaced with an abnormally large robotic gauntlet, while his right eye glowed with an unnatural orange hue. He still wore the tight armor of a commander that showcased his ripped muscles, and if Shiro closed his eyes – though he didn’t dare – old memories would have drudged up Sendak’s unique scent of stardust and stale air. It was a familiar scent, usually found in a Galra cruiser, and it reminded Shiro of Sendak every time he stepped into one.

Shiro shook off his shock as the best he could. None of Ulaz or Thace’s intel spoke of a commander aboard this ship, and as a direct subordinate to Sendak, Ulaz should have known – which meant the Komar Experiment was as terrible as they thought. Zarkon and Haggar chose their highest-ranking commander to complete this secret mission alone.

“You were fools to think you could steal from this ship,” Sendak rumbled, and before Shiro could reply, the commander lunged. “You will not leave here alive.”

Bumps raised upon Shiro’s skin. A numbness slithered up his spine and spread from his chest to the tips of his fingers. He almost lost hold of his blade, but the moment Sendak’s hand entered his reach, Shiro swiped.

Sendak might have marked him as his mate, but Shiro hadn’t taken the commander as his own. And he wasn’t about to let his conflicted emotions get in the way of the lives of billions of people. That intel needed to get back to the Blade headquarters, and if Shiro had to go through Sendak to do it, he would.

Sendak’s fierce and unrelenting strikes demanded Shiro’s full attention. They came in rapid succession, forcing Shiro’s muscles to burn and his breath to quicken. He kept up, rolling upon the floor and using the momentum to fuel his attacks. They engaged in a graceful dance that one might have considered romantic, their bodies flowing about one another, reacting, connecting.

Shiro wished he didn’t remember the feel of Sendak’s fur against his cheek or the thundering of the commander’s heartbeat in his ear. Every close call and every spark of his blade against Sendak’s gauntlet reminded Shiro of the nights he worried about Keith, when the cub had been sick or injured, and they needed a place to stay.

Sendak was not perfect. He’d taken what little trust Shiro could afford and decimated it in a single swipe. Perhaps Shiro could never forgive him. But there were times when he was alone at night, Keith off with Thace and Antok, that Shiro remembered the fur tickling his sensitive skin and Sendak’s rich voice thrumming low in his belly.
“You will stay,” Sendak had said, his hot breath sliding over Shiro’s neck. “You cannot hope to survive on your own.”

“You say that every time,” Shiro replied, not daring to meet the commander’s heated gaze.

“And every time you come back here. To me. To my bed.” Sendak rested his chin in the nook between Shiro’s neck and shoulder, Sendak’s larger body a warm blanket over Shiro’s back. “Why leave and put yourself through the struggle to return? You are a lower lifeform, Takashi. Accept your place and you will never want for anything again.”

Other than his freedom. Shiro would always lament that, so now, he refused to let himself fall into the trap of desire. He ignored the glimmer of a chain that shimmered about Sendak’s collar, the one the commander had procured, the same one Shiro’s birth mother had given him before she left him back on Earth. He ignored the memories that flashed through his mind’s eye, the ones that both shamed and ignited him. He ignored the dead look in Sendak’s eyes – and the scar across his right one, the one that might have marked him as the chosen lover of another.

Focusing on the here and now, Shiro dove his elbow into Sendak’s midsection. The grunt and subsequent growl urged Shiro to duck and roll under the swiping gauntlet. Shiro pivoted on instinct, whirling his blade about his hand and bringing it right underneath Sendak’s neck, tip pressing against the commander’s collarbone.

“Move, and you’ll lose more than a few strands,” Shiro warned, thankful that his mask distorted his voice.

Sendak’s teeth clicked, and a vicious hiss escaped through them. “How about your partner?”

Shiro’s eyes snapped up, only to see Kolivan tear through yet another sentry, but the momentary distraction cost Shiro. Sendak slammed his gauntlet into Shiro’s side and sent him flying across the hanger.

“No!” Kolivan yelled, but the sentries attacked Kolivan from behind, overpowering the Blade leader. The sentries trapped his hands behind his back and forced him to his knees while Sendak strode over to his side in an unhurried pace, gauntlet sizzling and snapping in a metallic warning.

“Surrender now, or I’ll take your partner apart piece by piece.”

Shiro’s feet shifted underneath him as Kolivan yelled, “Go. Now!”

The mission was bigger than any one individual, Kolivan had told him, but Kolivan always made Shiro just as important by giving him the data to extract. Likewise, Shiro always made Kolivan a priority and wouldn’t leave the Blade leader, especially in the hands of the Galra Empire’s highest-ranking commander.

As some measure of time gave out, Sendak reacted, slamming his fist into Kolivan’s cheek and drawing blood. Shiro needed no other encouragement.

“Stop!” But he couldn’t give up the data. They needed to stop the Komar Experiment from ever coming online. As his glove wrung the hilt of his blade and the weight of the data drive rested upon his heart, Shiro knew exactly what he could trade for the information and Kolivan’s life.

“Don’t you dare…” Kolivan wheezed.

“Last chance,” Sendak said, and Shiro stepped forward, back painfully straight, chin raised high to meet Sendak’s snarling expression.
“Let him and the data go, and I’ll stay with you.”

“*No,*” Kolivan roared, struggling against the sentries, but the hit stole his balance, the blood his strength.

Sendak laughed. “I do not believe you understand your situation, Rebel. Neither you nor your partner will leave this ship alive. Once you surrender, I will enjoy tearing down every wall and defense you have ever constructed to protect yourself. Afterwards, I will listen to your broken whimpers as you tell me everything about your organization, and I will force you to watch as I destroy it completely and utterly. Then, and only then, will I give you the greatest gift imaginable – death.”

Shiro sucked in a sharp inhale and attempted to calm his thunderous heart as it threatened to beat out of his chest. His blade shuddered in his hand. He kept his gaze focused Sendak’s vicious sneer, for he feared if he glanced away, he would run. And he couldn’t – *wouldn’t* – leave his father to the fate Sendak described.

Sendak’s patience snapped. He lifted his metallic claw but stopped when Shiro’s mask gave way. Shiro kept his hood up, somehow attempting to maintain some semblance of the security and anonymity he’d enjoyed the last seven years in the shadows of the empire. Yet, completely clothed save his face, he’d never felt more vulnerable than when Sendak stared stricken and hopelessly at him.

“No…” Kolivan cursed, voice gutted of its strength.

Shiro never seen such raw emotion upon Sendak’s face. The commander’s usual intense countenance was replaced by a longing Shiro thought he’d imagined throughout the years. But no, it was there for Shiro to see and accept. Though he trembled, though he wanted to do nothing more than to flee, Shiro stood firm and rigid as Sendak approached in a hesitant, uncertain stride.

Every nerve tingling, his stomach pulsating, Shiro watched as the same claw that scarred him all those years ago reached toward him once more. A flinch escaped. Instead of a violent attack, the sharp tips traced his skin, Sendak’s fingerpads feeling the scar tissue from Shiro’s left cheek, across his nose, and along the opposite curve.

A wave of lightheadedness swept through Shiro, hitching his breath, and he barely kept from passing out as Sendak asked in a desperate plea, “…Takashi? This…it’s not possible. I saw your body. I thought – I thought…I’d lost you.”

Sendak’s warm hand freed Shiro’s hair from the confines of his hood. Claws carded through his silken strands before Sendak dipped his head. Shiro’s throat tightened and choked his voice. He pushed up on his toes when Sendak’s snout tucked underneath his chin, ticking the smooth skin. At Sendak’s sudden snarling, Shiro sought Kolivan’s widened eyes and let out a tiny gasp as sharp teeth tested his soft skin.

Kolivan struggled to gain his footing, but the sentries held him back. A sudden zap wrenched a howl free from the Blade leader.

Shiro jerked, but Sendak’s robotic claw wrapped around his back, pinioning his arms against his sides. The commander continued his gentle examination, the feather-light fur of his cheek brushing
against the smooth column of Shiro’s neck. As the familiar scent of stardust and sage filled his nostrils, Shiro realized what Sendak was doing.

The commander was covering the pack’s scent. Sendak was claiming Shiro once more as his mate.

Shiro closed his eyes as the last eight years of his life were erased, swipe by swipe. As if they held no meaning. As if his place in the Blade of Marmora and the invisible but true bonds with Kolivan, Antok, Thace, and Ulaz were only temporary.

Shiro would always be a lower lifeform and Sendak’s property. He was destined to live under Sendak’s unforgiving claw, and he’d only been fooling himself when he thought he’d escaped his chaste all those years ago. And now, against the rebellious torrent swelling in his chest, Shiro would willingly return to that abhorrent station.

Closing his eyes, Shiro tightened his grip upon his dagger and with a sharp inhale, tore into Sendak’s robotic arm.

As Sendak stiffened, Shiro heard the commander’s vile hiss from all those years ago. *Enough excuses. I have been generous with your freedom for far too long. It’s time you learned your place.*

Shiro pivoted to break Sendak’s hold and slammed the butt of his blade into Sendak’s face. As the commander fell backwards, Shiro made a mad dash toward Kolivan and the sentries guarding him. The Blade of Marmora needed the data he and Kolivan stole in order to stop the Galra Empire from ever completing the Komar Experiment. The lives of countless people, every planet and every race in the entire universe, were at stake.

*Keith.*

Shiro wouldn’t fail.

*It is you who has no rights. You are an undocumented citizen, a lower lifeform, and as such, you will surrender completely to me.*

Shiro ducked under the blasts of the sentries, slicing through one android and kicking another. He buried his blade in a third before freeing Kolivan from his bonds. He hardened his resolve as Sendak took to his feet and readied for the battle that was to ensue.

The escape pod sat behind Shiro and Kolivan, doors open and ready for them to make their exit, but if they left now, Sendak wouldn’t stop until he hunted them down. If they managed to sneak onto the nearest planet without getting blown to bits or recaptured, they would be lucky. There was only one way to ensure the data would get to the people who could stop the Komar – and that was if Shiro stayed to make sure Sendak didn’t follow.

*You have no choice in the matter.*

There was only one thing left to say, and Shiro said it while shoving the data drive into Kolivan’s cloak. “Take care of Keith for me.”
“Taka – oof!”

Kolivan soared back toward the escape pods, slamming against the ground. The momentum kept him going until he skidded to a halt inside the pod. Shiro’s blade hit a nearby control panel, and the lights instantly lit up the exit corridor and led to the glistening freedom of space. The blade continued on its course, slipping through the pod’s doors just before they closed and embedding itself in the floor next to Kolivan’s right glove. Even though it felt like he lost a part of himself, Shiro couldn’t let the blade fall into Sendak’s hands. Kolivan would keep it safe – or maybe its rightful owner had been Keith all along and Shiro had just been holding it for him?

Even though Shiro couldn’t hear Kolivan’s desperate growls as he slammed his fist against the pod’s doors, Shiro saw the rage destroying Kolivan’s usual calm demeanor.

*Taka, you are worth the sacrifice.*

No, he wasn’t. Not this time.

Shiro had managed to find a life outside of Drule Central and away from Sendak with the help of Kolivan and Ulaz, Thace and Antok. Though he felt conflicted every day about what had been his relationship with Sendak, he’d never regretted leaving the commander’s side. He’d always known it had been the right decision for him and Keith, and he cherished his pack.

He’d do anything for them, including sacrificing his own life for them.

But Shiro barely caught his breath before Sendak’s massive claw slammed into him, still sparking and sizzling from Shiro’s earlier attack. It caught his head between the fore and middle fingers, while the claw’s thumb looped about Shiro’s waist. The immediate and overpowering force knocked Shiro’s feet out from underneath him, pinning him to the ground. Shiro snarled and struggled, but with the claws tips piercing the floor, Shiro couldn’t free himself from the strong grip.

Sendak leaned over him, though he no longer wore the sinister smile that promised the sweet agony of death. He appeared grim, resigned. “If you wanted to stay free of me for the rest of your life, you should have left when you had the opportunity. You will not get another chance.”

With one last futile shove on the claw, Shiro tipped his head back and collapsed against the hanger’s cool floor. Somehow, he didn’t doubt the truth of Sendak’s words.

Once Shiro finished, he kept his eyes averted, hands clenched between his knees in a fist. Ulaz hadn’t moved during the entire recount, and Shiro hadn’t looked up. His entrails twisted, and an undercurrent of worry slithered beneath his skin. Ulaz bore witness to the rest of his time in Galra captivity, save the few incidents he’d been alone with Sendak or taken to the Druids for interrogation.

Perhaps, though, this had been Shiro’s lowest moment – when he’d surrendered to his mate again and assumed his place in the Galra Empire as a lower lifeform. Even though he’d escaped, he’d only done so because of Ulaz’s bravery and quick thinking, and he’d survived because those around him were not willing to let him die.
Perhaps Kolivan was wrong, and Shiro didn’t deserve to be saved.

A hand rested upon Shiro’s hair, ruffling the long strands, before clasping him on the shoulder. “Thank you for sharing that with me. I know it was not easy. Now, I must send a message to Kolivan. He’ll want to know I have made contact with Voltron.”

“That’s – That’s it?” Shiro demanded. “Don’t you have anything else to say?”

Ulaz half-turned, ears pushed back in concern. “What would you like me to say?”

“I don’t know.” Shiro fought against his tight jaw to speak. “That you’re – that you’re disappointed in me for surrendering. That it was wrong for me to do so. That I wasn’t captured so much as held, and that – maybe I should have fought harder.”

Ulaz’s eyes softened, and he stepped forward to place both his hands upon Shiro’s shoulders. “You do not need my condemnation. I believe you have suffered enough for one lifetime.” Shiro found the floor utterly fascinating until Ulaz’s strong claw found his chin and raised it. “I do have one request, however. You are no longer a cub among your pack but a leader of your own. Try placing yourself in Kolivan’s position and wondering how you would feel if any one of your cubs would have sacrificed themselves like you did for Kolivan.”

A shock of pure, disarming fear shook Shiro to the core, and Ulaz’s once comforting smile disappeared, replaced by something akin to regret. “Yes, it is not a pleasant thought. One day, I hope you will realize your life is not your own but belongs to others. For now, think of your cubs. They rely upon you. You need to be there for them, and you cannot be if you continue to believe yourself expendable.”

But he had to be. He was willing to give his life for them because he was their leader.

“Shiro, Voltron requires five paladins,” Ulaz admonished with a scowl. “It cannot be formed with only four. You must remember that.”

“But Keith – he was able to fly Black. If something were to happen to me, I’m sure –”

A sour expression overtook Ulaz’s face. “Then allow me to give you a different incentive. Your pack will not be so forgiving if you regard your life so frivolously again.”

“My pack?” Shiro echoed, voice hoarse. He couldn’t have heard that right. “But I thought –”

Ulaz’s face twisted in sympathy, hand coming up to ruffle Shiro’s locks. “Just because you are no longer a part of the Blade does not mean you are no longer a member of our pack. Did you truly believe that we would disown you? That you could be?”

“Kolivan gave Keith my blade.” He needed no other proof.

“The blade does not define nor diminish the bonds we have formed with you.” Ulaz cradled Shiro’s cheeks between his large claws, gentle and affectionate. “You are our cub, Shiro. Nothing will ever change that.”

Shiro was no longer eighteen, alone and desperately in need of any sort of stability and kindness. He was twenty-seven, the Black Paladin, the former Son of the Blade, and a deadly warrior in his own right. And still, he wished for his mask back, so Ulaz wouldn’t see the tears that stained his cheeks.

Ulaz’s exasperated sigh was fond, tolerant of Shiro’s ignorance in this area. “Hm. I see we have
been remiss. May I once more claim you as a member of our pack?”

Keith reaffirmed Shiro’s scent daily, and though it took a toll upon the cub – a pack of five Galrans easily upkept the scent-marking of a sixth member, whereas one member struggled to scent-mark a pride of seven – Keith never stopped comforting Shiro with the familiar scent of their pack. And Shiro missed their pack – Kolivan’s strong hand upon his shoulder, Antok’s chin resting upon his head, Thace’s gentle caresses upon his cheek, and Ulaz’s welcoming embrace.

So Shiro allowed himself this moment of indulgence, lifting his chin and giving Ulaz the briefest of nods.

No matter how hard Shiro tried, he couldn’t bring himself to deny the sense of serenity and bliss that filled him. Every wisp of Ulaz’s fur, every whiff of the pack’s comforting scent slotted the fractured pieces of his soul back into their rightful places.

When Ulaz finished, his hands slipped down Shiro’s shoulders, his biceps, and along his forearms until he gripped Shiro’s hands in a firm embrace. His private, contented smile urged Shiro to return it.

“One more thing, cub,” Ulaz added, hands tightening. “Is the Blue Paladin courting your brother?”

Shiro’s cheeks burned, and he wished he could blame it on the castle’s heat. Unfortunately, the castle was anything but warm.

“Oh…Lance might be…flirting with Keith, yes? But they haven’t made anything official, I believe.”

“Hm. He will have to ask Kolivan first, of course, as it is formal for the one courting to ask permission from the pack leader.”

Oh, wonderful. Shiro could just imagine how that conversation would go – on second thought, no he didn’t want to.

“Ohm. Perhaps you will permit me to be the one to tell him.”

Shiro’s eyes widened. Every so often, he forgot that he wasn’t the only one who liked to ruffle Kolivan’s mane.

Ancients, he’d missed his pack.

“We might not be strong enough to beat his thing.”

Shiro kept Voltron’s back thrusters at maximum capacity, though Prorock, now a robeast, continued to pull them in with its tractor beam. He didn’t like the panic in Hunk’s voice and wanted to soothe the cub, but at the moment, all Shiro’s focus went into trying to figure out how not to get swallowed by the overgrown trash compactor.

“Hang on!”

No… “Ulaz!”

“I’m going to take it down from the inside!”

“Ulaz, no!” He couldn't lose anyone else. “Let us handle this!”
“Voltron is too valuable,” Ulaz insisted as his tiny craft flew past Voltron. “The universe needs you.”

Panic teemed an icy shower, numbing Shiro’s suddenly heavy hands. The universe slowed until his own blood pounded his ears, the blue lights of Ulaz’s fighter shrinking as it neared Prorock.

“…our pack needs you.”

A primeval growl clawed at Shiro’s soul, and instinct took over. The command to break from Voltron was so fierce that it sent Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow spiraling out of the tractor beam. It also allowed all of Prorock’s energy to focus on Black. Shiro used it to his advantage. He put Black on autopilot – or his equivalent of it – and the lion gained speed as it barreled toward the robeast.

“Ulaz!” Shiro screamed as he set upon Black Lion’s tongue, and surrounded by the comforting embrace of the other half of his soul, Shiro breathed in and out, once more connecting with the Black Lion.

Then, he grunted as a sudden force propelled him forward. With the Black Lion’s push and the robeast’s pull, Shiro rocketed toward Ulaz’s craft. He ignored Keith’s shrieks in his ears and the others’ frightened pleas, instead closing his eyes and allowing Black’s lifeforce to flood his body. He soared through the walls of Ulaz’s ship, solidified in this reality just long enough to clamp his arms about Ulaz’s waist and torso, and returned to the realm of transparency. Ulaz disintegrated in his arms, and Shiro zipped out of the ship’s front, tumbling through the robeast and emerging on Prorock’s opposite side.

Three metallic crunches echoed through the sector, and Prorock imploded as the space pocket devoured him from the inside out.

“Ulaz…saved us?” Keith murmured, while the rest cheered.

Shiro felt as if his heart had been dug out of his chest by the only thing he had left of his surrogate father – the blade in his hands, which now shifted back into its dagger form.

“He’s…gone…”

Allura offered her condolences as best she could and an apology for doubting their pack member, while Keith curled up alongside Shiro on the observation deck and sobbed silently against Shiro’s chest. Shiro soothed him with swiped and pets, but only a dim ember of hope kept Shiro from breaking down, too. Black continued to purr in the back of Shiro’s mind long into the night, keeping sleep at bay, so once Keith succumbed to his exhaustion, Shiro crept out of the room. Onto the bridge and then down to Black’s hanger, Shiro found his lion waiting impatiently. The beast lowered its mouth the moment Shiro stepped onto the platform, and with a pet upon his snout, Shiro listened to its beckon.

Though he walked toward the cockpit, he entered the astral plane, where Black met him. The lion wrapped itself about Shiro in a soothing embrace, its silken mane brushing along Shiro’s hip and his chest, before it took off toward a small alcove at the base of one of the mountains.

There, it stopped before a foreign being and bowed its head for a much-desired stroke.

Black purred; Shiro smiled.

“Hello…Ulaz.”
To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Special thanks to thebluewater7 for pack idea! ;) Totally used it. (Shiro needs the love.)
Shiro returns to the Blade of Marmora headquarters with the paladins and finds his relationship with Kolivan fractured; in his first meeting with Sendak following his capture, Shiro is forced to face his torrid past with the commander.

Chapter Notes

I've updated the warning post for this arc. Please take a read [here](#). Thanks!

"Identify yourself."

Shiro stood just a step behind Coran, hands curling into fists. A nervous energy vibrated under his skin, making him uncomfortable and anxious, but he managed to suppress it as best he could. Home. There had been only three places he’d given that distinction – the shack in the desert back on Earth, now the Castle of Lions, and prior, the Blade of Marmora headquarters.

Shiro had avoided coming here, as Keith knew, as Ulaz knew, afraid of the truth. Did he have the right to come back? He’d broken the bond of secrecy and trust. Perhaps even shredded it. He’d rejected Kolivan and his place within the Blade, and Kolivan, in retaliation or necessity, gave his blade to Keith. Of course, the weapon would choose Keith, so how could Shiro hope to be welcomed back into the Blade’s stronghold?

Ulaz thought differently. Following the fight with Zarkon, he’d placed a hand upon Shiro’s shoulder, the thin purple line about his body growing weaker every moment he spent in the astral plane. “You have run out of excuses, Shiro. It is time for you to confront your past and meet with Kolivan.”

Keith agreed. “So you found a way to strengthen your bond with your lion?”

“Yes.”

“Then we have to get moving. We need to get to the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters.”

And so the Castle Lions hovered before the blue sun and dual black holes, waiting for Shiro’s command.

“Open a hailing frequency, Coran,” he instructed, steeling himself for the evitable denial. “We are the Paladins of Voltron, sent here by Ulaz.”

A few tense dobashes passed, but Shiro waited. Perhaps he would wait forever.

The answer did eventually come. "Two may enter. Come unarmed."

Which meant Kolivan wanted to speak with him and Keith alone. Well, they didn’t exactly have
two quaintaints to kill, and as long as he was bonded with the Black Lion, Kolivan couldn’t kill him.

“I request entrance for the five Paladins of Voltron plus Princess Allura of Altea.” He stopped himself before finally divulging, “And I come carrying a sleeping blade.”

Ulaz’s blade.

Kolivan wouldn’t like unexpected visitors, but their time was limited. Zarkon would be searching non-stop for the Black Lion. They needed to speak with Kolivan, form an alliance, and figure out how to take out the emperor before he found them first and reclaimed Black. Shiro could never let that happen. He wouldn’t.

“Permission granted. Only one lion may enter.”

Red, it was.

Shiro had expected some pushback from Lance to take Blue, but Keith had been piloting about the base obstructions for annuals. Plus, Red’s armor could withstand the heat from the blue sun, and Lance seemed to respect that. What the Blue Paladin didn’t respect were boundaries, entering Shiro’s hanger as he pulled on his armor. Thankfully, Shiro had already managed to get into his jumpsuit, so he didn’t subject Lance to his scars again.

“Look, this is your space ninja dad we’re going to see, right?” Lance crossed his arms, looking suspiciously like Keith. “Y’know he’s not going to care what happened. He’s just going to be relieved you’re okay.”

Shiro tried not to laugh. “You don’t know Kolivan.”

“No, that’s true.” Lance leaned against the hanger door and tapped his booted toe against the floor. “But y’know, I one time broke this ancient, antique-y thingie. Looked like a vase but was a gift that my great-great grandpa gave to my great-great grandma. Some kinda traditional item that every monarch of Altea presents when he or she is…y’know, wooing. I thought my father was going to kill me.”

“Lance, you were a kid. Of course your dad – ”

“He asked me if I was alright and then grounded me for two movements.” Lance relaxed, reaching up to place a solacing hand upon Shiro’s shoulder. “I’m just saying. I think you’re misreading your dad. He’s just going to happy you’re okay.”

Shiro inhaled a quick breath and released it slowly. There was so much Lance didn’t know – his sacrifice for Kolivan and the Komar Experiment, his time with the Galra, his scar and his past – and his blade. Kolivan had given his blade to Keith and watched as the bond of secrecy and trust was broken. The fact that Kolivan even allowed Shiro into the headquarters spoke of their once close relationship, but Shiro stopped himself from hoping Kolivan would ever forgive him for betraying the Blade – and his pack.

The ride to the Blade of Marmora base was silent and tense, and where Takashi would usually give the team an encouraging talk about potential allies and finding a way to take down Zarkon, he remained quiet. He lingered just behind Keith’s left, eyes focused out the window, lost in his own thoughts. Keith wanted to tell him it would be all right, but Keith remembered the way Kolivan returned to the base after his last mission with Takashi. Irate. Cross. Frightened. He’d thought he’d lost Takashi to the empire and couldn’t find a way to cope.
No matter what happened, Keith knew one thing for sure. The Blade of Marmora would always be Takashi’s home, no matter what his brother thought. Red agreed, purring in the back of his mind, and Keith hoped Black did the same for Takashi.

Once Red landed at the headquarters, Takashi led the team down the lion’s ramp. Keith wasn’t at all surprised that Antok was one of the Blades who met them. He’d wanted to run and greet his packmate, but Antok’s fist by his thigh warned Keith to stay with the paladins. They would welcome back Takashi not as a member of the pack but in accordance with the Blade customs. The realization threatened to buckle Keith’s knees.

Takashi always feared the worse, so of course, he didn’t notice Antok’s restraint. Instead, he waited, wondering and then frowning when all he received was a nod. He hadn’t realized just how much Antok wanted to ambush him in a bear hug and sweep his chin across Takashi’s crown.

The elevator ride down was callously tense and bitter, and it felt as if the doors showed them mercy once they finally opened. The grand hall was just as Keith remembered it, formidable and intimidating, with its imposing ceilings and glowing violet accents. A digital representation of the Blade of Marmora symbol shimmered in the middle of the open cathedral. Blades lined either side of the walkway, leading up to a small platform where Kolivan waited, mask raised, hands folded behind his back.

Takashi trembled, and Keith doubted anyone but he and the pack would have noticed. But Takashi steadied his shoulders and straightened his back. With a sharp inhale, he took a step forward – and faltered.

The moment his boot touched the ground, the first Blades fell to their knees, fists upon their hearts.

Did Alteans know the meaning of personal space? “They are honoring Takashi,” Keith explained. “By falling to one knee, the Blades are welcoming him back as their favored son.”

“Favored – ”

“ – son?”

Ugh. “Yes. Takashi was – well, I guess still is – Kolivan’s second-in-command, the Son of the Blade.”

Takashi regained whatever bearings he could and continued down the line, guiding the paladins toward the Blade of Marmora leadership. With every step, another set of Blades fell to their knees, and they continued as such until Takashi reached the stairs that led to the platform and Kolivan. He stopped then, taking out Ulaz’s sleeping blade, and fell not to one but both knees. Lamenting its fallen bearer, Shiro rested the blade in the middle of his palms and presented it to Kolivan.

Keith watched with bated breath and then flinched when something cool but smooth touched his tail. It moved up and down the first curl in soothing glides before Keith’s responded and entwined with Antok’s. He glanced back with a smile, and though he couldn’t see Antok’s face behind the mask, he imagined the gentle, poignant smile that lived underneath.

Kolivan said nothing, only descended the stairs in an unhurried stride to take the blade from Takashi’s hands. He mulled it over, flipping it from side to side before placing a claw under Takashi’s chin and raising it. Kolivan’s mask faded away, revealing a condemning scowl, and still
he remained silent. Takashi met him in kind, the lower part of his helmet dissolving, but it was
Kolivan who lifted it off his head. The leader’s eyes widened at the shock of white hair, but he
recovered quickly, beckoning Takashi into his arms. The Black Paladin hesitated only for a
moment before he stepped up a single stair and pressed his face against Kolivan’s shoulder.
Kolivan dipped his head, swiping his jaw across the top of Takashi’s head. And still, he said
nothing.

Perhaps after all these years, words were finally not necessary.

Kolivan dismissed the rest of the Blades with a single motion, leaving only Antok, the paladins,
and Allura in the grand hall. After what seemed like an eternity but was only a few moments,
Takashi pulled away, though Kolivan’s hands lingered upon his shoulders. Keith didn’t fight the
grin that overtook his face when Kolivan turned and beckoned him into a warm embrace as well.
He reveled in the strong scent of pack from his surrogate father and let out a soft purr when
Kolivan marked him once more.

Once released, Keith turned to see Antok uncurling from Takashi, though the large Galra kept his
tail loose about Takashi’s waist.

Kolivan then approached the Paladins of New, stopping before Allura. He fell to one knee, his fist
pressed to his chest, and spoke with the utmost reverence. “Princess Allura, it’s good to see that the
rumors are true. You’re still alive after all these years.”

“So is Zarkon. Can we consider you our ally in the fight against him?”

“Yes.” He stood once more, towering over the stone-faced Allura, and Keith understood her
reluctance. They talked at length about the betrayal she endured by someone she revered as family.

“Kolivan,” Allura greeted before her icy demeanor thawed, her eyes shimmering in sympathy, “you
helped to raise two of the Paladins of New, one of whom has succeeded Zarkon to become the pilot
of the Black Lion. I can only surmise that if you were still loyal to Zarkon, you would have killed
Shiro and Keith before they understood whom they would become.”

Kolivan remained stoic, silent, his expression closed off and giving away nothing.

Allura approached him in a slow, steady stride, and once in Kolivan’s personal space, she took his
claws in hers. “My condolences, Your Majesty.”

Keith choked. Your Majesty!

“You lost your planet and your people the same as Coran and I,” Allura continued, undeterred. “I
know the betrayal I suffered still sears beyond comprehension, and yet I cannot fathom yours. But I
am grateful and elated to see you have survived all these decatheens.”

“I have your father to thank.”

“Or to curse.”

A rare but true smile from Kolivan was a gift. “Hm. It is sometimes difficult to tell, though it is
good to see you again, Princess.”

Keith’s mind raced. Again? He shot a look at Takashi, who stood with his arms crossed to the side,
unfazed by the revelation. He’d known all this time and never told Keith? That totally went against
their code. He spun to Lance who smiled a gentle grin and motioned back toward Allura, who drew
Kolivan low for a warm embrace.
“My father saved us both, Kolivan, to finish what he and the other paladins could not. Let us do that now.”

“Agreed,” and an urgent tone overtook the leader’s voice. “But we have little time to discuss this. I just received word from our spy inside the Galran hierarchy. They have become aware of our presence, so the timetable for our plan has been moved up.”

Now, Keith couldn’t hold his tongue. “Thace was discovered?”

“So it would seem.”

“How soon do we need to begin?” Takashi asked.

“Now.”

As much as Shiro wanted to retreat back to his life prior to surrendering to Sendak, he couldn’t. The cliché – you can’t go home again – rang true in his mind as he stood next to Kolivan during their strategy session like he had so many times in his youth. He still lingered just below the leader’s shoulder, arms crossed as he looked up at the sketches and battlecruiser locations. Antok stood on his opposite side, tail looped about Shiro’s waist as they spoke, a naked display of reassurance for both of them.

But things had changed. Kolivan, Antok, Allura, and the paladins now occupied the strategy room on the second deck, rather than the Hilt, since it attached to guest quarters the Blades rarely used. Shiro wore his paladin armor rather than his Son of the Blade uniform, and where Kolivan and he used to share a single focus and complementing views, they now incurred conflict at every mission point.

When Shiro saw the first Blades fall to one knee, he wanted to believe he was still the Son of the Blade, that even if he’d lost his weapon, Kolivan still welcomed him into the headquarters as one of their own. But he didn’t speak, despite having greeted Shiro as a pack member. Perhaps Kolivan hadn’t felt the need to explain his actions as he had in the past, but now, wanting to bang his head against the console as they hit yet another stalemate, Shiro wondered how to continue. If Kolivan wouldn’t listen to his input, he might as well not give it.

“Perhaps we can isolate Zarkon,” Allura offered, swiping her hand along the transparent screens and bringing up a certain sector of space. “We can bring him through here, to the Yggiz Galaxy.”

Shiro wondered out loud, “Well, we’d need a teludav large enough to wormhole his ship, but we shouldn’t have an issue luring Zarkon to it.” Though Kolivan said nothing, his pointed look urged Shiro to continue. He let out a loud sigh and forced the words from his tight jaw. “He’s still fixated on the Black Lion, and I haven’t been able to completely sever his connection to it.”

“From what I gather – ” Here it comes. “– Zarkon can overpower Voltron, including the collective willpower of its five paladins, and you are willing to present yourself and your lion like sacrificial – ”

“We should break,” Antok interjected, tail tightening about Shiro’s waist and tugging him back a few inches.

“We have been at this for hours,” Lance replied, voice lightening as he stretched. “And I, for one, could use the little lion’s room.”

Hunk pressed his fingers together for a nervous tick. “Any chance you guys have a kitchen around
here? Maybe I can make a fresh batch of cookies for the next part.”

“And what about the tech!” Pidge spun about the room, taking in the transparent screens and the shimmering consoles. “I want to see I how you balance the gravitational pull between the black holes and the sun.”

Kolivan appeared tired but lax, letting out a rumbling sigh. “We will meet back here in two vargas.”

Pidge, Lance, and Hunk latched onto Keith the moment Kolivan dismissed them, clamoring for him to show them around the base. Kolivan took leave of the team with a nod to Allura, while Antok’s hand fell to Shiro’s shoulder.

“Give him time. He does not know how to react yet to seeing you as an equal, not as his second-in-command.”

It was more than that, Shiro knew, but he nodded nonetheless and headed toward the guest quarters. He lamented not being able to use the old rooms he’d shared with Keith, but even if he had been welcomed back formally as a Blade, he was still a visiting member of another organization.

A quick shower helped to loosen the tight muscles in his shoulders and back but did little for the headache he had since entering the Blades’ headquarters. He surmised it probably wouldn’t subside completely until he returned to the castle-ship. As he zipped up the vest of his casual clothes and readied for the second part of the meeting, he wondered if he’d ever feel comfortable in the Blades headquarters again.

Sighing, Shiro threw his towel into the hamper and headed off to meet with Kolivan and the paladins. He barely stepped into the strategy room when Kolivan’s barely restrained growl startled him.

“He took your arm.”

Shiro blinked and then followed Kolivan’s incensed glower to his Galra arm. His breath hitched, and he found himself sputtering, “It-It’s not what you think.”

“It does not matter what I think. Taka.” Shiro had never heard Kolivan so bitter, so enraged. It reminded him of the first time they discussed his life prior to the Blades, back before he knew what the scar across his face meant. “I know Sendak carved a mating mark into your flesh without your consent –”

“What!” Keith yelled, eyes flashing toward Shiro. “Sendak…”

“– and then you returned to him by your own volition. You accepted your station as a lower lifeform and have allowed Sendak to steal from you. First your dignity, then your affections, and now a physical piece of you? You are smarter than this, Takashi. Better than this.”

“Kolivan –” Antok began, but a quick glare silenced him. A warning one to Keith told him to remain silent as well.

Shiro should have been embarrassed. Though the rest of the paladins and Allura were still in their quarters, this wasn’t a conversation he wanted Keith or Antok to witness. And yet, Shiro raised his chin and met Kolivan’s strangled shriek with a low, callous whisper.

“I didn’t want to return to Sendak. I-I wanted to find out why he did what he did to me but not then.
Not as his prisoner. We needed to stop the Komar from ever being completed, but that’s not why I gave myself up. I did it save you, Kolivan. I’d do again, no matter what it cost me.”

“Which is why you should have never been a Blade,” Kolivan replied, sharp claws catching the overhead light. “The mission is important, but you cannot complete it if you do not have the will to survive it.”

Shiro’s chest hurt. Even after all these years, Kolivan still regretted his decision to let Shiro into the Blades.

“You trusted me once. You trusted Ulaz.”

“Ulaz had a penchant for ignoring orders and following his impulses. It was what got him killed. I will not allow you to follow in his footsteps, and I certainly will not enable you to do so.”

Shiro grit his teeth, anger washing away all other emotions. “Ulaz sacrificed his life for me.”

“It wasn’t just for you,” Keith interjected. “He sacrificed himself for all of – ”

“Stay out of this,” both Kolivan and Shiro snapped before Kolivan’s eyes set upon Shiro once more. “Ulaz wouldn’t have been in that position if you hadn’t refused to leave Sendak’s side. If you hadn’t surrendered to him in the first place.”

“Ancients! You can’t be serious – ”

“If you didn’t believe yourself below the Galra, then they wouldn’t have been able to take advantage of you. You would have fought beside me and – ”

“And what? Been stranded on that planet with Sendak hunting us? At least this way, you had a chance to get the data back to – ”

“At what price? There are other options, Taka. Ones that didn’t lead to Sendak slicing off a part of you.” Kolivan’s damming countenance refused to give Shiro reprieve. “That mark upon your face should not define you, and yet you continuously let it. You are nothing more than his mate, his property, to do with as he pleases. When will you stop him? Or will you let him take you apart piece by piece?”

Shiro took a deep, steadying in breath to brace himself. “Ulaz took my arm, not Sendak.”

Kolivan stilled, eyes blown wide. The air expelled from the room as the doors opened, allowing the paladins and the princess entrance. Their idle chatter silenced once they sensed the charged atmosphere.

“My mission isn’t stopping the Komar Experiment from becoming operational,” Shiro said in a menacing snarl. “It’s not even Voltron or defeating the empire. It’s keeping those I love safe, Kolivan. You. Keith. Our pack and the paladins. That has always been my priority, and if that means I accept have some outdated chaste system so you survive, then I’ll do it. I’ll do whatever I have to.”

Kolivan huffed, “Even fall to your knees like a proper mate? Like a lower lifeform.”

Shiro only registered Kolivan’s grunt later, once the Blade leader slammed to the ground. Blood seeped down his nose and dribbled upon his glove as the universe froze and waited for Shiro to come back to himself.
Allura had gasped while Keith stood, stricken, claws clenching and unclenching. Lance hovered at his elbow, hand by his thigh to call his bayard if need be. Pidge and Hunk followed his lead.

"Are you mad I went back down to my knees," Shiro asked slowly, "or are you mad I did it in a Blade uniform?"

He didn't wait for an answer. Instead, he fled to the observation deck – his treehouse – where he used to hide, and found it graciously unchanged. He sank down to the couch, his hands still quivering, his heart pounding a mile a minute.

He missed Ulaz. He wished he could sink back into the astral plane, but he couldn’t calm himself enough to reach out to the Black Lion. The breathing techniques Thace taught failed to slow his breathing, and despite his best efforts, the harrowing memories pulled him asunder.

Shiro was used to being restrained. He’d worn heavy cuffs routinely during his training with the Blade of Marmora, but unlike the ones he practiced escaping, these formed metallic mittens over his hands and rose to the curve of his elbows. He could barely wiggle his fingers, let alone free himself, and though the heavy metal could be used as a blunt weapon to crack open the thick skull of a certain Galra commander, an attack wouldn’t do Shiro any good if he couldn’t get free. And with his boots and cloak taken, leaving him with only bare feet and a skin-tight jumpsuit, he couldn’t hope to survive in the expanse of space.

The ticks turned to dobashes, and they, in turn, became vargas. Shiro listened intently to the cruiser’s engines, but they only hummed with the delight of idling, making no effort to energize for hyperdrive. It seemed irresponsible for Shiro to be left alone for so long. If anyone knew where Kolivan was headed – or where he could be hiding – it would be Shiro. Someone should have at least tried to interrogate him by now – unless Kolivan had been captured.

How long had it been? Long enough for Kolivan to be found and Sendak to bring him back to the ship? Shiro assumed a few vargas, but in the small cell with one overhead light, it was hard to tell. And with the putrid rank of death and decay, and the numerous colorful body fluids decorating the walls, Shiro tried not to think of how many rebels had met their end in this room.

Shiro rested with one leg bent to the side, the other lying flat in front of him. Tipping his head back against what he hoped was a clean area of the wall, he let out a faint sigh, allowing it to drain the tension from his shoulders. He hoped the end would come quick and painless, though in his very core, he knew it wouldn’t. He’d suffer. Sendak would tear down every wall he’d erected in the last seven years, use his troubled past against him, and then torture Shiro until he came undone.

But Shiro wouldn’t betray the Blade of the Mamora or his pack. He would die before he ever gave up any information.

He only hoped Sendak planned to kill him and refused to allow his mind to wonder to what other interrogation techniques Sendak could use to make him talk.

Keeping his eyes closed, Shiro inhaled, held his breath for three seconds, and released it, just like Thace taught him. He followed the pattern once more, listening to the soothing sound of his own exhales, and remembered the serene tone Thace always used.

*That’s right, Shiro. You’re safe. You’ll always be safe as long as you have the blade.*

But he’d given the blade to Kolivan to safekeep, and now – for the first time in seven years – he felt truly alone.
The door to the cell lifted with a metallic shriek, and Shiro shifted. He drew his feet underneath him but stayed in a crouch, ready for an attack that might come his way. Bigger, Galra opponents would have to reach down for him, giving Shiro enough time and space to move.

The cell door began to drop the moment the person ducked underneath it, and Shiro found the air heavy and thick when Sendak stood before him, carrying what appeared to be a surgical tray.

Shiro’s voice was hoarse from lack of use and strangled from emotion. “So you’re finally ready to start that interrogation. The one where I beg for death? Sounds like a plan. I want to get it over with as soon as possible, and since I’m not doing anything now...”

Sendak said nothing, just stared down at Shiro with crooked eyebrows and a searching expression. Then his knees bent, and Shiro wished he could stop the flinch. He didn’t want to show any fear, any weakness, especially to one who saw him as nothing more than a lower lifeform, but his instincts failed him.

He wasn’t the only one uncertain. This close to Sendak’s eyes, Shiro could see the apprehension living there, a fear and truth Shiro wasn’t sure he wanted to accept. Sendak moved before Shiro could decipher anything else, placing the tray before his bare feet. A colorful mix of vegetables, fruit, and some sort of protein substance filled the tiny indentions in the tray, which also held a juice pouch and utensils.

Food. Sendak brought him food.

To Shiro’s underworked nostrils, the culinary offerings smelled absolutely divine, and his stomach rumbled in appreciation. But Shiro hesitated as he watched Sendak retreating. He gave Shiro space and sat on the floor with his back against the door, eying Shiro with equal intention.

With one leg hitched up, cuffs about his knee, Shiro waited, not sure if he could breathe, let alone speak and eat. Bile seemed to linger in his throat, waiting, waiting, for something – an attack of some sort or perhaps a proposition. Shiro wasn’t sure which was worse.

Shiro almost jumped out of his skin when Sendak began, “You must be hungry.”

“Starving was a better assessment, but Shiro wasn’t sure he could eat a bite. “Why are you here? I don’t know where my partner is, and –”

“He’s on the surface of Slax-85, and I’ve blocked all transmissions off the planet. I’ll have the data recovered soon enough.”

Sendak’s confidence unnerved Shiro. “So you don’t need information. Then what do you want from me?”

“I believe the answer is obvious.” Soft exasperation seeped into Sendak’s once cold tone. “You need to eat, my little kzelm.”

Shiro bristled, the one-time pet name drudging up too many warm and uncomfortable memories. “Don’t call me that. You don’t have the right to call me that.”

“How did you survive?” Sendak continued, voice pitched low and wondering, gentle in a way Shiro only remembered from their time in bed. “I saw your body. There was barely anything left.” His gaze shifted with dark memories and raw emotions. “I – I thought I’d lost you.”

When Sendak’s metal gauntlet snapped shut, Shiro flinched but found himself unable to pull away from the bewildering image before him – Sendak, the highest-ranking commander in the Galra
Empire, with his shoulders slumped, his face gaunt, and his eyes dimmer than Shiro had ever seen them.

He’d guessed Sendak thought he’d died, but for the commander to have actually found a body –

Shiro held in a gasp. Thace had known he’d been with Sendak and the nature of their relationship, and Shiro had propositioned Ulaz. His pack must have discussed his status as Sendak’s mate and decided to cover his disappearance, making sure Sendak never went looking for him.

Part of him wanted to be furious with them – for deciding how to handle Sendak without even discussing it with him – but another part swelled with an unsettling warmth, embarrassed but overwhelmed that they sought so hard to protect him.

Shiro resituated on the floor, lowering one of his legs and stretching out the other. He wouldn’t betray the Blades, but there were things he could say without compromising the mission or his pack. “I found others who didn’t view me as a lower lifeform. They valued me for who I am, and – and I’m grateful to them. They gave me the life I wouldn’t have had if I’d stayed in Drule Central.”

The with you, went without saying.

“Rebels?” Sendak questioned, his voice low and humbled. “You found rebel freedom fighters.”

Ah. So the interrogation had, in fact, begun. Was all Sendak’s vulnerable emotions a ploy to get Shiro to talk?

Shiro’s shoulders tensed again. “I learned how to survive in the empire.”

“You learned how to fight against it.”

“Is there any other choice for someone like me?”

Sendak’s own glower grew darker, more incensed. “You could have stayed by my side.”

“You wanted to own me.”

“As a Galran does a lower lifeform.”

“I’m not a lower lifeform!” Shiro found his fierce emotions simmering just under his skin, and he leaned back, taking a deep breath before continuing. “Just because I’m not Galra does not make me any less of a being. And you – you only saw me as that.” When Sendak remained silent, watching him with condemnation, Shiro continued with gentle reproach. “I will always be grateful for what you did for me. I – I know that you took care of me in a lot of ways others didn’t. You always paid well, and – and you didn’t make me feel like a – a body seller, when we were together. But you always wanted someone who would be complacent at your feet and in your bed, and I wasn’t. And you knew I wouldn’t be.”

“No, I didn’t know.”

Shiro’s head snapped forward, eyes narrowing as Sendak bent his knee and rested his flesh elbow upon it. The relaxed intimacy Sendak showed Shiro boggled him, even after all these years.

“I…I don’t understand.”

“I knew very little about you before,” Sendak admitted. “It might have been…presumptuous of me to have marked you prior to knowing you better, but I felt it within my right to do so.”
“Your right?” Shiro scoffed, his shoulders hunching with fury. “How can you – my body doesn’t belong to you.”

“The laws of the empire are quite clear on this issue.”

“I don’t care. You don’t own me, and no fucking mark you put on my body will ever change that.”

Sendak’s next words slapped Shiro harder than any physical hit. “I am aware.”

Shiro froze, mouth open, eyes blinking. No words would come, but Sendak continued, undeterred.

“I said the laws of the empire are clear, not the ones of…proper mates.” His shoulders heaved, his ear wide and pressed out, a clear sign of distress. “I thought taking you as my mate would be…beneficial to you as well as to me. It would alleviate many of your fears. You would be safe and fed. You’d be taken care of, and you’d be with me, someone strong enough to protect you from most of the empire’s mechanisms. I thought as a lower lifeform, you would eventually come to see these benefits and embrace your role. I did not…” Sendak faltered, and Shiro found himself leaning forward, chasing after the next words, “…I did not know you would come to resent me for my…regrettable actions.”

Shiro found himself uncertain of what to say, what he felt, uncertain how he should. Was Sendak apologizing?

“But those are excuses, Takashi. The truth was – I feared for your life, yes,” Calm, cool, forlorn, even, his voice sounded, but Shiro couldn’t process that. “And your well-being. I – I didn’t want what Marvok’s lieutenant intended to do ever happen to you, but…I marked you because I wanted to. Because I wanted you. I was tired of you leaving to go mate with others, and you weren’t staying. And then you were hurt, and I thought you may leave and never come back. So I needed to do something to make sure you never left.”

But Shiro did – and he stayed away from Sendak for seven years.

“I wanted to be able to choose my life and what happens in it,” Shiro breathed, struggling to find his voice. He wanted to run his hand along his scar but couldn’t. “You tried to take that away from me.”

Shiro could never forgive Sendak that.

Sendak remained unfazed, simply staring at Shiro from the opposite side of the prison cell. A stale air hung between them, swallowing any words that might have been spoken. Every time Shiro blinked, he found himself staring up the commander and remembering how Sendak’s impossibly strong arms caged him. The commander’s warm, heavy mass pressed down upon his naked body, and a lingering smile, something akin to affectionate, brightened Sendak’s usually stern countenance. The commander allowed Shiro’s hands to wander, running along the taut muscles that shivered and compressed when fingertips touched them.

“Hm. This position suits you. Perhaps you’d like to permanently stay this way.”

The words pumped ice into Shiro’s veins, though the tone had been light, teasing. And that, Shiro took pleasure in. Pushing Sendak’s shoulder, the commander indulged him and flipped onto his back. Shiro’s thighs squeezed his waist, and his long bangs tickled the commander’s chin when he ducked his head to kneed and bite.

“Yeah, uh, I see what you mean.”
Sendak’s artificial eye glowed, bringing Shiro back to the tiny cell, and he wondered what Sendak saw when he looked at him. He was no longer the long-legged teenager, lugging growing muscles and a tiny Galra half-breed on his hip. Instead, he filled out with sculpted muscles that developed from overexcretion and endurance, a confidence that came from age and wisdom, and a rebellious streak that the Blades only honed.

He would no longer submit to the empire, its demands, or its commanders. Sendak must have saw that.

“The data your partner stole is of little or no consequence to me,” Sendak said, a flat tone to his voice. “They are simply instructions for how to connect the main power source to the Druids’ new experiment. It is information Emperor Zarkon and Haggar would not like to be released but ultimately, the plan is already in motion. It is nothing your freedom fighters can stop.”

Shiro bit back the bile that launched itself up his throat. So everything the Blade of Marmora had done during the last seven years – finding out about the Komar, working to infiltrate, and finally procuring the data – was for naught. They’d never had any chance of stopping it from destroying planets.

No. Shiro refused to believe that. Sendak was just playing him, trying to find some sort of way to get under his skin.

“That is why I’ve decided to take you up on your offer.”

Shiro started. “My offer?”

Sendak nodded, slowly, carefully. “You offered to remain on my ship until such a time as I choose. In exchange, I will allow your partner to escape with the data.”

Shiro felt like a helpless teenager again, a sharp claw teasing his bottom lip as he stood before Sendak to make an arrangement. “You – You’d be willing to give up information Zarkon wanted you to protect – in order to what? You know you won’t get me on my knees a second time.” Not willingly, anyway, though by Sendak’s relaxed stature, Shiro didn’t think he’d need to fight off the commander.

“If I remember correctly, you’d satisfied me more than one time, Takashi,” Sendak mused, much to Shiro’s displeasure, “but no. I simply wish to know you better.”

Better? Shiro voiced his confusion.

“You know why.” Sendak motioned in one fluid swipe across the bridge of his nose, from cheek to cheek. A trace of Shiro’s scar, meaning one thing: Galra mate for life.

Right. Sendak chose him and now wanted to explore that relationship. To see if he made the right decision? To see if he truly loved Shiro? To see if he didn’t? And if he found out he didn’t, would he kill Shiro and move onto another?

Somehow, Shiro couldn’t see Sendak doing that. He’d never raised a hand against Shiro until that fateful day, but if he did it once…

“An annual,” Shiro spurted after Sendak pushed off the wall to stand. “I’ll stay with you for annual. After that…”

They’d see, but he could survive an annual by Sendak’s side for the Blade to learn about the Komar Experiment and to save Kolivan’s life.
Sendak stared, a neutral look of disappointment upon his face, before he replaced it a bitter acceptance. “All right.” He approached in an unexcited stride, prickling Shiro’s nerves and flipping his stomach. One press of his flesh thumb against the cuff’s hinge, and with it released with a loud clank.

“Eat,” Sendak encouraged, standing again and heading back toward the cell door. As it began to lift, Sendak called back, almost as an afterthought. “Takashi, how’s Keith?”

Takashi froze, rubbing his wrists and fingers to get feeling back in them. He wondered how to answer until he finally settled on the truth. After all, Keith was safe in the Blade’s headquarters. “He’s…fine. Good. He reaches my chin now.”

“A runt still.”

Shiro shrugged and tucked his bare feet underneath him. “I wouldn’t call him that to his face. He’s proficient with a blade.”

“Hm.”

Sendak left then but not without stealing another glance at Shiro. Shiro, for the most part, ignored him in favor of the filled tray. He dug his spork in and took a first bite, only to choke.

Sendak had brought him fresh zebu.

To Be Continued…
Broken Blade - Part Four

Chapter Summary

AKA "The Honeymoon Period." Shiro and Sendak spend two weeks alone on a Galra battlecruiser on the way to Central Command and attempt to find some common ground - and maybe some way to relieve the boredom.

Chapter Notes

I've updated the warning post for this arc. Please take a read [here](#). Thanks!

Five Vargas Later

Two sentries came to Shiro’s cell, and though they bit off curt orders, they made no move to restrain him again. They led him to small quarters on the third deck of the cruiser, where the officers had their personal chambers. Sendak afforded him a private room with a bed, side table, and closet, as well as a private bathroom. Shiro indulged, not having remembered the last time he had a moment to himself. Back at the Blade of Marmora headquarters, he shared his chambers with Keith, and though he loved his brother with all his heart, a few moments of peace and quiet were something to savor.

He allowed the steam of the hot shower to soothe his aching muscles and the warm water to wash away the sweat and grime from the fight. When a soft knock came at the door, he almost thought he might have traveled back to Earth with that courtesy. Even the Blades walked in on his shower or bathroom routine if he forgot to lock the door. Packs had no regard for privacy.

After wrapping a towel about his waist, he yelled, “Coming!”

As Shiro rushed into the main room, Sendak entered from the opposite side and stilled, taking in the sight of Shiro’s dripping hair and naked chest. He wore only a short towel and a glimmering necklace with a tiny ball of a Balmeran crystal, a gift from Kolivan on his 24th birthday.

Sendak held what appeared to be the uniform of a lower-ranking officer – a silver chest plate with glowing purple slithers, and silver calf and forearm cuffs over a purple and black jumpsuit. Sturdy boots completed the outfit, and Shiro was surprised to find they were his shape and size.

Shiro ignored the suit for a moment, instead wondering, “You…knocked.”

“…you’ve never knocked before.”

“I was paying to see your naked body before.”

Heat rushed to Shiro’s cheeks and climbed down his throat, and when he shifted, his crossed arms failed to cover the wet expanse of his chest.
Sendak’s eyes narrowed at the shimmering violet skin inking on Shiro’s shoulder, the one that crept up his back, spread across the shoulder and finished at a point just above his elbow.

“It’s an old ritual,” Shiro explained, fingers skimming up and down his bicep. “It’s designates me –”

“I know what it means,” Sendak interrupted. He placed the outfit on the bed. “You should put these on. When we dock at Central Command in two movements, I’ll have one of my technicians input your information in the system and assign you to my ship as a lieutenant.”

Shiro cringed at the thought of being listed as part of the Galra Empire, but as Sendak turned with a muttered, “I will leave you to your business,” Shiro called, “I thought only Galra could be part of the empire’s armed forces.”

“And that is what your inking designates you – a member of the Galran race. Hm.” A ghost of smile skirted Sendak’s features. “It is almost as if you knew this quintaint would come and wished to return to my side as an equal.”

“I am your equal, even if I’m not biologically Galra.” Shiro snorted. “And like I’d ever join the Galra Empire.”

“Willingly? Unwillingly? It matters little,” Sendak said as he retreated to the door. “You are here, Takashi, at my side, and it is where you will stay for the foreseeable future.”

Shiro’s fists balled. “An annual; that’s all.”

“We shall see.”

Shiro sighed after Sendak left, eyes drifting to the detestable outfit on the bed. Yes, they would see.

Three Quintaints Later

Sweat dribbled down Shiro’s face. His muscles ached from exhaustion and stimulation, and yet he couldn’t help but enjoy the true pleasure of fighting a worthy opponent. He pivoted, bare feet slapping the floor of the training deck, and brought his staff down upon Sendak’s metallic arm with a crack. The commander retaliated by falling to the ground and sweeping with both legs, an attack that Shiro evaded with a flip. He combated the subsequent, lightning-fast strikes with his staff – one after another after another – until he managed to duck to the side and slam his knee into Sendak’s gut.

Sendak flowed with the momentum, falling forward and snagging Shiro in the process. They rolled, feet over heads until they came to a stop, Shiro straddling the commander’s hips, staff posed under Sendak’s chin. Likewise, the commander’s claws hovered under Shiro’s jaw, ready to pierce the delicate skin.

It was an intimate position and one they’d enjoyed before, minus the deadly weapons, of course. Shiro ignored the stirring low in his belly and the tinging on his skin that didn’t come from sweat.

“You’re not fighting fair,” he accused between sharp inhales. His chest and stomach contracted with every word. “I only get a staff, but you get to keep your arm.”

“Why would I care if the battle is fair as long as I win?”

“Because you want to know which of us is the better fighter.” Shiro dropped his staff and went to
press down upon Sendak’s chest to stand. He stopped just before doing so. “Because how legitimate is your win if you don’t earn it.”

“I didn’t earn you, and yet here you are.”

Shiro choked on his own spit and all but fled from Sendak then, retreating a safe distance to swipe one of the water pouches. He managed a few gulps to calm his breathing. “I chose to stay. There’s a difference.”

“Semantics. And you cannot tell me those rebels who took you in always fight fair.”

Shiro still wasn’t sure if these dropped insinuations were part of an interrogation or just Sendak’s curiosity. Or if Sendak knew every time he mentioned the Blade, Shiro clammed up, thus allowing the commander to win the verbal argument.

Shiro decided to try a different tactic. He waited until Sendak sat upon the bench and then scrunched the pouch, spilling its contents over the commander’s head.

While Sendak sputtered and hacked, Shiro grabbed two towels. He used the first to dry his face and neck and dropped the second onto Sendak’s head. As he walked away, holding the edges of the towel in either hand, he heard the shuffle of movement, of claws scraping against the training deck floor.

Sendak came at him, claw lifted and ready to attack. Too slow, too trusting – Shiro should have known better than to turn his back on such a high-ranking member of Zarkon’s armed forces. An enemy. His pack taught him better. He shouldn’t have poked the proverbial beast, and now, even as he raised his arms to fight, he knew he’d find himself on his back, neck exposed at Sendak’s mercy.

But Sendak stopped, claws mere inches from Shiro’s face. His expression shifted from one of feral delight to a disarming mix of regret and sympathy. He stepped back, lowering his weaponized arm and turning so his large body hid a majority of it.

He’d been trying to sneak up on Shiro to tease, not to overpower or scare, and Shiro had misjudged. He wouldn’t feel sorry about that. Sendak hadn’t earned his trust again, and Shiro wasn’t sure if the commander ever would.

“I – I thought… I had hoped to perhaps – you may go,” he finally settled, turning his back to Shiro as he made his way back to the bench. “I’ll clean up.”

Shiro said nothing but kept an eye out for Sendak as he made his way toward the door. His shoulders bunched with a renewed tension. His hands shook, and he missed his blade all the more. Exposed, alone, he wanted something to defend himself against Sendak, even if a rational part of him believed the commander didn’t want to harm him. If Sendak had, he would have gone through with the attack.

Once in the corridor, alone with only the robotic sentries as his companions, Shiro let out a relieved sigh and collapsed against the cool metal walls. He wanted to banish the thought from his mind, but despite himself – Shiro found the commander’s sodden and droopy ears quite adorable.

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*One Movement Later*

Shiro narrowed his eyes at the transparent screens, attempting to recognize any familiar planets or constellations. Not that it mattered, really. Sendak said they would dock at Central Command.
within the next movement, but he felt uneasy not knowing where the next planet or blade outpost was located. Some semblance of position and normalcy would help his nerves greatly.

Sendak came up him from behind him on the bridge, this time making enough noise and movement for Shiro to hear. Shiro turned halfway to greet him, despite the fact that Sendak stopped a good five feet away. He’d been respecting Shiro’s personal space since their spar on the training deck, never getting too close and always signaling when he wanted something near Shiro, whether it be a drink or a datapad.

Shiro felt both relieved and annoyed by the attentive care, and he wasn’t sure how to rectify that. For now, he ignored it. “Hey. Do you know where we are right now?”

“So you can know where the nearest rebel location is?”

Shiro scowled.

“We are in the Yggiz System, approaching the Jayx Galaxy,” Sendak relented with a sigh. “We should be at Central Command within six quintaints.”

Shiro nodded and once more directed his sight toward the screen. He remained half-turned, unable to completely have his back to Sendak again just yet. “So…what do commanders and their crew generally do to pass the time between destroying planets and demoralizing entire populations?”

Maybe Shiro imagined it, but he could have sworn he saw Sendak’s lips twist upwards for a short-lived grin. “I assume what rebels do between their futile missions.”

Shiro took the teasing in stride. “Generally sleep, I guess. We talk sometimes. My…partner and I felt comfortable in each other’s presence, enough that words weren’t always necessary.” A shrug. “Other times, we played car games.”

“What are…car games?”

“The Name Game, Word Association, Comet on My Side. Things like that.” Shiro couldn’t help the fond smile that overtook his face. “Kol – I think he found them more amusing than he let on. He was far more…amiable than he let others to believe.”

He dismissed any thoughts of where Kolivan was now and his mental state. No doubt, he worried over Shiro, not knowing the benign quintaints Shiro tolerated on a Galra battlecruiser.

“Who is – was – he to you?” Sendak asked, the threatening edge to his voice unmistakable.

Shiro refused to give Sendak any emotional ammunition, especially if Sendak hadn’t kept his promise to stop the search for Kolivan. “A companion.”

“You seem to have a penchant for older officers in the Galra Empire. I assure you, you won’t find anyone higher ranked than me.”

Sendak thought Kolivan was his mate? Shiro ignored that particularly disturbing thought and snorted. “Zarkon’s taken, huh?”

“His tastes run different from mine.” When Shiro cocked his head to the side, Sendak elaborated, “Emperor Zarkon has a son.”

Which didn’t actually say what Sendak meant, but Shiro understood nonetheless.
Perhaps he couldn’t give Sendak the answer he sought, but he could give him an answer. “I only sought out Galra officers because they were generally clean.”

Sendak remained stoic, face callously neutral, arms crossed and waiting.

Shiro sighed. “Access to medical treatment, regular check-ups, medicine. Sometimes, I even managed to steal a few pills off them, depending on what the medication was.”

It was cathartic, in a way, to speak openly about his past. Kolivan always bristled when Shiro mentioned his past, and Ulaz nodded along, attentive and thoughtful but silent. He never offered any thoughts upon the matter, and Shiro feared to find out what they were. He’d slept with Sendak once to save Thace, and Shiro could never overcome the humiliation to talk about it. Antok never knew the details of his past before the Blades, so Shiro thought it best not to tell him. No way he could speak to Keith about this.

With Sendak, there was no pretense, no judgment or reservations. He knew what Shiro’s predicament had been and even sought his company, his mating. If Sendak ever held any regrets from accepting Shiro’s propositions, he never spoke them. Instead, he allowed his actions, his moans, his service to voice his pleasure and satisfaction. Shiro’s ears and cheeks burned from the memories.

“Did your…companion ever demand from you what others had?” That dangerous edge laced Sendak’s voice again.

Shiro’s skin crawled, but he managed to shake his head. “No. The nature of our relationship was different. I gave up that way of life when the rebels took me in.”

Sendak blinked, eyes inspecting Shiro with a clinical gaze. “You’re ashamed.”

“Of course. No one wants to do what I did to survive.”

“It is not a shameful profession, Takashi. The Galra way is victory or death, and you chose to survive by any means necessary. That is honorable.”

“Honorable?” Shiro scowled. “I do not believe using one’s ass in that way is at all seen as… moral.”

“That is your assessment, but no one holds their honor where you profess it to be. Or they shouldn’t, and if they do, they’re a vyzkarz.”

Shiro crossed his arms and averted his gaze, shoulders bunching with tension. He’d never heard someone speak of his former way of life with anything other than shame and remorse, and yet Sendak addressed it as nothing more than fact. Perhaps Shiro shouldn’t take any comfort from the Galran who bought rights to his body more than a few times over two annuals, but for one of the first times since that then, he didn’t feel like he needed to scrub himself from the inside out.

“Takashi,” Sendak murmured, “who was your partner?”


“Not the one who sired you.” Another fact.

Shiro nodded.

“He does not deserve you.”
A breathless laugh. “And you do?”

“A pack leader – or any member, for that matter – should never make you feel uncomfortable under your own … hair?” Sendak professed, unchanging in his stringent glare when Shiro’s head shot up. “You should always feel valued and cherished, and if you do not, then this leader is not one.”

“It’s not like – ”


“And you know what makes a good pack leader?” Shiro shot back.

“I do.”

“Oh, yeah? Your mom? Your dad? Zarkon?”

Sendak shrugged, an odd expression upon the formal commander. “You kept coming back to me for two years. No Galran returns to mate with another for that long without some strong connection.”

“I’m not Galran.”

Sendak motioned toward Shiro’s shoulder. “That is not what your inking says.”

Shiro thought, hands tucked in his elbows, silent and wondering. He was biologically human, despite what his shoulder said. He couldn’t just suddenly develop all the same genetic traits of a Galran because of some mystical connection he now shared with them, like pack dynamics and scent-marking. Sure, perhaps he welcomed and even enjoyed when one of his pack mates greeted him, and maybe he felt more comfortable and at ease in Kolivan’s presence. That didn’t automatically mean he’d simply gone back to Sendak for two years because he revered the commander as his pack leader. It meant that Sendak took better care of him than others, paid well, and didn’t quite make him feel like his tight ass and soft skin were the only good parts of him.

…and was it because at one time, he revered Sendak as his pack leader? But –

“I wasn’t Galran then, at least.”

Sendak let out a short sigh. “Takashi, your biology in and of itself is not the issue. A strong connection with a patriarch or a lover is not limited to the Galran culture. Keith reveres you quite highly, and I suspect you had others you relied upon before you came to me.”

Shiro stopped his mind from retreating to Puig and prior to that, Earth, with Moira and his father. He finally gathered his bearings and was able to meet Sendak’s interested gaze. “What changed? You always saw me as a lower lifeform. And now you’re saying it doesn’t – ”

“You were gone for seven years.” Sendak’s arms dropped from his chest as he pushed off the railing, approaching Shiro in an unhurried, open stride. He waited just out of arm’s length, his metallic claw snapping shut. “I lost you once because of my ignorance….and my arrogance. I will not give you reason to leave again.”

He didn’t want for a response and exited the bridge, leaving Shiro alone with his thoughts and the stars.
Something warm and wet tickled Shiro’s cheek, and he instinctively rolled over to get away from it. He only had a few moments of peace before it persisted, swiping across his skin in a continuous stream of caresses. He swatted feebly at the ill-timed attack and tried to get comfortable again, only for velvet fur to brush across the side of his face. When it began to purr, rich and warm and kind, Shiro’s eyes shot open.

The Black Lion leaned over him, a worrisome look in the lion’s gaze. When he purred again, the sound echoing deep within Shiro’s own soul, it sounded closer to a rumble, and Shiro pushed to sit up with a growing smile upon his lips.

“Hey, Black. It’s good to see.”

Black leaned forward again, this time pressing his forehead against Shiro’s. He let out another warm purr, urging Shiro to pet his soft mane.

“Are you – Are you worried about me? Being with Sendak and the empire?”

Another rumble, lower this time, almost like a plea.

“It’s going to be okay, Black. I promise.” He always felt a cub in Black’s presence, the formidable lion deserving of so much respect and homage. “I can handle him.”

Black huffed. He didn’t believe Shiro.

Shiro’s fingers clutched Black’s mane as he leaned back, morose. The other half of his soul, the only being who accepted Shiro when no one else wanted him –

“You don’t trust me?”

*It wasn’t about trust,* Black’s eyes relayed. There was something else in his gaze, something Shiro struggled to understand. He ruffled Black’s mane, trying to soothe the agitated beast, until he recognized the source of Black’s discontent.

Fear. The lion was frightened that something would happen to Shiro. Before Shiro could ask why, his fingers brushed against something cool but solid against Black’s throat. The beast went completely rigid as Shiro’s fingertips followed the shimmering violet wire about Black’s neck.

A collar. Someone had collared *his* lion.

“Black, who – who did this to you?” Who had access to the astral plane? Unless –

Black let out a deafening roar, sending sharp stabs directly to Shiro’s ears, and the lion reeled, placing himself between Shiro and the menacing intruder who strode toward them. The newcomer’s dark cloak and armor were familiar from the many recordings Shiro had seen. His eyes glowed an ominous amber against the starry nightscape, but the weapon in his hand drew Shiro’s attention immediately. Its deep, rich violet hue spoke of unfathomable power and limitless potential. Anything he could imagine, it could create. The universe, the cosmos themselves, were sown together by this magnificent weapon, and if Shiro could wield it, the war might not be so hopeless.

The dark figure stopped when Black’s growl intensified, his thin-edged grin growing amused and challenging. “So you are the imposter who had captured my lion’s attention. You were a fool to come here, and even a greater fool to think the lion could ever be yours.”
Zarkon. The emperor of the entire universe – plus or minus five percent – dissected him with one
gaze and found him wanting. Shiro couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t think. Ever since Kolivan told
him about the Paladins of Old and Zarkon’s place among him, he knew this quintaint would come.
He just never imagined he’d have to fight the emperor for the Black Lion or that the fight would
come so soon, without Keith or the other paladins’ assistance.

He couldn’t even defeat Kolivan on the training deck. How could he hope to defeat the leader of
the Galra Empire? Perhaps all this time, he’d been deluding himself into thinking he had a shot at
freeing the universe from this dictator’s rule when in reality, he was nothing more than another
casualty who would die for a cause that could never be realized.

Despite Zarkon’s malicious glare, his focus wasn’t upon Shiro but instead, Black. In a flash of
brilliant purple light, a chain extended from Zarkon’s bayard and connected with Black’s collar,
much to the beast’s dismay. It choked and thrashed, attempting to get free with no avail as hand by
hand, Zarkon reined in Black like one would a wild horse.

“No!” Shiro screamed, rushing to grab Black’s collar. A white hot fire flashed through him, too
tense and blinding for him to endure. He tumbled to the ground, streaks of purple lightning
dancing off his twitching body.

“You are no match for me,” Zarkon warned, dragging the struggling lion toward him. “If you
come here again, I will not be so lenient.”

Black’s pitiful snarl cut Shiro to the quick, and as he struggled his best to simply breathe, the lion
turned and with its remaining strength, released a reverberating roar. Shiro awoke with a start on
his bed, drenched in sweat, uncontrollable tremors rippling throughout his body. He gasped and
buried his hands in his hair, unsure of how he’d returned to the battlecruiser and his darkened
chambers within it, but sucking in dry heaves to stop the searing pain that ached deep within his
chest.

A soft but insistent knock sounded at the door, and when Shiro couldn’t pull himself together a
simple greeting, light flooded the quarters from the corridor.

“Takashi, are you all right? I thought I heard you scream.”

“I’m – I’m fine.” He couldn’t let Sendak know. If Zarkon’s most loyal commander ever discovered
he sheltered the new Black Paladin, he’d gift-wrap Shiro, mate or not, and present him to the
emperor for the next Galran holiday.

Sendak entered without an invitation, and shadows once more concealed the room when the door
slid closed behind him. He came to stand before Shiro’s bed in simple loose-fitting sweatpants and
a dark tank top, his cybernetic prosthetic detached for the moment. After one quick visual survey,
Sendak let out a whispered huff.

“You are not fine, Takashi. Allow me to comfort you.”

Shiro forced his legs to fold upon the bed but couldn’t take his arms out of his elbows. “It’s – It’s
nothing. Just a nightmare.”

That happened to be Shiro’s actual reality.

“You are anxious, trembling.” Sendak approached the bed and lowered himself onto the edge in a
non-threatening movement. “Let me help you.”

“How?” Shiro wanted to but didn’t add, “Are you going to take on the emperor of the universe for
his mystical weapon that’s connected to a large traumatized black cat, which is currently being restrained against its will and probably has been for the last ten thousand years, for me?”

Sendak’s eyes softened in a generous way. “Allow me to scent-mark you.”

Shiro started. Scent-marking was an intimate act between pack mates. Not just to ward off potential lovers, it also solidified a bond, offered comfort, and showed affection. No doubt, Sendak wanted to comfort Shiro, but the offer was more profound than that. They had been alone on the ship for more than a movement. Kolivan and the pack never went more longer than a quintaint between scent-markings, and his packmates loathed when he smelled of another, Galran or otherwise. Shiro carrying another’s scent must have unsettled the commander, too.

Shiro was not ashamed to admit he missed his pack and their grooming routine. He missed their purrs and their familiar scent. He missed the glides of their jaws against his own and the feeling of absolute trust when they drew him into their arms or wrapped his waist with their tails.

He should have said no. Kolivan and Keith and the rest would be besides themselves if they knew Sendak would be covering up their scent, but unhinged from the horrors he’d just witnessed, Shiro indulged and gave into the temptation, slowly unhooking his hands from his elbows and lifting his chin in a wordless consent.

Sendak still made a formal request. “May I scent-mark you?”

Though Shiro’s cheeks burned, he replied with a husky, “Yes.”

When Sendak still hesitated, Shiro wondered if the commander changed his mind but then Sendak’s large, flesh claw skimmed across his jaw. Its movements were so smooth, so gentle, Shiro’s skin prickled. Sendak continued, brushing his cheek along Shiro’s, not quite a glide but most certainly a test, making sure Shiro wouldn’t change his mind. As the strong, alluring scent of sage and lemongrass and stale, circulated air filtered into Shiro’s nose, he closed his eyes and surrendered to Sendak’s solacing touch.

His trust was rewarded.

The commander took his time marking Shiro, first offering tender but long strokes across his cheek before dipping to glide across Shiro’s collarbone and vulnerable neck. Sendak’s deep purrs lulled Shiro into a state of absolute relaxation, stealing the tension from his muscles and helping to return his breathing to normal. Shiro’s tremors subsided, leaving him worn-out and complacent, and Sendak had to wrap his arm about Shiro’s shoulders to keep him upright.

He eventually lay Shiro back onto his bed, finishing their ritual with a breathless sigh and a teasing nuzzle against Shiro’s temple. Sendak then straightened his back and regarded Shiro with a long-suffering stare. There was too much in that gaze – wonder, fear, relief, affection – too many emotions for Shiro to adequately process, and when Sendak moved to stand, Shiro’s hand shot out. Fingers wrapped about the velvety fur of Sendak’s wrist and tugged.

“Stay.”

“Perhaps it is best if I do not,” the commander replied. They hadn’t shared the same bed in more than seven annuals, and perhaps Sendak feared his own needs and desires. But Shiro needed Sendak and the smell of pack close.

“Stay,” he ordered again and shifted closer to the wall to give Sendak room to stretch out.

Sendak hesitated still, eyes widened and expression concerned, but he eventually relented. His long
arm rested comfortably upon the curve of Shiro’s hip, and Sendak pulled him close. The commander’s larger bulk helped to cradle Shiro’s substantive but smaller form in a solacing embrace.

Shiro banished the night’s events from his mind – for now. He needed to find a way to free Black, stop the Komar Experiment, and decide exactly what this thing was between him and Sendak.

Until then, Shiro appreciated the scent of his past lover, and so close to Sendak’s neck, his eyes caught sight of the silver chain that shimmered in the room’s low light. His fingers danced across it and felt the muscles contract under the soft inspection.

“Where did you get this?” he asked into the night, expecting no answer.

It eventually came as a quiet confession. “An Unliu swap-meet. It was yours at one time, yes?”

“My birth mom gave it to me, back on Earth before I went to live with my dad. I…I sold it to buy Keith some candy for his birthday and some clothes. How’d you get it?”

“I tagged the credits I gave you, so I could find where you went. After you disappeared, I went to the swap-meets to see if I could find you. Instead, I found this at one of the shops.” His claw skimmed across Shiro’s back in tender caresses. “It is a symbol of some kind?”

Lifting the chain’s lavaliere over the front of Sendak’s tank top, Shiro sighed. “It’s in my native language, Japanese. It means my first name – Takashi, or noble, prosperous.” He let out a bitter laugh. “I think my mom might have – ”

“ – chosen correctly,” Sendak interjected, resting his head alongside Shiro’s, claw still moving absentmindedly along Shiro’s hip. “It fits you.”

Shiro hoped the night’s shadow hid his blush. “I don’t understand why you want me,” he muttered. “You’re the highest-ranking commander in the Galra Empire. You could have anyone.”

“I do not want just anyone. It is why I paid for you.”

“But – ”

“Takashi.” Sendak’s claw scrunched Shiro’s shirt and sweatpants over his hip. “Why do you believe yourself so unworthy of such regard? I take things I have not earned because I want them, and you were – and are – a desirable lover and partner.

“You deserved to be earned, Shiro. I will earn you.”

Sendak seemed not to notice or just ignored Shiro’s frown, drawing absentminded lines upon Shiro’s back until he fell asleep.

It took a while for Shiro to follow, his heart pounding from not just the encounter with Zarkon but also Sendak’s soft gaze. Shiro played with the soft curls at the Sendak’s strands and watched the gentle rise and fall of the commander’s chest. He still couldn’t comprehend how or why the empire’s most feared commander pursued him, but he hoped in time it would make sense.

Despite his conscious effort not to, Shiro lamented the unexpected and temporary haven he’d found at the commander’s side on a Galra battlecruiser.

Two Movements Later
Shiro still debated on whether to call his twin sentries Twiddle-Dee and Twiddle-Dum or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but the point was moot the moment he used the staff on the training deck to take them out. By the time the second one’s head came to rest half-way across the sparring area, Shiro was bounding out the door and down the hall toward the containment unit on the fifth subdeck.

This wasn’t the best plan, but it was the only one he’d been able to come up with during his two-movement stint upon the battlecruiser. The closer they were to Central Command, the farther from Kolivan they became. By now, Kolivan should have made it back to the Blade of Marmora headquarters and be working on plan to take out the Komar. He probably had to contact Thace and Ulaz and figure out how to get close enough to the device to stop it, and that would take time they didn’t have if the Komar’s main power source reached Central Command.

The containment unit wasn’t all that sophisticated, and the Balmean crystal itself wasn’t supernatural in origin. If his training with the Blades proved accurate, the chemical bonds of the crystal were weaker than most pure carbon substances. Oxygen could easily get between the atoms to weaken its very state, so all Shiro needed to do was burn the crystal and make it into a make-shift bomb.

The tube-like containment unit served as a willing participant in the crystal’s destruction. The subdeck was too far from the engines for Shiro to pull from the main power, but according to the ship schematics, the power lines to the main armory ran under the floor tiles. Once he completed the necessary rewiring, Shiro made sure to open the valve on the unit’s side, so they’d be enough air to fuel the fire.

When the crystal began to smolder and to glow, he quit the room and ran as fast and as far away from the crystal as he could manage.

The reverberating explosion threw Shiro against a few walls and eventually to the floor, threatening to suck him through the sudden gaping hole in the hull of the ship. Without the proper equipment, he couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t scream. He could barely manage to hold onto the corridor’s wall as the battlecruiser’s safety precautions began to close off the damaged area and re-stabilize the ship’s interior.

Shiro began to worry, his air giving out and lungs starting to burn, but the pressurized atmosphere returned moments later – as did gravity. He slammed hard to the ground. His ears rung. Red warning lights flashed in the hallway, but he inhaled a relieved breath. The Balmeran crystal had been destroyed.

As he pushed up on all fours and back onto his haunches, his hearing returned, though he could have done without the ominous footsteps that singled Sendak’s approach.

“You destroyed my mission objective and ruined a part of my ship,” Sendak snarled, and Shiro refused to show any weakness, despite Sendak’s eight-foot-stature towering over him.

Instead, he pushed his feet underneath him and stood, ready for whatever punishment awaited him.

“Was this your mission objective all along?” Sendak demanded, brows set, eyes narrowed in a demanding countenance.

“Yes,” Shiro admitted. There wasn’t any reason to lie, even to protect Sendak’s feelings.

Sendak leaned back with a thoughtful “hm,” surveying the damage over Shiro’s head with a critical but not cruel eye. He crossed his arms, his robotic monstrosity over his flesh appendage, and
remained unrelenting.

“You’re testing me.”

It wasn’t a question, but somehow, Shiro thought it might be. “That wasn’t my intention, no. But… I guess, in a way, I am.”

Would Sendak give him up to Zarkon? Would he betray the very trust Shiro had given him to save his own fur? Would he harm Shiro again in anger, in fear, for having taken Sendak’s renewed trust and utterly destroyed it?

Sendak was the highest-ranking commander in the Galra Empire. There was no mistaking the power, the authority, the prerogative that came with such a position. But would he use that to bind Shiro to him a second time—or simply dismiss him for insubordination?

A lower lifeform defying his officer owner? It was a crime no Galran would tolerate.

Sendak released a short, peeved grunt before letting his hands drop to his sides. “It appears I cannot trust you to keep your rebellious tenancies to yourself, so for the rest of the journey, you will stay on the bridge. We will reach Central Command in a few vargas.” He motioned for Shiro to follow as he headed back toward the deck’s lift. “At that time, my crew members will come on board, and we will refuel and repair. I will need to speak with Emperor Zarkon directly to explain my failure. You will accompany me.”

“Your failure?” Shiro echoed. He couldn’t have heard that right.

Sendak hit the “up” button for the lift. “Yes. It was unfortunate that the containment unit for the Balmeran crystal was faulty, but I must take the blame for such malfunctions. Commander Prorock is in charge of X-95-Vox, so he will most likely be tasked with getting a replacement.”

When Sendak stepped in to the lift, Shiro didn’t follow. “You’re—You’re not going to blame me for the crystal’s destruction?”

Sendak leaned against the lift’s back railing, arms crossed again. “It is true that as a member of a rebel organization, you would prove not only a credible scapegoat but also a valuable asset to the empire, if you were broken. I would be praised for bringing you before Zarkon’s witch for interrogation.”

Shiro held his breath.

“You left once, Takashi,” Sendak said, soft, tender. “I will not give you reason to leave again.”

Shiro’s mouth dropped, agape, Sendak’s words carefully breaking down the walls he’d constructed over the years. But there was no reason to believe Sendak would keep his promise. The moment they docked at Central Command, Sendak could hand him to Zarkon or the Druids. This could just be ploy to keep Shiro complacent, so Sendak wouldn’t have to fight him. That would explain the slight quiver in Sendak’s voice.

Yet all of Shiro’s instincts told him Sendak was telling the truth. This was real—a Galran willing to give his life for his mate.

Sendak noticed Shiro’s uncertainty and stepped forward, lifting his flesh claw out for Shiro to take. “I will earn you, Takashi,” he vowed.

Shiro hesitated for only a moment, letting his hand hover about Sendak’s proffered one before
finally placing it – and his trust – in Sendak’s palm.

To Be Continued…
Broken Blade - Part Five

Chapter Summary

Shiro and Sendak arrive at Central Command.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Before the Blades

Keith appeared so tiny in the medical bed that he reminded Sendak of a newborn cub. The boy was more silent than one – or so Sendak believed. The commander made the customary gestures toward his fellow officers as needed – Throk had been the last one to procreate, if Sendak remembered correctly. But Sendak avoided meeting the cubs until they were of age to join the academy’s ranks, a bit older than the eight-year-old Keith was now.

Keith let out a pained whimper, shifting under the heavy white sheets, and Sendak briefly debated about brushing back those sodden bangs. But then he might have to mutter something encouraging or soothing, and he was at a loss as to what to say.

“You’re Galra. You’re only choices are victory or death, so you will beat this illness.” That didn’t exactly sound like something Shiro would say to his little brother. His little kzelz would probably sit on the bed next to Keith, draw him close, and murmur how everything would be alright.

That wasn’t Sendak. In fact, the commander was uncomfortable being in the same room as the cub, but he certainly couldn’t bring Takashi to a Galran medical facility. Lower lifeforms were not allowed such privileges, and Takashi would worry himself sick, seeing Keith in such pain. Sendak, himself, felt some concern for the boy’s condition, but he dismissed it. He only cared for Takashi’s ability to satisfy him. Nothing more.

“He’s a half-breed,” the doctor admonished sometime later, as if Sendak hadn’t known. Or perhaps the doctor was passing judgement, believing Sendak mated with the boy’s bearer. “One of his organs is inflamed, a tube that runs from the small intestine to the large one.”

As if to punctuate his assessment, Keith let out a tiny cry, hands scrubbing at his stomach. The doctor barely graced him with a disdainful glower. “It isn’t a vital organ, and extracting it would have no long-term effects, it seems.”

Sendak stood, arms crossed, eyes narrowing at the sardonic Galran. “Then you will do so.”

The doctor’s glasses caught the overhead light when he straightened them. “I see no need. He’s a half-breed and according to our assessment, won’t grow taller than a normal lower lifeform from System X-9-Y.”
A runt, then.

“Takashi,” the little being on the bed cried, face pressed into the pillow. “Takashi... it hurts...”

“Preserving his life will not benefit the empire,” the doctor continued, making notes on his datapad without a second glance at the crying cub. “I’m going to recommend that he be termin– ”

Sendak’s instincts reacted before he could stop them, his hand shooting out to grip the doctor by the collar and slam him against the nearest wall. The growl originated deep in his core and reverberated as such. “You will fix whatever needs to be fixed. He will survive, and if he does not, you will pray death. It will come, too, but much slower than it came for him.”

The doctor’s eyes widened, fear alive within them but not enough to break his composure. He cleared his throat, a subtle suggestion to be released, and though hesitant, Sendak listened.

The doctor straightened his glasses again, and then his coat, before tapping his datapad. “I will have the techs prep him for surgery.”

“I will accompany him.”

“I do not advise – ”

“I do not care.” Sendak turned back to the sniveling figure on the bed. “And you will allow me to do so, or I will bring your transgression before Emperor Zarkon.”

The doctor’s eyes paused at the implication that this cub – this runt – was of any value to the emperor himself. That changed things, Sendak knew, and the doctor became more complacent.

Being in good graces with Emperor Zarkon afforded Sendak many things, including the limited use of Zarkon’s name and favor. As the highest-ranking commander, Sendak risked scandal for taking responsibility for a half-Galran cub, but no one would breathe a cross word if they believed it would breed Zarkon’s wrath.

Once the doctor left, Sendak retreated to the chair next to the bed and pulled out his personal device, hitting open the line. He spoke factually and direct. “Takashi, I will not be returning tonight. I will have dinner sent up to you.” He listened and struggled to dismiss the fear evident in his lover’s voice. “Yes, I will check on Keith’s progress.”

Keith’s pointed ears twitched, and those violet eyes barely opened. “Is that Takashi?”

Sendak’s massive claw encompassed Keith’s crown, ruffling the wet locks. He shushed him gently before continuing, “I did speak with his doctor earlier, and the cub is showing signs of improvement.”

Takashi seemed to take some comfort in that, though Sendak wished he could be by Takashi’s side. He would wrap his arms about the human’s waist and hold him close, allowing Takashi to rest his head against Sendak’s muscular arm.

But Sendak was needed here, at Keith’s side, for now, and Takashi, even if he could come, would only be besides himself. Best not to make his young kzelz think there was something to worry about until Sendak knew for certain.

He ended the call with a reminder for Shiro to rest and then moved to the edge of Keith’s bed, drawing the half-breed’s head into his lap. He carded his sharp claws through the cub’s hair, making sure to caress and not scrape, and he murmured to the tiny, trembling being that everything
would be all right.
If only for Takashi, Sendak would make it so.

Pre-Voltron

Central Command was more formidable than Shiro ever thought possible. From his spot on the bridge, he endured a full view of the Zarkon’s command ship from the battlecruiser’s massive viewer screen, but he steeled his nerves and helped finish the cruiser’s docking procedures.

Once they landed, Sendak came to Shiro’s side and motioned for him to follow.

“Walk a step behind me at all times. Do not speak or look Emperor Zarkon in the eyes. When you are in his presence, kneel before him and place a fist to your chest. You will not be required to greet him with the customary declaration of loyalty since you are not Galra.”

“And what if I break protocol and decide to offer him the chance to surrender before his forces are completely wiped out by freedom fighters and other rebellious organizations?”

Sendak hit open the battlecruiser’s door and pinned Shiro with a stern glower. “Then you will die.”

Not exactly the answer Shiro was looking for, but he appreciated Sendak’s honesty. With a sigh, Shiro followed Sendak out the exit and down the ramp.

Demoralizing was the best word Shiro could think of to describe Central Command’s hanger. Hundreds of sentries – if not thousands – occupied the immediate area, swarming the numerous battlecruisers that had docked for unloading and restocking purposes. The sheer volume and numbers of the Galra Empire’s forces and supplies far exceeded anything the Blade of Marmora could hope to amass. All the time, the battles, the deaths the Blade of Marmora incurred – were they for nothing? How could the Blade ever hope to dethrone such a power machine of hatred and destruction?

“Takashi,” Sendak called from the bottom of the ramp, and humbled, Shiro staggered behind him.

A tall but slender Galra awaited Sendak, dressed in a similar outfit to Shiro and holding a fist over his chest. He went to one knee for a brief moment. “Commander Sendak, welcome back to Central Command. Emperor Zarkon requests an audience with you, and Lieutenant Ulaz will be joining us shortly. He is currently with the Druids, finishing up his latest assignment.”

“Very good, Haxus. Begin the re-docking procedures and hold any alerts until after my meeting with Lord Zarkon.”

“Yes, Commander.”

When the Galra – Haxus – shot Shiro a scrutinizing glare, Sendak interjected, “Haxus, Takashi will be joining us for our next sector sweep. I will need you to input his data into the system and assign him to my command.”

“Sir?”

Sendak’s frown relayed an unspoken threat. “Like you did with Yasek.”

Haxus bowed his head and tapped his fist to his chest. “Vrepit sa, Commander.”

Sendak started away, and though Shiro followed, Haxus lifted his eyes to meet Shiro’s, relaying an
ominous warning. Shiro dismissed it. After spending two weeks alone with Sendak, he held few doubts about how the commander felt about him. He wouldn’t lose sleep worrying what Sendak’s subordinate thought.

But Shiro felt like a cub again, sitting before a control room dashboard at a spaceport bar, watching as Sendak seduced a younger officer.

He hurried his step to catch up with Sendak’s longer strides. “Who’s Yasek?”

“He’s of no concern to you.”

“Sendak – ”

“That is ‘commander’ to you here,” Sendak snapped with an edge Shiro hadn’t heard the entire trip from the Balmera. “And that is the truth. You need not worry about him.”

Sendak was right, as much as Shiro hated to admit it. Here, at the mercy of the Galra Empire and its malicious prejudices, Shiro could not be seen questioning the highest-ranking commander in the Galra Empire, especially as a lower lifeform. That didn’t stop his curiosity from getting the better of him. Sendak encouraged him to speak of his past. Why wouldn’t Sendak do the same?

The further they traveled from the hanger, the narrower the corridors became. They passed two slender but tall figures on either side of large, intimidating doors. Long mauve robes flowed to the floor while white masks with four slits hid their faces. Sendak barely afforded them a passing glance while Shiro swallowed as silently as he could, a cool darkness sweeping over him like winter’s touch. He made his way to the lift – a small section of the floor that rose into the ceiling’s skylight – and held his breath, not sure why he suddenly felt like a hand reached inside his chest and squeezed his heart.

“Once we stop, you are to step off the lift and kneel. You are not to move until I return. Nod if you understand.”

Shiro did as asked; he wasn’t sure he could speak even if he wanted to.

The elevator’s bottom rose and locked into place on a large platform, and Shiro managed to take a short but gaping look at the magnificent room. The massive, domed windows showcased Zarkon’s command system, while a wide bridge cut through the center of the room, lined with vibrant purple accents. It led to a wicked-looking throne with six sharp points and a glowing stream of quintessence that stretched from the seat to the high ceiling.

On the throne waited Zarkon.

Shiro wasted no time. The moment Sendak stepped forward, Shiro fell to one knee and placed a fist over his heart. He highly doubted the emperor would notice him. Zarkon barely spoke two sentences to him in the astral plane, and they’d never gotten within twenty feet of each other. Still, dressed in the clothes of the emperor’s own warriors, head ducked, and with so much distance between them – Shiro struggled to keep still as his insides quivered and liquefied.

Sendak’s boots clicked upon the bridge and then swished as he dropped to one knee. “Emperor Zarkon, I have already spoken to Commander Prorock. He is excavating another crystal from X-95-Vox and will be arriving at Central Command within two-movements time.”

“What delayed the delivery, Commander Sendak?” a new vicious voice called, feminine and hissing, but Shiro hadn’t noticed another presence in the room.
Sendak wove a tale of complete fiction, about how the Balmeran crystal hadn’t been stable and exploded due to the fluctuating dimensional pressure caused by hyper-speed. Shiro remained silent and still, frightened to hear Zarkon’s response, though it seemed to take quintaints to come.

“That is unfortunate.”

Shiro breathed again.

“And highly unlikely,” the woman said. “Commander Sendak was briefed on how to transport the crystal. It should not have –”

“Sendak could not foreseen this development,” Zarkon interrupted. “Commander, return to your sector. There has been talk of rebellion. Silence those rumors immediately, and I will summon you when it is time to test the Komar Experiment.”

“Thank you, my lord. Vrepit sa.”

“Vrepit sa.”

Shiro blinked. That was it? No condemnations? No corporal punishments? Just a “good try and see you again soon”?

“By the way, Commander –” Zarkon spoke as Sendak came to stand by Shiro’s side. “— who have you brought before us?”

Shiro paused, halfway to his feet, and stared directly at Zarkon. His eyes took sight of the glistening purple weapon on the emperor’s hip – the Black Bayard, the traditional weapon of the Paladins of Voltron, and the leash that collared his lion.

Shiro needed to get that weapon to free Black – but Shiro was pretty sure he wouldn’t survive the next five ticks if he revealed his identity to Zarkon and that witch at his side. He wondered if Zarkon’s “not so lenient” threat matched Kolivan’s clawless decrees – when his legs gave out underneath him.

“I found this lower lifeform on one of the planets in my sector.” Sendak’s snarled voice carried across the throne room. “The indigenous people called him their greatest warrior. He has potential, but first I must teach him his place.”

“Do so before bringing him before me again.”

Shiro had fallen upon the lift, so he didn’t even have to get up as they exited the throne room.

Sendak knelt beside him once they were out of sight, hand out for Shiro to take. “Looking Zarkon in the eye is a privilege reserved for a select few.”

Shiro debated how to respond and eventually settled upon elbowing Sendak in the side and sending him tumbling off the edge of the lift. He glanced over the edge and couldn’t help but laugh as Sendak blinked up at him. Then, a true but rather surprised grin overtook Sendak’s usually dark features, and Shiro struggled to ignore the rapid fluttering in his chest.

When the lift stopped, Shiro stayed one step behind Sendak.

“You apparently have selective hearing,” Sendak said in a low rumble, though it sounded more like a plea than a reprimand. “Zarkon does not tolerate disobedience.”
“You didn’t seem to get more than a slap on the wrist.”

“My relationship with Emperor Zarkon is different from most.” Sendak never glanced back as he rounded another bend and led Shiro into the hanger. “He took me from my home planet and trained me personally. I owe him a debt of gratitude I cannot repay.”

“He’s the leader of your pack.”

Sendak nodded, though there was obvious hesitation in his voice. “All of his commanders are technically pack, but I do not believe we hold the same bonds that you hold with yours.”

“How do you know?”

Sendak stopped before the ramp leading to his battlecruiser, eyebrows tugged down in an honest confession. “I would die for Emperor Zarkon as you would for your father. But he is the only one.”

Shiro glanced up at Haxus, who waited for them at the opening of the cruiser, and silently disagreed.

Where Sendak and Shiro shared a quiet intimacy during the last two movements, now the battleship’s corridor hummed with excitement – officers, engineers, pilots, researchers, and sentries. A majority appeared to be fully Galra, but every so often a noticeably shorter or vibrant colored soldier passed. A few bowed with a fist over their heart, but for the most part, they only nodded to Sendak and scrambled past.

Haxus rattled off the list of necessary repairs to the battlecruiser and their departure time and rotation schedule. Shiro waited a step behind Sendak, listening absentmindedly and ignoring the various glowers from the passing officers. Sendak must have noticed them, however, and stepped back to be even with Shiro. Haxus stopped, and just beyond him, Ulaz faltered in mid-step.

Ulaz wore the black and purple uniform of a Galran research scientist but with long flaps over his legs and matching gloves that ran from the tip of his claw to the curve of his elbow. Shiro had seen Ulaz in his empire uniform before, but somehow he seemed more sinister here, bathed in the violet lights of the battleship.

Ulaz’s eyes barely widened a fraction, though his nostrils flared. His stride resumed less than a moment after it halted, and his neutral expression never shifted with his surprise. A true covert operative. Shiro could only hope to achieve such control over his emotions one day.

Haxus glanced between him and Ulaz, as if sensing some wordless conversation had passed between them. Shiro only glanced up at Sendak, who greeted Ulaz with a nod of acknowledgement. “You have completed your rotation with the High Priestess?”

“Yes, Commander,” Ulaz said. “The High Priestess requests more test subjects for her amusement. Have you started collecting?”

Shiro barely kept his hands from trembling at his thighs. Ulaz was asking Sendak how he’d come to capture Shiro and if he had plans of surrendering him.

The commander gave a professional response. “Shiro came to be upon my ship by his own volition. He will be joining us on our next rotation of the sector. He is of no concern of yours or Haxus’s.”

“Sir,” Haxus rebuffed, but Sendak kept his voice even-toned and his posture unthreatening.
“He is serving under my command with no official post within the empire. Do you have any more concerns, Haxus?”

Haxus held his tongue, falling back into step with Ulaz. “Sir.”

“Ulaz?”

“Sir.” Ulaz sounded bored, tired, like he couldn’t be bothered to acknowledge Shiro.

“Hm. You never disappoint me, Ulaz. Always indifferent to change. I am most pleased.”

Ulaz said nothing, and Shiro’s heart couldn’t help but ache. Sendak, who spoke of Ulaz with nothing but warmth and respect, didn’t actually know the Galra he’d oversaw for decadeebs.

Sendak dismissed them with an order to meet upon the bridge first thing in the morning. Shiro was both shocked and relieved to find his room wasn’t on the same level as the rest of Sendak’s crew. His was, in fact, one of the side rooms off Sendak’s own quarters.

Shiro barely sighed and leaned back against his door before it swished open. In a fury of movement, Shiro found his cheeks gripped between two massive claws and a worried Ulaz invading his personal space.

“What are you doing here? Are you all right? Has Sendak hurt you? Where is Kolivan?” Ulaz ran his hands along Shiro’s arms and began to pat Shiro’s torso, checking for injuries and firing off questions as he went. “Sendak didn’t attack you, did he? How did you get captured? Are you hurt any – ”

“Ulaz.” Shiro hissed, seizing the older researcher’s hands and squeezing them. “Ulaz, I’m fine. Sendak hasn’t done anything to me.”

“Then why are you here? What happened to Kolivan?” Those claws once more sought his face, and when Ulaz dipped his jaw, most likely to greet Shiro properly, he jerked back, appalled. “He scent-marked you.”

“…I, uh, yeah.” Shiro hoped Ulaz couldn’t feel the heat in his cheeks under those thick gloves. “He – We were alone on the ship, and I saw Zarkon in the astral plane and – ”

“Shiro.” Ulaz’s desperate shrill sliced right through Shiro’s muttering. “What happened?”

Ulaz hadn’t known he’d be on the ship? “Kolivan hasn’t contacted you?”

“No. I’m not scheduled to receive my next communication for another four quintaints.” Ulaz’s claws relaxed only a fraction, coming to rest upon Shiro’s shoulders.

Shiro forced down the bile rising in his throat and opened his mouth to answer when a noise sounded on the other side of Shiro’s room. Sendak must have returned to his own quarters.

Ulaz nuzzled the top of Shiro’s head but refrained from greeting him formally as a pack mate. Shiro understood why. If Ulaz scent-marked him, Sendak would immediately know of their close relationship – or worse, believe Ulaz forced himself upon Shiro.

“I’ll reach out to Kolivan,” Ulaz said, hush and urgent. “I’ll let you know once we coordinate a time for pick-up.”

“Pick up?”
Ulaz paused, hands still gripping Shiro’s shoulders. “Yes. You cannot stay here. Sendak will eventually –”

“He’s been nothing but kind to me since –”

“– the last time you saw him and he tore a mating mark into your skin.”

Shiro flinched as if hit. “That – That was eight annuals ago, and –”

“You are not this naïve, Shiro. I have seen the effect his actions have upon you. You have suffered great emotional distress because of him.”

Shiro crossed his arms and averted his eyes, unable to wish away the terrible memories.

Ulaz’s claws ran along Shiro’s biceps in a soothing manner. “And you must never forget. Sendak is the highest-ranking commander in the Galra Empire. He is ruthless. He is relentless. He’ll do whatever it takes to get what he wants, and he wants you.”

Shiro couldn’t quite argue that point as he sighed and ran his fingertips along his scar. “But I can’t leave, Ulaz. Even to get away from Sendak. I have to stay. I – I was in Zarkon’s throne room –”

“You what?”

“– and he has the Black Bayard.” Shiro quickly recounted his time in the astral plane. “The only way I’ll be able to get close to Zarkon again and without warning is to stay by Sendak’s side. He’s the one most likely to lower Zarkon’s defenses.”

Ulaz wasn’t pleased. “Shiro, Sendak has already taken so much from you. Do not force me to watch as he takes the rest.”

Shiro inhaled a long breath, dismissing the sudden uneasiness that settled in his gut. “There’s another side of him you don’t know, Ulaz.”

“And there’s a side you do not, either.” Ulaz leaned forward then and swiped his chin across the top of Shiro’s head once more. “Remember that before you lower all your inhibitions for him again.”

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**Before the Blades**

“Takashi, Takashi, I’m fine.”

Despite Keith’s squirming and whining, Shiro kept his arms locked about his little brother’s neck, refusing to let go. It had been more than a movement since Shiro sought out Sendak, carrying a sniffling Keith in his arms and beseeching the commander’s assistance. Sendak welcomed Shiro into his penthouse before leaving with Keith. He returned every evening for a few dobashes, called and messaged throughout the movement, and gave periodic albeit brief updates. Shiro worried, aware that his brother lived but knowing nothing of his status.

But now Keith was here, warm and writhing in his arms, and Shiro pulled back just enough to cup his brother’s cheeks.

“You’re okay? They didn’t harm you, did they? The Galra –”

“There was one guy who was nasty,” Keith mumbled after he stuck his umvy spice pop between his teeth and cheek. “He kept pricking me with needles and tsking, like I was doing something
wrong. But I wasn’t, Taksahi! I was keeping as still as I could and – ”

Sendak huffed and shed his cuirass as he retreated farther into the penthouse. Shiro waited until he heard Sendak’s door shut before dropping his hands onto Keith’s shoulders, clasping warmly.

“But you’re all right? They didn’t do anything else?”

Keith shrugged and slurped on his pop, rubbing his stomach in awkward manner. Bile burned the back of Shiro’s throat. Dread made his blood run cold.

He reached for Keith’s shirt and raised the bottom hem. There, just above Keith’s waistline, was a small patch of recently shaved fur that had just begun to regrow.

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for waiting, everyone! This story is completely written now, and I’m proofing/editing as fast I can. I’m hoping to get the whole story up by the Season 5 premiere! *crossing fingers*
Broken Blade - Part Six

Chapter Summary

Sendak tries to put down a rebellion; Shiro tries to save it.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here.

Pre-Voltron

Shiro entered the bridge with little fanfare, though quite a few officers looked up from their screens. They cast him a variety of glares – from resentful to envious to lustful – but Shiro had been ignoring those since his time in Drule Central almost a decafeeb ago. He came to the foot of the command platform, where Sendak resided for the majority of the flight.

Sendak noticed him within a few ticks and motioned for Shiro to join him. “Did you finished your rotation with Ulaz?”

“I believe he tired of me asking him an endless stream of questions and banished me from his lab.”

“Hm. So he sent you to bother me.”

“Would you rather me seek out Haxus and see if he has any tasks for me?”

Sendak heaved a tolerant sigh before redirecting his gaze to the viewer screen. “You could have at least brought me some vora.”

Yes, perhaps a proper mate would have brought Sendak one of the ship’s stimulating albeit legally addictive brews. But just because Shiro bore Sendak’s mating mark, didn’t automatically make them partners, despite what a majority of the ship’s crew believed.

In the additional three movements Shiro had been at Sendak’s side, he folded into the daily life of a Galra battleship as a separate entity, revered with mixed emotions as the commander’s mate. In his first few quintaints, there had been whispers and questions about his “lower lifeform” status, but apparently, rumors named him one of the best fighters on a rebellous planet. That seemed to court both respect and curiosity rather than open hostility. And after he’d fought Sendak to another stand-still on the training deck in front of half of the officers, the crew knew better than to question his place at the commander’s side.

Perhaps Haxus held the only reservations toward his and Sendak’s mating, though Ulaz disagreed in silence. But Sendak trusted Ulaz, calling him the consummate professional and warrior, and sent Shiro to Ulaz’s lab daily to help with any projects or medical needs the science officer had. Shiro enjoyed those times, working alongside Ulaz like he’d done at the Blade of Marmora’s headquarters. He used the sessions to catch up with his packmate and trade stories and information.
for Ulaz to send back to the Blade.

Sendak never sent Shiro to Haxus. In fact, Sendak made sure to always place himself physically between Haxus and Shiro if they happened to be in the same room, sparing Shiro from seeing the second-in-command’s displeasure of his presence.

Shiro witnessed a different side of Sendak, too, the one Shiro remembered from his time prior to the Blades. Sendak wasn’t cruel to his crew and perhaps could be described as encouraging, inspiring. But Sendak was also relentless. He demanded nothing but the best from his crew, and as the highest commander in the Galra Empire, they gave it to him.

Shiro waited to see the ruthless Sendak, though, and as they approached a rebellious planet that needed to be reminded of its place in the empire, Shiro crossed his arms and leaned back against the platform’s railing. He dreaded the death and destruction that was to come, ordered by the Galran whose soft touch lured warm memories and sensual reminders to the front of Shiro’s mind.

“I can hear you thinking from over here,” Sendak interrupted, coming to stand before Shiro. “What disturbs you?”

“You said earlier that these people are peaceful, right? That in however many annuals the empire has ruled them – ”

“Eleven, yes.”

“ – they’ve never rebelled.”

Sendak’s eyes narrowed, wondering. “What is your point?”

Shiro liked how Sendak never minced words. “What made them rebel now? There has to be a reason.”

“When one takes rather than earns, he is always fighting to retain what he believes to be his.”

Shiro’s head snapped up, and he found himself staring into Sendak’s calm and open expression. It allowed Shiro to see straight into Sendak’s soul. Likewise, he saw the commander gaging his reaction, so Shiro ignored Sendak’s obvious self-incrimination.

“Oh, so maybe you’re right about the reason, but that still doesn’t answer why they chose now to rebel. Why not five annuals ago or ten annuals from now? What caused the breaking point on – where are we going again?”

Sendak came to lean on the railing next to Shiro. “Puig.”

That sent Shiro’s stomach roiling. “What will you do to the Puigians? You can’t just – ”

“I will be the judge of those in my sector, but I am interested in what has fueled the rebellion as well. Haxus already sent a fleet ahead of us to bring order back to the planet. When we arrive, I will interrogate the leaders and see what has caused this uprising, so we may avoid it in other areas.”

“May I join you?”

Sendak seemed just as shocked by the question as Shiro was of asking it.

Sendak gave careful consideration to his words. “I do not believe that is wise.”
“I lived on Puig when I was younger, after my parents left Earth. I knew the local leaders. I might be able to get you answers quicker than using traditional Galra interrogation techniques.” He also had a feeling that Sendak might pull his punches – or perhaps not punch quite so hard – if he were there to watch.

They stood in silence for a few moments as Sendak mulled over his request. Shiro began to wonder if he’d ever get a straight response when Sendak asked, “You didn’t leave Earth and come straight for Drule Central?”

Shiro shook his head. “No. Keith’s mother wanted us out of the way of Galra Empire, so she brought us to Puig. It wasn’t ruled by the Galra then.” Had Moira and their father drawn the Galra out this far? Or had Keith and his combined quintessence lured Zarkon and Haggar to Puig?

“But Earth was not – and is not – threatened by the empire, so what would cause her to leave?” Sendak wondered.

Shiro cursed himself for letting that slip and averted his eyes, allowing his silence to serve as his only answer.

“I will allow you accompany me to Puig,” Sendak said some time later, “and perhaps one day, you will trust me enough to share some of your burdens, Takashi.”

The words flew from Shiro’s face faster than he could stop them. “Who was Yasek?”

Sendak halted in mid-step and offered Shiro a simple glance over his shoulder. He, too, offered no explanation, though the dim overhead light caught Sendak’s eye – his glowing, orange eye, which bore the scars of a mating mark.

Shiro eventually learned that hell hath no fury like a science officer left behind. Even Kolivan’s anger seemed tame compared to Ulaz’s laser stare and wordless admonishment.

“You know I can’t let him destroy Puig,” Shiro said with a roll of his eyes.

“And you think you can change his mind?” Ulaz muttered as Shiro passed him to board the small craft.

Shiro stopped and turned, meeting Ulaz’s skepticism with genuine uncertainty. “I don’t know, but I can’t stand around and do nothing.”

Haxus already sat at the controls while Sendak lingered by the pilot’s chair. The skin about the commander’s eyes crinkled when Shiro entered, and Shiro couldn’t help the natural up twist of his lips in response. Haxus let out a disapproving huff, but Sendak’s good nature dissipated when his gaze shifted above Shiro’s head.

“Ulaz, I am surprised to see you have joined us. You usually do not entertain yourself with political aggressions.”

“I prefer to extend my resources toward more precise avenues of victory, sir, but Puig offers some intriguing specimens.”

“Hm.” He bowed his head in reverence. “I shall endeavor not to bore you, then.”

After Haxus took off, Shiro lingered in the back of the cockpit near Ulaz, and though he knew he shouldn’t – he would be jeopardizing Sendak’s favor, Ulaz’s position and his safety, and perhaps
even the Blade itself – Shiro tapped the Blades’ code against the wall. The reverberations were just
strong enough for Ulaz to feel.

I’m twenty-four. I don’t need a chaperone.

Ulaz waited a dobash, two dobashes, five, and finally dropped his hand on top of Shiro’s. Your age
does not denote the truth. You are a cub.

Shiro rolled his eyes. Ulaz gave nothing away, simply shifting to cross his arms and stare out the
window.

Memories from a life long lost flashed in Shiro’s mind. Puig itself remained rather unchanged in
the last decafeeb – a natural landscape of forests and lakes, not unlike Earth, dotted with small,
rock structures that served as villages. The Puigians built their civilizations into valleys, protected
by large mountains, with living areas and trade structures in caves. Shiro always found it rather
rustic, like camping or how he surmised humans lived on Earth hundreds of years ago. But the
Puigians were not primitive. They were primarily farmers and crafters. They toiled on the land
from dawn until dusk, but they were also master storytellers, gifted in the art of tale weaving. Shiro
had sat mesmerized for hours, listening to epic after epic as the bonfire burned brightly against in
the night sky.

Shiro missed those days, even if he didn’t miss the lack of indoor plumbing.

He stepped out from the spacecraft and into the main city, which was built underneath a large rock
overhang. A laser now hung ominously over the village, ready to fire at the first sign of rebellion,
while troops surrounded the villagers and kept them corralled for Sendak to address. The Puigians
still reminded Shiro of a cross between a dear and a chipmunk, adorable but strong and fierce when
need be.

The sentries pushed the leader of the village to his knees in front of Sendak, and though the
Puigians had no formal communication system, Shiro held no doubts that word of Sendak’s arrival
would spread quickly.

The leader, a rather tall man with baby blue markings on his cheeks and nose, pleaded his case
with truth in his voice and fear in his eyes. “…had no choice. My people were dying. The drought
barely left enough water for my people to drink, let alone for our crops to grow. Our resources are
thin, and we could not – we cannot sustain – ”

“I do not want to hear excuses, Codax,” Sendak snapped “Your people are to produce results, and
when they do not, they shall be punished.”

“But – But Commander, you must understand. We do not control the weather. Our people are mere
keepers of the soil and of the tale. We are not able to – Shiro?”

Shiro blinked, taken back by the Puigian leader’s sudden beckon. Though he’d recognized Codax
immediately as one of the Puigians who greeted his family upon their arrival all those annuals ago,
he never thought Codax would remember him. But now the Puig leader craned his neck to see
Shiro behind Sendak with a wistful look upon his usually cheerful face.

“Shiro, you are of the empire now?”

Haxus let out a derisive growl, while Ulaz kept what Shiro now recognized to be his “empire
glower of apathy.” Sendak, however, simply glanced back at Shiro and waited to see his reaction.

Shiro responded with a tentative nod and stepped around Sendak to offer the Puig leader a hand. “I
wouldn’t say I am ‘of’ the empire, but I am accompanying Commander Sendak for the time being.” He allowed himself to be pulled into a warm embrace. “It is good to see you, Guide Codax.”

“And it is a pleasure to see you, Shiro. I often wondered where you ventured after us. Tell me. How are your mother and father? Keith? Are they well?”

Shiro pulled back and allowed Codax’s hands to grip his forearms in a gentle hold. He somehow managed a sheepish smile but nothing more.

“The drought left us with very little to show for our latest harvest,” Codax explained once they retired to Puig’s administrative cave, perched high above the village. Carved tales decorated the walls, speaking of battles and stories long lost to words. Shiro ignored them as he listened to Codax plead to Sendak, his tact gone from his usual lyrical verses. “Your regent shipped what little the harvest yielded off planet to other worlds in our system – ”

“As is needed for other worlds and their populations to survive,” Sendak replied.

“Yes, but there is not enough for my people.”

Is, Shiro noted with urgency, not was.

“We are starving, Commander Sendak. We only fought in order to feed those who hadn’t received rations from the previous harvest.”

“That is not my problem,” Sendak said. “Your people are to supply the raw materials to other planets in your system, and if you are unable to do so, then the rations set aside for personal consumption will not be – ”

Ulaz’s frown, however innocuous it may have been, did not deter Shiro when he stepped up to intervene. “Your people still do not have enough food to survive?”

Sendak sent a scathing glare that Shiro and Codax ignored. “My people – we have been cutting rations in half, sometimes thirds. But we can’t continue like this for much longer.”

Shiro immediately spun to Sendak, an uneasy current running under his skin. “We have rations on the ship. We need to bring them to the planet now and start distributing them first to those who have not – ”

“The Galra Empire does not provide assistance to its subjects,” Sendak admonished, sharp and dismissive. “Their subjects are to willingly serve their masters if they are to continue reaping the benefits of being part of the – ”

The rage that surged through Shiro only showed in his clenching of his teeth and hands. “You cannot be serious. These people aren’t choosing to disobey your regnant. A drought isn’t something they can stop, and I don’t know what benefits you believe they enjoy from being enslaved.”

Sendak placed both hands upon the table before him and pushed to his feet, rising to tower over Shiro and demand respect like the ruthless commander he was. For the first time since returning to Sendak’s side, Shiro saw the monster Ulaz described.

“Victory or death. If they are strong enough to survive this hardship, then they will. It is the Galra Way.”
Shiro’s hands curled into trembling fists, shoulders bunching, and he strode forward until he stood in Sendak’s personal space. So close, only Sendak could hear his whisper. “Keep your merciless persona, if you need to, but you and I both know you don’t believe that mantra.”

Sendak ducked his head, so his lips hovered just before Shiro’s crown. “You presume too much, Takashi,” he said, equally as low. “My favor extends only insofar as you entertain me.”

The words thrummed an old memory of their life together prior to the mark, when Shiro struggled against the yoke Sendak wanted to place about his neck, a yoke Shiro believed he now held. “So it’s common practice for a high-ranking commander in the Galra Empire to make sure their lover’s half-breed brother survives an appendectomy. Good to know.”

Sendak’s eyes shot wide before they narrowed. His frown deepened.

“You can’t tell me you did that just because you found a tight hole you liked to fill.”

Sendak said nothing, though his eyes demanded an explanation.

Shiro fought the urge to roll his. “You used to let me borrow your datapad, and as Zarkon’s highest-ranking commander, you have unrestricted credentials. It wasn’t difficult to find Keith’s medical records.” Even lower, he added, “Give these people food from your ship. Once we have fed them, we can determine the best course of action for the harvest.”

“No,” Sendak rebuffed. “If you want the Puigs to be spared, determine a solution first. If one cannot be found, the rest of the food shall be taken off Puig, and another source will be cultivated.”

“You can’t be serious,” Shiro shouted. “People are dying!”

“That is nothing new, Takashi. You of all people are aware of the empire’s endeavors. They are not achieved without sacrifice.”

The simplicity, the matter-of-fact tone, only added to Shiro’s anger, but he dismissed it with a huff and a quick glower to Haxus and the other accompanying officers. “I need reports on Puig’s exports and imports, as well as those of the surrounding systems.”

It did not surprise Shiro when no one moved, instead waiting for the directive from Sendak himself. It came quickly and without hesitation. “Do as he requests.”

Shiro knew he should have thanked Sendak, but he couldn’t bring himself to.

To Be Continued…
Broken Blade - Part Seven

Chapter Summary

Shiro and Sendak come to an understanding, i.e. Sendak is whipped.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here.

Post-Voltron

When the door opened to his treehouse, Shiro averted his eyes from the silhouette. He already knew who it was. Kolivan wouldn’t come to speak with him this time, and Keith wouldn’t be able to give any perspective. An embrace, a pack greeting perhaps, but that was all. With Ulaz trapped in the astral plane and Thace away at his post in the Galra Empire – that left only one member of their pack.

“It is hard for Kolivan to accept that you chose to remain with Sendak,” Antok’s deep voice rumbled. “He does not like to think of your mate – or how you acquired your mark.”

Shiro kept his back turned to Antok and wiped the tears from his cheeks. “How he reacts to my past is his problem, not mine.”

“Agreed.” Despite himself, Shiro swung to see Antok, who stood before him, mask off, expression one of despair. “If you need to speak, I will listen.”

Shiro couldn’t find the words to articulate how he felt, so he simply snapped his mouth shut.

Antok moved to take a step forward and aborted the gesture, instead deciding to take a seat upon the treehouse’s couch. “You hesitate to speak to Kolivan and Ulaz, fearful of how that will change their perception of you. You refrain from speaking with Thace because he allowed you to use your…assets in order to secure information for him.”

“My scars upon my face are not from battle but from my mate, as well.”

Shiro found his legs buckling, sending him to the couch next to Antok. The Blades’ fiercest warrior, its arguably best fighter, had been all but been mutilated by his mate? Shiro couldn’t comprehend that thought, and his expression must have relayed that. Antok remained calm and firm, though a slight tremor in his hand gave away his inner turmoil.

“I refused to take a mate, a sub-commander of the empire. In retaliation, she made sure no one else would want to mate with me again.” Before Shiro could offer any consolation, Antok continued in
a hoarse voice, “When Kolivan found me upon the Galran vessel, serving under the officer who had abused me, I hardly offer any resistance against his attack and helped him find the information he sought. I was shocked and grateful when he refused to leave me there.”

Shiro covered Antok’s quivering hand in his own and smiled when it stopped shaking. Antok responded by turning his hand over and folding his meaty fingers with Shiro’s slender ones.

“It can be difficult to confront your past, even harder to accept it, but you have no reason to be ashamed by it, Shiro. And you needn’t fear judgment from me.” He repeated, “If you wish to speak, I will listen.”

“Kolivan,” Shiro began, “he doesn’t trust me, and I think – I’m not sure if he ever did.”

“It isn’t about trust. Sendak did consume much of your time during maturation, and yet you willingly returned to his side, despite the pain he caused you. It concerns Kolivan. It concerns all of us.”

“You could just trust me to make my own decisions.”

“Kolivan did, and it led to you going prematurely white and losing an arm.” His hand tightened upon Shiro’s metal fingers. “You lost an arm, Shiro. No matter who took it – it is not something to dismiss.”

Shiro drew in a deep inhale, mulling Antok’s words.

“And you must remember – you gave yourself up for Kolivan,” Antok said, plaintive. “He will never forget or forgive that.”

Even after all these years, Kolivan was still his double-edged dagger, his greatest weapon and his greatest weakness. He’d do anything for Kolivan – or die trying. It was why his relationship with Sendak caused such friction between them. Kolivan would never forgive Sendak for harming Shiro, and Shiro agreed – neither could he, despite all the good Sendak had done.

“I know he thinks I chose to stay with Sendak for more than just his life,” Shiro admitted, “and he’s not wrong. Sendak…changed during my time with the Marmora. I – I saw a side of him I only caught a glimpse of before. I made him a better person, Antok. He wanted to be one because of me.”

“Mate or not, you cannot take responsibility for the actions of others, Shiro.” Antok’s golden eyes shone with a melancholy honesty. “You owe Sendak nothing.”

No, that was wrong. Shiro didn’t owe Sendak his affections or his life, just like Antok didn’t owe his former superior officer any loyalty. But he owed Sendak his gratitude – for Keith’s life, for his own life – which he would always give.

Antok dipped his head, running his jaw along Shiro’s. “You do owe Kolivan and your brother and your team the truth, Shiro, whatever it may be. We are your pack, and whatever you have decided, we will support you – no matter what.”

Pre-Voltron

There were no negotiations or arguments. Shiro simply took residence in the Puig’s main hall, spreading datapads and papers about him like an absentminded scientist. Ulaz sat in the corner, legs up, at first appearing bored or disinterested. Later, his soft snores kept Shiro company.
Sendak, himself, came and went, returning to the ship when called, but as the vargas turned into quintaints, Shiro went with Codax and his people to the soil, learning what needed to be done and how much they produced to be exported.

It surprised him that Sendak, Haxus, and Ulaz stayed in the Puigian village with him. He fully expected them to seek out refuge in their own beds, but Haxus stayed by Sendak’s side, Ulaz by Shiro’s, and Sendak stayed as needed.

The commander left for a long while once, almost a full quintaint, but Shiro kept toiling away, finding out what he could about the economy of the Javeeno Star System. Late at night, during the end of their first movement, Sendak surprised Shiro with a steaming cup of steaming *vora*.

“I understand you feel a connection to these people and their planet, but even you must concede this borders on madness.”

Shiro took a sip and let his brief smile be the only gratitude Sendak received. “I won’t let these people starve, not when you have the means to help them live.”

“Means? Perhaps. But they do not deserve to live if they cannot help themselves.”

“Deserve has nothing to do it,” Shiro challenged, sitting straight in his chair and pining Sendak with a callous, searing gaze. “It is a basic right to receive food and water and medical attention.”

“To be provided by another?” Sendak scoffed, taking a swig of his own mug. “It is not a right, then. It is a gift, and if they offer nothing to the Galra Empire in return –”

“People cannot be judged by their worth. Life is sacred and can’t quantified as such.”

Sendak’s troubled expression clearly showed he wanted to the argue the point but realized it was futile. He decided, instead, on a different tactic. “Why do you care about Puigians or anyone of these people for that matter? They are not your kin.”

Shiro fought the urge to glance back at the sleeping Ulaz. “I guess – I want to help others like they helped me. My pack sacrificed so much for me, cared for me when no one else –” When Sendak frowned, Shiro paused, then continued in a softer tone. “I wouldn’t be here without them. Neither would Keith. I owe them everything. The least I can do is try to help someone else like they helped me.”

Sendak’s brows hung low over his eyes, saddened. “You cannot save everyone, Takashi.”

“I have to try.”

Sendak took a leisurely sip of his vora, tongue sliding out to swipe across his bottom lip. He remained silent, wondering, for a few moments. “And if you fail?” he finally asked.

Shiro shrugged but flashed a brief, teasing smile. “You may have heard of the empire’s mantra – victory or death. I’m still here, aren’t I?”

Letting out a measured sigh, Sendak motioned toward the blinking datapad underneath Shiro’s fingerpads. “Show me what you’ve concluded.”

Shiro hadn’t finished his thoughts yet but explained his rationales. At the current time, Puig exported almost seventy percent of their harvest to the neighboring planets, who, in turn, shipped goods – clothing, furniture, spices – back to Puig. Though the harvest, itself, could not be saved, the Puigians could offer their tail-weaving services to neighboring planets in exchange for use of
their lands. This would also cut costs on shipping fruits and vegetables to those planets, and when
the delegate returned to Puig, he would bring with him various items from the planets for
consumption or use on Puig.

Once the harvest came around again, sixty percent of the take would allow Puig to start to
accumulate wealth, hopefully to become solvent, creating a market-like economy rather than one
fixed on empire pricing.

“You are not proposing a solution to the deficient harvest,” Sendak scowled. “You’re proposing an
alliance between neighboring planets.”

Yes, he was.

“Did you truly believe I would allow this?”

“No,” Shiro murmured in a breathless admission. “I didn’t.”

Sendak remained silent, though his eyes widened in a wordless demand.

“I know it doesn’t matter what I do here. You’re Galran, Zarkon’s most loyal commander, and
you’ll uphold the empire’s laws. Puig is already a lost cause. You won’t allow its rebellion to be
successful. You’ll use it to prove a point – resist your Galran overlords and you’ll be destroyed. I
just – ” Shiro faltered, leaning back in his chair with a frustrated sigh. “I guess I just hoped you’d
listen, at least, if nothing else.”

He couldn’t ask for anything else.

Sendak watched him closely, making Shiro feel like he was being dissecting by that sharp gaze.
Ulaz remained perfectly still behind him, though Shiro could tell he was awake, listening. The
night breeze kept them company, lazily meandering through the canyon and teasing Sendak’s fur
and Shiro’s bangs. It reminded Shiro of Black, in a way, swirling about his body and clinging his
shoulders. He wasn’t sure what to do next – to fight Sendak and possibly Ulaz, depending upon
what method Sendak chose to crush the rebellion.

“You propose that the planets stay in the Galra Empire for protection and commence, but they
would rule themselves.”

Shiro looked up to find Sendak skimming the papers in his hands. “In theory, yes.”

Sendak’s voice raised to yell but not shout, simply ordering the sentry at the door, “Call for Guide
Codax.” To Shiro, he directed, “This is a temporary solution. We will need to refine this agreement
and work alongside the regents on each of the planets to expand it throughout the solar system.

“Speak with the Puigian leader. A small Galran squad will remain on the planet for monitoring
purposes, but leadership will be held within the Puigian guilds. I will establish communication with
the nearby planets to start the farming process there.”

Shiro hadn’t dared to hope. “You’re – You’re going to allow the alliance?”

“For now,” Sendak paused, a longing in his gaze Shiro saw before, back during their time alone on
the ship. “People’s worth cannot be quantified, Takashi. I’ve…missed your quiet shuffling under
my covers and the way your eyes light up when delighted. I – I did not realize how much I missed
it until you were gone. If this is what it takes to keep you by my side, then I will do it.”

Shiro ducked his head but couldn’t contain the tiny smile that teased the edge of his lips. The tips
ult of his ears burned. Ulaz shifted behind him, clearing his throat to let Shiro know he was there, but Shiro barely acknowledge him, instead finding the glowing amber in Sendak’s eyes rather warm.

Guide Codax had few amendments to the proposition, elated to be out from under the yolk of the Galra Empire. His people celebrated, taking to the streets of their dilapidated village. Colorful flames of all spectrum painted the night sky a brilliant rainbow, and music awakened the planet’s very soul. Shiro sat above it all, watching as the food from the battlecruiser was laid out for the people to devour, their first true meal since the drought attacked their harvest.

Shiro felt Sendak’s eyes upon him, the indulgent gaze tender and embarrassing all the same. He tried to ignore it as best he could, focusing on the celebration below, but old memories reminded Shiro of lazy mornings and late evenings, Sendak waking him up with gentle claw trailing up his body, that heated and indulgent gaze pooling desire deep in his belly.

Eventually, Sendak murmured, “Does this please you?”

“Yes,” he replied, equally as low. “Thank you.”

“Good.”

Shiro’s hand moved on its own, reaching toward Sendak’s abnormally large one. Since it was too small to hold the whole thing, Shiro simply wrapped his palm about the thumb. Sendak tensed for a moment, then closed his hand just slightly, enough to return the gesture. They sat like that through the evening’s festivities, quiet but comfortable in each other’s presence.

The air of Shiro’s neck stood on end the moment he entered his quarters. He spun, hand clenching at the small of his back where his blade used to reside. But now Kolivan held out the hilt for Shiro to take.

“I have Ulaz readying an escape pod,” Kolivan said, urgent. “We must go now.”

So many emotions swelled within him – Kolivan was alive and well, and came for him – but Shiro surprised even himself when he replied, “No.”

Kolivan jerked. “This is not up for discussion.”

“Zarkon has the Black Bayard,” Shiro bit off before explaining what happened in the astral plane. “I can’t just leave it and Black in Zarkon’s hands.”

“And yet you expect me to leave you?”

Shiro’s arms crossed over his chest. “This is different. Sendak just – ”

“Ulaz told me.” Kolivan took a single step forward, his massive claw entrapping Shiro’s shoulder. “You mustn’t let your guard down around him. He will take advantage.”

Sendak take advantage of him? Shiro could hardly believe that less than a feeb ago, he’d thought that could happen. But now – “I’m pretty sure I just used my influence over him to free a planet, so if anyone is taking advantage here – ”

“The last time you trusted him, he carved a scar across your face – against your will.”

“You haven’t seen what he’s done,” Shiro found himself hating the words, feeling weak and pathetic, but he couldn’t help himself, not after the weeks alone with Sendak upon the battlecruiser
and what he just witnessed planet-side. “He’s lying to Zarkon and freeing planets for me. I just
can’t leave –”

Kolivan scoffed and released his mask. “And you believe the highest-ranking commander of the
Galra Empire is willing to give up his privileged life for you? A former body seller he used to buy
and mate?”

Shiro didn’t reply. Couldn’t. The mortification left him breathless, and for the first time in almost
seven annuals, he wanted to scrub his insides with steel wool.

Kolivan must have seen his sudden change and pulled back with a frustrated grunt. When he spoke,
however, his voice was soft and plaintive. “Galra mate for life, Takashi, but it’s not an absolute.
And Sendak’s favor will only go so far. What will he do once he loses his title as the emperor’s
highest-ranking commander? Or worse, will you court the attention of Zarkon himself for
compromising his protégé? You already have garnished his notice by being the Black Paladin. Do
you seek his anger as well?”

“It’s not like I sought his attention, Kolivan. And Sendak chose me.”

“But you are playing upon the affection he holds for you – or once held for you. If it does not get
both of you killed, it will certainly get you.”

Shiro hitched a breath and let it seep through his tense lips. He knew he should leave. Kolivan was
right, and yet he glanced down at the Blade Kolivan held out to him again and refused to take it.

“I – I need to be here, Kolivan. I’m sorry.”

Unlike Ulaz or Thace, Shiro had no quarters of his own, and even keeping the Blade on his person
wouldn’t guarantee its safekeeping. He couldn’t take it, no matter how much he wished to wield it
once more.

Kolivan’s hand curled about Shiro’s blade. “Do not fall into old habits because they are
comfortable or perhaps even fond. You are not what you were, and neither is he.”

“No. Years ago, he would have killed me before he saved a planet just to please me.” It was
certainly better than flowers. “I won’t let him hurt me again, Kolivan. You trained me to be
strong.”

“And yet, I have failed.” He slipped Shiro’s blade into his cloak again and leaned over to brush his
jaw across Shiro’s crown. “You seek knowledge, but I fear your trial will not provide the answers
you seek.”

“I never went through the Trials of Marmora.”

Shiro caught his gaze once more before Kolivan’s impassive mask rose, showing nothing of
Kolivan’s expression. Perhaps that was a mercy.

“No. I believe your trial may simply be survival. In Sendak, you see your greatest hope and your
greatest fear, and you are trapped in a continuous battle that has yet to yield any true self-
realization. But your trial will end eventually, Taka, and I can only hope it will be in your favor.”

To Be Continued…
Chapter Summary

Shiro is discovered.

Though not necessary, I recommend reading "Owned," which you can find here. It's Shiro and Sendak's meet-cute, and the two discuss the circumstances of it here. :)

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here.

Shiro busied himself with the daily reports from the ship, typing away on Sendak’s datapad. He signed documents, assigned details, and sent coded messages to the different fleets as needed, all under Sendak’s name. With an unconscious smile teasing his lips, Shiro wondered how they’d come this far.

He never thought he’d find a place upon Sendak’s battlecruiser, sharing meals and helping to secure – or liberate – a portion of it. He never thought he’d be able to see Ulaz every day or feel comfortable on a Galran ship with his ankles crossed upon Sendak’s desk and the distant sound of water clapping the shower floor.

It wasn’t perfect, of course. He missed Keith every day and the warmth of his brother’s tail wrapping about his waist or thigh or wrist, holding him close. In the last decade, they hadn’t spent more than a movement apart, and even after three feebs, Shiro still had problems falling asleep on the battlecruiser, his quarters silent and still without Keith’s breathing.

He missed Antok and his silent but sturdy presence. He missed Kolivan and teasing a quiet but sure smile from the leader. And though Ulaz and Sendak helped to ease his longing, Haxus’s distrust continued to keep him on edge. The first lieutenant under Sendak’s command made his feelings about Shiro’s continued presence known multiple times, even once cornering Shiro on the training deck.

“Commander Sendak may find himself distracted by your attributes, but I will not allow you to destroy everything he has worked to achieve.”

“You mean, galaxy-wide domination and demoralization?” Shiro shrugged and leaned over to grab a rehydration pouch. “I’m not sorry I put a wrench in that.”

“Victory or death, it is the Galra way. Commander Sendak has no choice but to enforce the empire’s will in his sector.” Then Haxus’s head cocked the side with a disarming curiosity. “What is a wrench? The translators didn’t interpret it properly.”

Shiro let out a soft laugh and explained, though Haxus crossed his arms as if the expression personally offended him. “So why would ‘putting a wrench’ into something lead to an unfavorable
situation?"

The discussion digressed into different sayings and idioms from Earth and Daibazaal, and they ended up taking up residence on the training deck for a few vargas, drinking pouches, sparring, and trading trash talk terms.

Shiro thought they had made progress – until they exited the deck, and Haxus stopped him. “I will do anything to protect Commander Sendak against what I see as a threat, Shiro, especially against the things that seem innocuous.”

Shiro blinked. “You believe me to be innocuous?”

“The commander’s past distractions were innocuous,” Haxus offered, and Shiro thought he was being tested, those glowing yellow eyes watching his reactions closely. Haxus shifted a moment later, looking quite pleased with himself, and answered, “No. I believe you are the most dangerous threat Commander Sendak has ever encountered, and I will not allow you to detract from his mission any longer.”

After four quintaints, the exchange still unnerved Shiro, but he pushed the memory away. There was nothing he could do now anyway.

Shiro was reviewing the next movement’s docking and reloading schedule when the water ceased and Sendak emerged from the bathroom. With a towel about his waist, the commander crossed the room without a word, stopping only briefly to swipe his jaw along Shiro’s crown. Shiro smiled up at him with a soft, “Morning,” while Sendak retreated to the large, walk-in closet in the back of his quarters, where his arm currently recharged.

The room held a comfortable silence, Shiro checking the logs while Sendak went about his business. As he exited the back room, dressed in his usual armor, Shiro wondered out loud, “You never said how you lost your arm.”

Sendak didn’t even glance down at it. “No, I did not.”

There were few aspects of Sendak’s life Shiro didn’t dare to tread – the Galran called Yasek, Sendak’s scar, and his relationship with Zarkon. The commander’s arm was not one of them.

Shiro shrugged and returned his attention to the datapad. “Fine, but until you tell me how you lost it, I’m going to assume Haggar tore it off during an arm wrestling match.”

Sendak leaned against his desk, near Shiro’s crossed feet. “You believe yourself to be quite humorous.”

“I’m just telling you like it is. If you want to change my perception, you’re going to have to tell me the whole story.”

Sendak regarded Shiro with a head tilt and a bemused grin, but before he could reply, the battlecruiser’s engines roared to life.

“We’re readying for a jump?” Shiro wondered, boots clapping the ground as he sat up. Sendak snatched the datapad from Shiro’s lap and tapped the necessary keys. “We’re heading toward Central Command.”

As if by some cue, Haxus’s ominous voice sounded from the room’s control panel, near the entry way. “Commander Sendak, High Priestess Haggar wishes an audience with you.”
“Thank you, Haxus.”

Sendak sent Shiro a commiserating frown and pushed off the desk as Shiro stood. “Does this happen often?”

“No,” Sendak’s voice was distant, wondering. “If Lord Zarkon wants something from me, he usually hails himself.”

Which meant whatever Haggar wanted, it couldn’t be good.

Sendak and Shiro entered the bridge, Shiro astride with Sendak as he had been since they left Zarkon’s command room. As they reached the platform, he diverted to a space to the side, where he could watch the exchange but not be seen by the contacting party.

“High Priestess Haggar,” Sendak greeted with little reverence, “it is unusual for you to hail my ship.”

“It is unusual for you to harbor criminals of the empire, Commander,” she chastised. “It has come to my attention that a member of a rebel force is currently aboard your ship. Do you deny this fact?”

The words echoed in Shiro’s ears, as if spoken from a great distance. Haggar already knew he was aboard and sought to bring down Sendak as well.

Sendak placed his fist over his chest. “I am aware, High Priestess. I have been attempting to court his trust in order to gain information about his organization.”

No. Shiro’s blood turned to ice. All this time, Sendak was playing him? Shiro immediately banished the thought. If Sendak wanted to hand him over to Haggar, he would have introduced Shiro to her sooner. Instead, he allowed Shiro to hear Haggar’s plans, let him free planets and create alliances, share meals and laughter.

Shiro cursed himself. This thing they were exploring could never be permanent – the eventual war would tear them apart – but Shiro thought it would last longer than a few feebs.

The shock stole his concentration, and a sudden pain in the back of his head sent Shiro tumbling to his knees. Before his head cleared, fat hands grabbed his arms and tugged them behind his back, while a blaster hovered just behind the curve of his earlobe.

Two officers, whom Shiro recognized from his time on the training deck, waited behind him, listening for a command from Haggar or Sendak.

“I am sending a battlecruiser to intercept now,” Haggar said. “When it arrives, you will relinquish custody of the prisoner to me.”

“He is dangerous. High Priestess. It would be best for the empire if I –”

“You will relinquish the prisoner, Commander. I’ll be waiting at Central Command to interrogate him myself.”

Haggar ended the transmission, and the next few dobashes passed with “dazed confusion. Shiro functioned on auto-pilot, dragged down by the sentries to the same cell he’d occupied fewer than four feebs prior. The sentries restrained him with the cuffs that reached past his elbows, but this time they allowed him to keep his boots. Shiro dipped his head back against the wall and sucked in deep breaths, remaining oddly calm and numb.
None of the Blades had ever been captured and interrogated by the Druids, and he wasn’t sure what to expect. From Ulaz’s discussions and how he refused to elaborate about his work with them, Shiro understood those to the darkest, most twisted experiments the Galra Empire performed. And now he would endure them.

Shiro thought he should feel something – fear, uncertainty, anxiety – but all he could muster was regret. He’d miss Sendak’s affectionate, private smiles, and Ulaz’s welcoming gazes. He’d miss the unorthodox but enjoyable routine he’d fallen into on the Galra battlecruiser.

When the cell door lifted, shrieking and grinding all the way, Shiro barely acknowledged it or the towering presence that cast a shadow upon him. Sendak settled next to him, back against the wall, and rested his abnormally large arm upon his crossed legs.

“Lord Zarkon demanded I prove my worth by battling his exiled son in the gladiator arena. If Lotor beat me, he could take my place as the highest-ranking commander of the empire.”

Shiro hitched a smile, though it couldn’t quite gather the humor. “I take it you won.”

Sendak’s eyebrows rose. “You believed I would not?”

“No.” Sendak was nothing if not a survivor and a winner. “But he took your arm.”

“I sacrificed my arm, drawing Lotor toward one side. It allowed me to knock him unconscious with my opposite fist.” Sendak cocked a crooked smile Shiro had never seen before. “Victory or death, Shiro. It is the Galra way.”

Despite himself, Shiro returned the grin. He liked how Sendak allowed him to see the sardonic humor beneath the ruthless commander façade.

“Even if I released you now, Haggar would find you,” Sendak said, frowning once more. “We are close enough to Central Command for the High Priestess to feel your presence and track you. You would not escape.”

Shiro guessed as much.

“You also cannot lie to the Druids. They will know and continue to press until you reveal something. If you do not say anything, then they will eventually become frustrated and give up.”

Shiro looked up at Sendak, searching for any deception in his eyes. He saw none.

“I have requested you be returned to me once Haggar completes her interrogation.” Sendak’s metal claw caressed Shiro’s side in an affectionate manner. “I cannot say for certain His Majesty will honor my request, but as his most loyal commander, I should be rewarded for my unwavering allegiance.”

Shiro struggled against the apathy, emotion finally breaking through. “What excuse did you give Haggar for wanting me back? If I’m revealed as a traitor – ”

Sendak’s eyes focus upon the scar carved into Shiro’s face. “That does not diminish what you are to me, even if you are determined a traitor to the empire.”

Shiro held Sendak’s gaze, uncertain, trembling, before he glanced away. Hope. Something to hold onto when the pain became too severe, when he was pushed to the edge and wanted to surrender.
But Shiro wouldn’t give in. He would never give away the Blades’ secrets, but Shiro wouldn’t
discard the comfort that came from knowing Sendak would be waiting for him; that death wasn’t
the only escape from the Druids’ torture.

He needed to give something to Sendak in response, a gift equal the one he’d been given, and he
lifted his jaw. It was the only thing he still had from his time with the Blades, and he doubted
Haggar and the Druids would let him keep it.

“My necklace,” Shiro said. “Take it.”

Sendak hesitated but eventually listened, his claws skimming Shiro’s neck and raising bumps upon
his skin. The blue-green shimmer of the crystal lent Sendak’s fur a dark purple glow, reminiscent
of the astral plane’s vibrant hue.

“This appears to be a crystal from X-95-Vox.”

“It is. My pack leader gave it to me for my birth-quintant after a failed…” He shook his head to
banish the horrifying memories. “Will you keep it safe for me, until I return?”

A promise. A vow.

Sendak’s claw wrapped about the necklace. The commander leaned down to press his forehead
against Shiro’s, eyes closed, expression solemn and pained.

The question came too easily, tumbling from Shiro’s lips in a breathless plea, “What made you
come for me that day? At the bar? Why did you want to – to –”

“– to stop you from mating a tasseled wobbegong,” Sendak offered.

“Yeah, that.”

Sendak shrugged, though it looked awkward and forced. “Because it had seven arms.”

“As opposed to…what? Six or eight? Fourteen?”

“Six. Seven-armed wobbegong are known to have certain…attributes in excess.”

Shiro sucked in a sharp inhale before letting it out slowly, tipping his head back against the wall.

“You were alluring, in your innocent appeal and vulnerable epidermis,” Sendak said. “You
demanded attention, even if you didn’t want it. Uncertain yet determined, you knew your position
in the empire and dared to defy it. I thought you’d eventually accept your place, but you proved me
wrong. You do so many times, and I find that…refreshing.”

“You mean, I surprise you.”

“Yes. Life in the empire is frustratingly mundane, and you refuse to let it to be.”

Shiro shifted uncomfortably, resting his restraints upon his lap. “I’d rather not add excitement to
your day by being interrogated by the Druids.”

“We agree in that aspect.”

Shiro closed his eyes, content to wait out the rest of their journey to Central Command in silence,
when Sendak murmured, “I do not regret marking you, Takashi. I wanted you for my mate, and for
that, I cannot bring myself to ask for forgiveness. But I do regret not asking for your permission
and respecting whatever choice you made.”

Shiro wasn’t sure what to say, if he should accept the heartfelt admission of guilt, but Sendak never gave him time to sort out his feelings.

“Come back to me, Takashi,” he asked. “If you do not wish to, then persevere. That is all I ask.”

Shiro couldn’t be that selfless. He lifted up his chin again, bearing his neck for the wide-eyed Sendak.

“Scent-mark, Sendak,” he asked. “Please.”

One last time.

To Be Continued…
Chapter Summary

Shiro tells the paladins about this past with Sendak; Shiro meets Haggar and the Druids. (Sounds like a rock band...)

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: [here](#).

Post-Voltron

Antok left shortly after the paladins arrived, and Shiro appreciated that small mercy. It was difficult enough explaining his past to the paladins and younger packmates. He certainly didn’t want his older brother there.

Black remained a steady presence in the back of his mind, cool and soothing as he always had been, and Shiro took strength in the lion’s eternal comfort.

Keith settled directly before Shiro, his tail loose about Shiro’s ankle, while Lance fell cross-legged to the floor next to him. Pidge hung off to the side, arms lightly crossed, but she was clearly on guard, while Hunk fidgeted with his fingertips, pressing them together in a haphazard rhythm.

Allura took a seat upon the couch next to Shiro but a respectful distance away, so not to make him uncomfortable.

He probably should have told Keith separately, but Shiro didn’t think he could get through the story twice.

It was easy enough to recite what the paladins didn’t know about his and Keith’s past – Earth, their mom’s crash landing, Keith’s birth, his sleepwalking, and leaving for Puig and the Faraway Systems. Shiro lost momentum when he reached Moira’s departure and began to recount his and Keith’s time in Drule Central. He managed to explain the mating mark with clinical accuracy, though Allura helped with the details. But no matter how many times he rehearsed the confession throughout the years, he still wasn’t ready for when Keith asked, “Wait. You’ve already been marked by a mate? But you got that scar before we came to live with the Blades.”

“...Yes.”

“Then who’s your mate? And why didn’t you ever introduce him to me? How – How could you be…”

Shiro rubbed his hands together and swiped his tongue long his bottom lip, worrying the skin for a moment. He was just about explain, but Pidge saved him from saying the words.

“Sendak,” she gasped with growing realization. "Your mate is Sendak.”
Keith’s head snapped up. “What! That’s – That’s impossible! There’s no way –”

“That was pretty obvious from their conversation on Arus.” The lens of Pidge’s caught the overhead lights as she resituated them on the bridge of her nose. “He definitely spoke to Shiro like – like a –”

“I knew Sendak back when we were in Drule Central,” Shiro admitted in a hoarse murmur, “before Keith and I were taken in the Blades. Keith, you remember how every so often, we would stay in a penthouse in the military complex.”

Keith was young at the time but not so young as to forget. “Yeah, but we never stayed there long. A few quintaints max, unless I was sick or something.”

“Right. Those were the times I met with Sendak.” His fingers tightened, folded and clenching. “He – He would take care of us, get us food and medicine and whatever else we needed in exchange for certain – services.”

Pidge blanched while Hunk looked horrified. Lance hugged Keith about the shoulders, expression crestfallen but calm, like he’d expected as much. Allura slipped her hand in Shiro’s and clasped, a wordless comfort. Keith was the last to understand and only did so after Lance whispered the truth to him.

The fire that burned in all aspects of Keith’s life extinguished. “You – You were a body seller?”

That sounded more respectable than it was. There were reasons – excuses – Shiro could give, like how their parents left them some money but not enough to live on for more than a few feebs. How Shiro was perceived as a lower lifeform and though Keith’s half-breed status offered them some privileges, Shiro couldn’t find decent work to make a living. How Shiro tried to save whatever GAC he could to get transport out of Drule Central to the Faraway Systems, but he’d never been able to procure the necessary documents to past customs.

But none of that mattered now. If there wasn’t a chance they’d run into Sendak again – or any other commander he’d slept with – or if they didn’t need to form Voltron, Shiro wouldn’t have told them. But reality proved to be a vindictive force of irony. There had been a time in his life when all Shiro wanted was a place to belong and people who wanted him, and now he literally shared a soul with four other beings.

He could only imagine what the paladins thought of his transgressions, and he couldn’t offer reassurance. The best he could do was show remorse.

“I know you’re all disappointed and probably wondering why the Black Lion chose me. I’m not quite sure why myself.” Shiro ignored Black’s disgruntled huff. Who was Shiro to question his choice of Paladin? “Perhaps he chose me when I was younger, before I became body seller? Or – Or maybe he wanted to save me and Keith from Drule Central? It doesn’t matter, I guess. I just hope you can still – uk!”

Keith slammed into Shiro’s torso, arms wrapping about his brother’s waist, face buried in Shiro’s belly. His supernatural strength threatened to crush Shiro’s midsection, but Shiro refused to pull away from his brother again.

“How could you keep this from me?” Keith cried. “You – You should have told me.”

A million thoughts ran through Shiro’s head, the least of which was, “I didn’t want you to know.” But compared to everything in their lives, it sounded like the feeble excuse it was. “I was
ashamed,” Shiro finally admitted, arms coming to rest upon Keith’s shoulders and squeeze. “I am ashamed. There’s – I tried my best, Keith. I tried to make sure you were taken care of when we were younger, and I just couldn’t – ”

“Is that where you went?” Keith’s voice lost its edge, low and hollow. He pulled back just far enough to look up at Shiro, though Shiro refused to meet his gaze. “When you left me alone in a bathroom or told me to hide under the tables at swap meets? You went to…to…get GAC?”

Shiro couldn’t find his voice but gathered enough strength to nod.

Keith’s tail tightened about his thigh. “You – You never told me. Anything.”

“You were a cub, Keith. You still are – ”

“No! We made a promise. You can’t keep things from me anymore.”

“From us,” Lance interjected, and though Shiro couldn’t meet Keith’s eyes, he forced himself to see Lance’s intense glower. The Blue Paladin’s gaze never wavered, offering no judgement or incrimination. “We promised we’d tell each other everything.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“It can be,” Hunk replied, stepping away from the wall with his arms spread. “It should be. We’re a team, right? We’re the team you brought together, and we’re supposed to be there for each other. But we can’t be if you won’t let us.”

Technically Lance met up with Pidge and Hunk on Earth before Keith arrived, and together, the four saved Shiro from the Galaxy Garrison. But Shiro decided against correcting Hunk, especially once Pidge threw herself at him, squeezing a yelping Keith between them in the process.

“Trust. Not just between you and your lion but between us, too.”

“I gotta get in on this,” Hunk muttered before diving forward, unhitching Lance and smooching him into the pile. Allura joined them a moment later, and Shiro couldn’t stop the teary smile from twisting his lips.

His family, the youngest members of his pack, accepted him for who he was, and Shiro let out the sigh he’d held for years.

Shiro’s heart stop when a muffled whimper sounded from his stomach. “It’s my fault…”

Shiro managed to free a hand to card through his little brother’s ruffled locks. “What is, Keith?”

“That you went all through that. If-If it wasn’t for me – if you didn’t have to look after me, then maybe you could have – ”

The tears came then as Shiro seized Keith’s chin and jerked it high, so his brother could see the fury in his gaze. “Stop. Right now.” His voice lightened as he tugged his brother out of the group hug and engulfed him in an intense hold. “You saved me, Keith,” he whispered against his brother’s ear. “You still do. Every day. I knew I couldn’t give up back then because you were there. I didn’t want to. I couldn’t wait to return to you after every time and just…see you smile. Or watch you learn something new, and – if not for you…Keith, I…” He pressed his cheek against his brother’s and rubbed their jaws together until Keith purred. “I would have given up. You kept me going, and – and thank you, for just being there for me.”
Keith’s claws dug into his shirt, and he pressed his face against Shiro’s shoulder. Shiro reached down to stroke the base of Keith’s agitated tail, helping to soothe the tension from his shoulders. The Galra could take everything from him – his innocence, his decency, his flesh – but they couldn’t have his brother. He wouldn’t let them.

Red’s warmth spread through Shiro, from Keith to Red to Black to Shiro, and Shiro reveled in its tender embers.

Lance broke the moment as abruptly as a cold splash of water. “So, you and Sendak, huh?”

Shiro settled back against the couch, though the paladins and Allura remained close. “I will always be grateful to him.”

“Grateful?” Keith echoed, tail squeezing again. “Shiro – he – he paid you to –”

“Yes, he did, but he never made feel like I was getting GAC for our time together. He took care of me – and you – and he never asked me to do anything I felt uncomfortable doing. And I never did anything for him worth all he did for us.” Low, Shiro confessed, “He always asked me to stay, Keith. To live with him.”

“Then why didn’t we ever?” Keith asked. “If you wanted to stay, we could have –”

“But I didn’t, not in the way he wanted me back then. I wanted to be seen as an equal, not as property or – or just a mate.”

After everything he already confessed, Shiro found it easier to recount how Sendak managed to get Keith the surgery he needed and other medical treatments throughout the years, how he clothed and sheltered them, offered his home to Shiro every time they were together.

How he’d come after Shiro called, helping to cover up what happened to Marvok’s lieutenant. The hardest part to explain was what happened after.

“There is no excuse for what Sendak did to me,” Shiro muttered, metal fingers grazing over the raised skin on his nose and cheeks. “I know that. And no matter what he did for me and Keith, it doesn’t change that he marked me without my consent.”

“You still feel you have to pay back your debt?” Pidge scuffed, voice high with emotion.

“No,” Shiro said with a self-depreciating laugh. “That’s the funny part. When you have a mate, there should never be any debts. What he does for me and what I do for him – it’s not based on anything other than mutual affection and acceptance.”


Shiro shrugged. “I had to get him off the ship.”

“You cracked his containment pod.” Hunk spread his hands. “I mean, I guess it could have held, but not for too long. It would have taken a miracle for him to get to planet and then contact the empire for a rescue.”

“Victory or death,” Shiro said simply. “It’s the Galra way. Sendak won’t stop until he wins.”

“Voltron,” Allura said.

“No.” Shiro shrugged. “Me.”
Perhaps it took almost a decafeeb to get to this place, where Shiro could admit that everything Sendak did was to impress and court him. Sendak wanted to be worthy of him, and if creating an alliance between planets or seeking a command under Zarkon’s son – was going to do, then Sendak greedily would accept the mission.

Shiro could do no less than admit the truth: His own feelings for Sendak never lessened, and he’d spent the last eight annuals mourning the loss of his mate, too, perhaps just in a different way.

Keith’s ears drooped, eyes dull and morose, and Shiro wanted nothing more than to take all his pain away. Lance, Pidge, and Hunk held similar pitiful gazes, expressions he loathed to see and wished he never had to. But Allura sat straight, back perfectly poised and chin held high, as if she refused to give him any doubt.

“Shiro, I understand it must have difficult for you to share your history with us,” she began. “However, I believe I can speak for all parties involved that you didn’t need to hide this from us.

“No matter what your relationship with Sendak is, it does not change who you are and what you mean to us.”

Shiro knew that to be true. The paladins and Allura accepted him for who he was, despite what he had done in the past or whom he chose as a mate.

“You survived and continued to push forward against insurmountable odds for the preservation of your life and your family.” She reached forward to grip his hands in hers once more. A tender smile crossed her features. “You are here today, Shiro, as is Keith, because of your selfless actions. I do not believe anyone in this base believes differently, do you?”

No, he didn’t.

“Y’know,” Lance murmured, leaning up against Keith but resting an elbow upon Hunk’s shoulder. “It’s difficult to fight against your mate, but I’m sure it must be equally difficult seeing a packmate be emotionally and physically tortured. I can’t really imagine that heartache from that, can you?”

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Pre-Voltron

Shiro refused to show the Druids any fear. Instead, he kept his chin raised, expression neutral and eyes unwavering, as they moved him from cell to cell. They eventually stripped him of his armor and shoved him into a prisoner jumpsuit with a purple vest. Hunger settled in, followed by thirst, but no one came to give him any rations and he didn’t expect them to.

He wasn’t sure how long it was until a tall, disjointed figure wearing a white mask and purple robes came for him. The figure led him down an ominous corridor, silent and foreboding, and a dark energy caressed Shiro’s cheeks and sent every nerve vibrating.

When he entered the room and noticed the glowing saw above the surgical table, he finally snapped, struggling with all his might. He kicked the sentries and used his cuffed hands as a hammer, but a blinding, debilitating pain like spread liquid fire from the tip of his head to the tips of his toes.

The Druid’s power probably lasted only a few ticks, but it felt like vargas. Once released, Shiro crashed to the ground, gasping and twitching, and he barely squirmed as the sentries lifted him onto the table and locked his wrists and ankles into place.

Haggar came to stand over him some time later, her long hair pricking upon his cheeks. Her yellow
eyes gleamed with dark intent, unlike Sendak’s which offered warmth and affection. When she stepped back, Shiro barely had any warning before she demanded, “Begin the interrogation.”

The pain overwhelmed him again, somehow cold and hot at the same time, tearing through his body and forcing it to arch against the restraints. They asked him questions, about the organization, about its leader. Who betrayed Zarkon? Were there agents working in their ranks?

Shiro bit his bottom lip until it bled. He coughed and vomited, coating the table with the thick, putrid substance. The room rankled, but he couldn’t care as his body jerked and thrashed against the assault upon his very soul.

It felt as if someone reached into his mouth and wanted to tear the information from him. Still, he gave nothing. He wouldn’t betray his pack, and nothing they could do would make him.

But as the ticks became dobashes and vargas and quintaints, and Shiro remained in that room, the questions became lost in the haze of agony. His throat burned from screaming. His body collapsed against the table, chest heaving, lips chapped and broken. Blood and vomit blended with salvia when he managed to swallow, and he wasn’t sure he ever slept so much as passed out. He never dreamed because he lived a nightmare.

He woke with a sudden jolt of pain, this time not able to catch his breath, unable to scream. A fog descended upon Shiro, creeping in from the edges and threatening to choke him – until a soft but persistent purr reverberated deep within his chest.

The Black Lion came for him.

The purr beckoned him, urging him to follow the tether linking their life forces together, and Shiro didn’t hesitate. He tugged on the lifeline and escaped through the tiny opening made. Landing hard into the astral plane, Shiro coughed and shuddered, unable to put the shattered shards of his soul back together. But then Black was there, helping him, soothing him, sheltering him from the torture he endured in real life.

His lion lapped up his tears before nuzzling the top of Shiro’s head. Shiro pressed against Black in return, resting his head upon the lion’s pillow of soft fur. His lion began to purr, rich and rhythmic, enough to lull Shiro into a restless slumber. Though Zarkon could find him here, Shiro took comfort in Black’s warm presence, urging him to relax and promising to protect him if the emperor did, in fact, come for him.

All too soon, something tugged at his soul, another tether but this time to something else, to someone else. But who could reach him here, in the astral plane? Keith?

At first, he refused to go, fingers ruffling the Back Lion’s mane and clenching for dear life. He wanted to stay with Black where it was cool and safe, but the pull became too strong.

Black nudged him. Safe. Go, and with one final swipe along the jaw, Shiro allowed himself to be pulled away.

Agony greeted him upon arrival in the present, but gone was the disgusting stench of puke and blood. Instead, the scent of star dust and lavender, of lemongrass and sage surrounded him, ensconcing him in a soothing embrace.

“I’m here, Shiro. I’ve got you.”

Sendak.
“Relax. For the moment, you are safe.”

Shiro listened and surrendered to the sanctuary that was Sendak’s hold.

*To Be Continued…*
Broken Blade – Part Ten

Chapter Summary

Haggar tries to make Shiro talk, and he does - to Sendak.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: [here](#).

A tiny cell – barely bigger than a bathroom – became Shiro’s entire existence. After Haggar and the Druids finished their interrogation, they dumped him there and had yet to return a feeb later. Escape was not possible with one door and no lock to pick or crack, and the eye slit was barely big enough to allow Shiro to see the sentries walk by. Shiro couldn’t even see the shorter prisoners as they headed to their fate.

Sendak came every five quintaints, or so Shiro assumed. The commander apologized for not being able to take Shiro from the cell. Apparently, Haggar wanted to find other ways to get information about the rebellion from Shiro, and she wouldn’t release him into Sendak’s custody until she succeeded. Despite the alarming news, Shiro made good use of his time with Sendak. In the presence of his one-time lover in the middle of a pure hellscape, Shiro found solace resting his head upon Sendak’s soft shoulder and dosing. Every time he awoke, Sendak was still there, cradling his smaller form against his side. It made Shiro feel protected. It made Shiro feel safe.

But after only three quintaints following Sendak’s last visit, the cell lock unhitched, and Shiro threw his legs over the edge of his bed. He barely got to his feet by the time Sendak entered and crossed the small cell in two strides. He gripped Shiro by the shoulders and forced him against the back wall. Flashbacks from their time together, all those annuals ago, replayed before Shiro’s eyes. He couldn’t fight the flinch, and Sendak’s grip softened. The commander ducked his head to press face against Shiro’s neck and whisper, “May I scent-mark you?”

Shiro gulped but replied, “Y-Yes.”

The gentle glide across his jaw eased the tension from Shiro’s shoulders, and he lifted his chin higher, giving Sendak better access to his neck and collar. As Sendak worked through the ritual, Shiro found his legs numbing and his knees buckling, but Sendak held him close, refusing to let him fall.

Sendak’s words, perhaps, had the most effect upon Shiro. “Haggar has ordered you to the arena. She believes a few matches against the battle-tested gladiators will loosen your jaw.”

The gladiator arena? Shiro had been part of the Blades of Marmora long enough to hear about those terrifying matches and to see the unfortunate results. No one left the arena unscathed.

“I will come back within a few vargas,” Sendak whispered, so low Shiro almost missed it. “I will disable the cameras and help you reach an escape pod. Will you be able to find your pack once
Shiro froze, fingers clutching the cuirass of Sendak’s armor. Sendak would let him go? His insides trembled at the thought of leaving his one-time lover, yet he couldn’t deny the twinge of longing in his heart.

In the back of his mind, Black mewed. It was still shackled by Zarkon. Shiro needed to break the collar upon his lion, and to do that, he needed to find a way to Zarkon’s side.

Shiro pressed his lips against Sendak’s crown and murmured into the velvety fur, “I can’t leave. Not yet.”

Sendak stiffened. “You cannot stay here.”

“But I promised you I’d stay by your side for –”

“I can’t leave with you, if that’s what you’re asking. I’ll need to cover your escape and make it appear as if you were killed.”

“If you stay, you’ll be branded as a traitor and sent to the arena yourself.”

Another swipe, long and graceful, sent Shiro’s head spinning.

“That is a risk I am willing to take,” Sendak said.

Shiro let out a breath, fingers clenching and unclenching. Sendak wouldn’t understand unless he knew the whole truth, but the thought of telling him sent Shiro’s stomach tumbling. Sendak was part of Zarkon’s pack, his most loyal commander. He should never side with Shiro over his pack leader, and yet some part of Shiro still couldn’t help but believe he might.

Sendak searched for him, found his necklace, and his “body.” He spent eight annuals mourning Shiro, and since they’d been reunited, Sendak had done nothing but try to “earn” him. Woo him. Take care of him. Shiro found himself closing his eyes and running his cheek along Sendak’s crown, ruffling the purple fur. Would Sendak help him – or would he condemn him?

If Shiro didn’t tell him, Sendak might just drug him and send him away from Central Command. Shiro shuddered at the thought of fighting in the arena, but he had no choice but to endure and maybe gain Zarkon’s flavor. That way, he could get close to the emperor again and retrieve the Black Bayard.

But trusting Sendak again – Shiro could only hope he wouldn’t regret it.

“Sendak,” he murmured, “I need to get the Black Bayard from Zarkon.”

Sendak froze, lifting his shocked and widened eyes to meet Shiro’s. Shiro cupped Sendak’s cheeks and drew him close to whisper into the commander’s large, twitching ear, “I’m the new Black Paladin.”

Stunned silence greeted him, and Shiro was equally shocked to see fear in Sendak’s gaze. The commander’s claws trembled, gripping Shiro’s shoulders in a desperate plea, and Shiro never lifted his own from Sendak’s chest plate.

“That is…impossible,” the commander eventually breathed. “You cannot – there is no way –”

“Voltron is real,” Shiro assured. A tiny smile hitched up the edge of his lips when Black purred in
his mind. “Zarkon was the original –”

“The lions were destroyed. Emperor Zarkon told me himself. King Alfor said they’d been…” Sendak’s words cut off, and he dropped his gaze. When he spoke, Shiro wasn’t sure if Sendak was talking to him or to himself. “So all this time – the lions have been waiting…for new paladins?”

“I-I guess? I’m not sure,” Shiro admitted with a shrug. “Black hasn’t told me, but I need to get the Black Bayard in order to break Zarkon’s hold upon my lion.”

“His hold?” Sendak echoed, eyes narrowed. “Or his bond?”

Probably the latter, though Shiro remained quiet, unable to voice his opinion.

Sendak’s claws tightened about Shiro’s shoulders, and Shiro’s breath caught in his throat. He’d made a mistake trusting Sendak. The commander would now reveal Shiro’s true identity to Zarkon and the witch, and Shiro would be tortured to find the lions. Once they had them, Zarkon would undoubtedly rule the universe – and kill Shiro and everyone he ever cared about.

Perhaps even Sendak.

Sendak straightened his body, his monolithic height looming over Shiro again. Those iridescent eyes captivated Shiro like they had all those annuals ago in darkened chambers and quiet hideaways when only their heavy breathing filled the silence.

“If you are truly the Black Paladin,” Sendak said, a challenge sharpening his tone, “then why have you not escaped? Surely you must be able to connect with the lion’s powers and transcend to the astral plane.”

Shiro had thought of that as well, but Black had always initialized his travels. And with Black’s fading bond – Shiro shrugged. “I-I don’t know. Zarkon did something to Black. Collared him. The only way for me to free Black is to get the bayard.”

“And all this time, you’ve been staying close to me in order to get it.”

Shiro’s heart throbbed with a terrible ache, but Sendak deserved to hear the selfish truth. “It was not the only reason, but…yes. As Zarkon’s highest-ranking commander, you were the one most likely to get me close enough to steal it.”

“I see.”

When Sendak’s massive claws released Shiro’s shoulders, it felt like the rejection it was meant to be. Shiro remained firm, chin raised and staring up at Sendak’s closed-off countenance. Sendak turned without another word, and every footstep resonated in Shiro’s soul. The locking mechanism echoed through the chambers, mocking his heartache, and Shiro returned to the corner of his cot, arms holding his legs close to his heart.

Sendak didn’t come by his cell again.

Shiro estimated that another movement went by, and he kept active as best he could, running in place, stretching, working through the strengthening exercises Antok and Kolivan taught him. When the door opened again, a sentry greeted him. It pointed a weapon that appeared to be a mix between a sword and a gun, and Shiro obliged its commands, walking a step behind him. Another sentry fell into line behind Shiro, and he laughed. It was almost as if no time had passed since he’d first been captured on Sendak’s ship.
Shiro steeled his stomach and hardened his back as he came to the place he’d heard stories about. “The pits” were no more than communal holding cells for the gladiator matches, and every lifeform and species imaginable was represented. Transparent energy fields acted as cell walls, and when the sentry slapped him across the back, Shiro stumbled into the closest pit to the arena floor. Other than a few snorts and sideway glances, no one paid him any mind. They all had bigger problems than the latest batch of fresh meat.

He surveyed the area, seeking anyone he thought could be an ally – or become one – when he heard muttering that sounded suspiciously like…English? Sure, the translators managed to effectively speak his native tongue and relay it to others in kind, but Shiro could always tell when different languages were being spoken.

“No,” Shiro said in English, shocking the boy who blinked up at him with relief so tangible, it pierced Shiro. “You can do this.”

Just like Shiro needed to.

“You’re…You’re human…?” the boy squeaked. “Or – Or a shapeshifter?”

Shiro allowed himself a brief laugh and settled across from the boy. “Human. You’re from Earth, right? How’d you get out here?”

The boy – Matt, Shiro came to know – was the son of a scientist from the Galaxy Garrison. He’d been a part of a mission to Kerberos, a moon of Pluto, when his crew was captured by a Galra scouting ship.

“My dad and our pilot were sent off to a work camp, but the Galra sent me here, to fight. And I have a little sister.” His voice raised, panicked again. “I – I’ll never see her again.”

“Yes, you will,” Shiro assured. “You can’t give up. I’m not giving up. I have a little brother I have to get home to. I will see him again.”

And his pack – Kolivan, Ulaz, Antok, and Thace.

*And Sendak,* his mind added traitorously, but Shiro wasn’t sure if Sendak would ever take him back. He wasn’t even sure he’d see Sendak again.

Shiro ached at the thought, and he tried to remember just when he came to acknowledge his own feelings for Sendak. When Sendak comforted him that night after his meeting with Zarkon in the astral plane? Or perhaps it was after Shiro destroyed the Balmeran crystal and Sendak refused to blame him.

“Prisoner 117-9875, step up to the bars.”

When Shiro stood, Matt’s glassy eyes followed him, and Shiro tried to comfort him with a quick shoulder squeeze. “Be right back.”
Shiro’s heart lodged in his throat as every step brought him closer to death. He held his breath as the sentries led him not to the arena but to a small room off the pits, which served as an interrogation area. Shiro readied himself to meet with Haggar herself, but instead of the witch, Sendak waited for him.

Shiro swallowed hard and squared his shoulders as the sentries closed the door and locked it behind him. Sendak approached in a tentative stride, massive claws raised to demonstrate his benign nature. His face remained cool and composed, showing no weakness or remorse. That changed when he stepped within Shiro’s personal space and hesitated before touching him.

Shiro crossed his arms in an easy movement but closed his eyes, letting out a disparaging sigh. “I’m sorry that I… I used you. I did. Your position – I thought it would allow me to get closer to Zarkon and – and look, I’m not asking you to choose between me and Zarkon, but – ”

“May I scent-mark you?”

Shiro’s gaze snapped back to Sendak. It’d been longer than usual between Sendak’s markings, but the showers were only allowed to prisoners once a movement. Surely he still carried Sendak’s scent since the last time the commander visited. Unless – Sendak wanted to tell him something, and he didn’t want any cameras or listening devices to pick up their conversation.

All right.

Shiro nodded, dropping his arms and lifting his chin. Sendak dove forward, his large, mechanical claw circling about Shiro’s back to hold him still. The flesh hand petted the inside of Shiro’s forearm in a soothing manner while his snout tickled Shiro’s collarbone with each glide of his cheek and jaw.

“Haggar has ordered your block to fight against Myzax, the current champion of the arena.”

Sendak was worried for him?

“You must allow me to help you escape.”

Though Shiro certainly didn’t want to battle against the arena’s best fighter – especially so soon – it would get him favor with Zarkon. Perhaps he’d even get an audience with the emperor. Of course, once he was back in Zarkon’s presence, he wasn’t sure how he’d get the Black Bayard, but he’d worry about that when the time came.

“I’m ready for him.” Shiro managed to sound self-assured. “I’ll beat him.”

Sendak pulled away, face hovering just above Shiro’s. “Do not be a fool.”

Shiro wasn’t sure if he should be offended or endeared. “You’ve seen me fight. You can’t even beat me.”

“And you have yet to beat me, but these are feral creatures, nothing more.”

“Is that how you see me?” Shiro asked, but Sendak rolled his eyes, or the Galra equivalent of it.

“I will not designate that with a response.” His mechanical arm tightened about Shiro’s shoulders. “You could die.”

I could lose you again.
Shiro cupped Sendak’s cheeks and pulled his head down until he could push their foreheads together. “Thank you, for worrying about me, but I need to do this.”

Sendak’s flesh hand came up to cradle Shiro’s cheek in response. “You cannot die,” he amended, thumb swiping across Shiro’s soft skin, just under his scar. “You are my mate – strong, enduring. You are worthy of a commander’s favor.”

Sendak’s ears twitched, a sure sign of his delight, and Shiro fought the urge to stroke them. Instead, he settled for running his fingers through Sendak’s fur.

“Thank about what you’re saying,” he said.

“I already have.”

“You’re choosing me over Zarkon.”

“I am simply placing my priorities with my mate rather than my pack leader.”

“Don’t trivialize it.” Shiro didn’t think he could keep his composure if Sendak, in fact, did. “Mates and pack leaders are not to be – ”

“I made a promise to myself when I saw you again, Takashi. I would not lose you again. If I cannot use my position as the highest-ranking commander to protect my mate, then why should I give my allegiance to any leader?”

Shiro’s breath hitched, and his forehead dropped to rest upon Sendak’s chest. He tried to gather his bearings as best he could, but instead of stopping the tears, Sendak urged more when he lifted Shiro’s chin and besieged him with a tender kiss.

Sendak peppered kisses along his crown, starting at one temple and following the curve of Shiro’s jaw.

All too soon, the sentries returned, and Shiro pushed onto his toes to glide his jaw against Sendak’s in a traditional pack parting.

“Thank you, Sendak.”

“I did nothing.”
“You came,” Shiro insisted. “That is not nothing.”

And it wasn’t. Even after Shiro betrayed Sendak, even after he chose to stay in the Galra Empire not to be with Sendak but to get the Black Bayard, Sendak still refused to abandon him. Shiro could think of no greater gift in a time of such strife and terror than knowing he wasn’t alone.

When the sentries returned him to the pits, the warden began to mutter off the rundown of those who would fight the champion first. Shiro’s number came up fourth, three after Matt. The prisoners lined up accordingly in a bleak and shadowed corridor leading into the arena, but Matt was despondent, almost catatonic.

Shiro forced a sigh through his clenched teeth. He’d signed Matt’s death warrant. By sharing a block with Shiro, these prisoners would be forced for Myzax, rather than a less ruthless gladiator, to compel Shiro to betray the Blade and his pack.

Shiro would take responsibility. He wouldn’t allow others to die for him, and he wouldn’t damn Matt – who was perhaps a few annuals older than Keith at the most – to a life in the arena.

The adrenaline banished Shiro’s fear when he rushed forward, attacking the sentry and stealing its weapon. One slash sent Matt slamming to the ground, and then Shiro was on top of him, pining the shorter human to the ground and screaming in his face, “I want blood!”

Matt trembled, eyes blown wide and mouth open. If only Matt knew there was others out there — allies and good people fighting against the empire, like Shiro learned. Shiro wished he could tell him more than a whispered, “I’m sorry. I’ll try to get you transferred to Kraydah.”

Not that Matt would know the significance of that, but Kraydah hosted one of the closest Galra work camps to the gladiator arena. There was also a group of rebels on its moon who might be able to get Matt out.

The sentries tugged Shiro off Matt, and Shiro steeled his glare for the battle ahead. Filled with Galran commanders and sentries, the crowd cheered when Myzax took the sand battle ground. The so-called champion played his part, throwing his glowing sphere about the arena in an obvious challenge to Shiro.

There was no drawn out introduction for Shiro, the announcer simply calling him “The Challenger,” and he preferred that. He wanted Myzax to underestimate him — like the Blades had originally, like Sendak and everyone else who had ever met him had.

Shiro raised his chin and glanced up into the darkened stands. At the very top, Zarkon’s throne loomed, the emperor sitting upon its glowing structure, its purple essence reminiscent of the Black Bayard. Sendak sat on the emperor’s left as the first-in-command of Zarkon’s fleet. Haggar, Zarkon’s witch, sat on his right.

Shiro couldn’t see Sendak’s face from such a long distance, but he took strength from his mate’s confidence. Sendak was correct — he was worthy of the commander’s favor.

Shiro closed his eyes and accepted whatever strength Black could give him, the lion’s mighty roar reverberating in his very soul. He was the next Black Paladin and gladly accepted the responsibility and the burden.

He thought of Keith and his little brother’s fury, allowing it to flow through him like liquid quintessence. Keith would never give up on him, and he, in turn, would never give up.

Shiro thought of his pack, of Kolivan and Ulaz, Thace and Antok. They took him and Keith in,
gave them a place to belong and affection Shiro wasn’t sure he deserved. They accepted a body seller into their pack and then honed that body and one-time fragile mind into a deadly weapon to fight the empire.

Myzax never stood a chance. After all, the sentries gave Shiro one weapon for the battle ahead, and it was a blade.

To Be Continued...
Broken Blade - Interlude

Chapter Summary

What are Kolivan, Keith, and Antok up to during Shiro's year with Sendak and the Galra? Glad you asked.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here.

The hanger floor was cold and uncomfortable, and made Keith’s tail end fall asleep, but he refused to move from his position. He’d wait however long it took for Kolivan and Takashi to return and his brother’s strong, soothing presence to fill his chest again.

Just over a movement ago, Takashi and Kolivan departed for a secret mission, not unlike every other quintaint. But instead of Takashi waking him the next morning, Antok knelt by his bedside, his massive upper body towering over the fourteen-year-old Keith.

“Your brother was captured on his last mission,” Antok said, direct but remorseful. “He was uninjured the last time Kolivan saw him and should remain that way.”

Keith’s heart clenched; his breath hitched. He would have cried out if not for Red, who ironically soothed Keith with a vicious growl. She would attack any who dared to harm Takashi, the beloved kin to her paladin.

Her continuous presence in the back of Keith’s mind allowed him to breathe and ask questions. Takashi had been captured by someone he knew. No, he was not a member of the Blade. The battleship he was on would dock in less than two movements at Central Command, where Ulaz was currently stationed. Interrogations with the Druids and subsequent experiments shouldn’t be an issue prior to reaching Central Command. Kolivan wouldn’t be able to reach the ship in time as it would jump in and out of hyper speed until it reached Central, but he would get there and bring Takashi home.

Once the lightheadedness passed and Keith swallowed down the bile in the back of his throat, he stumbled out of bed to speak with Kolivan, albeit with support from Antok.

Kolivan barely glanced away from the read-outs on the transparent screens before him, but when he did, it was to card his claws through Keith’s long locks. He bent down long enough to swipe his jaw along Keith’s, spreading his scent and mollifying some of Keith’s worry, but it wasn’t enough. It wouldn’t be enough until Takashi was home.

A movement passed, and Kolivan said nothing. He worked from the Hilt, barely coming out to shower, change, and eat. Keith found himself at Takashi’s usual console, either helping to decipher codes or passed out from worry.
Being close to Kolivan and Antok (and Red) brought Keith some comfort, and he began to understand why Takashi liked to spend so many vargas in the Hilt with the pack. Their presence alone soothed some of his fears. They ruffled his hair, offered tender embraces, and sometimes— in Antok’s case—wove their tails together. The pack came together in times of distress rather than pulling away.

Eventually, Keith woke up to Kolivan crouching by his console, brushing back his bangs. “I’ll be back with your brother by the end of the quintaint.”

So Keith sat, waiting at the edge of the hanger for Kolivan’s ship to return. He fidgeted with his bayard, which he kept with him at all times. After his power erupted and destroyed four decks of the Blade of Marmora headquarters, Kolivan and Takashi put him through trial-and-error exercises until they discovered the bayard kept his flames under control. It also helped to hone the lioness’s voice in the back of his mind.

Red— or Kitty— as Keith affectionately called her— was a fierce protector, at times snarling in the back of Keith’s mind when he became angry, other times purring as he mentally stroked her ears and the base of her tail. She bathed him in flames when he slept and wrapped her tail around his waist, much like he did to Takashi. Kitty was his best friend, always there when he needed her, like now.

After almost a quintaint, Kolivan’s spacecraft returned, settling upon the metal ground with a thunderous stomp. Keith was up and dashed to the opening of the shuttle just in time to see Kolivan exit, a harsh expression darkening the leader’s face.

“Where’s Takashi?” Keith demanded, glancing around Kolivan and up into the ship. “TAKASHI!” he called but no one answered.

“His position in the empire was too deeply entrenched to overlook,” Kolivan admitted, disdain and something else mingling in his voice. Was it fear? Did Kolivan worry for Takashi, too?

“But—But you said you’d bring him home,” Keith whined, gripping his bayard. “You’ve never given him an assignment longer than a few quintaints. He’s never even been gone a full movement from—”

“Your brother is a very capable operative, Keith,” Kolivan said. “I trust him to succeed. You should do the same.”

A scolding from Kolivan was seldom. He was more apt to praise than to condemn, guide than chastise. When Kolivan did snap, Keith always knew he deserved it. This time, however, Kolivan did so without provocation.

“Kolivan!” Keith called after him. “None of this makes sense. This isn’t a normal mission. What happened to Takashi? You said you were bringing him—”

Kolivan stopped and glowered down at Keith with the scorching heat of the base’s blue sun. “You seek knowledge? There is only one way to gain that here, and you are too young to undergo the Trails. We will discuss this again when you come of age.”

“That’s annuals way,” Keith shouted. “Takashi— he can’t be gone for that long.”

“Takashi will be gone for however long his mission lasts.”

But annuals? “No! There’s no way— ” Takashi wouldn’t leave him for that long. They’d never spent more than a movement apart, perhaps the longest stint being when Keith had gotten
treatment at a Galran hospital. Takashi couldn’t see him because those deemed lower lifeforms weren’t given the same rights or access to medical care as the Galra. Instead, a commander whom Takashi befriended took Keith and comforted him during his hospital stay. Once they were reunited, Takashi’s embrace had been so strong, it threatened to break Keith’s ribs.

Keith couldn’t imagine being unable to see his brother for longer than that.

Kolivan placed a hand upon Keith’s shoulder and squeezed. “It will be alright, cub. Your brother will come back. He just needs to see this mission through to fruition, and then he will come home.”

Kolivan continued down the hall and didn’t stop until he reached the Hilt. Keith watched him go, every step squeezing his heart tighter and tighter. In the small of Kolivan’s back hung a sleeping blade.

Takashi’s blade?

Movement after movement passed, and Kolivan continued to rebuff Keith’s request for information. But Keith could see the way Kolivan’s eyes skimmed Ulaz and Thace’s transactions, how they would narrow in certain places, eyebrows low and tense. Keith never managed to sneak a read, though Antok would update him every few movements. The larger Blade never gave away any of the details, but he confirmed that Takashi was alive and in relatively good health.

An emptiness hollowed out his chest where Takashi’s once cool but vast presence resided. A dim tether remained, much like Keith’s connection to Lance after they’d left the Blue Paladin on Earth. He still felt Lance, right in his center of his chest where he held Shiro, but his presence wasn’t as pronounced as when Lance was at his side.

His soul had physically ached, torn to shreds, when Lance remained on Earth, but he managed to forge ahead. He remembered what it was like before Lance came to live with them, even if he didn’t wish to be apart from a piece of his soul. But he’d never lived without Takashi. His older brother had been a part of his earliest memories, always there, never leaving, except for the one time Shiro was willing to leave Keith with the Blades.

Now, Keith wasn’t sure how to cope with this sudden void in his soul, the absence so profound that its shook his core. He began to spend more time on the training deck, challenging larger Blades to spar. When he wasn’t there, he retreated to the Hilt, where he hoped to get some information on Takashi.

Kolivan sometimes left for his personal chambers, and every so often, Keith followed. He’d curl up on Kolivan’s bed while the older Galra took a shower, and surrounded by the comforting scent of his pack, he dozed. He sometimes brought a pillow or a blanket from Takashi’s bed, just to feel closer to his brother, but once he washed it, his brother’s familiar scent left him, too. Sometimes Keith enjoyed dreamless nights. Other times, he dreamt of all true nightmares from his and Takashi’s time in Drule Central.

But Kolivan stayed some nights, sleeping when able. Many times, Keith awoke with his head resting upon Kolivan’s chest, Kolivan’s massive claws keeping him safe and secure against the leader’s side.

Though Keith worried for his brother, he feared for Kolivan as well. The stoic leader maintained a safe distance from Keith, one Keith wasn’t sure how to bridge. The skin under Kolivan’s eyes
darkened, and his braid was not as tight as it used to be. His silence spoke louder than any words.

If Kolivan was so concerned for Takashi, why didn’t Kolivan bring him home? No mission could ever be as important as Takashi’s life. Knowledge or death, might have been the Blade’s mantra, but they always preferred to wait than to risk it all. To Kolivan, “all” included Shiro’s life; Keith was sure of it.

A transmission came less than four f feebs after Takashi’s capture by the empire. Kolivan deciphered it himself, working diligently until something surprised a soft gasp from him. His hands clenched into tight fists, and a primeval growl slipped through his clenched teeth.

“Kolivan?” Keith called, hesitantly coming up to Kolivan’s side. “Kolivan, what’s wrong?”

Kolivan jerked, as if noticing Keith for the first time, then tapped off the transmission. “Everything is fine, cub. Return to your task.”

“Not until you tell me what happened. Does it involve Takashi?”

“This is not up for your discussion. Taka – ”

“I have the right to know, Kolivan.” Rage gnarled his words, gaining strength for the upcoming battle. “Takashi is my brother. I want – I need to know he’s okay.”

Kolivan’s firm face gave away nothing, his arms crossing in a natural but stern position. “For the moment, your brother is well. It would be best for you to – ”

“For the moment?” Panic seized Keith then. “What does that mean? What’s happening?”

Kolivan might have stretched a truth here and there over the annuals, but he’d never downright lied to Keith. And in the all the previous times, it had been over nonconsequential issues. Takashi had broken a leg and needed a cryo-pod, and Kolivan told Keith that Takashi would be returning from the field late. Or once Keith didn’t want to sit for a proper grooming, Kolivan said Thace wouldn’t return until he did.

Ice froze Keith’s veins and slowed his heart. “Will Takashi be okay?”

“I don’t know.”

“We have to go after him,” Keith practically shrieked, tiny hands gripping Kolivan’s wrist and yanking. “We can’t abandon him!”

“The Druid sanctum is not easily infiltrated,” Kolivan explained, much to Keith’s acknowledgement. “Ulaz informed me that your brother’s already been transferred and is no longer reachable to us.”

“No! No, I don’t believe that.” Keith needed to do something, anything. “There has to be some way we can save him.”

“We will, but rushing into the enemy’s stronghold without a proper strategy will only lead to our organization being – ”
“Who cares about the organization! Takashi –”

Kolivan’s expression darkened. “The Blade of Marmora has survived more than ten thousand annuals because it is stronger than any single member. Your brother was aware of the risks when he decided to join our –”

“So you’re just going to leave him there?”

“Of course not. There are plans in motions that you do not know –”

“Then tell me, Kolivan. We have to –”

“Keith.” Kolivan’s large claws fell upon Keith’s shoulders, holding him close. “Calm yourself. Your brother needs us to be clear-thinking and level-headed. Antok will escort you back to your room for now. Once you’ve had time to –”

“No! Takashi doesn’t have time for us to –”

“Antok.”

More than seven annuals of training with the Blades led Keith to feel the moment Antok stepped behind him. He whirled on instinct, ducking underneath the hand that reached for his shoulder, but Antok wasn’t one of the Blade’s best fighters without cause. He compensated by continuing forward and clutching Keith’s tail. Keith dropped to the ground and using what little slack he had, swiped to kick out Antok’s feet.

A large hand gripped the back of Keith’s uniform and tugged him upright. Keith hissed, tail lashing once Antok released it, and bared his teeth at Kolivan.

“Antok, if the cub wants to work off some frustration, take him to the training deck. I’ll call for you once I’ve made contact with Thace.”

“Wait! Kolivan –”

Antok dragged him by the scruff out of the room before Keith could say anything else, but as soon as the doors shut, Antok dropped Keith to his feet. Wound and tense, Keith swung to elbow Antok in the gut, but Antok caught his arm.

“Antok!”

“Kolivan is not wrong. You need to reclaim your head before you can help your brother.”

“I’m just not going to sit around and do nothing.”

“Nor should you.” Antok motioned for Keith to follow and led him through a secluded hallway along the side of the Hilt. After pressing his hand to a sensor, they were allowed entry into Kolivan’s personal quarters. Antok rummaged through Kolivan’s various hiding places before finally brandishing a blade, one that thrummed Keith’s very core.

“You have been taught how to make the blade sing. Now it is time you awaken it,” Antok declared. “The Trials of Marmora. Should you survive, Kolivan will have no choice but to welcome you into our ranks.”

No matter what Keith believed, Kolivan always swore Keith was too young, too inexperienced to become a full member of the Blade of Marmora. When Keith voiced this, Antok released his mask
and clasped Keith’s shoulders.

“I am not entirely convinced that if your brother hadn’t awakened the blade prior to the trials, that he would have ever been given the opportunity to join us. But if you wish to follow in Takashi’s footsteps and help us reclaim your brother as a member of the Blade and our pack, then that is the path you must carve for yourself.”

Kolivan would not be pleased, but hopefully he would respect Keith’s wishes once he survived the trials. And Keith would — because Takashi needed him, and nothing could ever keep Keith from his brother’s side, not Kolivan and certainly not the Blade.

The first tear into Keith’s skin also tore a pained shout from him, but he forged ahead. He lifted his blade and held it out toward the masked Blade before him. Keith recognized Tryrk’s moves after two attacks and immediately sought the Blade’s known weak spots. Tryrk always sliced toward Keith’s hip, so Keith combated the attack, whirled, and sliced up the taller warrior’s arm. As Tryrk fell, the second and third warriors retaliated, and the fight continued until a death blow was dealt.

Each door led to another arena and another Blade. Though he lost speed with each step, Keith also gained clarity. This part of the trial would continue until he sought knowledge or found death. If he wasn’t learning anything by fighting those who could best him, then that meant he needed to look elsewhere.

He collapsed on the lower level of the arena, his body giving out after such punishment. When he awoke, he heard a familiar slow stride nearing him. Dark boots stopped at his eye level, inches from his face, and they were different from the type worn by every member of the Blade. Instead of the toes splitting in the middle, these boots curved about the front of the wearer’s foot, smooth and uninterrupted.

Keith still felt the sucking void in his chest from his brother’s loss — their bond hadn’t reconnected? — but relief swept through him, too.

“Takashi…”

Takashi deactivated his mask and pushed back his hood to smile at Keith.

“Hey, little bro. You did it.” The easy, familiar voice sounded too forced, fake even, while the words weren’t quite right. Shiro referred him as his brother. Every so often, he added “baby” in front of it, but he never actually addressed Keith as “bro.”

The tense smile wore an edge and was too tight to even hold a candle to Shiro’s usual easy-going expression, and Shiro didn’t lean down to greet Keith like a packmate should. But Keith dismissed those blaring warning signs. Takashi was home, and that was all that mattered.

“Way to go, Keith.” Takashi smiled. “Kolivan said you lasted longer than anyone ever has in those battles. You don’t have to keep this up.”

Keith accepted the hand Takashi offered and was hauled to his feet. He refused to let Takashi go, leaning heavily upon his brother’s side and wrapping his tail about Shiro’s thigh. “You came back.”
Takashi’s hand rested on the base of his neck, his thumb ruffling the short strands at the nape. “Just give up the knife, Keith, and let’s get out of here.”

Keith raised his eyes to search Takashi’s scolding expression. “What are you talking about? This is the only connection I have to you, the only way to find out what really happened. I don’t want to go through that again. I want to be with you and the Blades.”

“You don’t need to worry anymore. We’re destined to be Paladins and leave the Blades. You can stop the Trials now.”

“Takashi, you can’t be serious. The pack – the Blade – this is our home. This is where we belong.”

“And the Red Lion? Voltron?” Takashi accused, brows low and serious. “You were chosen to be a Paladin, Keith. You can’t just ignore that responsibility.”

When Takashi’s firm hold upon his waist lessened, Keith pulled away. “Is that what you’re doing now? Choosing to be a Paladin over being with the Blade?”

“No!” Keith shouted. “I just can’t turn my back on the pack. I have to do this. I have to be a part of the Blade –”

“No, you don’t. Just give them the knife.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Just give up the knife, Keith!” Takashi ordered, exasperated. “You’re only thinking of yourself as usual.”

Keith looked down at the knife. It looked exactly like the one his mother carried, like the one she gave Takashi. He couldn’t imagine Takashi leaving the pack, not after he fought so hard to be a part of it.

“You and me, Keith,” Takashi continued, soft yet scathing. “It’s always been you and me, and it’ll always be that way.”

“But what about Kolivan and Thace and the others? We can’t leave the leave the pack!”

“I sacrificed everything for you. What has the pack done, Keith? They’re putting you on trial now. You could die, and for what? So you can learn what you already know? They’re not your family. I’m your only family.”

Family. Pack. They were one and the same. Keith swallowed, mouth sudden dry, throat tight. The sucking void in his chest gnawed him from the inside out. “I’ve made my choice.”

But Takashi’s expression was cruel. “Then you’ve chosen to be alone.”

Keith’s vison darkened about the edges as he watched Takashi’s back retreat toward the exit. Something was wrong. Takashi would never leave the pack, not willingly, and on a visceral level, Keith knew Takashi would never leave him behind, either. Takashi had refused in Drule Central and only reluctantly offered to leave Keith in the Thaldycon System. If Takashi chose to leave now, then he was in trouble, and Keith would do anything for his brother, even give up the only
connection he had to the Blades.

After all, pack bonds were stronger than any single object.

“Takashi, wait!”

As he ran after Takashi, the training deck faded away until he stood in the observatory just off his and Takashi’s quarters. A blazing heat licked his fingers, and he was surprised neither his hand nor the blade was on fire.

“There is no need to continue this, cub.” Kolivan’s rich baritone voice soothed Keith’s frayed nerves. “As long as you stay here, you will be fine.”

Keith pivoted, shocked now to be holding the blade in one hand and the Red Bayard in the other.

“So many annuals have passed since you and Takashi came to live with us.” Kolivan stood just inside the room, blocking the exit. “I have so much to tell you.”

An explosion rocked the base, and Keith swung toward the viewer screens. A battleship hovered just before the Blade headquarters, but the Galra’s target wasn’t the base. Instead, it was a brilliant white castle-ship with shimmering blue and black accents. A fiery presence, one as intimate as his own soul, called to him in a desperate plea for help.

“What’s going on?”

“You don’t have to follow in your brother’s footsteps,” Kolivan promised. “Stay here, and you will be safe.”

But it wasn’t. Fighters swarmed the base while a battleship fired its ion canon at the white castle-ship. Screams pierced his ears, and they, too, sounded familiar, like Takashi’s voice, like Lance’s. The void in his heart pulsated so violently that it threatened to buckle his knees.

He whirled. “Kolivan, I-I’m sorry. I gotta go. There’s people that need me out there.”

“But they do not need you, Keith.” And suddenly the blade was now in Kolivan’s hands, held out for Keith to take. “You are meant to stay here, with the Blade. Your mother gave this to Takashi, but it was meant for you.”

“…Mom?” He hadn’t thought of her in annuals, never knew her enough to truly wonder.

“You learned to wield a blade. One day, you will be ready for the burden of knowledge that comes with it, but today is not that day.”

Another burst of the canon. Shrieks of pain. Fire burned his fingertips.

Kolivan stood in his way.

“The only way you will ever know the truth – about your brother, about your role in this war, is for you to stay here and wait. I will tell you everything when you are ready.”

An impossible decision, one Takashi dared him to make. To stay, would be stop seeking the truth, to accept whatever path Kolivan and the pack set out for him. But to leave, would be to carve out his own destiny, to seek knowledge from other sources and finally take his place – among the Paladins and Voltron.

Perhaps he could never be a Blade. Perhaps he wasn’t ever meant to be one, but no matter what,
the pack would always support him. He knew that one universal constant deep within his soul, and it gave him the strength to shout, “I can’t wait around anymore. I have to go.”

He’d already found it – seven annuals ago on a base in Thaldycon System.

“Goodbye, Kolivan. And thank you…for everything.” The doors opened to vibrant, turbulent flames, and he stepped into them without hesitation. A fierce roar rattled his teeth, and then his eyes snapped open.

Over him leaned Kolivan, a sick look of worry etched upon his face. Antok stood just behind him, mask raised to hide his expression, but his tail lashed with concern.

“You haven’t awoken the blade,” Kolivan snarled, but Keith thought he heard of note of relief in the leader’s words. “He is not yet ready to wield it.”

“That is not for you to determine,” Antok replied.

“Nor is it for you.” Kolivan rose to his feet and admonished Antok with a sharp glare. “Shiro gave the blade to me to safekeep. He has yet to break the bond of secrecy and trust, so you cannot expect Keith to – ”

“If the cub is ready to handle the burden, then we shall not hold him back.”

“He failed to awaken the blade.”

“What does that mean?” Keith demanded, and Kolivan turned toward him, hand raised.

“It does not belong to you. Give up the blade.”

Well, if that’s the way he was going to play it – Keith lifted it up to hand. “Take it.”

Astonishment washed through both Kolivan and Antok’s gazes, and Keith had no trouble holding out the blade and spouting. “I know who I am and where I belong, and this blade doesn’t change that. I’m going to find Takashi and bring him home, with or without your help. If that means I give up this knife, then fine. Take it.”

Before he finished his words, the violet Marmora insignia on the blade shimmered. A burst of pure white light engulfed the room, stinging Keith’s eyes, and when he reopened them, his blade had lengthened and curved in various areas. It resembled a khukuri knife, if Keith remembered his classifications correctly.

“You’ve awoken the blade,” Kolivan murmured, his voice gutted and broken in a way Keith had never heard it before. His eyes dimmed, expression becoming distant and eventually neutral. Antok, however, looked pleased, almost giddy, with his tail shuddering behind him.

Keith simply lowered his blade and pinned Kolivan with a fierce gaze. “Where’s my brother?”

The events of the last few vargas came rushing back – Takashi demanding Keith give up the blade, Kolivan giving him the ultimatum – but if Kolivan never made such demands, then Takashi must never have come back. He was still in the hands of the Galra.

“You brother currently fights in the gladiator arena,” Kolivan said, his voice hoarse but firm. “He
seeks to reclaim the Black Bayard from Zarkon himself.”

“What!” Zarkon, the emperor of the universe, had the Black Bayard? “We can’t leave him there. We have to help him!”

Kolivan pivoted on his heel and stormed from the room. His long legs put Keith at a disadvantage, forcing him to jog to keep up.

“At this current time, we are only able to give Shiro tactical support,” Kolivan said, “but there are other ways we can improve his chances of survival.”


Kolivan stopped just inside the Hilt, and after the doors shut, he divulged, “By finding the other lions of Voltron and their paladins, but first…” His voice softened and grew tender as he squeezed Keith’s good shoulder. “You must recuperate from the trials. Go. Rest in my quarters. Antok, attend to any injuries Keith suffered.”

Antok bowed his head, and though Keith wanted to complain, Antok already began to lead him out of the room.

“And Keith,” Kolivan called, almost as an afterthought, “welcome to the Blade.”

Keith’s ears drooped, and his tail sought Antok’s. Kolivan didn’t sound proud at all.

“Can you repeat that?” Keith muttered. He certainly couldn’t have heard that right.

Kolivan’s claw swiped across the transparent map, the field of stars and solar systems coming to rest upon one particular planet. “Earth, Keith. Ulaz says the Galra have located the Blue Lion upon your home planet. You must get there first and find the lion before Zarkon and his Druids do.”

Keith kept his hood up, though his mask dissolved as he met Kolivan’s stern gaze. “You want me to go there…by myself?”

It seemed almost unthinkable, for Kolivan to give him a mission to complete alone. After feebs spent at Kolivan’s side, learning the ins and outs of mission briefings and protocol, and even less time at Antok’s side in the field, Keith was beginning to think Kolivan would never trust him to complete the task of getting his morning vora, let alone a mission as important as finding the Blue Lion of Voltron.

“The Galra have yet to invade with Earth, but our timetable is short. I need Antok here to coordinate with Thace and Ulaz, so you must go alone. It is our only option, cub.”

Keith crossed his arms and looked up at the screen again, miffed that Kolivan was only sending him on this solo mission as a last resort.

Kolivan’s claws dropped to Keith’s shoulders. “If I didn’t trust you to complete the mission, I wouldn’t send you.” His soft, solacing tone jerked up Keith’s gaze. “I am hesitant to send you on any mission, let alone one by yourself. You are young, Keith. A cub. And I already lost your brother to the empire. I refuse to let it have you, as well.”

“Takashi will come back.” In the feebs since Takashi was missing, Keith learned this one truth – Kolivan feared for Takashi’s life just as much as Keith. “And so will I.”
Kolivan’s grip tightened for a fraction of a moment before the older Galran pulled Keith into a strong embrace, one so intense it shocked Keith into relenting for the entire duration – dobashe, it seemed.

Antok saw him off, and Keith found himself gripping Antok’s arm once the warrior started to pull away. “Thank you,” he said and struggled to find the words. “You gave Takashi his blade, and now you’ve given me mine. If not for you, we wouldn’t have found a pack or a place to call home.”

Antok’s mask dissolved as he intertwined his tail with Keith’s, and he engulfed Keith again in another tender hold.

Keith inputted the coordinates Antok gave him and followed the dangerous route out of the Blade’s headquarters. Hyper speed brought him to Earth within a feeb, though he was curious to see his home world first-hand. All his knowledge came from Takashi’s stories and their journeys to planets his brother said reminded him of Earth.

It was exactly how Takashi described it – hot, dry, and orange. Keith landed in a desert, by a shack in the middle of nowhere, as per Antok’s instructions. When he stepped out, the dry heat and intense sun pelted him at first, but thankfully, his Blade suit allowed his fur to breathe. Standing before the rundown house, its size barely bigger than his and Takashi’s own room at the Blade of Marmora headquarters, Keith wondered how his parents and Takashi lived here for so many annuals.

The place looked its abandoned state, and after some jiggering of the door, he managed to get inside. It yielded a select few necessities – a couch, a bed, a kitchenette – but enough for Keith to make do. The corkboard would probably come in handy, and once he stashed the Blade’s spacecraft, he could use the shack as a makeshift base of operations.

Keith turned, trying to decide what to clean first, when he caught sight of a picture, half-covered on the coffee table. He moved a book and brushed away the annuals worth of dust. The picture was of Takashi, beaming into the camera and holding a small little bundle of purple fur in his arms. Red purred in the back of his mind, content and soothing, and Keith wiped away the tears that stung his eyes. Yes, that would be the first picture to go on the corkboard and the reason why he came to Earth. Voltron had only been an excuse. Keith came to find a way to bring Takashi home, and the Blue Lion was sure to be on board with that.

After tacking the picture to the board, Keith headed back out into the desert. The nagging, sucking void in his chest eased as a cool, flowing presence crashed over him like a violent wave. He stumbled forward but caught himself, turning toward the source of the sudden tug in his chest. A nudge from Red urged him toward the colorful horizon.

“Okay, okay, I get it,” he muttered and returned to the ship for a hoverbike.

As he flew through the canyon, following the tangible tether to his soul, a crazy, playful energy whipped about his body and clawed at his suit. Red helped him through, growling and slashing with the invisible force, but it was difficult. The playful energy included not just the cool, soothing energy but also an inquisitive one that poked and prodded his side, his shoulder, his cheek. Another warmer, friendlier presence rubbed against his hip.

A large, shimmering white building loomed in the distance, sleek and modern for Earth standards, or it seemed. He stashed his hoverbike behind one of the massive mountains in a distance and made the rest of the journey on foot. Night covered his arrival and allowed him to read the base’s
Hadn’t Takashi mentioned their dad had been part of that before leaving Earth?

Keith shook the thought free and made his way through the darkened corridors, moving from shadow to shadow. His chest still maintained its persistent ache from Takashi’s absence, but a new, somehow familiar presence thrummed his soul and Red’s like a favorite song.

He found his way to the roof, and when the doors opened, he was met by a sudden shout, “Who’s there?”

The person before him held an attack stance and leveled a white staff with a glowing aqua end. Sun-kissed skin, ethereal blue eyes, and a hardened expression that didn’t belong on the usual jovial face – caught Keith off-guard, and he immediately dropped his mask.

His assailant lowered his staff, mouth agape. “…Keith?”

Words couldn’t convey the sudden relief that swept over Keith. Every day, he thought of Lance and the time Takashi, Kolivan, and he came to Earth to drop off the soon-to-be Blue Paladin. They hadn’t been able to stay, the quintessence of three paladins too strong of a beacon for Haggar and the Druids, so Keith learned to endure the pain that came from losing a piece of your soul.

But now Lance was here, in front of him, and unfortunately taller than him. Keith let that go as the staff dissolved in Lance’s hands and the Altean lost his human look. With pointy ears and blue markings, Lance rushed forward to engulf Keith in a startling tight embrace.

“You came back for me,” Lance muttered.

Keith closed his eyes and pressed his face into Lance’s shoulder. Even if that wasn’t why he returned now, it had always been the plan. Takashi and he would never be complete without this piece of their soul.

Keith and Lance stayed that like for a long time, arms just wrapped about each other, seeking solace after annuals of being apart. Keith’s tail gradually curled about Lance’s thigh, and an overwhelming sense of delight came through their repaired bond from Lance to Blue to Red to Keith. Lance and Blue’s responding, breathless laugh soothed Keith – and Red’s – fiery soul.

They retired to the edge of the garrison’s roof, legs dangling over the edge as they stared into the starry night sky.

“We have to save Shiro,” Lance declared once Keith recounted the last annual’s events.

“That’s why I’m here. The Blade sent me to find the Blue Lion.”

“No kidding?” With a high-pitched zip and a glow of light blue, the Blue Bayard sparkled in Lance’s hand. A wicked grin appeared upon his lips. “We’ve met, and I also know a couple of people who can help us.”

To Be Continued…
Chapter Summary

Shiro meets Yasek. And Shiro gets his arm.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here: here. Please read. This chapter has quite a few triggers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A hoarse howl tore Shiro’s throat raw. It persisted until he screamed in silence, his mouth open, lips flat as he continued to expel his pain in the only way possible. His body writhed and contorted, but the restraints upon his wrists and ankles held him immobile against the surgical table.

Looming figures in dark hoods with white masks sent waves of dark energy through Shiro, setting every nerve ablaze. Shiro’s bottom teeth clicked against the top and grinded. Just when he thought he couldn’t hold out any longer, just when he thought his body would burn from the inside out – the attack ended, and Shiro hung forward against his restraints.

Blood pounded in his ears so loudly that he almost missed the Druid’s hiss. “We know you are a member of an outside force. If they are readying for an attack, they will fail.”

No.

“You are a lesser lifeform. An inking does not change that. You will never be accepted as a Galran, and the only way you can hope to survive is to tell us your organization’s plans.”

Shiro would have snorted if he had the strength.

“What you believe to be bravery will not get you accolades, Champion,” the Druid sneered, calling him by the title the other prisoners bestowed upon him. “We will break you, and then we will find your organization and destroy it. All you are doing is delaying the inevitable.”

And staying alive. He was only useful to the Druids if he knew something. Despite being Sendak’s chosen mate, Shiro had no doubts that the moment he gave up information about the Blade, the Druids would have no use for him. The Galra Empire didn’t make it a habit to keep around those it couldn’t use in some way.

A blistering, ominous energy entered the room, and Shiro struggled to raise his head. He was greeted by two glowing amber eyes under a dark purple hood. Haggar. She’d come to see him personally, though he wasn’t sure what he’d done to warrant such attention.

Haggar’s gaze was intense, searching or merely observing him, Shiro wasn’t sure. Her bony fingers snaked out from under those billowed sleeves and clasped him by the chin, lifting his head.
uncomfortably high and to the side to examine. Her thumb claw drew a small crimson stain across
his cheek.

“There is something…familiar about you,” she said, thoughtful and sinister.

She offered no explanation, simply told the Druids to take him back to his cell and to ready the
chamber for another unwilling participant. Shiro wouldn’t wish the Druids’ torture upon anyone,
but he couldn’t deny the relief that came from the end of a session. Even his tiny cell with a
nothing more than a cot and toilet seemed like paradise compared to the Druids’ chambers.

The sentries dragged him from the table, to the floor, and into the hallway, and he allowed them to.
He wasn’t sure he could walk even if they placed his feet under him, and he shut his eyes for the
duration of the short journey. He knew the direction by heart after more than two feebs in Galra
captivity.

The sentries led him to the communal shower and thrust him inside, ordering him to clean before
they took him back to his cell. Shiro guessed he should have been grateful – it had been more than
a movement since his last visit – but he ended up leaning against the shower wall, forehead
enjoying the cool tile against his heated skin.

He jerked when someone touched his back and almost collapsed, but a sudden stern hand gripped
his shoulder tightly and wrapped about his chest, keeping him upright. Another set of hands lifted
his free arm and wrapped it about a thick neck.

“Do not despair, Champion,” a gruff voice claimed. “We shall help you.”

Shiro managed to lift his head high enough to confirm that the fellow prisoners didn’t mean any
harm. They appeared to be dog-like beings with long hair pulled back in bun and large, pointy ears.
One had patches of missing fur, replaced by the pink flesh of scar tissue, while another appeared
blind in one eye, having taken a blade across the left side of his face. They worked meticulously,
holding Shiro up and helping to wash away the grim and sweat that came from his time in the
arena and interrogation chambers.

He didn’t deserve their assistance, but somehow, that mattered very little to his fellow prisoners.

Champion, they called him, like he was some sort of hero. Shiro was undefeated in the ring, but
that was not why he received his title. After defeating Myzax, the reigning champion, Shiro had
disobeyed his Galra masters. He refused to kill the former champion to take his place. When the
Warden of the Gladiator Arena entered the fray, Shiro fought the sentries who restrained him and
screamed when a shock whip coiled about his wrist.

After they released him, Shiro still refused to deliver the final blow.

That day was the first time the prisoners and Galran masters called him the same name –
“Champion.”

The prisoners treated him as such, helping to dress his wound in the pits, giving him extra food he
refused to eat, protecting him when new challengers thought they could fight him outside of the
arena – cleaning him when he could no longer do it himself. The dog-prisoners even helped him
into a fresh jumpsuit and vest before presenting him to the sentries.

He didn’t deserve it. He didn’t do anything extraordinary. In fact, one of these times, he would
probably die in the arena or on the interrogation table, defeated in every way that truly mattered.
That would give the prisoners the exact message the Galra wanted to convey – no matter how
strongly one fought, they wouldn’t be able to defeat the empire.

Sendak hadn’t come to see him in more than a feebs, sent away by Zarkon or Haggar. So he hadn’t seen Ulaz, either. Kolivan, Keith, and Antok couldn’t reach him here, and even Black had stopped talking to him.

Shiro wasn’t sure what he’d done to offend the only being in the entire universe that wanted him and cherished him for almost as far back as he could remember, and he missed Black terribly. In fact, their once strong tether faded, like it had been diluted in some way. Or perhaps Black regretting helping Shiro in the arena? Perhaps he wanted to shatter their bond?

Shiro dismissed that thought, remembering the soothing purrs in his chest when he lay his head upon Black’s flank, the vibrations feeling like they came from his own soul. Black’s feral growls still echoed in his ears when he remembered walking out into the arena that first time. Black wouldn’t just reject him like that. Something must have happened when Shiro left the astral plane, and he’d stop whatever it was once he retrieve the Black Bayard.

If he could retrieved the Black Bayard.

Shiro usually stopped that finalistic thinking before it took root, but always after a Druids’ interrogation, he allowed himself to wonder – would he die in this Galra prison and never see his pack or Sendak or Black again?

Shuffling boots, a strained grunt, the distinct sounds of a struggle, and though Shiro could barely put one foot in front of the other, he raised his head to see a rather tall Galran surrounding by five sentries. His rounded ears, purple fur, and sculpted muscles reminded Shiro of Sendak, but Shiro shook himself. He had to be hallucinating. The Galra Empire hardly imprisoned one of their own. Any Galran deemed a traitor would be executed immediately, as Shiro knew from his time with the Blades.

As the five sentries attempted to subdue the Galran prisoner, Shiro’s twin sentries placed their hands upon his shoulders and squeezed, a silent warning not to engage.

As Shiro passed, the Galran’s eyes flashed toward his. Shiro’s blood ran cold; a breathless gasp escaped him. “…Sandrik?”

“You should know better than to resist, Yasek.”

Yasek? Where had he heard that name before?

Shiro gulped as the sentries jerked him forward, half-dragging him down the corridor toward his cell. Shock made Shiro’s mind go blank and hazy.

It wasn’t possible. Shiro watched as the blast sunk into Sandrik’s side. He checked the Galran’s vitals and saw they had flatlined. When it brutally informed Shiro there was nothing he could do, he triggered the safety protocol to destroy the suit and left with the rest of the Blades. There was no way Sandrik could have lived, and yet here he fought against the prison sentries.

Dread gripped Shiro. Sandrik had taken the blast for Shiro more than an annual ago, which meant the Galra had been interrogating Sandrik all this time. He hadn’t given up any information on the Blade of Marmora. He couldn’t have. Their operation had continued undeterred and without interruptions.
Not to mention, Shiro heard what the sentries called Sandrik Yasek.

Shiro agonized with that knowledge as he lay stomach down upon his cot, arms draped over the sides. Even if Sandrik was the one who marked Sendak, who took Shiro’s place as Sendak’s mate, the Galran traitor had once been a Blade. And Shiro, unknowingly, abandoned Sandrik to a life of misery and pain in the hands of the enemy. He also might have possibly doomed the Black Lion to the same fate. And without Voltron rising to fight, Zarkon’s reign would be endless.

Shiro snorted and buried his face in his pillow. Yes, Champion indeed.

Shiro wasn’t sure how much time passed – vargas? Quintants? – before the cell door opened. He halted in the middle of his two hundredth push-up and kept in a crouch, though he sank back onto the balls of his feet. In the case of an ambush, he’d gain the advantage by striking low to high, but there was no need. A claw jerked him to his feet before taut arms engulfed in a strong embrace.

“Are you all right? How did you get here? Why hasn’t Ulaz or Kolivan rescued you yet?”

Shiro blinked, mind slowly coming back online when he processed the reassuring scent of lavender and pine, of desert willow and vanilla. Pack.

Thace released him just enough to grip his shoulders and pin him with a scolding glare. “Shiro, we need to get you out of here. You cannot stay here, or – ”

“Thace,” Shiro breathed, hands raising to grip his pack mate’s forearms. His voice came out warm and relieved, and Thace must have heard the change in tone, face thawing of its cold countenance.

He pulled Shiro close again, swiping his jaw across the top of Shiro’s head. “We do not have much time. Someone will find the destroyed sentries in a few ticks. Come. I’ll show you where the escape pods – ”

“I don’t need your help to escape, Thace,” Shiro murmured into his packmate’s shoulder, fingers gripping Thace’s armor.

Thace stilled. “But you do need my help.”

“Sandrik is alive, Thace. And he’s here. The Galra have – ”

“Sandrik?” Thace repeated.

Shiro quickly recounted his failed mission almost an annual ago and what he’d heard upon Sendak’s ship. When Thace stepped back, a pensive expression enveloped his face. “Hm. I haven’t heard of this Yasek, though if he was upon Sendak’s ship, Ulaz might have convinced him to ally with the Blade.”

And Sendak, too?

“But Shiro, you cannot be asking me to save him and leave you? That is not possible – ”

“I met a human in the arena who was taken off a moon in my homeworld’s solar system.” Shiro inhaled sharply. “Zarkon’s almost made it to Earth.”

The implications lingered between them, blaring and all-compassing. Thace’s grip tightened. “What do you need of me?”
“I need my Balmeran crystal, the one Kolivan gave me on my birthday,” Shiro said. “Sendak has it. And I need you to speak to Te-Osh. She owes me a favor.”

“And you?” Thace hesitated, claws trembling as they held onto Shiro’s shoulders. “I will not leave you again to suffer. I – I should not have left you there, all those annuals ago in Sendak’s quarters.”

Shiro blinked. All this time, Thace blamed himself for Shiro’s mating mark?

One of his claws reached up and gently traced the scar across Shiro’s face. “But I…I do not regret it.”

“Neither do I,” Shiro replied.

Unlike Ulaz, Thace wouldn’t have brought Shiro and Keith back to the Blade headquarters, which meant they would never have become part of the pack. Shiro would never have become a Blade. He wasn’t sure what would have happened to him and Keith if he’d never propositioned Ulaz on the skyway that night, but Shiro knew on a visceral level that this was where he belonged. A part of a pack. A member of the Blade. Hopefully, one day, a Paladin of Voltron.

And none of it would have been possible if Thace hadn’t left him all those annuals ago with Sendak.

When Thace ducked his head, Shiro closed his eyes to savor the feeling of Thace’s jaw across his crown. He didn’t expect the whispered plea, “Forgive me.”

“Of course,” Shiro laughed, mutely. The reprieve, no matter how brief, invigorated Shiro. “If there was ever any need, I did the moment you accepted Keith as your own cub.”

“And you, Shirogane Takashi of Earth, of Marmora, of Daibazaal. You are mine as well, which is why you cannot stay here. I will not leave you again.”

Shiro smiled and pushed up on his toes to return the traditional pack greeting. “You’re not. We’re pack, Thace, and that means I’m never alone.”

Shiro could think of no greater gift and no greater strength than that.

Thace still hesitated, but Shiro assured him, “You don’t need to worry about me. Haven’t you heard? I’m quite famous around these parts.”

From the pits, Shiro heard the arena crowd chant his title. It made for an ominous soundtrack to his battles, meant to encourage but more often left him anxious and uncomfortable in his own skin. Though he had learned how to battle like a gladiator, he learned how to fight like a Blade, and if Shiro knew one thing, it was how to win.

Upon learning his rank as “Champion,” Thace feared for his safety but eventually expressed his desire to be the one to tell Kolivan of Shiro’s exploits in the arena – once Shiro was safe and sound back at the Blade headquarters, of course.

Shiro doubted he would ever get home. As quintains became feebs, and he was no closer to getting the Black Bayard, Shiro wondered if he had misjudged. Had he not attracted Zarkon’s attention? Perhaps only Haggar was interested in him for his ties to the Blade?

He began to debate taking the next Blade up on his offer to free him when the sentries stopped him just before the arena floor. Hunched over and hidden under her hood, Haggar pinned Shiro with
those chilly amber eyes. She waved a bony but elegant hand over Shiro’s face.

“You – Your energy… I’ve felt this before…” She composed herself, pocketing her curiosity and straightening her shoulders. “One final chance, Champion.” A sneer. “You will tell us all about your organization, or you will face your greatest challenge in the arena. And this time, you will not win.”

His entire life has been one challenge after another, and with any luck, Zarkon would wish to try his hand at fighting the undefeated champion. Perhaps that was hubris on his part, believing Zarkon would lower himself to fight one of his slaves, and instead of the emperor in the arena, Shiro found himself standing before a large Galran with four arms – two mechanical. Attached to his thick neck were two purple canisters filled with quintessence.

The challenger slammed a large red button on his gauntlet, and following an animalistic roar, his arms grew larger and thicker in sudden spurts thanks to the refined quintessence in his neck. Shiro swallowed and took a step back. He’d battled larger opponents before – after all, everyone in the Blade was bigger than him – but this enhanced warrior truly was the strongest opponent Shiro had ever faced. He’d need to discover the challenger’s weakness, devise a plan, and stick to it in order to survive.

Unfortunately, the challenger was quick, rushing Shiro and sending him tumbling away. Once he came to a stop, Shiro found his footing and flipped, narrowing missing another punch from the challenger’s robotic left arm. He ducked and weaved, rolled and slashed, and the challenger roared in anger.

“I will destroy you!”

The challenger’s mechanical arm slammed into Shiro’s stomach and sent him flying into a pillar. His back screamed; his head pounded. He fell face first to the sandy floor, a metallic taste rolling over his tongue. He coughed, and though he managed to get to his feet, another swipe sent him tumbling across the battlefield. Somewhere, he lost his blade, and Shiro couldn’t fight back when the challenger descended upon him, slamming him time and time again against the floor.

His vision danced, and his muscles ached. One of the challenger’s massive hands clamped his torso, pinioning his hands to his sides, and then his tightened grip tore a pained cry from Shiro’s throat.

Shiro instinctively reached for strength, for Black.

Nothing.

Nothing.

Nothing.

After leaving Earth and finding hell in Drule Central, earning Kolivan’s trust and seeking Sendak’s affection, he was destined to die here with an empty title, against a nameless enemy, in a futile attempt to save the one being who had always been there for him.

Shiro wasn’t strong enough. Perhaps after everything, this was the end he deserved. He could only hope Keith and the pack would forgive him for dying. He hoped his lion would forgive him for failing to free him.

I’m sorry, Black.
As his vision started to blacken one the edges, a sharp, unrelenting voice demanded he listen -

*Sometimes the greatest challenge is knowing when to quit. Other times, it’s knowing you should quit and deciding to forge ahead anyway.*

No. No! He couldn't die here. Not yet.

A mighty roar resounded in his ears and shook his very core.

A cool sensation that felt to wide, so vast, it couldn’t possibly be contained in his body – spread from Shiro’s very core. It was a reconnection, an enlivened tether, a beckon.

Shiro answered it, releasing a deep sigh and allowing his presence to be pulled out of his body and into the astral plane. Black knelt before him, melancholy eyes and morose expression an apology for deserting Shiro, for worrying him. But he’d been attacked, and some chains lay upon the ground, shattered from Black’s tireless efforts. Others still restricted the lion – two about his collar, another set about his back paws.

Black had been fighting to get back to him. For ten thousand years, he’d waited for a new paladin, and Black wouldn’t lose Shiro again.

Shiro’s fingers gripped Black’s mane, and he pressed his forehead against Black’s.

“I need you, Black. I can beat him, but I need your help.”

A soft rumble. *Foolish.*

“I’m not talking about the challenger.”

A pause. *Yes. More.*

More?

*All. Five. One.*

Shiro gulped. “Voltron.”

*Stronger. Together.*

“Yes. Always.” And now, he was talking about them – his lion and he.

Black rumbled again, the sound resonating deep in Shiro’s chest, and when his eyes opened, he once more hung in the arena, gripped tightly in the warrior’s massive hand. The pain came rushing back – his overworked muscles, the bruises, the potential broken bones, but then so did the constant cool presence in the back of his mind. All he had to do was reach for it, and a tingling sensation swept him.

Shiro phased through the challenger’s hand.

Once on his feet, he rolled forward, under the warrior’s swiping arms. He limped toward the massive four-pillar structure of the arena complex and ducked behind one column as the challenger lunged. Its metal fist slammed into the pole. Pain ripped through Shiro, causing him to stumble as he made his way toward the second pillar. The warrior’s fist narrowly missed him again, adding to its frustration and the pageantry of it all.

Another pillar cracked, this one causing the structure to wobble. Shiro barely made it the third one,
tossing himself behind it as the challenger punched, and he collapsed to his knees just outside the structure’s grand ring. His chest burned, and sweat dribbled down his forehead to sting his eyes. Blood slipped from the corner of his mouth, and the ground shook under him with every step the challenger took.

“Giving up? Hm. Disappointing. I thought I’d get more of a fight from the Champion. Maybe lose a limb or two.”

Shiro hissed, holding his side, but gathered enough energy to toss a wicked grin at the warrior. “Well, I certainly don’t want to disappoint you.”

A loud snap silenced the arena, and when the warrior looked up at the breaking structure, he uttered, “Oh, no.”

The heavy rock of the structure’s pillars plummeted then, burying the warrior and cutting off both of his mechanical arms.

Shiro sighed with a quick laugh and though he tried to listen to Black’s mewl in his ears, the arena’s blaring shouts drowned him out.

“Champion! Champion! Champion!”

That was the last thing Shiro heard as the darkness rushed to embrace him.

Ulaz’s tense face greeted him upon awakening. “You had your chance. It is now time for you to leave.”

Shiro rolled his eyes at the scolding tone. “You know I can’t. I have to free Black, and I’m close. Black spoke to me again, and –”

Ulaz would hear none of it. “You barely survived this –”

“But I did.”

“You may not next time.” Ulaz retreated to the cell door and peered through the narrow eye slit. “You cannot stay here any longer.”

Shiro stood and squared his shoulders. “I can’t leave now. I need to do this, Ulaz. I’m sorry.”

“Then I must do what I must.”

The solemn tone shocked Shiro, and he gasped when Ulaz raced toward him, the Galran’s speed more than Shiro could ever hope to accomplish. Shiro ducked the strike that had rendered him unconscious eight annuals earlier and blocked Ulaz’s subsequent attack. Whereas he might have fought Ulaz to stand-still or at least held up his own prior, Shiro’s aching muscles and bruised body suffered from the previous arena match. A swift kick sent Shiro slamming back against the cell wall, and as he slid down, arms crossed over his mid-section, Shiro looked up at the approaching Ulaz.

“This isn’t my choice, Ulaz. I don’t want to be here, but I need to be. And you know that.”

Ulaz stopped, stricken.

“I’m a Paladin of Voltron. My lion needs me, and I will do anything I can to free him. I have to.”
Ulaz’s hand clenched and released, and his eyes averted. He appeared bitter, enraged in a way Shiro only remembered from when he returned hurt from a mission. With a frustrated sigh, Ulaz released his tension and knelt down to place his claw in the crux between Shiro’s shoulder and neck.

“But you must be alive to do so.”

“Crack.”

Muffled, clipped commands greeted Shiro upon awakening, and he needed to blink against the bright, magenta light that blinded him from above. When he shifted, his muscles complained with deep, lingering aches that reached his bones. An involuntary groan escaped through his clenched teeth.

Stillness.

Then – “I told you I want him out. He should not feel this.”

“…Ulaz?” the murmured beckon drifted from his lips, and a large claw clamped down upon his forearm. He flinched, only to realize he couldn’t move his wrists. His eyes shot open, and he jerked, first seeing Ulaz’s golden eyes before glancing down at his arms. Restrained on a surgical table, Shiro tried to swallow down the bile that rose up in his throat along with the heavy dose of fear. A laser saw hovered just above his arm. Ulaz wore a mask over his nose and mouth. Thick gloves stretched past his elbows.

“What – What are you doing?” he asked, breathless.

Ulaz’s hand remained firm upon his arm, never tightening, never relenting. “Get him a sedative now.”

A lab technician raced off, and Shiro’s attention snapped back to Ulaz, hoping for an explanation or a comforting word. But nothing. Instead, Ulaz straightened his back and turned toward a control panel, tapping rapidly.

Shiro knew better than to call Ulaz again, though it took all his effort not to, especially when the technician returned. He held down Shiro’s arm, his grip painful and squeezing, and Shiro hissed when the needle broke his skin.

“What is that? What are you doing? Hey!” Shiro writhed in his restraints and shouted toward Ulaz’s back. “Hey! Answer me! What’s going on!”

When Ulaz refused to turn, Shiro closed his eyes and sunk back into himself, into Black, instinctively reaching out for the lion to phase through his cuffs. Before he fully connected, a large hand clasped his bangs and gave them a painful jerk, breaking his concentration.

“Have you not learned yet, lower lifeform?” Ulaz seethed. He lowered his lips until they lingered just above his ear. “You do not question your Galran masters.”

So close, Shiro could smell Ulaz’s scent of lavender and pine, of vanilla and desert willow. Of Kolivan, Antok, Thace, and Keith. It calmed him better than any words could, and with the comforting scent of his pack surrounding him, Shiro surrendered to the darkness.
“…all right. I am here, my little kzelz. You are safe now.”

Shiro’s entire body felt unnaturally heavy and stiff, and something cold clung to his right arm, just above his elbow. He wanted to clench his fingers, but somehow they felt awkward, disconnected in a way Shiro remembered from the time he tore wrist ligaments. Soft, velvet fur brushed against his cheek, distracting him, and with the little power Shiro mustered, he burrowed his nose into the familiar and soothing embrace.

“…Sendak.”

A claw trailed through his locks and eased his tense nerves. “Rest, Taka. I am here.”

Shiro listened without question.

When he awoke again, he was more alert and fought off the remnants of exhaustion. He wasn’t alone, though Ulaz didn’t hover like he always had when Shiro was sick or hurt in the Blades’ headquarters. Instead, Ulaz stood just inside the door, like he’d wanted to be anywhere else but Shiro’s cell.

“…Ulaz?” Shiro called, and when he threw his legs over the edge and sat up, a new weight dragged his vision down to his right hand.

A metal right hand.

“You cannot die, Shiro,” Ulaz murmured, sharp and unkind in a way Shiro had never heard his packmate. “I will not allow it.”

To Be Continued…

Chapter End Notes

Just FYI - in order to get everything up by the Season 5 premiere, I'm going the read the remaining chapters twice before posting, rather than the usual three editing rounds. I'm hoping to go back through after season 5 for one more round, but I want to make sure you read the story before we all hate Sendak. :) Thanks!
Broken Blade - Part Twelve

Chapter Summary

Shiro's identity is revealed to Zarkon.

Chapter Notes

I think I might have lost a few people last chapter. Just FYI - only two chapters left in the past (including this one), and then we're back in the present/Season 2. (Yay!)

Trigger warning post can be found here.

The metal fingers listened to Shiro’s request, wiggling like his own ones would. The wall even felt cold upon its tips, burning slightly against the pads. The heavy weight he remembered from the brief time he awoke – had Sendak been there? – was gone, replaced by a metal arm that moved like his, except it made a tiny zip when he clenched his hand into a fist.

There was no pain, no lingering ache other than the stiffness in his muscles, and yet Shiro couldn’t shake the feeling of violation, of loss, deep within his chest.

“You took my arm,” he whispered, as if trying to make sense of it all. “How could you take my arm?”

“You would not listen,” Ulaz said, voice remorseless and factual. “I had no choice.”

“No choice?” Shiro echoed, unable to move, struggling to breathe as he gaped at his new appendage. “Ulaz, you – you cut off a piece of me, and – and replaced it with a –”

“A weapon. All you must do is focus your quintessence into the hand, and it will become a heated blade you may yield in combat.”

Shiro already had a blade, and though he missed its presence every day, this meager substitute would never replace the luxite dagger he’d received from his mother. How could Ulaz ever think it would?

He wanted it off. It wasn’t his weapon. It wasn’t his arm. His arm was gone. Shock sent trembles climbing up his spine, and he couldn’t process the sudden ache that squeezed all the air from his chest.

Ulaz lurched forward. “Breathe, Shiro. You are safe. No more harm will come to –”

Shiro couldn’t stop the flinch. Ulaz’s hand aborted the motion; his eyebrows arched low, his lips pursed. He regrouped, quicker than it took Shiro to inhale, hold it for three seconds, and release. Shiro lowered his chin, resting his head against his now bent knees, but Ulaz’s hand gripped his cheek and forced his head up to clear the passage ways. It didn’t change the horrifying truth.
Ulaz, Shiro’s packmate, one of the closest people to him, harmed him worse than anyone ever have. Even Sendak.

Ulaz went through the breathing exercises with Shiro – inhaling, holding, and exhaling – though he kept his distance once Shiro made sure to keep his head up.

“I shall take my leave of you,” Ulaz said, after Shiro regained control. “I have spoken with the warden who has agreed to suspend your matches for the remainder of the movement. It is best if you acclimate to your new arm and learn how to wield it within that time. It has a failsafe that will be deactivated once your trainer comes to see you.”

Trainer? If Ulaz wasn’t going to teach him how to wield this – this thing, then who would? Shiro would find out eventually, but there was an answer only Ulaz knew. And Shiro couldn’t let him flee without telling him.

“Ulaz…who is Yasek?”

Ulaz froze, halfway out the door, before pivoting on his heel. His hesitation was obvious, though he eventually relented. After he finished and left, Shiro drew himself into the corner of his bed, legs close to his chest, and glared at the new arm, unable to come to grips with it. He wanted to tear it off, but only having one arm wouldn’t help him in the arena. And how would he ever fly Black that way?

He slept fitfully that night and managed to come to terms when the truth of Sandrik’s true identity by the time the door opened the next morning.

Relief swelled in Shiro as Sendak entered his cell. Though it was foolish, Shiro reacted on instinct and shifted to conceal his new arm, but Sendak said nothing. He only stepped forward and with his flesh hand, threaded his fingers with Shiro’s new metallic ones. With his opposite gauntlet, he caressed Shiro’s side, immediately stealing a tiny grin from Shiro.

The warmth of his body and the strong scent of stardust and sage surrounded Shiro. When Sendak’s frame curled around Shiro in a protective embrace, Shiro allowed the tears to fall, knowing Sendak would catch them.

While Shiro usually tested his opponent and decided on a course of attack, he rushed Yasek, activating his hand and slashing to meet the Galran’s swinging blade. Shiro ducked, parried, and struck. It was an awkward strategy, more offensive than defensive, and he missed the reach his luxiate blade had afforded. Yasek took advantage, swiping low, then delivering an upper cut that sent Shiro sprawling backwards. He rolled with the hit, came up to his feet, and wiped his bleeding mouth with the back of his hand.
Controlling his breathing, heaving silent but drawing breaths, Shiro sought Black for the strength to do what was needed.

Shiro had killed before and would undoubtedly do it again. Death surrounded every mission, ready to consume him with one wrong move, but Shiro had never planned someone’s death.

Perhaps Ulaz was right. Sometimes they were no choices.

Shiro allowed Black’s power to phase him out of reality and get close to Yasek, though Shiro wished with all his heart Sendak wouldn’t see the moment his new arm, the very weapon Sendak helped Shiro to master, tore through Yasek’s chest.

Shiro willed himself to make it fast, to cut deep and straight and true. No need to create more damage than necessary. No need to cripple Yasek with the pain. Shiro simply needed to end the traitor’s miserable existence and leave him for the sentries.

The silence in the arena sounded almost as loud as the screams once had, and Shiro lamented the chants they used to yell for him. Instead, the arena seemed stunned that their Champion had surrendered to their Galra masters and had become a deadly warrior.

In the pits, news of Shiro’s kill spread through the ranks, and where they used to gather about him and heal any wounds, they gave him space and solitude. He wanted Sendak to come, but Shiro awaited Haggar. She arrived first, waiting just beyond the transparent cell, wearing a contented, almost giddy smile.

“I thought there was something different about you…Paladin.”

With the strong hand of a commander between his shoulder blades, pressing him to the ground before the throne, Shiro began to wonder if perhaps Kolivan chose wrong all those years ago. He’d wanted this, Shiro reminded himself. To get close to Zarkon, to claim the Black Bayard and free the Black Lion from its collar. He betrayed Sendak for this. He fought in the arena and killed for this, and yet his insides quivered as he knelt before the emperor.

Zarkon rose to his feet, and Shiro followed the massive shadow that approached and then swallowed his smaller form. When Zarkon spoke, the entire universe held its breath. “You believe you can take my place as the Black Paladin of Voltron?”

Somehow, Shiro doubted Zarkon wanted an answer. He gave one any way. “I don’t believe it’s for me to decide. The Black Lion chose – ugh!”

Pain struck immediately. The familiar taste of blood washed over his tongue.

“You are not even worthy to speak its name.”

He. The Black Lion was a he.

“Ten thousand years, and the Black Lion could do no better than you.” Shiro forwent the protocol Sendak taught him to glare up at the emperor. Their eyes locked, and with a wave of lightheadedness, Shiro found himself falling. He slammed hard against the ground of the astral plane but quickly stood to meet Zarkon’s imposing figure.

Black rumbled in the back of his mind, though the lion struggled against his remaining chains, which kept him tied to Zarkon’s side. “Surrender. You cannot win here.”
“Surrender?” Shiro echoed. Why would he surrender? Success or death, knowledge or death. There was no surrender in a Galran vocabulary, so why would Zarkon want to keep him alive? Unless…

“You don’t know where the Black Lion is,” Shiro murmured.

Black jerked against the chains when Zarkon tugged. “Alfor was a fool to believe he could hide the Black Lion from me. I will find it and the rest of Voltron, and then nothing will be able to stop me.”

“I won’t help you,” Shiro declared.

Zarkon’s eyes narrowed, his hand tightening upon the Black Lion’s chain. “You were right about one thing, Paladin.” He spoke the word like a sneer. “You do not have a choice.”

Purple-laced black lightning danced upon the Black Lion’s leash, and crippling pain wracked Shiro’s being. As Black let out of a harrowing howl, Shiro collapsed to his knees, arms wrapped about his midsection. He tumbled to the ground, unable to keep from grunting and choking as he suffered the endless agony tearing through the very fabric of his being.

The energy sought his memories. Black roared through the tether in his chest, but some foreign energy pervaded it, violating their sacred bond. Alone, without any of its kin, Black couldn’t hope to stop the energy before it reached Shiro.

Shiro wasn’t ready for the blinding pain that followed. He lost any grip upon defenses then, his mind torn open for the energy to sift through, but it also opened a vein to Zarkon’s memories. Not just visions but also emotions, feelings, strangled Shiro. Black mewled in his mind, urging Shiro to save himself, but Shiro couldn’t. Severing a connection between he and Zarkon also meant losing Black - and Shiro lost an arm for a chance to claim the Black Bayard. Perhaps it was selfish, but Black was the other half of his soul. He would rather die than lose that part of himself.

The cost was great.

The lightning allowed Zarkon to see Shiro’s most inner thoughts – Keith and Lance, Kolivan and the Blades – but it also presented Shiro with a truth he hadn’t known.

Kolivan dominated Zarkon’s thoughts, almost as much as the Black Lion, almost as much as Alfor. Kolivan, the leader of the Marmora Clan, fought alongside Zarkon, laid alongside Zarkon. Tradition demanded a marriage between the reptiles and the cat-like warriors of Daibazaal, but Zarkon chose a courtship.

A begrudging, tentative pact grew into much more, and a wave of affection swept through Shiro. It intensified and became love, love for a partner, love for Kolivan from Zarkon. Blood dribbled down their faces to reveal mating marks, which Zarkon presented proudly to his band of fellow rulers and friends.

The images came and went, jumping by feebs and even annuals, but Kolivan’s strong presence remained. Zarkon came and went with Alfor and those who would become the Paladins of Old, but he always came home to Kolivan. On the rare occasions that Zarkon’s adventure took him to nearby planets, Kolivan tagged along, and a camaraderie of sorts formed between Kolivan and the future Paladins.

The serendipitous comet and subsequent rift shifted Zarkon’s focus, and when Honevra came to study it, she grew close to Zarkon. Kolivan embraced her as a friend, confident in his relationship with the emperor, and neither Zarkon nor Honvera betrayed that trust. But as the feebs passed and
the rift grew, Voltron rose to the task, stopping the trans-dimensional beings and continuing onward to bring peace to the galaxy.

Then Honevra fell ill. Alfor and Zarkon fought, and not even Kolivan couldn’t get Zarkon to see reason. The power of the rift began to change Zarkon – or so Kolivan thought until the beings began to exit the rift faster than Voltron could contain them. Kolivan returned to the Marmora to rally them for battle.

Voltron fought, and during the battle, Zarkon fell. Honevra as well, only to be revived by the rift entities. Alfor saw only one way to end all the bloodshed and death, and Kolivan reluctantly agreed. When Zarkon eventually returned, animated by the rift entities, not even Kolivan could dissuade him. Zarkon let Kolivan escape but refused to let Alfor, his closest friend who destroyed Daibazaal.

He destroyed Voltron, too. Now no one would have the power the comet possessed, and yet – Black’s tether to Zarkon’s soul never ceased. It dulled, becoming nothing more than a faint flicker in the back of his mind, but Zarkon held onto that little glimmer of hope for more than 10,000 years.

Until Shiro showed up.

The transference slammed to a halt as Zarkon focused on one particular memory – Shiro, standing next to Kolivan in the Blade of Marmora headquarters, asking to become Galran.

Shock numbed the bond, woven with longing and relief. All this time, Zarkon assumed Kolivan had died, but how had he survived? His mate, a piece of home that existed even after their planet was destroyed. Zarkon wanted to collect the shattered pieces of his soul that his mate held, but Kolivan had sided with Alfor. The Marmora clan leader wanted to stop Zarkon from destroying Altea, and Zarkon would never forgive him for such betrayal.

A new wave of power surged through Zarkon and slammed into Shiro. It stole Shiro breath and forced open his soul, ripping more memories from him. Of Keith. His brother, his best friend, and the knowledge of the Red Lion who growled in the back of his mind. Alfor’s lion had gone to a Galran, and Zarkon laughed, following the connection from Black and Shiro to Keith, and onward – to a planet bathed in flames.

“Mobilize my fleet,” Zarkon said, breathless. “I know where the Red Lion is.”

No.

Zarkon glowered down at Shiro. “Make sure he stays unconscious for the duration of the trip. We’ll need his connection to the lions and their paladins to find Voltron.”

Shiro’s addled mind managed to grasp onto Zarkon’s meaning, and he immediately sought Black to use his power. But before he could phase out of reality and escape, a commander hit him over the back of the head, rendering Shiro unconscious.

To Be Continued…
Broken Blade - Part Thirteen

Chapter Summary

Zarkon begins to collect lions; Shiro is forced to help.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here.

Shiro slept without dreams, muscles strained in a way he remembered from the roughest training sessions with Kolivan. His head lolled to the side, thoughts cloudy and disconnected. The glowing emblem of the Galra Empire on the far wall jerked him fully awake, but as he attempted to sit up, restraints bit into his ankles and wrists.

“Calm yourself, Champion,” Haggar sneered as she approached the table, glaring down at Shiro with intense disdain. “You will not be able to escape.”

As if to prove her point, she fingered the illuminated purple collar about Shiro’s neck. Immediately, Shiro sought Black and his power, but he found himself unable to connect to the beast again.

“Fight as you might. Voltron belongs to us, and nothing you do will change that.”

Haggar ambled out then, and Shiro readied himself for when the sentries released the cuffs. Unfortunately, five sentries gathered about his table and held him down, manhandling his appendages and forcing his hands behind his back. He was bound and guided through the battleship corridors until he found himself upon the bridge. A commander placed a massive hand between his shoulder blades and pushed him to his knees before Zarkon’s throne once more.

Through the front viewer screen, the intense flames of the planet that housed the Red Lion licked the dark expansive of space.

“Paladin.” Zarkon’s dark voice cut through the silence of the bridge as he stood, towering over Shiro’s kneeling form. “You will accompany me to the planet’s surface to retrieve the Red Lion.”

Shiro knew better than to take his gaze off Zarkon. “I won’t survive the heat,” he responded, thankful that his voice remained steady.

Zarkon’s eyes narrowed before the emperor clasped Shiro’s collar and tugged him to his feet. He said nothing as he pivoted and pulled Shiro like a disobedient pet.

Shiro opened his mouth to shout, only to gasp at the sight of the glowing weapon strapped to
Zarkon’s hip.

The Black Bayard.

He couldn’t grab it. With his arms restrained behind his back and the collar tight about his neck, Shiro could do nothing but follow Zarkon to a smaller spacecraft. Zarkon stopped before the entrance and turned to speak with Haggar and one of his commanders, a dark purple Galran with a go-tee and long, electric claws.

“Ready the fleet to wrangle the beast. It will not come quietly.”

Like Keith would never. His brother was nothing if not intense, passionate, and unwilling to be tamed. Shiro imagined the Red Lion would be just as volatile if provoked.

“Commander Throk, you’re with me,” Zarkon said.

A tall but slender Galra with purple stripes crisscrossing his face and twin ears that stretched high above his head, stepped onto the small craft before Zarkon. Zarkon followed and pulled Shiro aboard. He only let go of Shiro’s collar once the craft lifted off the hanger floor and zipped into the open expanse of space. A choking silence enveloped the cockpit as Shiro stood, shoulder to shoulder with Zarkon. He kept his eyes straight, watching as the burning planet came into view.

“You were Kolivan’s mate,” Shiro said without preamble.

Zarkon remained silent, long after Shiro thought the emperor would reply, but he eventually relented, “He betrayed me and his people.”

“The Marmora are Galra, too.”

“I do not need to explain my actions to you, Paladin.”

The edge to Zarkon’s voice warned Shiro to stop, but Shiro glowered upward. “You wanted to destroy an ally’s planet. Alfor was your friend, and he was trying to save Daibazaal. Instead, you – uk!”

Shiro grunted when pain exploded in the back of his head and shoulders, his neck held fast and firm against the wall of the cockpit.

“I have no qualms about ripping out your tongue,” Zarkon hissed.

Shiro lifted his neck, attempting to breathe through the tight hold, and Zarkon only slackened his claws once Shiro bit his bottom lip. He let out a soft exhale after Zarkon retreated but stayed near the wall. He saw no need to provoke Zarkon any more than he already had, and even though he’d seen so many of Zarkon’s memories, he couldn’t quite grasp how Kolivan could have accepted Zarkon as his mate.

Once the craft flew through the flames and settled upon the surface, Zarkon gripped Shiro’s collar again. “I will take this off of you, so you may connect with the Black Lion. You will use your bond to lead me to the Red Lion.”

“You can’t force me to – ”

“You can either lead me to the Red Lion, or I will search your memories again and ascertain the location of the Red Paladin. Then, I will force him to bring the lion to me.”
No. Anyone in the universe but Keith.

Shiro ducked his chin, a clear surrender, and as Zarkon unclipped the collar from him, Shiro reached out to Black with a melancholy greeting.

*I’m sorry.*

Black only whimpered.

A fire erupted in Shiro’s heart, burning more fiercely and brighter than any true flame, and as Zarkon opened the back hatch, a feeling of lightheadedness swept through him. Black was phasing him out of reality. The chains slipped from his wrists and clattered against the floor of the craft. Taking a deep breath, Shiro stepped through the flames like he’d done the first time Red granted Keith her powers.

The entire planet’s surface burned with the fury of Earth’s sun. The hard rock ground held without worry, though thick, black smoke billowed from the flames. Shiro sucked in quick, heaving breaths as he maintained his connection with Black, and he started toward the edge of the high plateau, on which Throk had landed.

A valley of red flames fluttered and popped as they devoured whatever served as sustenance. The flames stretched to the majestic mountains in a distance, which were also covered in the same burning fury. Shiro wondered how long it would take to search the entire planet for Red. Surely, his connection with Black wouldn’t allow him to stay phased for that long.

The moment Zarkon perverted Shiro’s bond with Black and connected with the lion, a sinking feeling flooded Shiro. He clenched his teeth and struggled to keep his own tether to Black strong, but exhaustion began to muddy his thoughts.

Zarkon’s footsteps thundered behind Shiro, sounding over the fanning of the flames, and he searched the memories he received from Zarkon to learn how to connect Red through Black.

Like second nature, his mind stretched like a hand reaching toward a loved one, and like Keith always did, Red returned the affection. She was a *lioness*, fierce and protective of her paladin – she would not lose this one like she lost her last one – and her bond with Black, with all the lions and paladins of Voltron, hummed in Shiro’s chest.

Shiro sought a narrow but stable trail and headed down the mountainside. He followed the tether from his soul to the lion, urged by Red’s impatience, but in a trance and in tune with Black, Shiro could feel Zarkon’s restless anticipation.

Now that Zarkon knew Red was located on this planet, Shiro couldn’t attempt to steal the Black Bayard and leave. He needed to find Red first – preferably without Zarkon, though how one loses the emperor of the universe on a seemingly deserted planet escaped Shiro.

Before he could come up with a solution, Zarkon caught him off guard with a tug of Black’s chains, causing Shiro to stumble.

“Whatever you are thinking, you will not succeed. The lion belongs to me.”

“The lion belongs to no one,” Shiro shot back with a quick glance over his shoulder. “You were partners, but you betrayed that bond and your people.”

Zarkon’s eyes glowed a venomous purple hue, and the emperor surprised Shiro by replying, “It was to save my planet and my people.”
“Daibazaal was dying,” Shiro pressed. “I saw it in your memories. There was no way anything you did would have saved – ”

“You do not think I was aware, Paladin?” Zarkon snapped with a low, menacing growl. A warning. “I was there. I knew what was happening to my planet.”

“Then why did you try to use Voltron to enlarge the – ”

“I needed the quintessence to save Honvera. I had hoped – ”

“One person – compared to your entire planet! Potentially the universe?” Shiro demanded.

“Yes.”

Shiro’s fists clenched.

“Black agreed,” Zarkon insisted, sending chills down Shiro’s spine.

“…What?”

“It was not Honvera for whom I entered the rift,” Zarkon explained, “though she was a dear friend and there was little I would not have done for her. It was the child she was carrying, whom I wished to save.”

Black’s remorse and pain flooded the bond, buckling Shiro’s knees. He barely managed to keep a footing in the astral plane with the heat slicking his cheeks and the smoke closing his throat. The images came again, Black overwhelming him with sights and emotions. Honvera had been carrying, though the child was not to be hers by nurture. A Galra tradition by the ruling couples of the same gender, a surrogate was to be requested and the child of such a union to be deemed next-in-succession.

The child would be both Zarkon’s and Kolivan’s.

Black had wanted to help, and though he agreed to bring Honvera and the unborn child into the rift, Black had not agreed to bring Voltron. In the end, his lion hadn’t been given a choice and was forced by his paladin to put his fellow lions in harm’s way.

Shiro bowed his head, and his heart beat in a slow staccato with Black’s. The mighty beast comforted a devastated Kolivan, who lost not only his son but also his mate. Alfor came to their side, his warm embrace kind and soothing, but ultimately nothing could save Kolivan and Black from the agony that only came from the loss of a child.

“My bond is still stronger with the lion than yours,” Zarkon challenged, and Shiro couldn’t deny that horrifying truth.

As he came to the valley’s bottom and followed a route only his heart knew, Shiro felt the Black Lion’s longing. Alfor had all but severed the bond between paladin and lion, to protect Black and stop Zarkon’s universal expansion, but the truth remained – Zarkon had shared a soul with Black. Not even 10,000 years could change that.

Shiro suddenly felt like the imposter Zarkon called him, wanting desperately to be something he wasn’t. No matter how hard he tried, he could never be worthy of Black. Instead, he’d always be Black’s second choice, a substitute for the paladin he’d lost.

Shiro’s already unsteady connection wavered, and he tripped over his own feet. He only regained
his footing once Zarkon snatched him by the collar and lifted him upright. Shiro wanted to laugh but couldn’t find the breath. The emperor of the known universe picked him up by the scruff of his neck like he was a clumsy kitten.

The flame crackled and roared about them, engulfing them in an intense blaze. The heat began to register, igniting the once cool air of the astral plane. Sweat still dribbled down Shiro’s forehead and cheeks. Dread settled heavy and cold in his belly as he reached out to the Black Lion again. He barely managed to maintain the connection, though Black scratched and mewed his way to Shiro. A force impeded Black, Shiro thought, rather than Black rejecting him outright, but Shiro wouldn’t blame the lion if he did so. What could he possibly offer Black that Zarkon couldn’t? Black needed a strong paladin to lead Voltron and wield its awesome power, and Zarkon was that paladin.

A weakness settled in Shiro’s bones, but a sweeping power cradled his own and allowed it to reach the astral plane. He wouldn’t lose his footing there just yet.

“Reach out,” Zarkon demanded, forceful claws clasping Shiro’s shoulders. “Connect with the lion. Find out where it is.”

“I-I…” Why did he need to reach out to Black? Why couldn’t Zarkon? If he was Black’s paladin now, if Zarkon was the leader of Voltron, then why couldn’t he find Red? Why wouldn’t Red come to him, even if Zarkon had killed Red’s last paladin? Wouldn’t she listen to the paladins’ leader?

Perhaps Red needed the approval of her paladin. Keith.

A fire ignited in Shiro’s very core, something fierce and intense, like a storm during its peak. Keith was unyielding and strong. Passionate. He fought every battle with a fury of emotion and effortless grace, and Shiro missed him with a deep ache nothing could ever soothe.

Shiro missed the glowing red patterns that suddenly shimmered under his boots, illuminating the ground and burning brighter than any fire.

The longing Shiro felt from Black shifted, growing hot, burning his chest, and Red’s own pain bled through the connection – from Keith to Red to Black to Shiro. She missed Alfor, always would, and nothing could ever close that wound. But Keith was her paladin now, and she would find him and protect him with all the power she possessed.

Just like Black. Something raw and vicious clawed at the back of Shiro’s mind, trying to tear through the force that kept him and Black all but separated. With Zarkon’s claws upon Shiro’s shoulders, closing upon his neck, Shiro’s mind wandered to that first meeting in the astral plane between him and Zarkon.

When Shiro first felt the collar about Black’s neck.

Shiro reacted without thinking, hand shooting back toward Zarkon’s hip. The emperor reacted faster, and for a moment, the fire planet disappeared. They stood in the astral plane, Zarkon clenching his wrist and twisting it painfully. Shiro let out a pained cry, only for Zarkon to release him. When he stumbled backwards, the fire planet reappeared, and Shiro reached out instinctively to Black for more power.

Some trickled down their connection, enough to stabilize Shiro in his phased form, but it proved difficult. He eyed the glimmering violet light at Zarkon’s thigh and lunged for it. The fire planet gave away again, blending into the background that became the astral plane.
The memories surged through one after another – Zarkon and the Paladins of Old, Honvera, Kolivan, and the Marmora – and Shiro couldn’t stop his own thoughts from escaping – the Blue Lion’s caves, Keith, Sendak, the Blade – Kolivan.

Kolivan saved him and choose him to be the Son of the Blade. Kolivan trained Shiro for this very purpose – to fight Zarkon and ascend to the role of Paladin and leader of Voltron.

Kolivan raised him to be Zarkon’s and his son.

Perhaps Shiro wasn’t worthy for such an honor, but Shiro would never stopping trying to be.

With a blaring roar, Shiro launched himself at Zarkon, kicking, blocking, parrying his attacks, while Zarkon combated him strike for strike. Zarkon phased out in front of him, only to appear directly behind him, slamming Shiro to the ground. Shiro let out a pained gasped, then rolled over and out of the way as Zarkon fell to the earth.

The fire appeared again, disorientating Shiro, only for the astral plane’s cool landscape to reappear just in time for Zarkon to attack. Shiro flew back, cheek throbbing and side bruising from the impact. Before he managed to land, Zarkon appeared before him and slammed his knee into Shiro’s gut, then knocked him to the ground with an elbow to the back of the neck.

Knowledge or death. Success or death. Shiro would always seek a way to survive. Maybe he wasn’t the Black Paladin. Maybe he couldn’t defeat Zarkon, but he wouldn’t allow the emperor to collar Black.

They were on the planet of his brother’s lion, and Red adored Keith. Shiro felt it in his very bones. The fire intensified and raged about him, though Shiro’s connection to Black continued to be strained. Red’s increased, however, fueling Shiro. Keith was his right arm, his Red Paladin, his universe. Keith supported him, had been there for him when no one, not even the Black Lion, was.

With Keith on his side, Shiro couldn’t lose.

Ripples of quintessence rocked his body, flowing down his arm. As Zarkon’s eyes narrowed and he readied for another round, Shiro looked down at his now glowing hand. The paladin’s quintessence was mirrored in his lion, and if the quintessence fed into the bayard – then all this time, the solution had been simple.

Shiro allowed Red’s fire to flow through him freely, filling him with Keith’s burning passion and fiery spirit. He launched forward then, fist glowing, as the fire planet darkened and the astral plane returned. Zarkon’s menacing growl echoed over the quiet valley, “You cannot defeat me!”

But Shiro didn’t need to defeat Zarkon – at least not yet. Using his momentum, he ducked under Zarkon’s swinging arm, skid across on his knees and dove at the restrained Black. With the precision of a surgeon, Shiro carefully sliced through Black’s collar.

Relief. Concern. Gratitude. Fear. Delight. So many emotions swept through Shiro like a raging river, threatening to sweep him away. Black’s essence, like he hadn’t felt in months, once more cradled his soul, and Shiro almost wept in his own relief. His lion hadn’t abandoned him.

“NO!” Zarkon howled, and with a brief greeting from Black, the astral plane faded.
The fire planet returned, and a menacing, fierce roar toward through the burning valley. The very ground underneath Shiro’s feet illuminated with ancient red markings and crumbled, plunging Shiro five feet, ten feet, twenty feet into an abyss. He was caught by the soaring Red Lion who broke through the darkness to greet him.

For a moment, the universe seemed to halt. Shiro stared into the glowing amber of the lioness’s eyes, and he thought he might have caught a faint, haughty laughter. Then, her jaws opened, and the universe restarted in double speed. He tumbled down her jowls, past her teeth, and slammed hard into a too-small chair. It moved a moment later, sliding into place in a red-tinted cockpit. The screen before him flashed to life, and he barely caught sight of Zarkon’s scowling form as the Red Lion launched itself into the sky and toward the cosmos.

Shiro hesitated but ultimately rested his hands upon the lion’s controls. There wasn’t a distinctive purr, but Shiro definitely felt the lion’s reluctant approval.

“Thanks,” he murmured with a tiny smile. “I know I’m not Keith, but think we can lose these battleships?”

That haughty laughter returned, and Red’s thrusters tore through the atmosphere. The stars of space embraced their incredible pace, and Red broke free of Zarkon’s battlecruisers in less than a few ticks.

Another one exited hyperdrive directly in front of Red, and Shiro barely had time to register it before a blast slammed into Red’s front breast plate, sending her spiraling head over paws.

Shiro gripped the controls and reigned her around, but another shot slammed into her side, knocking her further. Another and another and another. Black mewled in the back of his mind but couldn’t offer any assistance as Red tumbled back toward the surface. Shiro tried to right the ship, gripping the controls and tugging. Red listened begrudgingly.

She found her footing, and Shiro laughed, “I guess a cat does always land her feet.”

Red was not amused and projected her displeasure through Keith to Shiro.

Before Shiro could respond, a hard force slammed into Red, jerking her awkwardly, only to yank her back toward the battlecruiser.

“We’re caught in a tractor beam?” Red growled, and on the screen popped up a picture of the attacking battlecruiser. Shiro gasped. “Red, can you hail that ship?”

Red huffed, a clear sign of irritation, but she listened. After a few tense moments, the tiny blinking box on the screen fluttered to life, and Sendak’s face fit into the field.

Shiro let out a relieved sigh. “Sendak, please. You need to let me go. This – This is one of the Lions of Voltron, and I have to get it to –”

“Voltron belongs to Emperor Zarkon,” Sendak proclaimed, a harsh edge in his voice that Shiro hadn’t heard in quite some time, the same edge that scolded him for sleeping with Marvok’s subordinate. “The Red Lion will be brought onto this ship and presented to Emperor Zarkon for the trouble my former mate has caused him.”

Shiro’s insides grew cold. Black pressed against his mind, trying to comfort him as his breath quickened and his chest ached. “…I don’t – I don’t understand. Sendak, I –”

“What was the true purpose of your return, Takashi?”
Something was wrong. What had Shiro missed? “To get the Black Bayard. I told you that. I thought – I thought you forgave me for using you to – ”

“Then what the purpose of murdering Yasek?” Sendak snarled. Bile rose in Shiro’s throat. “Do you really expect me to believe you didn’t do it to harm me? One of the few challengers the Champion killed in the arena happens to be someone related to me?”

There was no explanation Shiro could give that would pacify his wounded mate.

“Was that your mission all along? To come back and harm me? To hurt someone close to me like I had hurt you?” The sharp tone remained, slicing through Shiro with every word. “I never went after Keith, Takashi. I would never go after your brother. If you didn’t forgive me for the mating mark, I would have understood, but killing my nephew out of spite? I cannot let that pass.”

“He was being held by your empire for high treason!” Shiro yelled. “That, you could excuse?”

“I – I did not know he was alive. I thought after a battle with rebel forces, he had – but it matters not. His crimes against the emperor were his to bear, and so are yours.”

Dread settled in Shiro’s belly, low and cold and unbearable, and he barely managed to force the words from his tightened lips. “Sendak, I know you. You don’t approve the empire’s methods or its cruelty. Voltron is the only thing that can stop Zarkon, and if he gets this lion – Keith’s lion – ”

“I cannot betray Emperor – ”

“He’s going to use me, Sendak. He and Haggar – they’re going to force me to find the lions, and then – ” Shiro gripped the controls, pleading directly into Sendak’s venomous eyes. “He’ll find Keith and the other paladins. He’ll – Sendak – please. Let me go.”

Those amber eyes wavered, Sendak’s face softening for only moment, before the callous demeanor of a Galra commander reappeared. “It is over, Takashi. Prepared to be boarded.”

“Sendak! Wait –”

The connection held on for a hair’s breath longer, and Shiro laughed wetly, tears coursing his cheeks. “Puig. I was…happy there. When you asked. I – I hope you were, too. That was…I wanted that. For us. I still do, and maybe…maybe one day we can – ”

Sendak’s expression remained unwavering in its harsh condemnation, but Shiro thought he saw a ghost a melancholy smile “Goodbye, Takashi.”

The connection closed then, and Shiro arched over the controls, allowing the tears to fall freely. He wept for the lions, for the universe. And he wept for himself.

The small aircraft came to an uneventful halt on the floor of the rural valley where the largest gathering of Puigans lived. Sendak stepped out to little fanfare, Guide Codax and a choice few advisors waiting. Codax gave the customary bow of a Galra servant, and Sendak responded with a tiny incline of his head. There was very little needed protocol-wise here. Under Shiro’s careful direction, Puig gained independence in all but the name and worked alongside Sendak’s regents to create a democratic society, or as close to one as they could get within the empire.
inquiries.

Sendak felt a distance, a disconnection, between himself and reality since he watched Takashi tear through Yasek’s chest with neither remorse nor hesitation. He’d been ruthless, truly the Champion of the Galra Empire, and Sendak sat stunned and confused as Shiro’s final blow tore own heart from his chest as well.

Takashi planned Yasek’s death, decided he would kill Sendak’s packmate, and Sendak couldn’t determine why. Sendak helped to train Takashi with his new weapon. He’d forgiven Takashi for using him, for trying to get to Zarkon through him. He’d been nothing but the solicitous mate, forgoing every tendency to uphold the Galra Empire’s insidious ways in order to be the mate he believed Takashi deserved.

He anticipated Takashi’s needs, asked Takashi’s permission to touch and be touched, gave anything that was asked for, and accepted whatever pleasure Takashi offered.

Sendak entered the administrative cavern of the Puig government, and his mind retreated to that first night of freedom for the Puig people, when they celebrated in the streets. The lively music reached Takashi and Sendak as they sat the cliff overlooking the valley, and it was the first time Takashi grabbed his abnormally large hand, holding onto the thumb.

Sendak would always cherish those memories. Those few months had been heaven to Sendak, where he’d been able to keep his command and hold onto his mate as well. It was perhaps not perfect, and Sendak had wanted to enjoy Takashi again, both emotionally and physically. But they’d never gotten the opportunity, and Sendak lamented that now they never would.

Sendak scowled, though inside, he felt drained and numb. None of this made sense. Takashi was the Black Paladin of Voltron. Sendak would acknowledge that, even if it meant accepting that Lord Zarkon was no longer. Takashi wanted to get close to Sendak to find a way to get the Black Bayard from Zarkon, so why showcase his skills as the Black Paladin and then kill Yasek? To be taken as the Champion, to become Zarkon’s Champion? And then reclaim the Black Bayard?

But then why would Takashi plead to him like a true mate and then accept when Sendak refused to let him go? And then why would he mention Puig of all places?

Sendak still could not ratify the sharp contrast between Takashi’s actions and his words, and he probably never would. Perhaps Takashi was the one mystery he would never unravel.

Codax and his advisors led Sendak and Haxus in the meeting hall where most of the negotiations took place, and Sendak shifted away from the absent fourth wall.

“Ah, Regnant,” Codax greeted, and Sendak turned to the Galran with his back to the entering party. He was tall, just under Sendak’s height, with massive ears and similar violet fur. “May I present Commander Sendak. He has come to – actually, my apologies, Commander. I do not believe you stated a reason for your visit.”

“The commander needs no reason, Guide Codax.”

Sendak’s ears set back. His eyes rose, and when the Galran turned, he wore a tired but indulgent smile. “Hello, Uncle. It has been some time.”

“Yasek?” It was impossible. “…You live?”

Yasek nodded and stepped forward to greet his uncle properly. He smelled of vanilla and lavender, of pine and desert willow.
Pain tore through Shiro’s mind again, digging its way back into his connection with the Black Lion, now with Red – to Blue. Shiro grit his teeth and fought back, pushing against Zarkon and Haggar’s combined energy. It wasn’t enough. Even with two of the lions, Shiro wasn’t Keith, and Black’s connection with Zarkon already limited his power.

Tears streamed down Shiro’s face as Zarkon stole what he needed – the Blue Lion’s cave, the young Altean prince, Lance, Alfor’s son – Alfor’s son was the new Blue Paladin.

Shiro collapsed back against the table, depleted and defeated. He felt enough of Zarkon’s rage to fear for Lance. Zarkon wouldn’t just take the Blue Lion. He’d find Lance and make him suffer for being the previous Red Paladin’s son.

And there was nothing Shiro could do to stop it.

Zarkon strode from the room without another acknowledgement of Shiro while Haggar lingered, ordering a nearby researcher to continue the Operation Kuron experiments.

By trying to free Black, he’d delivered Voltron to Zarkon. Now the emperor would hunt the paladins – Keith and Lance, and even Green and Yellow, whom Shiro didn’t know – and he’d kill them all. And then universe would be Zarkon’s forever.

As a sentry leaned over, holding down his wrist to inject something, Shiro struggled. If he was going down, he wouldn’t do so without a fight. The lead researcher hit the sentry’s hand away, however, and chastised, “Stop what you are doing. I want him to feel this.”

When he leaned over, the Galra’s scent of pine and vanilla, of lavender and desert willow, wafted past his nose, and Shiro smiled.

To Be Continued
Chapter Summary

Shiro and Kolivan finally talk.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here.

Post-Voltron

The shimmering purple lines upon Shiro’s Blade jumpsuit were familiar, though he’d never worn this pattern before. Lines ran down either side of his neck and flared out from the cleft of his chest, signaling a recruit for the Blade as opposed to a full-fledged member. But Shiro needed to do this. He spent eight annuals in the Blade, and though his blade awakened when he faced his greatest fear – losing his little brother – he never underwent the Trials of Marmora, the ultimate journey of knowledge and self-discovery.

Back on Sendak’s ship, Kolivan had said he thought Shiro’s trial might have been life itself and that it refused to relent until Shiro surrendered. But Shiro refused to give in. He wanted to prove, once and for all, that he belonged not just among the Paladins but also the Blades.

Antok hesitated, holding Ulaz’s blade in his large hand. “You do not need to do this. Kolivan welcomed you back as his second-in-command. You belong here, Shiro, and the Trials will not change that fact.”

When Shiro gripped Ulaz’s blade, it slept in his palm, proving his point. He might have fought against Zarkon, became a Paladin of Voltron, and sought the affection of a commander of the Galra Empire, but Shiro still needed to come to terms with his place in the universe.

He’d witnessed enough of these assessments to know how to complete the first trial – seeking another solution to a problem. He saw no point in prolonging the fight, so he disappeared through the elevator door in the first room and dove into the mindscape.

“When have you been? Your father and I have been worried.”

There were so many things he wanted to say to her – how he’d missed her, how he hoped she was well, why did she have to leave?
“Cub?” she took a step forward, fingers reaching. “Is something wrong? You can tell me anything. You know that.”

Even if he saw her again, Shiro wouldn’t tell Moira what happened to him and Keith after she left. He’d never tell Moira about how their father disappeared one night and never returned and how he was forced to his knees to make a living. But there was one thing he wanted to tell her, and he wouldn’t stop himself from doing it now.

He stepped into the circle of her arms and indulged in her comforting hold and familiar scent. She cradled him against her taller form, and even though he’d spouted from the small cub he had once been, she still had to bend to swipe her chin across his crown.

“Cub?” she called again. “It’s alright. I’m here now. You’re safe, away from the empire. Away from Sendak and Zarkon. You’ll never have to fight them again. I’ll protect you.”

This was his greatest hope at one time – finding Moira, then his father, and being the family they once were – but he was no longer an eighteen-year-old cub in the hell that was Drule Central. Now, he was a Blade and a Paladin, and she was no longer the greatest hope he held near and dear to his heart.

Shiro pulled away just enough to see Moira’s loving expression one more time, to remember and cherish it for the rest of his life. Then, as his throat constricted and horror pooled in his belly, he managed to say what he’d always wanted to.

“Goodbye, Mom. I’ll never stop missing you.”

Before he could see her dejected face, a tail wrapped about his waist and tugged him away. Keith greeted him, smiling the same grin that Moira wore but with a loving worship only he held for Shiro. A warm hand snaked about his waist from the other side as Lance fit under his opposite arm. The Blue Paladin had settled back into his Altean form with those pointy ears and glowing facial markings, while Pidge, Hunk, and Allura joined them in the shack.

Coran stepped in from the outside and cleared his throat. “Well, now. Enough of that. There are universes to save and space pirates to loot – I mean, barter with. We must get going.”

Right here, this was his greatest hope, where he drew his strength, and a wet smile found his face.

“Sounds great, Coran. Lead the way.”

Coran’s smile was crooked but true. “I believe that is your job, Shiro.”

Keith squeezed his waist, and Lance nudged him in the side. It was enough to push him through the door – and into the Hilt at the Blade of Marmora headquarters.

Shiro didn’t have to turn from the transparent screens to know Kolivan stood behind him.

“You don’t have to say it.”

Kolivan’s boots clicked upon the ground behind him as the leader came about, a disapproving expression upon his face. “You do not know what I was going to say.”

“You were going to tell me that I’m a lesser lifeform, that I don’t deserve to be here, that I’ve never deserved to be here.” Shiro sent him a knowing smile. “You already did that, so we can skip it this time. I know I belong here.”
Kolivan crossed his arms and shifted his weight onto his back foot. “Do you now?”

The sleeping blade sat snuggling across Shiro’s palms. “I don’t know when I actually stopped being frightened of you. That first annual here – I was pretty sure you were going to eject me at any moment. I was too short, too slow, too…not-Galra. It was only a matter time before you tired of me or thought I couldn’t contribute, and then I’d have to go back to Drule Central.”

His hands curled about the blade’s hilt and glanced up to see Kolivan’s thoughtful face. In the darkened light of the Hilt, Kolivan’s yellow eyes took a dark orange hue. “I never told anyone this, not even Ulaz, but – that day on the skyway, when I met him – I was going to go back to Sendak. If Ulaz didn’t take me up on the offer, I – I didn’t know what else to do, and – and Keith was really sick. His fever was high, and he started to hallucinate – and I’d lost everything else in this world. I was willing to do anything to make sure I didn’t lose him, too, even if that meant going back to the person who abused me.”

Kolivan said nothing, and Shiro didn’t expect him to.

“I still get nightmares sometimes, about Drule Central. And I can’t tell you how grateful I am to you and Ulaz and Thace and Antok for taking Keith and me in. I – I don’t know what would have happened to us if I’d gone back to Sendak, but I know you saved our lives.”

“The Galra believe only the strong deserve to be acknowledged,” Kolivan said, neutral. “Success or death, knowledge or death.”

“You remember that mission we went on together?” Shiro replied. He wiped the tears that began to slip down his cheeks. “That one to Dvask when I phased out of reality the first time? I told you I thought I heard a lion growl, and you – you had this bewildered, almost frightened expression upon your face. For most of the journey home, I seriously thought you were going to space me. I ended up passing out in the co-pilot chair and woke up with your jacket over me. You were sitting next to me and said I’d been mumbling in my sleep. You probably don’t remember what you told me after that, but I never forgot it.

“Sometimes the greatest challenge is knowing when to quit. Other times, it’s knowing you should quit and deciding to forge ahead anyway.”

The blade in Shiro’s hand shimmered a brilliant, blinding violet.

“There were so many times when I was in the empire, that I wanted to quit. That I even thought it was better for me to give up and surrender, but I didn’t. Because you told me not to. You told me to go on, and I did.

“I’m a Paladin of Voltron, a member of the Blade of Marmora, the Son of the Blade, and I don’t need this to tell me what I already know.” He didn’t try to suppress the daring smile that overtook his face. “I know who I am – your son.”

Light exploded from the blade then, bathing the Hilt in a violet light that reminded Shiro of Black’s interior glow. When he opened his eyes, he found himself on his back and blinking up at Kolivan’s concerned face with Antok hovering just beyond him. But the sleeping blade that once had been Ulaz’s lay inside his open palm, its extended length running along his fingertips.

“You seem to enjoy worrying me, Taka.”

Shiro smiled, fingers gripping about the blade’s hilt. He eventually raised his opposite hand, and with a sigh, Kolivan yanked Shiro to his feet.
“Patience, focus – I have taught you these things,” Kolivan said sometime later, after Shiro received medical treatment, a shower, a set of loose sweats. “And yet you blindly ignore them on a regular basis.”

“I needed to take the trials.”

“Why? You awakened the Blade previously. You already have fought within our ranks for almost a decade. What more did you need to prove?”

Barefoot and nursing a cup of nuvill, Shiro sat upon the couch in the treehouse and watched Kolivan, the leader standing before the viewer screens, hands tucked into the small of his back. When Shiro spoke, his words were measured and firm. “I know I belong here, but I needed to make sure you knew it, too.”

Kolivan swung around, eyes blown wide, mouth slightly open in shock.

“Look, you always doubted my place here, even after you made me your next-in-succession. And then I chose to be with Sendak and become a paladin. But just because I left, doesn’t mean that I don’t remember where I came from or that being part of the pack isn’t important to me.”

The silence that engulfed the room was easy for Shiro, though he doubted the same could be said for Kolivan. The leader remained firm and unmoving for a few moments, and Shiro glanced away, bringing his mug up for a quiet sip. The shimmer of his blade caught his eye, and unlike the curves of Keith’s Kukri blade, Shiro’s own was a straight ken that curved slightly in the middle, giving it a subtle hour-glass shape. It glowed on both edges and was longer by almost half of Shiro’s original blade design. The truth he’d obtained about himself, he couldn’t deny.

Kolivan settled next to Shiro, though he stared straight at the viewer screens. “I do not understand how we successfully completed missions and yet communicate so ineffectually.”

Shiro didn’t know how to respond, so he didn’t.

Kolivan continued without prompt, “I never doubted your place among us, Taka.”

“Except when you took Keith and me in, and when – ”

“Taka – I placed you directly into Zarkon’s path.”


“I allowed you in the Blade. A cub.” His voice held self-incrimination and regret. “I let Antok and Ulaz and Thace teach you, and then I assigned you missions accordingly. I allowed you to become strong, a weapon in your own right.”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“It made you into a formidable enemy for Zarkon and a warrior not just worthy but also able to fight for the mantle of Black Paladin.” Kolivan glance away, chin tilted forward with condemnation. “If I would have forced you out of the base all those annuals ago and sent you either to Drule Central or the Faraway Systems, you would have been nothing for Zarkon to see as a threat.”

“My mom tried that, and I still ended up in Drule Central, in the company of the empire’s highest commander.”
“Because the empire’s mechanisms placed you there,” Kolivan growled before letting out a disparaging sigh. “But it was my error in judgement that brought you to Zarkon’s attention, and I needed to take responsibility for the great disserve I did to you. I needed to make sure you survived. I’m still trying, but you dismiss my efforts.”

The weight of the blade upon his lap kept Shiro anchored to the present. “It’s not on purpose. I needed to save Black, and the easiest course of action was to manipulate Sendak.”

“A person who tore a mating mark through your face without your consent.”

“If I can’t at least try to forgive Sendak, then how I can forgive Ulaz?” Shiro asked, raising his Galra arm.

Kolivan glanced away, a disparaging sigh lifting his shoulders. “You should not base your feelings for one relationship upon another. Ulaz was the one who took you from Drule Central and – ”

“– and Sendak was willing to die for me – multiple times, Kolivan. He mourned me when he thought I was dead.”

“If he harmed you once, then he may do so again.”

Shiro blew out a slow side, gathering the courage to continue. “Yes. I know, but I’m stronger than I was back then. And Sendak changed. Both of us – we’re not the same people we were.”

“No, but he is still the highest-ranking commander of the Galra Empire.”

Shiro licked his bottom lip and glanced down at the now awakened blade that lay upon his crossed legs. “I know you’re worried about me. Thank you.”

“I do not worry for your gratitude, Taka. I worry because – ”

“– your mate was – is Zarkon, and you’re afraid that what happened to you might happen to me.”

Kolivan jerked as if hit, though his chin never lowered. There was no shame, only regret. “Zarkon explained our past to you.”

“We connected through our bond with Black,” Shiro said. Anger licked his spine, and he barely stopped his cup from shaking. “He saw some of my memories, and I saw some of his. Why didn’t you just tell me you were Zarkon’s mate?”

Kolivan’s steadfast composure dropped then, a terrible pain striking his face. “It seemed irrelevant. Daibazaal is gone, and so is her king. The best thing I could do to honor the memory of my homeworld and my mate was to support those who would end the suffering of the universe and her people, to once more create the peace we once took for granted.” His hands clenched between his knees, back hunched in a way unbefitting of the leader of the Blade. “You and your brother have brought me great joy, Taka. I see many of the qualities I knew in Zarkon reflected in you, but my relationship with Zarkon – whatever it may be now – matters little when compared to that of my own pack and its cubs.”

Shiro accepted the truth for what it was and bowed his head. “I’m… I’m sorry, for what happened to Ulaz. I – I tried to save him, and I might have. I’m not sure, but – but I know that if I hadn’t – ”

“It was not your fault,” Kolivan said, his massive claws clasping Shiro’s shoulder warmly. “It was wrong of me to place blame upon you. Ulaz made his own decisions, foolish though heroic as they might have been. But in a similar situation, I would have made the same call.”
Shiro had long stopped biting his tongue when it came to Kolivan. “And yet you hated that I made that decision.”

Kolivan straightened again, his height meant to intimidate, Shiro knew. “You cannot ask me to condone your surrender to the person who harmed you in such a callous manner.”

“It saved you. It saved the mission data.”

“It led to you losing an arm!” Kolivan shot to his feet and stormed away, shaking his head. When he spoke, his rage battered against his hissed words. “It led to you being tortured by the Druids and thrown into the arena to fight for entertainment.”

“It wasn’t – It’s not what you think.”

“It led to you – to you returning to the life you led prior to the Blades,” Kolivan muttered, wiping a hand across his eyes. “The uniform means nothing, Taka. The person inside is the important part, and when that person is abused and violated in the most intimate of ways…”

Though it pained Shiro to leave his blade on the couch, he crossed the distance and came to take Kolivan’s claws in his smaller hands. He looked up at Kolivan, who for the first time, refused to meet his concerned gaze. “Kolivan, whatever you think happened, didn’t. It didn’t.”

“You smelled of him, that time I saw you on his ship.”

“Because he scent-marked me, with my consent. That’s it. He didn’t – we didn’t – do whatever you thought we might have.” Shiro sighed and pulled away, pressing his shoulders to brace himself for what he needed to say. “But if we had – Look, I’m…I’m not comfortable with what I had to do to survive in the empire and with Sendak, but – I’m not going to ashamed of it any longer. I chose to live, and I found a way to make that happen. And I know you don’t want to accept that, but – I survived. Keith survived, and that’s really all that matters, not the how.”

“I was never ashamed of your former life, Taka.” The fierce edge returned to Kolivan’s voice. “But it matters, what you did. It hurt you. He hurt you. You were forced to use your person for the entertainment of others – first as a body seller and then as a gladiator. So do not demand that I accept these roles the empire has placed you in. I cannot. I will not.”

Shiro blinked, taken back. It never occurred to him that Kolivan would see his time as a body seller and gladiator as one and the same. It never occurred to him that they were the same, if only changed due the nature of the entertainment. During both, he’d been injured. During both, he’d been in pain in some way. And during both, he’d been nothing more than another’s source of pleasure.

“But.” Kolivan’s voice dropped to a whisper as he came forward to cup Shiro’s cheeks between his claws. “For your life, I will always be grateful, Taka.”

The wet, tearful smile only lasted a few moments before Shiro dove forward to wrap his arms about Kolivan’s torso. Kolivan’s own came about Taka to cradle him against his chest, and as he dipped his head lower, he said, “And I will always be grateful to Sendak for saving you.”

Shiro’s head snapped up, though his arms remained tight about Kolivan. “Sendak?”

“Ulaz didn’t tell you.” Kolivan gave a thoughtful hum and a nod. “He did not go into details in the final transmission before he released you, but Sendak had him transferred to the Druids to infiltrate. He’d asked Ulaz to free you and then disappear.”
So all this time, Ulaz hadn’t come and found him. It was Sendak who had sought his freedom.

“That does not mean I can condone what he did to you,” Kolivan said.

Shiro’s shoulders hitched in an abbreviated shrug. “You said you’d support whatever I decided, when I decided it.”

“And have you?” There was no judgement in Kolivan’s expression, only an honest eagerness. “Do you love him?”

“I – I don’t know.” Shiro refused to look away, though his words fumbled now, even if what he said was the truth. “We’ve never been on equal footing before. Even during my time with the empire, I was his captive. I might have had free reign, for the most part, but it didn’t change the power dynamic. He was in a place of power over me.”

Even if Shiro, himself, held the power of their relationship.

“But the person I met, the person I came to know while with the empire – I would like to see him again. Maybe spend some time getting to know him better.”

Kolivan drew him close, gripping tightening in the back of Shiro’s shirt. His voice was strained. “I…I think that is a…logical course of action.”

Shiro sighed as Kolivan welcomed him back into the pack once again, the scent of vanilla, lavender, pine, and desert willow a much-needed comfort. The pack scent was strong here, unlike the castle where only Keith could give him this gift, and he moved in the well-practiced embrace to reciprocate and give Kolivan the reassurance and comfort he needed as well.

Kolivan repeated the ritual, just for affirmation, before releasing Shiro. “Come. The others are waiting.”

Shiro wore his loose-fitting clothing to the strategy session and promptly ignored the raised eyebrows from his team. Keith’s tail wrapped about his thigh, while Antok’s occasionally slapped his side. Lance smiled but eventually came to his side to ask, “You all right?”

“Hey, anytime. It’s kinda my thing, y’know? Friendliest lion, friendliest paladin.”

The session began once more, but as Shiro said, “…and I’ll use the Black Lion to lure Zarkon’s fleet to our agreed upon location.”

“Alone?” Kolivan challenged.

Shiro fought the urge to roll his eyes. Hadn’t they just cleared all this up? “Yes, alone.”

With his arms crossed, Kolivan stared at Shiro through the transparent screens. “Has Zarkon ever hesitated seeking your lion when the others are present?”

“No,” Allura answered. “Zarkon has always attacked Black, almost always when he and Shiro are
Antok’s tail ran along Shiro’s side. “Then it would seem the best course of action would be for all the lions to be present when luring Zarkon.”

Shiro shot him a glare. *Traitor.*

Antok’s tail now smacked him the back, hard enough to send him tumbling forward and almost through the screens. Pidge let out a surprised laugh, but she quickly tried to cover it up. Lance didn’t even try to suppress his, while Hunk snorted. Allura smiled, and Keith was positively beaming.

“Fine, fine, all right. We’ll do it your way.” Shiro huffed and regained his footing to glare at Kolivan. “Happy?”

Without his stance or voice changing, Kolivan replied, “Ecstatic.”

The entire room cracked up, and this time, Shiro did roll his eyes.

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**Final Battle**

“Takashi!” Keith’s breathless sob cut Shiro to the core. “Takashi, Thace – Thace wants to me to leave him here to –”

Shiro gritted his teeth as he soared between Galra battlecruisers and with his jawblade, sliced through two sentry ships on Lance’s six.

“Listen to him, Keith,” Shiro shouted, though fresh tears stung his eyes. “Get to your lion.”

“You will.” Softer, warmly, “Keith, I won’t let anything else happen to Thace. We almost lost him once. I won’t lose him again.”

A beat passed, then another, and Keith’s yell was a response in and of itself. He was on his way through the auxiliary duct.

Shiro tightened his grip about Black’s handles, and the lion flew through space toward the Central Command ship. A rumble echoed deep within his soul, and he reached out to it, like he’d done so many times in his youth.

“Please, Black,” he asked. “I know I keep asking, but I need your help.”

They were both already at their limits and pushing beyond them. If they timed it wrong, if Keith didn’t make it to his lion and needed Shiro to save him, Shiro would be forced to choose. But a fierce growl that sounded in the back of his mind alerted Shiro that Red already left her hanger, and with a nudge from Black, Shiro fled his seat and headed down Black’s ramp.

He used Black’s momentum to shoot himself toward Central Command and phase through the walls. He continued through the decks and chambers, finally entering the central hub for the Galra fleet.

Shiro barely noticed the red, fiery glow of the chamber’s stalactites, his rapt attention captured by the crouching figure behind the room’s control unit. Thace was taking heavy fire, but as he heard a resound, “No!” Shiro slammed into Thace’s larger form, arms wrapping around him like they had
Ulaz. Shiro tumbled over the edge of the platform, Thace’s shocked and horrified face filling his vision for only a moment before he, too, faded from reality. Then, Shiro grunted as the shock waves sent him careening through the walls.

Black awaited him on the opposite side of Central Command, a deep, relieved purr thrilling in Shiro’s chest. If Shiro closed his eyes, he could imagine Black’s large mane sweeping across his face in a reassuring caress.

“Hurry, Paladins!” Coran called over the comms. “We must make it in before the wormhole closes.”

Keith and Red easily fell into formation, allowing Shiro to let out a relieved sigh. They were given a few moments of reprieve before they exited the opposite side of the wormhole and formed Voltron. Everything went according to their plan – until Voltron was hit with some sort of “witch craft,” Coran called it.

The Komar Experiment. Shiro dropped his head back against the rest, blinking back the tears. All the time he’d sought the Black Bayard and Voltron, he should have focused on stopping the Komar for good. When did it become operational? How could have he allowed such a dangerous weapon to be created? How many planets and souls fell to its abominable power?

Shiro couldn’t focus on that now. Allura gave them the time they needed to recover. He would usher the lions and their paladins the rest of the way.

But Zarkon was powerful, reminding Shiro of the time he’d met the emperor on the astral plane, but this time, he wasn’t alone. They were stronger together, always, and with the paladins and their lions, Shiro could not fail. He took strength from them when Zarkon once more entered his mind through their bond.

Black roared. Zarkon thrust, and Shiro absolutely refused to let him pass. Never again would Shiro allow Zarkon to harm Black.

He woke with a splitting headache. Disorientated, Shiro assumed he must have passed out and severed the connection with Zarkon to stop him from getting to Black. But as the desperate cries of the paladins sounded through their comms, Shiro tried to find his bearings.

Instead, he found the solid ground he’d been searching for. Black rose his bayard slot, calling for Shiro to act, and Shiro gripped the controls. Taking a deep, cleansing breath, Shiro poured everything he was into Black. The last few feesbs flashed through his mind – finding Black, bonding with the lions, forming Voltron, fighting Zarkon – and he went further back. Meeting Black in the astral plane, searching for him in the desert, reveling in the cool, refreshing quintessence that mirrored his own.

Opening his eyes, Shiro saw through Black’s eyes. No – Shiro was Black.

As he soared through space, power tore through his back but didn’t hurt. Instead, wings grew, an extension of himself-Black. A rush of quintessence sent Shiro-Black phasing out of reality; he put his hand out on instinct. His hand caught something and tugged it free.

Shiro-Black mewled with a deep, painful ache, but not for the lost of his former paladin. Though that would always hurt Black, Shiro-Black pushed forward, flying through Central Command. Shiro-Black cried out, but it came as a savage roar when Shiro-Black saw the magenta-lined black fire tear through Antok’s chest.
Shiro-Black blazed forward, snatching up Antok as he had done with Thace, as he had done with Ulaz, and Shiro and Black separated on the opposite side of Central Command.

“Whoa. What’d you do?” Lance wondered across their comms.

Shiro stared, awestruck at the glowing weapon in his hand. “I’ve got Zarkon’s bayard,” he gasped.

“You mean, you have your bayard.” Keith always, always had his back.

They only had a few minutes left. “Form Voltron!” he called, and the team came into formation once more.

The paladins’ emotions buzzed through their bond. Relief blended with reassurance and faith to exhilarate not just Shiro but Voltron itself, and together, the paladins battled Zarkon as one. Shiro grunted, the overwhelming pressure returning in his mind as Zarkon forced his way into his and Black’s bond again. But Shiro refused to let him in and as Black called for his bayard, Shiro gained strength. Lance, Hunk, Pidge, and Keith joined the fight, and together, they repelled Zarkon’s attack. Their shared quintessence channeled through Shiro-Black, down Voltron’s arm and into Keith-Red. Fire burst from Voltron’s blade, and together, they pierced not just Zarkon’s armor but also his very soul.

As Voltron tore the sword up and out of the emperor, an explosion erupted Zarkon’s very core. Shock waves washed over Voltron, too strong and too powerful for Shiro to fight, and when Black beckoned, Shiro allowed himself to be carried away.

As soon as Pidge and Red lowered Black to the hanger’s, Keith bolted out of his chair and out Red’s mouth. His fierce lioness purred in the back of his mind, trying to soothe him, but only one thing would stop his panic.

“Takashi!” he tore through the hanger toward his brother’s lion. “Takashi!”

Kolivan was already exiting the Black Lion’s mouth, Lance and Hunk solemnly at his side. Allura and Coran joined them a moment later, frantic as well.

Kolivan shook his head. “He is gone.”

“How can he just be gone?” Keith shouted. First Ulaz and Thace. Antok was missing, too, and now his brother? “He can’t just disappear!”

“Your brother’s powers were unstable to begin with, as are your own,” Kolivan said, hands tight at his thighs, voice laced with an edge Keith didn’t want to acknowledge. “If Zarkon was able to do something through his bond with Black – ”

“We were all there, fighting with Shiro,” Lance argued, coming to stand next to Keith. He physically took Keith’s lashing tail and wrapped it about his arm. “We pushed back on Zarkon. It wasn’t him.”

“Maybe – Maybe Black called Shiro away?” Hunk thought, turning to look at Black’s open mouth. “Maybe it was afraid Zarkon would do something to him?”

“It does not matter,” Kolivan replied, turning to look up at the massive beast. “Shiro is not here.”

Allura’s hand dropped to the sprawled Black’s massive claw, Coran giving her shoulder a tender squeeze. Pidge turned away, shoulders bunching. Lance’s hand slipped about Keith’s waist, pulling
him close, but Keith closed his eyes and focused on the refreshing coolness in the chest that only came from Takashi. It was still there, as vast and as encompassing as when his brother stood next to him, there to ensconce his soul in a cradling hold.

Kolivan was wrong. Unlike when Shiro was with the empire, Keith didn’t feel a void in his soul. Shiro was alive. Shiro was there, and Keith slowly ambled about Kolivan. He tripped over his own feet and almost fell, but Lance was there, holding him up.

*Keith.* The breathless call sounded distant, yet Keith heard it as if Takashi whispered it into his ear.

Lance tensed, his grip tightening. He must have heard it, too.

Something flickered in Black’s mouth, like static on an old television. Keith stepped forward, Hunk and Pidge joining him.

*Keith.* Weaker, more desperate.

“Takashi?” Keith murmured, reaching out his hand, reaching out toward Black.

Another flicker of light and power, of someone fading in and out of reality. A black gauntlet reached for him, passing through Keith’s own glove before disappearing again. Keith kept his hand lifted, fingers bending. He wouldn’t give up on Takashi. He waited, fear tingling inside his gut as a dobash passed and another and another, and nothing happened.

His hand started to drop as the tears coursed his cheeks, and suddenly, a firm, demanding hand seized his wrist.

“Keith!”

Takashi suddenly phased into reality, just long enough for almost his entire body to be present. He was on his knees, right hand somehow tight about Keith’s wrist like a vice. His other hand remained outside of reality, swallowed still by the astral plane.

“I can’t – I can’t hold onto them any longer.” His eyes shimmered; so did Keith’s. Keith’s free hand came to grip Takashi’s wrist with all his might.

“I have you,” Keith shouted. “I won’t let you go!”

But Keith’s strength wouldn’t be enough. Even with his fingers digging into Shiro’s armor, a sudden tug in his chest stole all his air. The astral plane called his brother. Black called Shiro back, but Keith wouldn’t let him go. And yet, as Shiro’s body began to light and fade from sight, Keith didn’t think he had a choice.

“No!” Lance’s hands wrapped about Keith from behind, tugging him back. “You’re ours. Whoever they are, they can’t have you!”

Pidge, then Hunk, anchored their combined force behind them, and then the taller, more muscular Allura gripped Hunk, followed by Coran, and Kolivan.

Keith saw none of them, his entire rapt attention focusing on his older brother’s losing battle. Still, he grew lighter until Keith almost couldn’t see him. It was then, with desperation glistening in his brother’s eyes, that Keith let his fear show.

“No…please, don’t leave me, too.”
Their parents, their pack – it couldn’t just be him and Kolivan and the paladins. He needed Takashi, here by his side, always. He wouldn’t take over as the Black Paladin, and Takashi wouldn’t leave him to clean up his mess and the rest of the empire. Takashi couldn’t. Keith wouldn’t let him.

Something in Takashi’s gaze hardened as he gazed at Keith, and his chin snapped up to look at the underside of Black’s jaw.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to worry you, but I can’t stay there. I need to go, and you have to let me take them. Please, Black,” Shiro pleaded. “I’m here. I’m not going anywhere.”

Not like Zarkon.

Black’s physically body remained where it lay, but as Keith tugged, hands making their way down Shiro’s arm, he noticed that Shiro slowly began to exit the astral plane. His arm popped through the small opening about his left side, and Keith was surprised to see Takashi gripped a purple’s wrist.

“Pull,” Shiro said, strained. “Keep going.”

Keith gasped as the portal about Shiro’s hand grew and a new figure began to ebb and flow through to reality.

Ulaz.

Then Thace.

And finally Antok, pushed by Black’s metaphysical head.

The lion only appeared through the portal, surrounded by a violet light, for a mere tick before the tugging force dispelled all together, sending Keith and the castle crew flying backwards. Lance cushioned his fall, but Keith pushed to his feet instantly.

Thace and Ulaz looked worse for wear. Ulaz gasped on the floor, emaciated and weak, while Thace nursed the glowing wound Keith noticed earlier in the central hub. Antok leaked all over the front of his uniform from a chest wound, though thankfully it appeared on the side opposite the heart. It would still prove deadly if not treated as soon as possible, and Shiro – Shiro was already moving. One quick glance at Black, a silent but no less heart-felt thank you before grabbing Antok’s arm.

“We need to get them into healing pods. Now!”

Kolivan rushed to his aid, arm wrapping about Antok’s body from behind, while the rest of the paladins came to Ulaz and Thace’s side. They hurried through the corridors of the Castle, Coran and Allura running ahead to ready the devices. Blood trailed upon the floor behind Antok, and Keith maneuvered Thace around it, Lance assisting from the other side.

Thace. Thace clasped his shoulder, breathing heavily but alive. Alive.

Antok, too, and Ulaz. All this time, Takashi had held them in the astral plane, safe but slowly dying. Had he been unable to bring them out himself?

Thace ducked his chin, swiping it across Keith’s crown, and Keith tightened his grip. “Hold on. We’re almost there.”
They reached the pods, and to their surprise, Slav waited. He’d begun to procedures, but Coran and Allura took over once they arrived. Allura helped with Antok, placing him inside the chamber first and starting the healing processes, before helping with Ulaz and eventually Thace.

Once the final Blade member was safely tucked away, Takashi swung toward the group. He looked frantic, eyes snapping over each one. Antok’s blood coated the front of his armor, and he’d lost his helmet somewhere along the way. But he was there and alive.

“Is everyone okay?” he demanded. “Is anyone else hurt? Did we – Did we do it?”

He reached out toward the nearest person, swaying as he stepped forward, and Kolivan caught him. His massive claws came to cradle Takashi’s uncomprehending face.

“You did it, Taka,” he murmured. “Everyone is safe, and Zarkon has been defeated. You did it.”

There was an awe in his voice, and a softness, too, one Keith had heard during the most trying times of his life. Takashi must have understood that as well, and despite his usual composure in front of the team, he crumbled. His knees gave out, and if not for Kolivan’s strong hold, he would have collapsed to the floor. Kolivan lowered him to the ground, curling about Takashi’s trembling form.

Takashi sobbed then, loud and ugly, gripping the front of Kolivan’s suit and pressing his face against the Blade leader’s chest. The demand upon Takashi and the tolls he paid had been great, Keith knew, and now, after eight annuals of training and struggling and fighting – it’d paid off.

Takashi had not just fought Zarkon and won; he’d also saved their pack.

Keith slammed into Takashi from behind, arms and tail wrapping about different appendages, and then Lance followed, tucking himself against Keith’s side and Takashi. Allura hugged him from behind, while Pidge and Hunk filled in on the opposite side. Coran sandwiched them with Kolivan, while even Slav wiggled his way into the group hug.

They battled the former Black Paladin, they battled the emperor of the universe – and survived.

Together, as it should be.

To Be Continued…
Broken Blade - Final Chapter

Chapter Summary

Post-Season 2 fluff; "Crystal Venom"; Antok gets some (really).

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning post can be found here.

Life on the castle-ship changed after the final battle with Zarkon. Though Kolivan and the Blades wouldn’t stay indefinitely, they didn’t say when they would return to the Blade headquarters and Allura didn’t ask. Instead, Allura afforded them the deck below the paladins’ quarters, and as each member of the Blade exited his cryo-pod, he retreated there for recovery.

Slav, too, seemed to become a permanent fixture in the castle-ship.

Shiro lamented that soon he wouldn’t able to walk into the common room and see Ulaz and Antok there, teasing Thace that he’d need to get his Blade uniform refitted. Or see Keith settled between Antok and Thace, while Kolivan stood at the room’s viewer screen and sent messages back to the Blade headquarters.

Lance entered first, his voice signaling his arrival when the door opened. He greeted Kolivan before draping himself across Keith from behind. Hunk and Pidge entered the seating area on his heels, coming to book-end the Blue and Red Paladins. When Allura entered, she easily joined the circle of Blades and Paladins, and Slav came last with Coran, carrying most of the breakfast food.

A warmth, a completeness settled in Shiro’s chest; the feeling was fleeting. Soon, they’d have to get back to the war and fighting the remaining Galra commanders, but Shiro would cherish the time he’d been given with the people whom he’d found and loved.

His family.

Black purred in the back of his mind, content and soothing, and Shiro went to Kolivan’s side, leaning back against the console. He took a sip of his coffee and stared down into his half-drunk mug.

“I’m – I’m sorry, Kolivan. About Zarkon. I – I know it must have been hard for to watch – ”

“Stop.” Kolivan glared at him, his voice low but pitched to command. “I have mourned my mate for longer than you have been alive, Taka. Though I will always regret that things could have been different, I have long stopped seeking the impossible. Instead, I will appreciate the gifts I have been
given—” His claw came to rest upon Shiro’s head and ruffle the soft strands. “—and the future they may one day create.”

Shiro’s cheeks flushed hot, and he ducked his head. As he lifted his cup for another sip, Kolivan stole it and made his way toward the lower seating area for breakfast.

Shiro rolled his eyes but followed, and when Kolivan reached down to take a cheese and berry pastry from Antok’s plate, Shiro entered the pit and began to take food items from the paladins’ napkins as well. Allura had long stopped caring about eating in front of them and headed up to read the reports Kolivan procured from the Blade headquarters, half a cinnamon roll hanging out of her mouth.

When she stiffened, Shiro sighed. Their reprieve was over.

“Everyone, eyes front,” he called. “Allura has news.”

Allura managed to gather her bearings and took bites of her roll between sentences. “It has come to our attention through numerous Blade sources that Zarkon had a son—Prince Lotor.” The screen behind her flashed with a crude photo of a Galran in his early to mid-twenties. He was taller than the paladins, perhaps a head shorter than Kolivan himself, with purple skin and long, white hair.

No doubt, Lance would be jealous, but Shiro ignored that for now. Kolivan narrowed his eyes but said nothing.

“Lotor has been named emperor protem of the Galra Empire,” Allura continued and straightened her shoulders, looking over the gathered Blades and paladins. “Taking him down will be our next priority.”

“I can assure, not everyone will be pleased with Lotor’s ascension,” Ulaz said. “Zarkon’s highest commanders will surely look to dispose of the prince, so they may take the position themselves.”

“Throk, no doubt, will head that list,” Thace added. “Perhaps followed by Ladnok or Trugg.”

“Yeah, but it can’t be that easy, right?” Lance asked, dusting off his hands on Keith’s tail, much to the other’s annoyance. “I mean, he’ll have people around him to support him. Lieutenants and sentries. Bodyguards.”

Allura glanced down at the tablet. “There is no information about that.”

“We currently do not have a Blade stationed with the prince,” Kolivan said, weigh set back in a comfortable but alarmed stance as he sipped his stolen coffee. “Lotor has been exiled for some time, away from Central Command where no one knew where to look. We do not know his capabilities or his vision for the empire. We must assume, for the time being, he is hostile and looking to uphold Zarkon’s ideals.”

Shiro sighed and stood. Time to come clean. “May I?” he asked Allura as he approached, and when she handed over the tablet, he brought up the last transmission he received. One of the attachments was a picture, which he uploaded onto the screen. “Publicly, Lotor has four generals under his command, all half-Galran—Axca, Ezor, Zethrid, and Narti. They are fiercely loyal and will go to great lengths to protect their charge.”

Kolivan never took his eyes off the screen. “How do you know this?”

Shiro took the opportunity to steal back his coffee. “I have someone on the inside who sends me updates on Lotor’s position and his plans. Apparently, Lotor has been studying Honvera’s
experiments on Daibazaal and the rift. It appears he wants to enter the rift and harvest the pure quintessence there.”

Something shattered behind Shiro, and he turned to see Coran’s serving tray had fallen. “No – it was closed when Alfor destroyed Daibazaal. The rift no longer exists.”

“Lotor believes it does – or that he can reopen it.”

Then we must stop him,” Allura proclaimed.

When Shiro spun back, he blinked at Kolivan’s unnerving glower. “This still doesn’t explain your insider,” he said. “How do we know we can trust this person? And how did you even manage to find someone who would be willing to betray Lotor?”

“Sendak.” Keith’s murmur call startled Shiro, who averted his gaze. “It’s Sendak, isn’t it?”

The question felt more like accusation, and Shiro flinched as if hit. He’d lied to them – the paladins, Allura, and Coran – but he had no choice. He didn’t know if they’d survive the battle with Zarkon, but in case they did, the Voltron Force needed to be ready for the next stage of the battle if the time came. He couldn’t trust that the paladins or Allura would understand his rationale, and the problem was – he’d been afraid that if they disagreed, he’d have listened.

Eight Feebs Ago

Shiro debated what to do the entire time Coran and Pidge set up the memory extraction process. Should he just explain to the team his past with Sendak or hope Sendak kept their time together far from his conscious? He definitely would have to be the one to go through the data. He couldn’t have Keith, Pidge, or any of the paladins reading the content of his – or anyone’s time – with Sendak.

But it was more than that. Though he’d resolved to extracting Sendak’s memories if he need be, he understood how it felt for others to invade his mind and steal his most private thoughts. He didn’t want someone else to have that done to them and certainly didn’t want to be the one to do it. He especially didn’t want to do it to someone who revered him as a mate.

One by one, the others left, and once he was alone, he hit off the extraction process. Shiro stepped back to stand in front of the cryo-tube and wait for Sendak to wake up. His stomach flipped. His nerves tingled, but he crossed his arms and schooled his face to be as condemning as it could be. He wouldn’t let his personal feelings get in the way of the interrogation. Sendak had almost killed Lance, brought the lions to Zarkon, and ordered Pidge’s death. Not to mention, Sendak had handed Shiro back to Zarkon and Haggar.

He couldn’t let Sendak get the better him again, especially when it was no longer just his life on the line. It had to think of his pack on the castle-ship, too.

When Sendak awoke, he let out a deep, throaty groan, reminding Shiro of the many sensual times they shared. When Sendak finally looked at him, Shiro demanded, “How’s Yasek? Doing well on Puig?”

Sendak sobered immediately, his surprised expression shifting into indignation. “You could have simply explained the situation. I would have listened.”

“Over an open channel with half of the Galra Empire tuned in? I would have blown Yasek’s cover.”
“He was already treated as a traitor the empire. What did it matter if it was known that you and he were members of the same rebel group?”

“Because I wanted to keep him safe, and there was no need to blow his cover.” Shiro sighed; his arms tightened across his chest. “My organization was able to change his status in the system and place him as your regent on Puig, away from those who’d harmed him. No one would know of his transgressions against the empire, and he would still have access to the empire’s commands for tracking purposes.” Shiro sighed and waved his hand. “But you wouldn’t trust me. Instead, you believed I’d kill your nephew.”

“It was not as if you did not have adequate motivation.”

Shiro’s eyes narrowed; his Galra hand swiped over his face, over his scar. Every time he closed his eyes, he could see Sendak’s embittered snarl, his sharpened claws catching the overhead light as they sliced through the air and Shiro’s face. Shiro tried to forget the crimson that smeared his hands and the crippling pain that came after. He even flinched when the doctor treated the wound.

He also remembered locking himself in the bathroom afterwards, keeping his sniffing brother secure in his arms, sitting with his back to the door. He placed a bottle of nuvill at his feet just in case he needed to defend himself, and when Sendak was called away to a meeting, he left the penthouse and resolved never to return.

But he would have, if Ulaz hadn’t taken them in. He would have done anything to get Keith the help he needed, and eight annuals later, here he stood, needing something else from Sendak. It seemed that he was always using Sendak in some way. Sendak wronged him, but perhaps Shiro had harmed the commander in his own right.

“I’m sorry,” Shiro said, raising his eyes to meet Sendak’s shocked gaze. “I guess we both have reasons to distrust one another.”

“What is it you want, Takashi?” Sendak asked, voice deep and rich, low as if a beckon. “You would not have awakened me if you were not in need of something.”

That statement hurt more than Shiro wished, but he couldn’t refute it. Sendak was right, and nothing hurt more than realizing that by saving Yasek, he’d lost his chance with Sendak. Now, the commander only believed Shiro wanted to be with him for his position and connections, and after so many times abusing Sendak’s affections, Shiro accepted he wouldn’t be able to convince Sendak otherwise.

There was nothing left now between them but a meaningless scar, broken promises, and a terrible regret Shiro was sure to carry with him for the rest of his life.

He swallowed his apologies to ask, “What is Zarkon’s greatest weakness?”

“You,” Sendak answered easily. “If you are truly the Black Paladin, you have already defeated him, if not the empire.”

“Then how do we topple the empire? Who is next-in-succession?”

A smug smile teased the edge of Sendak’s mouth. “Me. As Zarkon’s highest-ranking commander, I have a claim to the throne by force alone, but next-in-line would be Lotor, Zarkon’s son. The witch Haggar will call him back to Central Command.”

Shiro glanced away, thinking. “So what you’re saying is, I need someone close to Lotor, so when he is placed upon the throne, I already know his movements and his tactics.”
Sendak’s upper lip pulled back in a sneer. “All his generals are half-breeds.”

Shiro’s eyes snapped up, and he allowed his glare to burn. “I’m not sending Keith to infiltrate, if that’s what you’re implying.”

“I will go to Lotor,” Sendak offered, much to Shiro’s shock. “Any attempt for the throne would be foolhardy without Haggar’s support. To become a member of Lotor’s inner circle will be the best strategic move for my command.”

Shiro struggled to find his voice, but once he did, he still sounded skeptical. “And he will just accept you?”

“I will convince him.”

“Why?” Shiro demanded. He didn’t dare to hope. “Why would you agree to do this?”

Sendak’s eyes positively glowed behind the glass. “Because I am in love with you.”

“That’s just biology. Galrans mate for -”

“If it were only biology, I would not offer. I did not offer, back when you found the Red Lion.”

Perhaps it was the greatest confession Sendak would ever give him, and yet – “You’d be willing to turn your back on everything and everyone you are loyal to...for me? Even after everything I’ve done to you?”

If Sendak felt resentment, his languid and gaunt face didn’t show it. “I was willing to release you from the arena. I supported Ulaz when he decided to take your arm, and I trained you to use it. I freed planets in order to please you. Why does this surprise you?”

It didn’t. “You wanted to present the castle-ship and the lions to Zarkon.”

“You still need the Black Bayard, do you not? It seemed like a reasonable strategy to bring the lions before Zarkon, and once all five of you were there, it should have been relatively simple to steal the bayard.”

Shiro could find no faulty logic in that statement.

Sendak’s claw rested upon the cryo-tube’s curve. “Victory or death, Takashi. I will earn you.”

Or die trying.

Shiro should have questioned if he could trust Sendak, especially after the commander handed him to Zarkon. He should have asked about how he could turn his back on Haxus so quickly, especially how Haxus had been there for Sendak throughout the annuals. He should have asked about Ulaz and why he had been allowed to transfer to the Druids’ command.

Instead, Shiro asked, “Your eye – how did it come to be marked?”

It was the most intimate question Shiro could ever ask, but before he could even entertain the thought of a relationship with Sendak, he need to know the truth.

Sendak met his inquiry unabashed and without remorse. “I thought I’d lost you, and I did not wish for a life without some reminder of you every time I looked in the mirror.”

The thought sickened Shiro. “You harmed yourself? You ruined your own eye – for me?”
“A meager loss compared to that of cherished mate.”

Shiro took no pleasure in the confession, fighting back the bile burning his throat. He placed a hand over his mouth, wondering how to reply, unsure of how all this could have happened because Sendak saw him on the dance floor of a space port bar and decided to play hero.

It had ended with quick tryst in the restroom, a good amount of GAC in his pocket, and a card with digits that Shiro would end up calling time and time again.

“And you seriously want nothing out of this?” Shiro asked.

Sendak paused before relenting, “One more chance. That is all I ask. That is all I will need.”

He wouldn’t screw up this again, and Shiro believed him, even if he found himself spouting, “We’re equals now. I am no longer your captive or your – your stress relief. I’m a Paladin of Voltron.”

“Of course.”

“We’re partners, mates – and – and if I decide, lovers.”

Sendak nodded, waiting.

“And if I ever say it’s over, it’s over.” His Galra hand sliced through the air, glowing with quintessence. “No more chances.”

“I will adhere to your wishes.”

Shiro reached out, his hand resting upon the opposite side of the glass from Sendak’s and then – before he lost his nerve – hit the button to open the containment unit. He stepped back as the glass gave away with a tinkling noise. Sendak heaved a grunted sigh, then stepped out, his upper body dwarfing Shiro’s shorter form.

Shiro came a long way from being that body seller, no longer innocent, no longer timid and weak, and when he looked up Sendak, the commander was not looking down at him.

Sendak lifted a hand toward Shiro, and there wasn’t fear this time. No agitation, and yet the commander didn’t touch.

“May I?” he asked.

“Yes,” Shiro said, and Sendak’s massive hand caressed the soft skin of Shiro’s cheek. Shiro leaned into the tender embrace, his own Galran hand coming up to rest upon Sendak’s. He stepped forward, entering Sendak’s personal space and resting his hands upon the smooth armor. He canted his hips and internally laughed at how they slotted perfectly against Sendak’s large form. As he slid his hands up Sendak’s chest, the commander ducked to allow Shiro’s arms to wrap about his neck and his fingers to tease the soft fur on the back of his neck.

Sendak’s hand followed the path of Shiro’s body, ghosting down his neck and along his side to rest in a chaste hold.

“Scent-mark me?” Shiro asked, and Sendak’s indulgent gaze was an answer all its own.

Keith would be pissed later that the pack’s scent had been covered, but he wouldn’t know the implications of Sendak’s marking. He wouldn’t understand that when Shiro lifted his head and
Sendak nuzzled about his collarbone, stroked his neck, shoulder, and arm, that Shiro reveled in the comforting ritual. It was a reclamation of sorts, but unlike before, where Shiro felt uneasy accepting Sendak’s affection, he now embraced Sendak as a mate would.

He may never forgive Sendak for the mark across his face, but perhaps now, after all these annuals, he would at least accept that what Sendak felt for him, he felt for Sendak – his mate.

His knees trembled; his heart fluttered in his chest. Shiro reached up to cup the sides of Sendak’s face and lift it up until their eyes met, only inches apart, and then he pressed his foreheads together.

“Thank you.”

“All you have to do is ask. If it is my power, I shall make it so.”

Shiro's exhale ruffled Sendak’s fur. “Come back to me. That is all I request.”

They stayed like that longer than they should have, but after so many annuals apart, Shiro couldn’t bring himself to pull away.

“So you released him back to Lotor, just like that?” Allura asked, not quite comprehending.

Shiro nodded and opened another transmission from Sendak. “I ejected the cryo-pod to cover his escape and lowered the pod quantity in the hanger by one. I also masked Haxus’ escape from the center energy chamber.”

Pidge gasped. “Haxus was still alive?”

Shiro nodded. “Apparently, he was able to slow his descent with his sword and found purchase to climb out of the funnel. He ended up hiding in the bowels of the castle-ship until I found him.”

“So all this time, you’ve been receiving communications from Sendak about Lotor’s movements,” Ulaz said.

“Yes.”

“And you believe you can trust him?” Antok asked.

Shiro wondered if he should be offended that his pack questioned his judgement, but he dismissed it. He was confident in this decision. “I do, and I have. He knew of our plan to attack Zarkon and had any number of times to alert Throk and the other commanders. He didn’t.”

Thace pet Keith’s tail about his wrist. “Maybe he just wanted Zarkon out of power for himself. We cannot eliminate that possibility without assessing Sendak’s loyalties first.”

“Then what are you suggesting?” Kolivan asked.

Shiro didn’t need to hear Thace’s rationale. He yielded with a loud sigh. “I’ll contact him.”

It took three quintaints to arrange the meeting and another movement before a Galra fighter approached the castle-ship. Kolivan insisted the pack be in attendance for Sendak’s arrival, much to Shiro’s dismay, while Allura wanted the paladins to greet the commander in their armor. Shiro let the others don their battle gear, but he remained in his casual dress – black jumpsuit, vest, cut-off gloves.

As Sendak exited the fighter, Shiro wondered if he’d ever be able to see the commander without
his breath hitching. Sendak wore a different uniform from his time as one of Zarkon’s commanders, donning a dark black armor with royal blue and coral accents. His ridiculously large arm had been replaced, its once purple lighting now shimmering a bright, royal blue.

Sendak’s eyes roamed over the gathered Blade and paladin forces, but once they rested upon Shiro, they didn’t leave him again.

He started forward in a rushed stride. “Taka – ”

Shiro met him a little less than halfway, hands coming up to rest upon Sendak’s claws. He stopped from embracing Sendak intimately, however, acutely aware of the critical eye of his pack watching them.

“Did you just come from Lotor?” Shiro asked, squeezing. “Has Haggar already called him to Central Command or – ”

“Taka – “

“How long do we have before he arrives at Central Command to take over as – ”

“Takashi – ”

“How do you think we should intercept him before – ”

“TAKASHI!”

Shiro halted. He frowned up at Sendak, perceiving Sendak’s discomfort for the first time. “What?”

Sendak broadcasted his movements, lifting up his arms before one hand came to rest upon Shiro’s cheek, the other his opposite shoulder. He bowed his head, pressing their foreheads together. He ignored the audience completely, his entire rapt attention focused upon Shiro’s questioning gaze.

“Are you all right?” he murmured.

Ah. They’d only exchanged a few messages since Voltron’s battle with Zarkon and only concentrated on strategies and necessary information. Shiro couldn’t tuck the smile away and reached up to stroke Sendak’s strip of fur and hair. “I’m all right. A little worse for wear, but – ” He shrugged and caressed Sendak’s cheek when the commander tensed. “I’m okay. Really.”

They stayed like that for several dobashes, and Shiro indulged, stepping between Sendak’s legs and allowing the larger Galra to curl about him. When they finally broke, Shiro wasn’t surprised to find Kolivan standing directly behind him.

Sendak spoke to Shiro but glowered at Kolivan. “I assume your team is resting.”

Kolivan’s hand lingered close to his sheath. “That is not your place to – ”

“Yes,” Allura admitted, stepping to be even with Kolivan. “We’re taking a few quintaints off, strategizing and getting things in order. How long do we have until Lotor is beckoned?”

Sendak’s hand fell to loop loosely about Shiro’s hip. “Haggar already has called for him. He and his generals will be docking with the main fleet within the next quintaint or so. You’ll have to move quickly if you want to intervene, but there are more pressing matters that require Voltron’s assistance.”

Kolivan’s eyes narrowed, frown deepening. Allura mirrored him, much to Shiro’s amusement.
“More pressing matters?” Allura wondered, skeptical.

Sendak glanced down at Shiro. “Since I left my sector to join Lotor’s command, it has been overrun by Throk and other commanders seeking to expand their own hold upon the empire. I… would appreciate any assistance Voltron and the Blade of Marmora could provide in helping to once more liberate the people who trusted me with their freedom.”

Dread sent Shiro’s stomach roiling, and Sendak tightened his hold upon Shiro’s waist. All those people they helped to free – Puig.

Allura looked at Kolivan, and together, they seemed to come to a wordless decision.

“We will see what we can do.”

She gestured for Sendak to follow, and Kolivan didn’t oppose. The others began to filter out of the room and toward the bridge for planning, and later, Shiro was sure Ulaz and Sendak would have words. They’d need to catch up after having served on the same bridge for more than a decafeeb and never having actually known one other.

But for now, Shiro slipped his hand into Sendak’s and led him deeper into the Castle of Lions to join his pack.

End Broken Blade

Omake 1:

On the bridge, Shiro stood before the Black Paladin’s seat, arms crossed and frown evident. “Discussion? You want us to meet with Lotor?”

“He is not Zarkon,” Sendak replied. “He is a gracious ruler and listens to his people. We have a common goal.”

Gracious? With only instinct and emotion fueling his actions, Shiro gripped Sendak the collar and dragged him down, so he could sniff along Sendak’s jaw.

Sendak laughed. “Hm. Are you jealous, my little kzelz?”

“Ah, you’re right. Keith!”

From his own console, Keith groused, “I’m not your dog.”

“No, you’re my cat. Now get over here and sniff Sendak for me.”

Sendak’s laugh only continued to grow louder until three Blades appeared behind the unwitting Shiro. Sendak instantly silenced and trudged to Keith’s console, much to the Red Paladin’s dismay.

Omake 2:

When Sendak eventually called Haxus from the shuttle, Antok had been tasked to escort him to the castle-ship’s bridge. Haxus took two steps out of the shuttle, eyes lifting to take in Antok’s
exquisite form.

“Hm. Perhaps we should get lost on the way to the bridge,” he offered.

Antok hit off his mask, revealing his scarred face and bitter scowl.

Haxus shifted and cocked a sinister smile. “I will take that as a yes.”

Antok blinked once, twice, three times – and then slowly, began to smile.

*End Broken Blade*
Shiro unhooked Sendak’s abnormally large mechanical arm from the hanger wall unit. Pidge and Hunk created the compartment to house and charge the appendage when the commander came to the Castle of lions. Once onboard, Sendak replaced the arm with a more balanced Altean version, which put less stress on his muscles and allowed Shiro and him to enjoy more intimate activities. It also brought Kolivan and Allura comfort, trapping what they believed could be a listening and tracking device safely away from the team.

“Why do these reprieves always go so fast?”

“If you need me before then – ”

“I always need you, my little kzelz,” Sendak assured, his flesh hand cradling Shiro’s cheek, “but I will refrain from calling for you.”

Shiro rolled his eyes and straightened his back. “You realize I’m tall for my species, right?”

“And yet you are still a foot and a half shorter than me.”

“I am also twenty-seven, and – ”

Sendak lowered his jaw and brushed it against Shiro’s smooth one in a soothing and indulgent motion. “You will always be my little kzelz, Takashi. Neither your age nor your height will change that.”

Shiro hated that his lips dipped into a pout, but he couldn’t help it. He was the Son of the Blade, and yet Kolivan refused to pair Voltron with any Blade missions unless the Lions were absolutely necessary. He was leader of the Paladins, and yet Allura and Coran and his teammates always made sure to keep him in their eyesight. Even his mate refused to see him as an equal.
“Is it wrong for me to want to protect you?” Sendak asked.

“I do not need to be protected,” Shiro said, releasing Sendak’s massive thumb. “I’m not that cub you picked up in a space port bar anymore.”

Sendak reluctantly released him as well. “I am quite aware of that, but I lost you for eight annuals. When I finally found you again, I had to watch you fight for your life countless times in the arena. I waited to hear if you survived the Druids’ interrogation, and yet I let you go once more – so you could take on the emperor of the universe. Do not ask me to put you into a situation where I could lose you. I will not adhere to your request.”

Shiro stiffened, but Sendak brushed his jaw again in a traditional pack parting before whispering against his cheek, “I will see you in two movements. Please be there.”

Shiro turned and watched the commander walk toward his spacecraft, Sendak’s muscular outline calming and familiar, despite the thunderous beat of Shiro’s own heart.

He always failed when it came to Sendak. He might never forgive the Galra for claiming him as he did, but Shiro led Sendak to believe he was dead for eight annuals. And since Sendak found out he lived, Shiro had put him through hell. Yet Sendak only asked for another chance and then subsequently betrayed everyone and everything he believed in – including Zarkon himself – to get it.

Even now, Sendak went back to the empire in order to procure information for their cause, Shiro’s cause.

So the breathless admission spilled from Shiro’s lips effortlessly. “Stay.”

Sendak shifted, his one eye glowing with uncertainty. “You know I cannot.”

In all the annuals they’d known each, Shiro never said it, and he hated that it took him this long. “I love you.”

“And that is why I cannot stay.” Sendak smiled, true and tender with just a hint of his usual wickedness. It was as if he shared a secret he’d been keeping for the last decade, but Sendak couldn’t understand the depth of Shiro’s feelings. Shiro had done nothing to prove what he felt for the commander, and he couldn’t let Sendak leave without knowing.

“Sendak!”

Sendak pivoted on his heel to meet Shiro’s bellow, only to suck in a sharp inhale at the glowing hand that hovered just below his right eye, the same eye Sendak marked himself when he thought Shiro had died.

Shiro heaved, loud breaths exploding from his open mouth, tears streaming down the flushed cheeks.

Every ounce of derision was gone from Sendak’s expression now. Taking off the glass casing, he closed his eyes and fell to one knee, bringing his face just below Shiro’s chest level.

“Do it.”

Without hesitating a moment longer, Shiro traced the scar across Sendak’s right eye, burning a new mark with his Galra hand.

A mating mark.
After all, Galra mated for life.

*The End*

Chapter End Notes

Thank you everyone who read this story! I really appreciate all your kind words and support, and I hope you enjoyed the ride.

The main story is complete. I do have prompts written and more to write featuring storylines from Season 3 and beyond, but this was always the ending I had in mind for the story (wrapping it up after Season 2).

I will be uploading side stories to “Sharpening the Blade” for a bit longer. I have a backlog from Tumblr and as aforementioned, a few prompts still in my inbox to complete. So I hope you’ll jump over there and read those.

Thanks again, and hope you all enjoy Season 5!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!